

## THE ORGANIZATIONAL TRICK: CRAFTING A LIFE THAT SUPPORTS CREATIVE TIME

### *Profile: Marilyn Simonds, Author*

Marilyn Simonds has published several books, notably *The Convict Lover* (1996), *The Lion in the Room Next Door* (1999), and *The Holding* (2004). But writing books is only one of her many literary endeavours. She is an award-winning freelance journalist having penned scores of magazine articles and book reviews. She also writes a monthly column for a local newspaper and weekly gardening-themed essays for her website ([www.frugalistagardener.com](http://www.frugalistagardener.com)). In addition to writing, she evaluates manuscripts, mentors writers through the development of manuscripts, teaches online university writing courses, and gives talks at book clubs. She says that keeping herself organized is key to her success: “When you do six or eight different things to earn money, you have to organize your working life very carefully.”

That careful organization results in a work life that is structured to support Marilyn’s creative pursuits. She is very aware of time and has established a schedule that maximizes blocks of time for writing. Marilyn outlined her full – and efficient – schedule: “When I teach my university courses, I do that work in the evenings ... between 7 and 10 at night. I do my mentoring work on the weekend; so they submit their material on Fridays and I give my comments back on Monday. This gives me a full Monday-to-Friday working week for my own writing. ... I take one day of my writing week to write essays for my website: I do that Friday, edit it on Saturdays, and post it on Sunday.”

While Marilyn has an agent who looks after negotiating contracts, selling publishing rights internationally, and other related tasks, the scope of the agent’s work is limited to the book manuscripts and to short stories that Marilyn seeks to place internationally. The rest of her varied career Marilyn oversees and administers herself, but without a conscious sense that she is managing an artistic business or seeking to further her career. She emphasizes that “it’s not really a business mindset, but it is organizing your life in a way that the creative can really take a prominent place and really be fulfilling. ... I think writers who make the business the prominent thing aren’t as likely to succeed. The creative has to be paramount. The business and performing skills and all the rest have to be in service of the writing.”

She has a number of systems in place to free her time for creativity. For example, she has set up several templates, including standard time sheets for different activities. “I just pull them out ... put in the start time and end time. So it’s easy.” When she is booked for a reading at literary events, she has a template email that she sends in advance that outlines her needs, such as water, a microphone, hotel arrangements, etc. She has a template for thank-you notes, invoices, and deposit slips. Not having to think about these things again and again has concrete benefits for Marilyn: “I don’t want this stuff in my brain because I want my brain to be free to be doing the creative work.”

Her organizational skills are not a surprise to her. Her success with the business-related tasks may be very much connected to her artistic abilities. "I'm a very organized person as are many, many writers. ... So many writers I know are actually very disciplined," she says. "Business is very creative and that whole balancing thing -- that's what we do in a novel. We're keeping all these balls in the air in a novel -- all these characters, all these plot lines. It's a real organizational trick. Managing our lives is not that different from managing a fictional world."

### ***Reflection Questions***

1. To what extent would you say your business tasks are in service to your creativity?
2. Have you experimented with different schedules and systems to keep yourself organized?
3. What have you learned about yourself and your work habits that can help you to be effective in the business tasks and in preserving your creative time?