



Nauman's Nautica

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by A.D. Nauman

Thoughts on navigating the turbulent life of an author

(Nautica [noun] /'nawtika/-- navigation, seamanship)

(Nauman [noun] /'nawman/-- my last name)

August 31, 2023

Hi friends,

Thanks again for subscribing to my newsletter. I had a lot of fun with this one!

And I do have news to share this month: thanks to the Off Campus Writers' Workshop (OCWW), I'll be at Printers Row Lit Fest on Sept. 9th, Saturday, from 2 to 6 pm, with my fellow OCWW authors selling and autographing books. I got a hold of about a dozen copies of my finished novel before the official release date. So if you're strolling around the Lit Fest that day, I'd love to see you! I'll be at a table in Quad 3, Section E, on the corner of Dearborn and Harrison, north of Harrison.

--ADN

Embracing Our Lack of Fame and Fortune

by A.D. Nauman

Like most aspiring authors, I spent the early years of my writing career hazily dreaming of fame and fortune. Someday, I knew, I'd be as iconic as authors in movies and TV shows, stepping out from a coffee shop in a quaint Maine village, or from a fancy restaurant in



Launch Party!

for *Down the Steep*

October 14th, 2023,

Saturday

4:00 pm

A.D. Nauman

in conversation

with **Abby Geni!**

at

The Book Cellar

(in Lincoln Square)

4736-38 N Lincoln Ave

Chicago, IL 60625

New York City, into a mob of fans clamoring for my autograph, lavishing praise, begging for my next novel. Sometimes they'd be screaming, Beatles-style.

Now that fame and fortune have completely eluded me, I've not only adjusted to that reality, I've come to appreciate it. One may wonder why.



Before I explain the benefits of being fameless and fortuneless, consider how unreasonable it is for our culture to require that writers be famous. When I tell people I write fiction, the response is often, “Oh, have I heard of you?” I say probably not, and they lose interest, or look embarrassed for me, or pityingly reassure me *that’s okay*. Why is fame a measure of our writing ability? When we’re introduced to a dentist, we don’t ask, “Oh, have I heard of you?” No? Well then you obviously are not a very good dentist. How pathetic that you still practice dentistry despite your lack of fame. But you just keep on trying, honey—maybe someday you’ll “make it.”

Think of all the types of people we show respect despite their lack of fame: biomedical engineers, airline pilots, surgeons, college professors, research chemists, entrepreneurs, ocean scientists, judges. We don’t expect them to be famous. And although Walmart cashiers and FedEx drivers don’t receive the same level of respect, we acknowledge that the work they do indeed makes them what they say they are: cashiers and drivers. For writers, a lack of fame makes others—and sometimes ourselves—reluctant to even say we are “writers.” I would venture that 99.999999(999)% of writers are not household names—that doesn’t mean they aren’t brilliant and worth reading. Of course, other types of artists in our culture, especially actors and musicians, suffer the same fate: lack of fame is seen as failure.

When I was a kid, my father was wildly enthusiastic about my writing because he thought I could be *famous someday*. He’d see me hard at work on my little stories and exclaim, “You could be *famous someday!*” He also said this to my sister, the musician. *Famous someday!* In general, I had such a hard time garnering my father’s attention, I took this message to heart: if I were *famous someday*, I thought, my father would finally love me. Yes, yes, all very sad and pathetic. But that’s how deeply, unceasingly invested I was in being *famous someday*, and thus, I am living proof that even the most fame-hungry among us can learn to overcome their desire for fame—along with their dysfunctional childhood families.

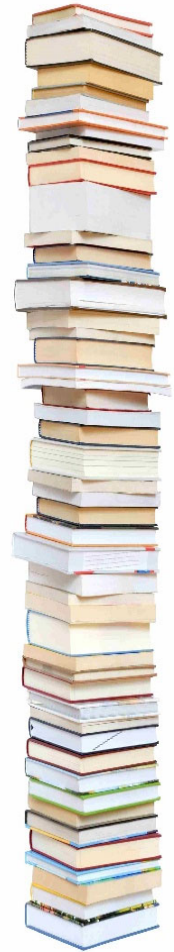
Obviously, my father isn’t the only American fixated on fame. Being *famous someday* is an aspiration so widespread I’d call it a facet of the American psyche. Why is that? Why are we

so impressed with celebrity? Famous people die like the rest of us. Most famous people fade from collective memory, too, like the rest of us. Do we believe fame indicates superiority? Is our cultural obsession with fame actually a need to feel superior to others? Are we Americans going to be stuck forever thinking hierarchically about the human race? Is the ranking of everybody one of capitalism's necessary gears? Or is it built into our lizard brains—this pecking-order interpretation of the world? Perhaps it's both. Perhaps it's neither.

But enough of such musings. Let's delve into the benefits of being unfamous. You may be surprised at how many there are. First and foremost, we fame-lackers are gloriously free of scrutiny. We can put on slovenly clothes and walk down the street talking to ourselves, noisily belching and passing gas, and no one grabs a video of us. Dinners in restaurants are peaceful and predictable. I for one regularly spill beverages and drop food on myself, and I appreciate that no one bothers to notice. After dinner, nobody rushes us on the street, touching us and coughing in our faces. We don't have to post TikTok videos—no one cares! We can misspeak on twitter (or is it X?)—no scandal erupts! We can post unflattering pictures of ourselves on Facebook (or is it Meta?)—no one re-posts! (We don't have to lamely rename our failed and unethical business ventures.) We are free from the time-consuming chore of reading fan mail. We don't have to worry about creepy stalker admirers as does poor Stephen King. We don't have to schedule time to file restraining orders or interview potential bodyguards. What a lot of glorious time we have to write!

And the bottom line is, fandom is fickle. One minute everyone loves you; the next minute, they're piling on. It happens. Just ask Jesus.

Now let's move onto the advantages of not being rich. Before we do, let me be clear: I fully appreciate the importance of having *enough* money. Lacking *enough* money in the US is not just stressful, it's life-threatening. The greater the *need* for money, the more important money becomes. But let's assume that we—me and you, dear reader—have *enough* money to cover our living expenses, as well as to do the things we most enjoy, like travel and buy bags of chocolate chip cookies. If we have *enough* of a thing, and we're mentally healthy individuals, we don't feel a need for *more* of it. I do understand having a *desire* for more. For example, after I've eaten half the bag of chocolate chip cookies, I admit, I want more. I want all of them—every last cookie in the bag. Then I want to go to the store and buy more bags and eat those, too. But I recognize that pursuing more chocolate chip cookies is neither rational nor in



my best interest. I know this may sound un-American, but I am arguing that having huge excesses of money is, in fact, neither necessary nor normal.

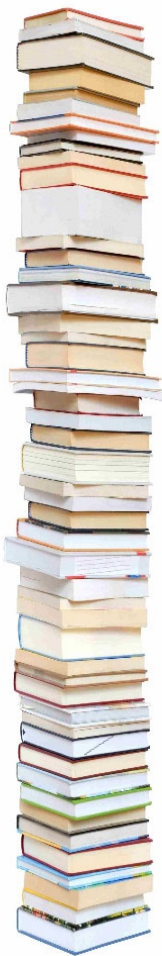
In any case, to me, having a large excess of money sounds like a chore. Imagine: if we had big bunches of money, we'd have to go out and spend it. I hate shopping. Eventually we'd accumulate so much stuff, we'd have to buy a bigger house, and then we'd have to hire people to clean it and maintain it, and supervising people is a job. I don't want another job. I already have a job. Undoubtedly, we'd end up buying condos in some vacation destination to winter at, and there'd be a list of things to do before closing up a residence for six months, like putting a block of ice in the freezer and shrink-wrapping the toilet seats. More chores!

If we were rich, we'd have to go to meetings with wealth managers, who would tediously explain terms like *gifts of equity* and *financial securities* and *AUMs*, then tediously re-explain them because our minds were wandering. No offense to anyone out there who thinks money is an interesting topic—I would just rather not spend my limited time on earth hearing about instruments and products or reading up on which investments might yield a .05% greater return.

You'll tell me the financial advisors are there to take care of that for me, but I've had conversations with those people, and, as nice as they are, they do launch into long explanations. I think they can't help it.

Finally, if we were rich, we'd have to hobnob with other rich people, who are likely to be Republicans. We'd have to buy designer clothes, and then we'd have to lose weight to fit into them. Inevitably, we'd have to play golf. We'd have to take up squash, whatever that is. We'd join a country club and then maybe we'd acquire yachts, with all kinds of boring boat-related forms to fill out. We'd have to hire a crew to maintain and drive our yachts—more people to supervise! You can see how the whole thing could get out of hand.

Of course, fame and fortune provide affirmation for writers. We want to be acknowledged and appreciated for the grueling work we do. We want readers. It's disappointing not to have more. It's disappointing that life isn't a movie—with a soundtrack, and maybe a laugh track. But those of us who persist at writing over the years and decades do so because we can't not write. We are creators, not just consumers. Any act of creation puts something positive into the world, and that's priceless. Creation has



value apart from the fickle world's response to its product. So go out there, my fellow authors—dare to be unrich and unfamous! Be an unapologetic writer!

And remember: your work could be rediscovered after you're dead, like Melville's—and, hey, you could be *famous someday*.

