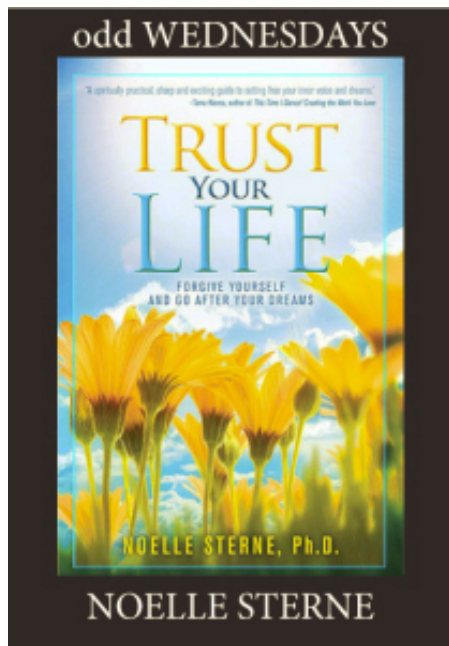


Author Magazine

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Sinatra in the Cuisinery



A friend sent me an issue of an excellent newsletter, the *Virtual Gourmet* by award-winning food-wine writer John Mariani (<http://johnmariani.com/current-issue/index.html>). The newsletter combines reviews of restaurants and wineries from all over the world with food-related photographs of many kinds and especially stunning images of restaurants, wine country vistas, chateaus, inns, and gorgeous plated offerings. Not that I'm into gourmandizing—I'm happy with canned tuna, light mayo, and filtered tap water. But in this issue, August 4, 2013, one photo grabbed me even more than others.

The photo is of Frank Sinatra in the kitchen of his palatial home in Palm Springs, California. In the background sits a stove with four of who-knows-how-many burners visible, the handles and beginning glass fronts of two huge ovens, and an expansive counter of granite (or gold). In the center of the photo spreads an equally expansive butcher-block counter, with Sinatra leaning against it. Above his head, to the left, hangs a giant metal bouquet of gourmet utensils (the photo is black and white, but they've got to be solid copper). And directly above his head hangs a *second* equally grand copper cluster.

What's Sinatra doing? Looking glum and holding a sandwich.

This photograph struck me as inexplicably sad.



However Sinatra may have felt at that moment, whatever he was thinking as he held his sandwich, we will never know. What motivated someone to photograph him, and him to allow it, we'll also never know.

But thinking about him in that grand kitchen, turning his back on its gourmand glories, and eating a simple, bland-looking sandwich, showed me what we writers can learn from this image.

We can see this photo as not sad but sane. We can make our choices for simplicity in writing tools, and turn away from copper-pot software with names that promise the world: PlotZapper, CharacterBlaster, DialogueMaxer, OpenCloserEnder, BlockShatterer, QuitYrStalling. All that stuff, like copper saucerie, can take a career of learning its uses and upkeep. Undoubtedly it's helpful to some, but I've found the simple sandwiches of loose sheets or Word docs as effective—instantly accessible and much easier to use.

Maybe simplicity leads to greater satisfaction. Who's to say that Sinatra didn't enjoy his bread-and-filling as much as, or more than, a twelve-course epicurean meal from that incredible kitchen? When I spin out a character's traits on a piece of paper or blank doc, I'm enjoying it as much as getting corralled by a fancy software program and trying to find the right screen and fill in the correct blanks (and cursing). I've taken more time trying to master these than I would in just getting down the character's profile.

Maybe it's fun once in a while, or a challenge, to wrassle with one of those programs, like melting perfect butter in a copper saucepan,. But that's not where your main creative diet is; that's not what feeds you or will ultimately help you produce.

So, like Sinatra in his kitchen, turn away from the fancy stuff that eats your time (and money). Sink your teeth into the simple act of writing, allow the stream to build and surge, yield to your creative side, and let your work nourish you.



Author, editor, writing coach, and spiritual counselor, Noelle Sterne writes fiction and nonfiction, having published over 300 pieces in print and online venues, including *Writer's Digest*, *The Writer*, *ReadLearnWrite*, *Women on Writing*, *Transformation Magazine*, *11.11*, and Unity booklets. Her monthly column, "Bloom Where You're Writing," appears in *Coffeehouse for Writers*. With a Ph.D. from Columbia University, for over 28 years Noelle has helped doctoral candidates complete their dissertations (finally), with a practical-psychological-spiritual handbook in progress. In her book *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams* (Unity Books; one of ten best 2011 ebooks), she draws examples from her practice and other aspects of life to help writers and others release regrets, relabel their past, and reach their lifelong yearnings. With *Trust Your Life*, Noelle appears in the Unity Books 2013 "Summer of Self-Discovery." Discussions appear on Goodreads: <http://www.unity.org/publications/unity-books/summer-reading-series>. Her webinar on the book of June 26, 2013, can be heard and seen on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?V=95EeqllONIQ.

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