



Candace Neal

WRITING PORTFOLIO

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STARVING ARTIST MUSINGS

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I remember my senior year of high school vividly. It was a ruthless quest on my part for an untarnished GPA and a podium speech that would surely find itself woven into a Rom-Com screenplay one day. Most important of all was having an answer to the perpetual question, "Where are you going to college?" I'd almost be better off saying "I haven't decided yet" than rattling off an unknown institution. I'm fairly certain I chose my first university (yes, I said "first") purely based on my need for the approval of my elders, teachers, and peers.

Needless to say, that one Ivy League semester was but a breath as I pushed in my chair and transferred to a school that could handle my real passion: The Arts.

Fast forward one Bachelor Degree and a near decade later, a bigger question hits my ears on a regular basis, "What do you do?" This inquiry is a no brainer for the, dare I say, normal people of this world who are apt at things like decision-making, expertise, simplicity.

If I answer, "I'm an actor," there is usually a follow-up question that goes something like this: "Neat! And what do you do for work?"

I do not blame these everyday humans for accepting acting as a profession only when it's alongside Harrison Ford and a hefty check decked out in multiple zeros. We are asked as children: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The seemingly indelible finality of this mindset always left me feeling backed into a corner of one word occupations: A firefighter. A doctor. A lawyer.

As I grow older in my artistic endeavors, I have found myself intermittently drowning in the jadedness of finances, tourism, unparalleled physical expectations, working holidays, and

an insatiable appetite to do everything. I want to act, sing, write, blog, draw, teach, cook, travel, and create. Did I mention tap dancing? I want to tap dance, too.

Artists, being the self-proclaimed messes that we are, have to decide if our art is for ourselves or for our audience. We are in a battle of stability, success, and satisfaction. If we do something for free, there's no bread in the box. If we do something for sustainable pay, we are sellouts. Sara Bareilles wasn't going to write us a love song. But, she would go on to make a financially stable life for herself doing what she loved.

It's called show business for a reason. If we want to put on a show, it has to be our business, or else we have nothing to show for it.

The deliciously savvy beacon of light that is Jason Mraz has not dimmed after all of these years. A recent interview on NPR's Ask Me Another revealed the always-positive singer musing on his constant state of happiness. In an effort to prevent the music industry from turning him cynical, Mraz stated how happy he would be to live his life out as an avocado farmer alongside wife and baker of sweet things, Christina Carano. He already owns the farm. He's well on his way to that beautiful retreat of growth, introspection, and Chocomole (a favorite recipe of the self-declared Geek in the Pink).

I have always obsessed over the quick-witted, tongue-tying lyrics of Jason Mraz — not to mention the smooth vocals and toe-tapping melodies that seem well suited for a windows-down kind of car ride. So, it surprised me that a man so in tune (pun intended) with his own songwriting and so seemingly comfortable in his profession, would want to abandon it for a barrel of alligator fruit. But then I felt more sane than ever about the disjointed puzzle pieces making up my "Jackie of All Trades" kind of life.

If even Jason Mraz longs for a peaceful respite from center stage to pursue untapped talents, I do too.

Balance.

You can't sit and wait for fame to call you or money to show up on your doorstep a la Publisher's Clearing House. But you also don't have to forego your artistic dreams to pay the bills via cubicle-dwellings and insurmountable spreadsheets. Here's to being the fulcrum in your own bill-paying, paint-by-numbers, fast-paced, teeter-totter life.

MY FAVORITE DOLLAR-MAKING APPS

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It's no question that in today's tech-savvy, candy-coated, Insta-prettyed, multi-tweeted, Black-Mirrored world, all of the things are at our fingertips. We are droned out, swiped up, Netflixed-in, and Face(book) down in politics, pop culture, grocery deliveries, crowdsourced rides and two-day shipping. It's as majestic as it is detrimental to our human psyche, I'm sure. But, on the plus side, we have more options than we once did as far as "lemonade stand" profit is concerned. I, for one, am obsessed with the ability to score a gift card here or there with the things I already purchase and the places I already go. I'm not promising you a mountain. But, a molehill sounds nice when you want a free ice cream cone or a movie on a rainy day.

Here are my favorite apps for scoring a little pocket change on the side

ReceiptHog & ReceiptPal

Receipts are pesky little things. Sometimes, you need them for your taxes. Sometimes, you need to return an item. Most of the time, they end up in a crumpled conglomeration of gum wrappers, tampons, and stolen Splenda packets at the bottom of your purse (or satchel, as it were). I now scan in all of my receipts to these apps and have scored about fifty bucks between the two in the last year. Bonus: they retain the original image of your receipt should you ever need to go back and revisit them. Snap and toss. Voila!

iBotta, Checkout 51, & SavingStar

I lied! Don't toss those receipts just yet! The rebate apps are here. You've heard of them, and while they may require a few moments of your time with which you'd rather be playing TwoDots, they are a supreme replacement for coupon clipping. Most of these pay out via PayPal, Venmo, and/or other various gift cards of your choice. iBotta has recently launched the ability to act more like an Ebates counterpart with online shopping cash back. And Savingstar will link to a number of store cards, which eliminates the thought process altogether (just make sure you activate the offers ahead of time)! iBotta is also great with "any brand" products. "Oh snap, 25 cents back on these random apples? Yes, please!"
How 'bout THEM apples?

Shopkick

I am, admittedly, not much of a shopper outside the grocery store and major pharmacies. Malls give me anxiety and Amazon is my friend. Anti-socialites unite, right? But if you're wanting to get in those extra steps, Shopkick can be a glorious thing. I landed a \$100 Walmart card after only a few months. Essentially, you get "kicks" for simply walking into certain stores. Earn more kicks by scanning specific items, and even more kicks for purchasing those items and/ or using linked cards. I like to aim for 100-200 kicks a day to expedite the gift card earning status. Promo Code: GIFT902531 to get started!

UserTesting

This one requires a little more effort, but is well worth it. If you don't mind using your voice, you can actually get paid to talk about websites. This site gives you TEN dollars per 10-15 minute sessions of navigating a site and recording your opinions. You can be compensated more for longer site sessions. Bonus: there are additional tests that can be performed on your smartphone or tablet. Downside: Like survey sites, you have to qualify for the tests. So, there may be some times that tests that need you to be a seven-foot tall Mandarin-speaking goat living in a block of cheese in the south of Miami on a snow day in order to take the test. They can't all be winners. Note: That test, to the best of my knowledge, does not exist. ... Yet. Two weeks ago, I made \$50 in three days simply testing new sites and apps aloud.

These are just a FEW of the many, many ways you can plump up the old wallet. Don't overlook store specific apps. I have received lots of free coffees at 7-Eleven and burritos with the Moe's & Qdoba apps. There are also, of course, a multitude of other money-making and money-saving apps and sites out there (Fiverr, Etsy, MobiSave, CheckPoints, to name a few). Do your research, have fun, don't go overboard, make some cash.

AN ANTHEM OF 90' S SENTIMENT

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Something happened around 1992 that was more gripping to the young anklebiters or, dare I say, rugrats of the world, than Bill Clinton's presidency or the separation of Prince Charles and Princess Diana or the birth of Miley Cyrus. True, the gelatinous, green substance known as "slime" had existed since the days of *You Can't Do That On Television*, starring the glorious, pocketed-hand Alanis Morissette. But it was around this time that the youth of America began to cling to a Gak-laden era dressed in stirruffed leggings and Blossom hats.

There is a certain simplicity captured in the nineties that neither the Baby Boomers nor the Millennials can quite grasp. Sandwiched between these generations is a group of individuals who understood that they were once technologically on the brink of something bigger than Tamagotchis and Gameboy pockets, but who were beyond satisfied to watch a popsicle stick with googly eyes and a low self-esteem introduce their favorite television shows every weekday after school. It wasn't low budget, it was friggin' adorable.

This nineties-bred legion of Daris and Dougs is not out to shake a disgruntled, elderly fist at the young, Bieber-loving, finger-swiping youngsters of today. Rather, we are here to celebrate the finer times of being super strong and super naked. We are here to expose teenagers to the likes of Lori Beth Dinberg, to empower college-goers to fly as high as Quail Man, to educate SNL viewers that Kenan Thompson had another half and that he, indeed, dropped the screw in the tuna. With the installment of shows such as *Fuller House* and *Girl Meets World*, it is undeniable that there is an army out there with a desire to revive the spirit of Corey and Topanga's romance while simultaneously hushing the naysayers and "how ruder's" of the world.

In the nineties, there was time—time for epic, catchy-chorus theme songs, time for the Kid's Cuisine to heat unevenly in the microwave (don't forget to remove the brownie first!), time to await the cacophonous beeps and buzzes of a near AOL connection before the glorious "Welcome!" met your ears.

There was acceptance. Sure, none of those original Jumanji animals looked at ALL real, but

gosh, those moviemakers tried. Sure, those beautiful Spice Girls-inspired platform shoes and pleather pants were overtly impractical in school hallways, but God, they looked good. Sure, the Creepy Crawlers likely contained harmful carcinogens and hazardous substances that could singe flesh or wreak havoc on unsuspecting eyeballs, but they were a scientific magic Bill Nye would applaud. Sure, “da bomb” sounded obnoxious even from the lips of Carson Daly, but we’d take it as credible critique terminology any day.

There was color. From Lisa Frank trapper keepers to the Snick couch; from complacent mood rings to blazing troll hair; from butterfly clips to Screech’s pants; the nineties were a kaleidoscopic tango of Clueless plaids and Beetlejuice stripes.

Before we were dying young girl’s hair silvery gray, we were frosting our tips.

Before we were slowing our lives to a Paleolithic, clean-eating, green-smoothie, carrot-juicing, whole food pace, we were Slimming Fast.

Before we were taking saltine-cracker challenges, we were eating Warheads.

Before we were using a YouTube to MP3 converter, we were Napstering.

Before we were Wikipedia-ing, we were Cliffs-noting.

Before we were Tweeting, we were away-messaging.

Before we were drinking Queen B’s lemonade, we were raising Destiny’s Child.

So, to all of you post-nineties darlings clinging to a rebirth of plaid shirts tied around the waist and hopeful reboots of Friends (I think it’s a lost cause): we do not condemn you. We salute your shorts for saving the bell. Thanks for keeping the better times alive.

HOLEPUNCH ME

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I've never been tempted by store-specific credit cards. I haven't flinched at the temptation of memberships or gold cards or limited time only specials. But, there is one thing that will always, ALWAYS propel me into a gradual state of wallet-weight-loss. Frequent Buyer Cards.

The very concept alone fascinates me. You buy. You buy. You buy. You buy. You buy. And congratulations! You DON'T buy. Then you begin the vicious but enticing cycle again. The thing is, it's not the free 20 oz smoothie at the end of a sixty dollar fruit-purée journey that gets me. Or the free hot java. Because, after all, when you think about it, it's not really that good of a deal.

It's the card, alone. It's like a ticket to the cool club. And with every hole-punch or ink stamp, you get THAT much cooler. It's a frickin' progress report studded in gold stars.

I want to be a frequent buyer for the status, not the drink.

My addiction to this gimmicky means of regularity, albeit out of control, does have its limits. I will only keep my buying frequent at coffee shops and smoothie places. These are addictions I can publicly feel good about versus, say, a candy store or a donut shop or an ice cream parlor or a burger joint. Ice cream cards say, "I'm totally fat." But, coffee shop cards say, "I'm terribly busy because I'm- that's right- employed and heaven forbid I start my highly productive, groundbreaking day without my morning jack-me-up and clean-me-out caffeine and diuretic." The smoothie card, a bit less impressive, says, "I'm SO into overpriced fake healthy products that accessorize my yoga pants and sweatbands."

THE SANCTUM CAFE

(RESTAURANT REVIEW)

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The Sanctum Cafe boasts “real damn good food” across its t-shirts and social media. And it is no lie. As someone who recently failed at the chickpea cookie dough recipe everyone’s talking about, it’s easy for me to turn squeamish at the thought of traditional staples manifesting themselves through unassuming veggie-filled vehicles.

That is not what The Sanctum is about. They are not out to trick you with Morningstar patties and oddball fake-out versions of Applebee’s entrées. Yes, you can get “caulfredo” and “tempeh-walnut meetballs.” But, the tribe of the Sanctum Cafe are here to immerse you in a colorful garden of textures and flavor-combinations that are “unrefined, mostly organic, made from scratch and sourced from the best ingredients [they] can find.”

And did I mention the atmosphere? My God. The atmosphere. Tucked away on Fern Creek Avenue, this beautiful establishment is blanketed in stunning murals and has windows adorned in logos that make this graphic designer want to dance with joy. It’s hip and upscale, but not standoffish. Inside, there is a charming bakery display of delicious vegan treats, plenty of seating for an often-packed house, and the bathrooms come with savvy bulletin boards decoupled in local flyers for amazing nearby businesses and events.

We sat outside next to a fence beautifully speckled in veggie-art, and were happy to order a delicious French press in the rare cool Florida breeze. I ordered a tummy-warming carrot soup to start which was brilliantly seasoned. I then had the polenta cakes which came with a hint of coconut flavor and made for an exquisite culinary experience with the red cabbage slaw, organic corn, avocado ranch, sriracha, and black sesame seeds. The portions are plenty. More than enough. Service was divine: attentive, resourceful, and kind without any sense of pushiness or rush. Even the water in its tall glass pitcher for the table looked pretty.