

# Dear Writer:

written by Guest Contributor | November 9, 2016



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Dear Writer:

Remember me? I am the grateful recipient of the thoughtful words you sent [yeah, it was that long ago] for possible inclusion in the first [and best damn] anthology celebrating the wild places of Orange County, CA.

I would like to thank you again for contributing [to what seemed like a good idea for a sabbatical proposal two years ago] and apologize for the [hella] delay in responding to your submission.

The last year has been challenging [who knew long-distance running could be so addicting—and how productive one feels while literally running away from life-shizz] in ways that might seem small to some [especially those with real problems] but that loom large to me [100-miles large]; I am thankful, however, to be emerging from whatever kind of cocoon these long months have proven to be.

The question remains: will this cocoon lead to butterfly-hood, or just another awkward instar phase? [Instar = “developmental stage including pupa or imago. The number of instars an insect undergoes depends on the species and the environmental conditions. Lower temperatures and humidity often slow the rate of development” . . . Wikipedia.]

If only I could blame temperature and humidity for the slow rate the [best damn, if I ever finish it] anthology is developing.

But if not temperature and humidity, then what?

How about: fear [says many quite respectable psychology of procrastination web sites].

**Fear.**

What kind of **fear**, you might ask—if you did not consider the insect analogy a cheap trick and have continued to read thus far, maybe out of curiosity to see if this is some kind of wandering rejection letter ending with the gut-punch line, “Sorry, but your work is not quite right/ready/relevant.”

Let’s avoid that issue for a bit and wander a ways down this **fear**-filled path, thesaurus in hand, and let us notice together what might be growing in the cracks between the stones [having abruptly slid the analogy from pupa to plants]:

*Angst, anxiety, concern, consternation, cowardice, discomposure, dismay, disquietude, distress, doubt, dread, foreboding, funk, jitters, panic, suspicion, terror, unease, worry.*

What a thesaurific bumper crop! Where to begin! Have you ever seen such a thick mat of creeping *angst*, subspecies *anxiety*? Even though the bloom season is over, those ripening seed stalks mean we can look forward to lots more of this in the future every time someone asks, “How’s that anthology coming along?”

Humble *cowardice* is another low-growing plant, so tiny many people don’t even notice it, but you know it’s there, sending underground runners in every direction until it has formed an impenetrable layer of tiny leaves that smell like dreams when you crush them.

Then there’s the “*dis-*” genus, which has many remarkable members, all with one identical identifying trait—sort of like salvias with their square stems—but the similarity between the “*dis*” is how they affect your central nervous system: *discomposure, dismay, disquietude, and distress* are all guaranteed to make your right eyelid twitch every time you think about opening the [best damn] anthology email account. So let’s not do that.

*Foreboding*? You really don’t see it? It’s right there: that red-stemmed, red-leaved, red-flowered plant a few feet off the path, over in that patch of shade. Keep looking, and pretty soon you’ll see it’s everywhere, little red flags to keep you worried about what might happen if you leave the path and try something new. Like compiling a [damned] anthology of writing that celebrates the wild places of Orange County.

Once your eyes get used to picking out *foreboding* in the landscape, it’s easy to let the path lead you to a major low spot, or *funk* as thesaurus.com likes to call it.

Down here grow some really intense varieties of fear such as *jitters* and *panic*—both will take your breath away [read: hyperventilate].

*Suspicion* and *self-doubt* are another fascinating pair of fear synonyms; they both sprout from bulbs in response to changes in temperature. When the heat is turned up, *suspicion* buds: “Besides the fact that this damnthology has transformed me into an incompetent whiner, what else is going to go wrong?”

On the other hand, cold weather is what activates *self-doubt*, as in, “It’s gonna be a cold day in hell when I’m ever be able to get all these pieces

read and edited and arranged and off to an agent.”

(*Suspicion* flowers are more outwardly showy as well, while *self-doubt* blossoms are almost hidden by the thick strappy leaves that do a great job protecting the flowers from just about everything, including friendly pollinators who would really like to help out but are repulsed by *self-doubt*'s impenetrable leafy defense.)

*Terror* is pretty rare in this neck of the woods, thank goodness. But *unease* thrives just about everywhere there is no damnthology happening . . . as does *worry*, a plant so prolific it spreads not only by rhizomes but by wind, bird, animal, and insect pollination.

What most people don't realize is that the various morphs of *worry* take just as many forms as its pollination: most common is *worry* about one's ability to complete the project, closely followed by *worry* about hurting people's feelings if their work is not chosen to be included. Then there's the more hypothetical *worry* about how life will change once there is a completed book to market, publicize . . . sell.

Finally, by working underground, the hemi-parasitic *procrastination* enjoys a symbiotic relationship with all the varieties of **fear** listed above. The more **fear**, the more *procrastination* thrives. Welcome to my world.

All right, Thea. Enough is enough. Can this long-winded **fear**/plant analogy provide any seeds of hope as it progresses into ridiculousness?

Mycology to the rescue! What grows out of rotting debris? Specifically, what is ready to grow out of the rotting debris left behind when **fear** is (finally, inevitably) vanquished by hope and love and purpose and joy and friends and prayer and hard work?

A mushroomy fruiting body that rises above the soil, exquisite and delicious.

Time to sporidify!

[And so I've managed to spend another couple of hours *not-working* on the anthology.]

Please bear with me as I continue to carry this weird weight of ~~writer's~~ editor's block. I remain committed to seeing the project through, and look forward to contacting you soon with news of progress.

Cheers,

Thea Gavin, Editor  
Orange County Wild Places Anthology

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**Thea Gavin** is a native of Orange, CA, where the steep trails east of town continue to inspire her barefoot running and writing. Other inspirations include Summer Fishtrap workshops in Wallowa County, OR; the Artist-in-Residence program at Grand Canyon National Park; and all the adventurous wanderers and writers she's met in her journeys.

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