

Sage Advice for Writers from TA Barron

By Jamie Lee Wallace

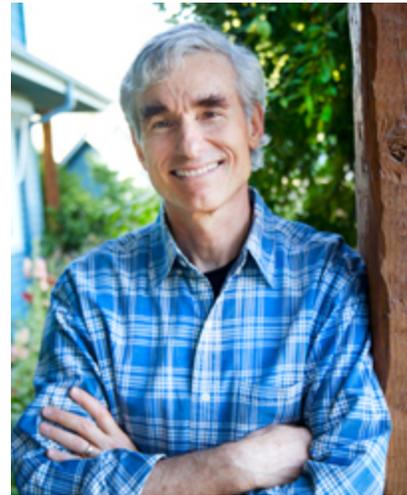
Live to Write – Write to Live Blog

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***Author's Note:** Hello! Nice to have you here. Today's post is an extra long one – packed with real world insights from T.A. Barron, the real world author of more than twenty books including *The Heartlight Trilogy*, *The Merlin Saga*, and his latest release, *Atlantis Rising*.*

Barron is a writer whose heart is as big as his imagination, and I'm so pleased to be able to share some of the lessons he has learned over the course of his writing career so far.

Why do you write? What story are you trying to tell? What question are you trying to answer? What void are you trying to fill?



These are big questions.

As I rush through my days juggling deadlines, parenting duties, and all the tasks that keep my world spinning, I do not always have time to give these queries the attention they deserve. But every once in a while something pulls me up short and reminds me that these are the very questions a writer must sit with each day.

It was a kind and inspirational voice from three years ago that pulled me up short this time, the voice of author [T.A. Barron](#).

Barron's stories inspire children young and old all around the world. Covering vast mythical territories, his epic fantasies draw you in and captivate your imagination while gently whispering in your ear about your own heroic potential. As a writer, he has earned bestseller status, numerous awards, and the high praise of his peers including [Lloyd Alexander](#), [Madeleine L'Engle](#), and [Isabel Allende](#). As a man, he lives a life worthy of any one of his curious, courageous, and compassionate protagonists.

Though Barron's life story reads something like a fairytale, it was passion and perseverance rather than magic that led to his happy ending. Barron wrote throughout his childhood and young adult years, but didn't start writing full time until he was nearly forty. As the story goes, he made a sudden departure from a prestigious job as the president of a growing New York-based company. After assuring his shocked partners that he hadn't lost his mind, Barron moved to Colorado. There, he and his wife raised their children while Barron worked on his novels.

Barron explains the unexpected mid-life career change, "Even when I was president of a business, I often found myself getting up at 4 a.m. to write, composing during meetings, or

scribbling in the back of a taxi. Finally I had to make a choice, to do what I love best, because life is too short not to follow your passions.”

Life is too short. Follow your passions.

These statements might feel cliché or contrived coming from someone else, but not Barron. They reflect not only themes that are central to his work, but how he lives his life.

When I met him three years ago, Barron struck me as a gentleman adventurer whose travels have occurred as much in the heart as in the world. His genuine warmth made it feel completely natural to greet him with a hug instead of a handshake. Part philosopher, part scientist, and part artist, he sees writing as a journey of exploration and discovery that encompasses not only his own experiences, but those of his characters and his readers.

Though many seasons have passed since I had the pleasure of interviewing Barron via postal correspondence and phone, the ideas and advice he shared remain as relevant today as they were when we first spoke. I have unintentionally kept these to myself for far too long and to continue to do so would be tremendously selfish. So, I'd like to take this opportunity to share a few of my favorite writing- and life-related bits from our conversations. There's a lot of great stuff here, so grab a cup of your favorite tasty beverage, settle in, and let me introduce you to Mr. T. A. Barron.

On what it takes to be a writer:

Writing is a craft, something one learns by doing. There is no substitute for constant practice. (And that, unfortunately, requires constant discipline.)

So, write every chance you get – when traveling for work, during lunch, any time you have a few spare moments. And don't ever, ever, EVER let anyone tell you to stop trying to tell your stories!

On his personal writing process:

Writing is a strange, mysterious process. After more than twenty years, I still don't know how it really works. But I do know it requires a special, personal chemistry. As a writer, I approach a story with the flexibility to have the higher view and the up close scrutiny at the same time. It's all about getting inside the story, inside the characters - finding out what, ultimately, this is about.

Normally I need a sort of aerial photograph of the terrain of a quest so that I know the approximate beginning, ending, and the dangerous marshes or inspiring peaks in between. In this way, the outline becomes a kind of trail map. Then, I intentionally lose the map, so I can find out what the terrain is like on the ground. I wander, explore, and really get to know the place and all the characters. Now, sometimes my characters tell me to turn right when the map says turn left. In such cases, I always listen to my characters. They have their own integrity, and that must be respected if they are going to feel true to my readers.

On the perilous danger of distraction:

If you think of [your] life as a package of potential then you either say, 'I'm not up for the challenge of trying to fill it and I'm going to be distracted my whole life' (which is a choice), or you can say, 'I want to be whatever I can be and this is going to be a journey.' To quote one of the greatest writers who has ever lived, J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Not all those who wander are lost.'

On the inspirational qualities of mortality:

I have always thought of every second of life as truly precious and therefore one's job in life really boils down to this, 'Be whatever you can be. Grow in every way you possibly can. Rise to whatever heights you dream of achieving and along the way really be present. Appreciate the world. Appreciate the way a single leaf falls to the ground and makes a barely audible crunch as it hits the other leaves.'

On being a good parent (*which is also great advice for how to nurture your inner writer*):

It's really about helping her realize that her dreams have value, helping her know what they are, and then encouraging her to live those dreams ... being around kids is the most energizing experience somebody can have in life because they are naturally so full of curiosity, humor, wonder, vitality, nonsense, and a kind of endless playfulness ...

It's such a rare and quickly passing experience but I find it so humbling and beautiful that for that short amount of time we get to be right beside them in their discovery of the world – in their first use of language, in their early explorations of their imagination, in their initial faltering footsteps, in their conquests and their tumbles ... To see them discover a whole world that is now part of their lives. It's really a privilege.

On what's really scary:

It's always scary to do something that's different and untried ... to change a job and change location, but that is not nearly as scary as the idea of growing old, sitting on my front doorstep, and thinking, 'Why didn't I really go for it? Why didn't I really try to follow my dreams?'

On the power of following your heart:

If you clarify for yourself what you love and then go for it, something marvelous will happen. There is no doubt about that. It may not be exactly what you conceived at the start (and it certainly won't be something you can predict at the start), but it will be good.

On the truth of living your dream:

Mainly, all I know is that I still have a lot more to learn. But I do know this much: The first key to making your dreams come true is to know those dreams clearly. That means looking inside – asking yourself what you truly love – rather than looking outside ... Dreams come from inside, not outside. They must be owned at the level of your soul.

Then comes the second key: Perseverance. Once you know your dreams, never stop pursuing them, no matter what obstacles the world throws at you. This is your life, your soul, your dreams – the most precious things you have. So it's worth fighting to keep them wholly alive! If you stay true to them, with a bit of luck, you will succeed. And you'll have a marvelous journey along the way.