



The Inside Story

A Writing Life at the Intersection of Shy and Introvert

By Carol Coven Grannick

I live at the intersection of Shy and Introvert in a world and business of Put-Yourself-Out-There. I'm guessing there are others reading this who live in the same neighborhood.

Few recent acquaintances, colleagues, or even friends of mine would call me shy or know that I'm an introvert. Many people who meet me these days tell me that it simply can't be true.

But it is true.

Even though I'm now far from the socially awkward girl who felt like she didn't know what to say to people, this little one still lives inside me:



She's not the loudest voice, but she stays around to remind me of where and who I've been. She is part of my personal tapestry of qualities, experiences, and characteristics that make me one whole human package.

In fact, her little *I'm-scared-I'm-small-I'm-not-good-enough* squeaks also remind me of how much impact

I've been able to make on my own life's journey. I've learned through practice and hard work to replace Mousey's pessimistic thoughts with more optimistic thoughts. (And I recommend for anyone serious about learning to reframe negative thinking the work being done in the field of [Positive Psychology](#).)

That, and a feistiness I may have been born with—but have definitely cultivated—encourages me to continue to stretch myself beyond characteristics that limited me in childhood. These traits and practices also allow me to be the more relaxed, spontaneous, funny, authentic, honest person I've always been, although with only a small group of close friends.

Taking Stock

As an introvert, I prefer small gatherings to large events, meetings with a few friends or colleagues, and a schedule that doesn't fill up with back-to-back social engagements. I need a feeling of meaningful connectedness in relationships, as well as enough alone-time to feel connected to myself.

I still set reasonable (achievable) goals that take my "tapestry" into account. I may tell myself, *Go ahead to this event, even if you don't enjoy it as a whole, because you can find a way to enjoy small parts of it, like interactions with a few people that will add meaning and value to life. But I might also give myself the option to say, Nope, not going to this, because today, right now, it's overwhelming because of _____.* And I'm okay with that. I get to decide when I want to leap, and when I'm just not up for it. We all do.

When Journey Meets Challenge—or Celebration

In most journeys, major life events, both painfully difficult and joyfully positive, tend to test us and allow us to *discover unknown or dormant strengths*. My journey to stretch myself beyond my childhood limitations has led to both painful and joyful events that push me to change or adapt much more quickly than I might otherwise have.

For example, I wrote about [my experience at a major medical center](#) in Chicago after my husband's heart surgery because it changed me forever. I discovered in an instant my capacity to overcome a lifelong hesitancy to speak truth to a *certain kind* of power. This not only enabled the hospital crisis to have a positive ending, but it has impacted my writing life. For example, I've noticed a greater comfort and authenticity in the queries I send out and a parallel increase in feeling like a peer of editors and agents, rather than someone "smaller," in need of their approval.

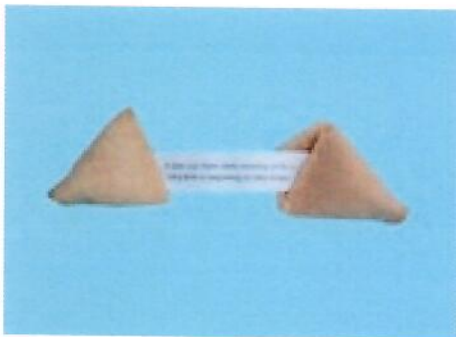
In March of this year, the positive experience of receiving a book contract jolted me onto a new path. I felt a warm but quiet glow of pleasure in the offer, and in that instant my decade-long journey with this story, its ups and downs, its multiple revisions, and what I call its "Beautiful, buts" ended. The road, previously filled with *angst* and the pure emotional weight of being on the journey, turned a corner. I was on a new road now. The road I'd been on became a story I could tell, filled with experiences I could share that might help others.



I overflowed with excitement about all the marketing activities I would need to plan leading up to my book launch. What? Huh? Me, the shy and introverted writer, the mouse, excited about marketing? Yep. I was as surprised as you might be.

The Plan

Rewinding for a moment...I like to plan ahead, if I can, for events that may challenge me, test how I've grown, or allow me to use strengths I've developed. In September of 2018 I applied for an [Illinois Arts Council Grant](#) to attend [Esther Hershenhorn's Vermont Manuscript Workshop](#).



At the time I applied, I hoped I wouldn't be doing yet another revision of *Reeni's Turn*, my MG novel in verse, but I figured I'd have a new manuscript. Since I couldn't attend without the grant, it was a plan in limbo. But as a person wanting to make a good match between my preferences and my strengths while also aiming to challenge myself a bit, I'd chosen this workshop for three very particular reasons:

1. Unlike my previous [Ragdale Foundation residency](#), where I had a meaningful but not completely socially copacetic experience, I knew I'd be more comfortable in a group of children's writers.
2. Esther's workshop is small. For the shy part of me, meeting a handful of people I didn't know would be easier than meeting a whole



Landgrove Inn, Landgrove, Vermont, where Esther Hershenhorn's Manuscript Workshop takes place

houseful. We were four writers and Esther.

3. I knew and had worked with Esther early in my children's writing career and trusted her to be straightforward and extremely helpful in getting a manuscript to blossom.

(and potentially amazing!) social or professional situations.

• Act Friendly.

I had a friend in my graduate program in social work who once made an interesting comment to me. I'd probably said something about feeling uncomfortable in social situations, to which she replied, "You say you're shy, and I get that, but how you *look* and *seem* is aloof and angry." Wow. That was a good friend, and she taught me something I've never forgotten.

I learned that friendly, mannerly behavior that focuses on the other person relaxes the shy, sometimes self-deprecating "Why would anyone want to talk to me?"-ness that can happen to us in new situations.

I learned to ask about the other person and stop worrying about myself. When the opportunity arises, saying *please*, *thank you*, and looking directly at someone while talking or listening—even if it's uncomfortable—is so helpful.

- **Remember how interesting most people are, with stories of their own they often enjoy sharing.**

And Then...

In midwinter I was notified that I would receive the IACA grant. Yay! I signed up for the workshop. In March, only two months later, I signed a contract with Fitzroy Books for the September 2020 debut of *Reeni's Turn*. Before the workshop I consulted with Esther concerning initial ideas for marketing the book, and we agreed that we would spend the week in Vermont creating a "Grand Promotional Plan." I could hardly wait until July!

Now that the workshop has come and gone—and yes, Landgrove was this exquisite—I have reflected on some *behaviors* that enabled me to have an amazing week. You may recognize them and may have your own ways of behaving that help you as you head to potentially uncomfortable



As soon as I ask about someone else and that person begins to share or story-tell, it helps me feel involved. As I get to know a new person, I remember how interesting most people are. We all have our unique stories. And hearing another's story may encourage me to share my own.

• Embrace the idea of "stretching" yourself.

I love Ray Bradbury's quote: "You've got to jump off cliffs all the time and build your wings on the way down." The more I gather "stretching" experiences and the more I take leaps without wings, the more comfortable I become, even though I never expect to lose (or get rid of) Mousey.

For many of us the behaviors I note above are the result of *beliefs* we hold about being decent to others and believing in their goodness, using good manners, extending hospitality in the broadest sense, and more. I have found that tying these positive, people-oriented behaviors to my beliefs is an aid as I attempt to integrate such behaviors more fully into my life.

But back to the Vermont retreat... Before I even thought about it, the five of us had gathered at dinner, chattering about writing and the business of writing and what we each hoped to accomplish during the week to come. By the time I settled into my cute room for the sleep I craved, I already felt part of this small cohesive group of mutually supportive children's writers, each with a different creative focus and unique work.

Becoming

One of the big issues Esther and I discussed in Vermont was my protagonist's journey. She has inner strengths, undiscovered and untested



until she makes a decision to perform a solo—the thing she dreams of but also the thing that frightens her more than anything. It is a journey, we realized, of *becoming*. Reeni must discover whether she can find courage, and voice, as a dancer and a young woman without giving up who she already is. I love the idea of a journey to become. My own journey does seem to echo through the heart of all my work.

I returned home from the retreat energized and with a commitment to myself to "leap" daily. Whether these leaps were tiny or big, I would try each day to do something *put-myself-out-there-ish*.

A few of the leaps I've taken recently include:

- Posting poems on **David Harrison's** [Word of the Month blog](#) (a little scary, but fun)
- Reaching out to someone I didn't know yet to make joint plans for a book-related event (not too scary)
- Promising a colleague I would show up at the local SCBWI-IL network party (promise = easy, actually going = not so easy, and in fact I didn't go, for several reasons)
- Contacting another colleague to try out for blog participation (uncomfortable but not terrifying)

- Reaching out to yet another colleague to ask about being featured in an article (really scary)

Based on the Grand Promotional Plan Esther and I developed at the Vermont Manuscript Workshop, I have about seven more things to do yesterday—so I plan to do them by the end of August.

Today I am neither the shy and introverted girl I once was nor completely free of those characteristics.



And that's just fine with me. I like my Mousey. She is part of me.

I believe we are all our history, our present, and our future. We are a mix of who we've been, who we are now, and—a favorite part of living, those repeated leaps of faith—who we can become.

How about you? I'd love to hear about "leaps" you've taken that might have been difficult for you but resulted in feeling great about "stretching" yourself. You can email me at carolcovengrannick@gmail.com.

Carol Coven Grannick's MG novel in verse, *Reeni's Turn*, will debut from Fitzroy Books in September 2020. Her take on the creative "inner journey" appears in the *Prairie Wind* and in *Cynsations* columns. In addition, Carol is a new member of the GROG Blog. Carol's poetry and fiction for young listeners and readers appears or is forthcoming in *Cricket*, *Ladybug*, *Babybug*, *Hello*, *Highlights*, and *Hunger Mountain*. She's working on her website to debut soon at carolcovengrannick.com.