

Editor's Column: When You Just Can't

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At some point, it became clear that I could *write*. I have enjoyed writing poetry since elementary school – whether or not that poetry is any good is, of course, a matter of aesthetics and personal opinion. Possessing a Master's degree in Creative Writing is, to me, no sure indicator of talent – simply perseverance. Anyway, at some point, I realized that not only was I good at writing, I *enjoyed* it – all sorts. While I might have shared my classmates' groans about term and research papers, secretly I enjoyed the challenge of crafting papers, integrating research and finding just the right words to convey my arguments and ideas. Teachers frequently commented on my skill, and I ultimately decided to major in English when I entered college. My mother became convinced that I could write a best-selling novel, without considering whether I wanted to or not. (She is still holding out hope.)

Though just between us and the fencepost, I'm not sure I have another book in me. I have co-authored a couple of book chapters. In 2017, I co-authored a full-length book with my colleague Lindsey Reno (University of New Orleans) entitled *Examining the Emotional Dimensions of Academic Librarianship* (IGI-Global). Though a non-fiction, research-based book, we wrote about something we knew (which "they" genuinely recommend for writing fiction): the emotional impact our jobs have on us. We connected this to concepts like emotional labor, emotional exhaustion, and burnout – connections that had already been explicitly made in other "people work" professions like healthcare and teaching.

While I believed and continue to believe in the importance of that topic and the work Lindsey and I did on the book, I'm not sure I have another book in me. I am still very much dedicated to the topics of emotional labor and exhaustion, burnout, and emotional intelligence. Ironically, however, I am terrible at taking my own advice, much like the plumber whose pipes leak. I am terrible about working myself to exhaustion and crashing full-bore into burnout. All of my emotional intelligence and (arguable) expert knowledge about emotional labor do not necessarily spare me from the inevitability of burnout. Whether that is somehow a personality flaw or expert blindness (that's a thing, right?), I'm pretty awesome at burning out (just ask anybody who knows me very well).

So what is my point in all this – this brief sojourn through my love of writing and writing my first book? Only this: that I am, for all my love of writing and all my knowledge of what burnout looks like and how to mitigate it, *completely burned out*. Some of it may be attributable to a busy professional schedule (I hate being bored). Some of it may be attributable to the fact that I've started working on a doctorate (Doctorate of Education in Higher Education Administration) which has, obviously, necessitated a great deal of writing. I have fibromyalgia. My immune system seems to have failed me this year; I've had several sinus, ear, and respiratory infections requiring several rounds of antibiotics. Regardless of *why* I am burned out, the fact remains at this point that ***I am very burned out***. I am, consequently, feeling quite unmotivated. I am also, to borrow an analogy from the chronic pain/fatigue community, very low on spoons (if you aren't familiar with Spoon Theory, I highly recommend checking it out). I mean, very, very low on spoons. In the last two weeks alone, I've abandoned my usual morning routines which included make-up and hair-straightening (I mean, I'm still bathing and put on deodorant, so that's good, right? And I put on work-appropriate clothes and stuff).

My point is: *I frankly do not have the resources to write a whole column this time around.* For weeks, I've been wondering what I was going to give up (or have to give up) in order to continue until Christmas break without having a nervous breakdown or wind up in the hospital with nervous exhaustion. I've been making mental lists of things I have to do or am responsible for in some way and attempting to meaningfully prioritize them, without much success. Translating this activity to pen and paper or the digital page has not been any more helpful. I finally figured out that it would be easier to sort out what would be dropped based on what I wasn't actively picking up or doing at a certain point.

One such task emerged when I sat down to do the layout for this issue of the journal and realized that *I hadn't written my usual column.* I examined the circumstances that led me to this point and realized: *I had run out of spoons.* For all my love of writing, it had not saved me. The reality was that in my current state, love of what I do could not overcome a lack of personal resources. And so, I decided that I would give myself a break and not write my usual column. I'm not sure I've exactly succeeded, to be honest (she says as she writes on page 3).

What I want to say to you, dear readers, is that: take time to take care of yourself. Sometimes the word *self-care* makes me cringe, but it's important. Don't assume that "love of the game" is enough to carry you through – you will hit a wall. You will burn out. The thing you love will stop being so lovely and lovable. You will get sick, you will get tired. Don't let that happen – *take care of yourself.* I am choosing to take care of myself with this small task: by not making myself write a full-blown, research-adjacent article. I am choosing to take this opportunity to encourage you to stop – breathe – consider your priorities, and make one of those priorities *yourself.*

BUT in less self-focused, self-care oriented, more scholarly news, this issue mark the

beginning of a new column, authored by the former Electronic Resources Librarian & OER Coordinator, now newly-minted Director of the Ellender Memorial Library at Nicholls State University, Elizabeth Batte (congrats, Elizabeth!). Elizabeth approached me earlier this year about doing an OER/AER-focused column, given the push for these resources in the state (not the least of which is all the great work being done by LOUIS). Welcome aboard, Elizabeth! She's penned a banger of a column about OER/AER initiatives all over the state and LA SB117, which I think will be a major boon to those of us who believe in the benefits of OERs and AERs.

So, the takeaways from the rambliest column I've ever penned for *Codex*: take care of yourself. Get excited about things. Learn new stuff. Try new things. But take care of yourself. Remember Steven Covey's advice: sharpen the saw. You cannot be effective, productive, or healthy working yourself dull. Whatever sharpens your blade – running, professional development, a hike, painting, whatever – be sure you're doing that, too. It's too easy to work ourselves down to the nubs. Instead, let's worry about ourselves as much as we worry about our students, our colleagues, and our co-workers. Let's take care of each other.