

Respecting the Reader

Hello, is anybody there?

Some writers write to write; it's a compulsion, like singing along to *Mama Mia* or reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* on your Kindle.

Other writers write to remember, anticipating the day when they will have to leave sticky notes around the house to remind themselves to let the cat out.

Me, I write to be read. If I didn't, I'd just cavort with my fantasies all day and save myself a lot of grief.

When I was an advertising writer, there wasn't a word I wrote that ever ended up the same way it started out. Even the minimalist words in a television commercial were scrubbed up one side and down the other, from colleagues to creative directors to clients—and, *oh, yes*, the lawyers, who never met a fun word they couldn't find some reason to kill.

But as a novelist, objectivity is a choice rather than an imposition. Personally, I've found it easy to get sucked in by my own words, basking in how wonderful they were to write rather than how relevant they might be to read.

So I try to keep one goal always in mind: Respect the reader.

If someone is going to spend actual money to buy my book, then invest hours or days of their time to read it, my principal obligation, I think, is to make that investment worthwhile. Money may come and go, but time only moves in one direction, and there's nothing worse than getting through a book and thinking you should have spent your time washing the car or watching reruns of *Friends*.

Personally, I think books should be fun to read, should be engaging, involving, challenging, enthralling. Elmore Leonard said if it sounded like writing, he took it out. For me, it's just the opposite: I think reading is *all about the writing*.

Words *matter*—not just in the mouths of the characters but in the minds of the readers. I don't just want to be told a story, I want to *get lost* in a story. I want poetry and imagery and sensory experiences. I want to *do* things and *think* things and even *be* things I could never do on my own. I want the book to be a guide to open up a whole new world for me, so I feel enriched for having read it rather than depleted for having wasted my time with it. In the end, I want to put down the book and be flabbergasted and exhausted and utterly alive and say, "Wow, that was great! When can we do it again?!"

Is that easy to achieve? Nope. But it's worth striving for, don't you think?