

---

## Here's Why Writing and Sharing Books Brings Me Purpose and Meaning

"So, if you have found something that brings you meaning—whether a hobby, a cause, a learning experience or a creative endeavor—but fear that life's constraints will hold you back from engaging in it, I invite you to shift your perspective," writes Norman Shabel.

August 30, 2024 at 10:00 AM

Op-Ed

By Norman Shabel - August 30, 2024 at 10:00 AM

A fundamental question people grapple with at all stages of life is: What brings me purpose and meaning?

From a young age, one answer stood out to me: writing fiction. By the time I was in my 20s I had drafted several novels. Eventually, I penned 7 plays and 8 novels—many based in the New York and New Jersey area. Putting stories on paper then bringing them out into the world has always brought an unparalleled level of meaning to everyday life.

But knowing what brings meaning is just one side of the equation. Finding ways to engage in meaningful activities amid life's multiple constraints is another altogether. When I was just starting out, I was extremely busy building a career as a plaintiff's attorney and prosecutor and raising a family. I often squeezed writing in while I was hunched over my desk waiting for a jury verdict to come in. Today, life is calmer and yet, there are always constraints. I no longer have the adrenaline of youth. My family has grown to include grandchildren. Traveling to see them, as well as to spend time with the many other people I care about, keeps me busier than I anticipated. There's always something.

So, I have found a new way to keep the meaning of writing alive. That is, focusing my energy on sharing the stories I wrote in the past. In many respects, this has proven to be the most meaningful part of my writing journey.

Why?

First, my inspiration for writing was initially sparked by seeing the prejudices and injustices that riddled our legal system while I was practicing law. These include judges' and juries' unconscious biases. There are also hidden agendas that guide the decision-making process, and alliances between judges and defense lawyers, mayors, police and others in power. All of this can shape what a jury hears in a case, therefore greatly influencing the outcome—and justice. In writing New York and New Jersey based legal thrillers, I wanted to show this to the world. And I did.

For example, my novel "Four Women" is about four elderly women struggling to retain their homes in Miami despite greedy builders attempting to remove them to make a profit. The protagonist—their lawyer—also represents a young father who fell into a vat of boiling sulfuric acid at the factory where he worked. He couldn't sue his employer for negligence because the workers' compensation laws in Florida favor the employer. Both situations reflect incidents that, as a lawyer, I saw time and again.

These issues are still prominent in our legal system today, and I am still just as passionate about telling the world all about these behind-the-scenes forces. Sharing my books allows me to do so. Knowing that readers will learn from them, becoming more aware as citizens and empowered to take action to fight such injustices wherever they can brings me a tremendous sense of fulfillment.

Perhaps more importantly, I am deeply gratified to share the legacy of the real-life people—women in particular—who inspired many of the characters in my fiction. For example, my mother, Jeannette, who emigrated from Poland, married at 14 and raised four children alone after my father was severely injured in a work accident. Her personal struggles as a welfare recipient inspired her to fight for the rights of others in New York's welfare system. My aunt Helen, too, had a formidable spirit, fighting for tenant rights in Coney Island after witnessing landlord neglect. Aspects of their stories are woven into various novels and plays I have written, including "Four Women." It is immensely gratifying that by sharing my books, I am keeping their legacies alive.

So, if you have found something that brings you meaning—whether a hobby, a cause, a learning experience or a creative endeavor—but fear that life’s constraints will hold you back from engaging in it, I invite you to shift your perspective. The imperatives of reality never go away; they merely evolve. Instead of abandoning meaningful pursuits or giving up before you start, you can adapt them. For example:

Break them down into a series of smaller steps and take them one step at a time.

Focus on the process and the parts of it that you enjoy instead of the end goal.

Remind yourself why the activity brings you meaning and continue nurturing the aspects most closely related to this.

In my case, the ability to share my stories has always been a key ingredient of the meaning writing brings me. Today, I consider it a privilege to be able to focus on this aspect 100 percent.

**Norman Shabel** *is the author of eight novels, praised by Judge Andrew P. Napolitano as “terrific, fast-paced reads about the dark side of law enforcement and the judiciary.” Many of his stories are inspired by his 55-year career as a plaintiff’s attorney and prosecutor, where he witnessed injustice and oppression on a daily basis; others draw on his experiences of Jewish family life and his observations of its unique dynamics. His novels include “The Aleph Bet Conspiracy,” “Four Women” and “The Badger Game.” Also a prolific playwright, Shabel has written seven plays, three of which have been produced off-Broadway in New York City, Philadelphia and Florida. Among them are “A Class Act,” “Marty’s Back in Town,” and “Are the Lights Still on in Paris?” Born in Brooklyn, Norman is retired from law and splits his time between New Jersey and Florida. He finds much joy spending time with his adult children and his grandchildren. For more information about Norman Shabel, his books or his plays, please visit <https://normanshabel.net>.*

NOT FOR REPRINT

---

Copyright © 2024 ALM Global, LLC. All Rights Reserved.