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The Washington Post

The Writing Life

Watching a writer write is about as interesting as watching paint dry -- but something hairy is going on. . . .

By Stephen King
Sunday, October 1, 2006

About halfway through my latest novel, Jim Dooley, a dangerously unhinged literary stalker finds himself in the study of his idol, Scott Landon, a famous writer. Although Scott has been "He deserved a nice place like this," he tells Scott's widow. "I hope he enjoyed it, when he wasn't agonizin' over his creations."

Lisey Landon spent 25 years with Scott, and knows a thing or two about that creative process: She "thought of Scott at the desk he called Dumbo's Big Jumbo, sitting before his big-sc. Chewing either a plastic straw or his own fingernails. Sometimes singing along with the music. Making arm-farts if it was summer and hot and his shirt was off. That was how he agonize-

She keeps her mouth shut because Jim Dooley -- like Annie Wilkes in *Misery*, another book of mine that touches on the writing life -- is a walking land mine. But even were Dooley an sets him in motion), I think she would have held her peace. Because some things simply don't bear much talking about, and the writing life happens to be one of them. Although Lisey co late husband, if it came right down to it. Most writers are actually pretty punk when it comes to explicating what they do or how it makes them feel, and why not? Does a barber cut his

Quotes do come to mind, however. One of them is Gertrude Stein's famous *bon mot* concerning Oakland, Calif.: "There is no there there." Another is Otto von Bismarck's on the legis. Knowing the process by which novels are written would not keep many readers awake at night, but it certainly wouldn't sell many papers . . . and the next editor to propose an essay or

There's a mystery about creative writing, but it's a boring mystery unless you're interested in this one small animal, sometimes quite vicious, that makes its home in the bushes. It's a scruf domesticated and isn't exactly known for its loyalty. I'll speak more of this beast -- to which the Greeks gave the comically noble name *musa*, which means song -- later, but in the mea show the working part in movies about writers, only the drinking, carousing and heroic puking in the gutter by the dawn's early light.

Dig this: The so-called "writing life" is basically sitting on your ass.

You have to have a place, but it can be anywhere, really. You have to have some time, but it can be anytime. Early this summer, while my wife and son were doing a joint reading at the He makes no trouble. I took him to Deering Oaks Park, found a bench in the shade and wrote four good pages on my new novel in the notebook I carry around. Frodo kept an eye on

People walked past, and no one gasped, "Oh, look! That man is caught in the cosmic godhead fire of the writing life!"

One woman did ask if my dog was a Corgi. I said he was. She informed me the Queen has Corgis. I told her I knew that. Then I went back to writing my novel, and Frodo went back.

It's nice to have your own place, I will admit that. And it's nice to have your own time because you can keep people from calling you on the phone and breaking your concentration. Of bushes.

That part of the romance I really believe. There is indeed a half-wild beast that lives in the thickets of each writer's imagination. It gorges on a half-cooked stew of suppositions, supersti place one calls one's study or writing room is really no more than a clearing in the woods where one trains the beast (insofar as it can be trained) to come. One doesn't call it; that doesn comes, drawn by the entrancing odor of hopeful ideas. Some days it only comes as far as the edge of the clearing, relieves itself and disappears again. Other days it darts across to the