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The Art of Creative Research

Philip Gerard | October/November 2006

Philip Gerard

The assignment was typical for the graduate course called "Research for Creative Writers"-a course designed to replace the old "Research Methods" class required of grad students in English: Visit an old cemetery. Find the name of a dead person *who interests you for some reason and about whom you know virtually nothing*. Track down all the information you can on the deceased and create a living character of dramatic interest to your reader and let us know why the bare facts etched on the grave marker enticed you to learn more. I call the assignment "Interrogating the Dead".

One of my students, Kirsten Holmstedt, a gifted journalist, interviewer, and essayist, visited a veterans cemetery out in the county where she came across a tombstone inscribed with a man's name, his birth and death dates, and the cryptic line, "We love and forgive you."

Love and forgive? For what?

Her find provoked a lively discussion in class, and a consensus emerged that the poor fellow must have committed suicide. But that was only a guess, and a guess is not a fact.

Kirsten telephoned the caretaker, who remembered only that the deceased had been in the Army and had died in prison. Prison? For what crime? She visited the local library and found his brief death notice on microfilm. The veteran had died in a hospital clear across the state from where he lay buried. Because she had been told he'd died while in prison, she also searched the North Carolina Department of Corrections Public Access Information System, an online database.

There she discovered his crimes: Incest. Crimes against nature. Indecent liberties with a child. He had been convicted more than a decade earlier and died of respiratory failure just before finishing out his sentence and being released.

But the story didn't stop there. Now that she knew his date of conviction, Kirsten was able to call up local newspaper stories in the town where the trial had occurred, including a short one headlined "Sex Offender Gets 30 Years."

The forty-nine-year-old had pleaded guilty to two counts of incest-ten years each-and a third count of crimes against nature, another ten-year sentence. But the judge suspended two of the sentences, substituting only five years of probation. Having been denied parole eight times, the man died only months before he would have been released.

Kirsten recalls, "At this point, I thought I was done with my research, until I read the next sentence: "'This was the most depraved and bizarre case I have ever prosecuted,'" said Assistant District Attorney Bob Gleason.' What?"

So she consulted an attorney friend in town and learned all sorts of details that never made it from the police reports into the court files. The victim was the man's daughter, who would have been younger than sixteen when the "indecent liberties with a child" were inflicted upon her. Originally the man had been charged with nine counts and had pleaded guilty to five-what became of those extra counts? Prior to this conviction, he had been sexually involved with two minor daughters in another state, so he was a chronic offender with deep-seated psychological issues- considered to be passive-aggressive, clinically depressed, an alcoholic, and suicidal.

Who paid for the grave marker and the inscription offering forgiveness-all of the abused daughters, or only one or two of them? Or someone else? *Who* forgave him? How did they come to forgive such a man? And if any one of them didn't forgive him, how did she make her peace with the others? And why was a dangerous pedophile given a sentence so light it outraged the prosecutor? What role did the mother-or mothers-play? How had he gotten away with it for so long? What became of the girls, now grown?

A cryptic inscription on a grave marker signaled a twisted and tragic family drama of serial incest that damaged the lives of three innocent girls, created a public furor, and opened a mystery of the human capacity for both depravity and compassion-the skein of story tugged loose from an arbitrary assignment that led to walking the ground, interviewing a stranger, visiting electronic and library archives, using expert contacts, and beginning to fit all the pieces together. The story lived in one word: forgive. That single word carried both a past and a future, embodied a relationship, a transgression, pain, sorrow, and redemption.

It was nothing like art yet, not even a coherent story. But the elements were beginning to reveal themselves, and the writer could then choose to investigate whichever part intrigued her the most-the relationship of the sisters, the sin and crime of incest, the ethics of crime and punishment as debated in this small town, or even the question of the motive of whoever set that tombstone in place: the inscription guarantees that the deceased will never rest free from the probing curiosity of whoever reads it. So was it truly an act of forgiveness, or a final, enduring note of disgrace?

Stories lie buried under our feet, painted over on the façades of our cities and towns, silenced under the barrage of everyday noise, forgotten or lost by death, erased from the public memory, but the writer can find them-and bring to life the personalities of the dramatic players, the sights and sounds and images that resonate with the meaningfulness of their lives, the language in which they acted out their hopes and loves and losses. Their stories lie dormant in objects, on musty pages of records and diaries scrawled with ink, in a riddle etched in a slab of granite marking a felon's grave.

To discover them, all that is required is imaginative research.

For the writer, researching is about being resourceful in every sense of the word: finding research resources and exploiting them in your creative work, using all your ingenuity and inventiveness to develop an archive for your particular project and learning how to manage the precious and finite resources of time, energy, and money to accomplish it. It is based on our fascination with mystery, in the broadest possible sense: that which is hidden from us, the answer we crave to know in order to make sense out of our world.

"Resurrection Men"

In the 19th century, midnight entrepreneurs carried on a lively business raiding fresh graves to supply doctors with cadavers on which to practice their anatomy and surgery-so necessary to becoming healers. These grave-robbers called themselves

"resurrection men." I like to think of the writer doing research as a kind of resurrection man (or to be gender neutral, "resurrectionist") because we exhume the dead past-often that part of the dead past that many would rather see remain safely buried-in order to grant it a new and different life. The term reminds me of both the nobility of the cause and the need to get our hands dirty while serving it. And that sometimes we must serve it rather clandestinely.

I mean this to apply to poets and fiction writers as well as writers of creative nonfiction-indeed, in the years I've taught research classes, it has often been the poets who have penetrated to some surprising level of insight based on a research project that took them far afield from the comfortable and familiar. I still vividly recall a cycle of poems based on a decades-old murder case in a small Southern town, in which two lovers who had last been seen together went missing, their bodies recovered in pieces in several locations. The poems were heartbreaking and beautiful, and a good bit of their beauty derived from the author's having visited the scene of the crime to capture its shadows and light and contours and smells, read the extensive testimony in order to gather in the local idiom and the various theories of what had happened in that moment of dismembering violence, talked at length to the retired local sheriff and others who knew the slain couple to hear the barely concealed anger and sorrow and horror in their voices all these years later, and recovered the vivid lives of the victims with an authentic accuracy.

To me, research is a habit, an attitude of open-minded alertness, a way of being in the world, of being alert for *knowledge* in any form-knowledge defined as some clue I didn't have before about how the world works.

Research takes you the writer out of yourself, frees you for a time from paralyzing self-absorption, while offering endless fascinating subjects. It entices you into the public arenas of history and politics and catches you up in the shared public memory of a place, a community, a region. And ultimately, of course, leads you back through a new route into yourself, your deepest writer's heart, teaching you what you truly care about and why. Research, as creative writers practice it, is really a combination of treasure hunting, investigative reporting, talking to interesting people, playing detective, and solving mysteries.

Accidentally on Purpose

It seems to me that there are three kinds of research:

1. Deliberate research, directed at a particular project-e.g., visiting a planetarium to view star clusters for a series of poems about the mythology of the night sky.
2. Deliberate research, not directed toward a particular project-e.g., visiting a planetarium in order to allow the experience to possibly provoke some image, idea, or connection and thus inspire a story or poem that may or may not have anything to do with the literal experience of viewing stars and planets.
3. Accidental research-e.g., you find yourself dragooned into chaperoning your daughter's field trip to the planetarium and simply open yourself to the experience, paying attention, possibly even taking notes, watching the reactions of the kids, listening to their banter, captivated by the dome of heaven rotating above you full of light and meaning.

In the first instance, you have a specific project in mind-a book, a cycle of poems, a short story, a long essay. You are searching the known archives for particular information that you know or suspect can be found there-facts, statistics, photographs, records. Answers to questions you have already formulated. You may even know-or think you know-the shape of the thing you are constructing: a braided essay with seven parts based on days of the week, or a poem in the form of a scientific paper, or a novel that reads like a trial transcript.

In the second, you know almost nothing, but you do feel a sense of allurements in either the subject or the archive. Something is calling to you, tempting you to take a look. You may have no clue what has snagged your interest. As you research, you will, if you are lucky, discover the basis for your infatuation and be able to pursue it with more focus, to get a handle on your story in the largest sense, then to figure out its shape and form and significance.

In the third case, you have simply blundered into a situation ripe for inspiration-for breathing into your writer's brain some glimmer of language, sensation, or idea that can then shape itself into something more. In an important way, almost all memoir derives from accidental research-surely most children don't create and preserve a deliberate archive of their life experiences to draw upon later when they decide to take up the literary life. They did not *choose* to do an immersion project as the abused child in a dangerous home, or volunteer to be raped, or deliberately participate in the Holocaust. They rely on the memory of experiences that *happened* to them-an episodic, fragmented, skewed, kaleidoscope of moments filtered through attitude and emotion.

Yet for the writer, everything is a lesson.

I say "in an important sense" because it calls to our attention just how provisional the evidence is upon which so much memoir is based. If someone had indeed been taking notes or videotaping the experience, would that truth corroborate remembered truth, even in a broad way? Of course not, or at least, not often, which makes an argument for researching your own life-ransacking the archives of home movies, photographs, public records, and the reminiscences of others who were there, to enlarge and complexify the narrative about yourself you have rehearsed for so long.

A student of mine, who happens to be a reporter for a major metropolitan newspaper, and who was just a teenager when her young mother succumbed to cancer, for a long time deliberately suppressed the painful memories of those years of illness and loss. Now she is putting her investigative reporter's skills to work, investigating her own past just as she would the background of a stranger who made the news: interviewing relatives and recovering artifacts-including photos and home movies and tape recordings of her mother's voice-in order to find out who her mother was, to recover accurate memories of their time together, and to make sense of it as memory and story. It is the best kind of project, driven by her passion to know the truth about someone who matters, leavened with a humility about trusting too much her own limited memories, executed with professional skill and the useful detachment that comes with playing a role-reporter-rather than insisting on the emotional identity of daughter. And taking advantage of archives that hold pieces of the story-the secrets she must discover to bring her mother to life on the page.

Seven Kinds of Archives

Which brings us to archives. I count seven kinds, though any writer may reasonably count more or less, and of course many of the particular sources spill over into more than one category. The number is not important, just the attitude that "archives" are found in many more places than the library. An archive is any repository of knowledge. You need to be inventive and imagine where the knowledge you want will be found. Part of researching is finding out what you have to find out. By the time you finish the research phase of your project, you will become the expert on it-you will in fact create the "archive" specific to your purpose.

My seven archives include the following:

1. **Paper Archives.** The obvious-libraries, special collections, private papers, letters, government documents, trial transcripts, manuscripts, books, monographs, periodicals, diaries, field notes, etc. My favorite paper archive was an unexpected one: a "receipt" or recipe book kept by the young third wife of a white supremacist in the 1890s including both recipes for confections such as a Lady Baltimore cake and sentimental poems about her philandering husband. Priceless to capture her mood and disposition, as well as the order of her household.
2. **Living Archives.** People-as you encounter them in personal interviews, performances, expert consultations, and simple observation. Of the hundreds of interviews I've conducted over the years, none was more satisfying than a day spent with the painter Ellsworth Kelly at his studio, where he not only talked about his own evolution from bird-watcher to artist, but also led me through a captivating private seminar on the development of the abstract aesthetic in art and the influence of French Cubist painters on military camouflage-all illustrated with his own sketches and paintings.
3. **Electronic Archives.** The World Wide Web full of databases and websites, CD-ROMs, proprietary databases, blogs, interactive sites, DVDs, CDs, digital photos, even GPS and radar data from instrument clusters on ships and airplanes. You can't afford to be a Luddite-get control of the technology and use it as you would any tool. Online facsimiles of documents and art now can save the researcher thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours and help you make smart choices about where to spend your resources. But beware: any online data is only as good as its provenance, so pay attention to the source. The documents available from the Massachusetts Historical Society are likely to be far more reliable than those found on private websites. One measure is that any bonafide electronic archive will credit the original source in detail, so you can back-check any item you're not sure about.
4. **Visual Archives.** Any graphic representation of knowledge-photographs, films and videos, blueprints, art, x-rays, graphs, charts, maps, museum displays, inscriptions, even monuments and tombstones. One of the most useful discoveries for *Secret Soldiers*, a book about a wily band of artists who conducted daring scenarios of deception against the Nazis, was a top-secret training film that showed them in action: broadcasting bogus radio traffic and then projecting sound effects of tank traffic over giant loudspeakers while actors costumed as famous generals diverted the attention of local spies. Not only did the film show detailed views of equipment that had long since been destroyed or lost, it also demonstrated that equipment in the working context of a "story" that would be staged again and again on

the battlefields of Europe from Normandy to the Rhine-the closest thing I would ever find to combat documentary footage.

5. **Audio Archives.** Close your eyes and listen-to music, natural sound, speeches, broadcasts, cockpit voice recordings, radio distress calls, industrial noise, the sounds that animals make. We are so visually-oriented that we often overlook this whole added dimension of research. But ask anyone who has ever been under an artillery barrage or a tornado and you'll realize that sound can take on a reality that almost creates a sense of mass and oppressive weight, just as insect chatter in a nighttime Carolina swamp can feel as silkily tactile as atmosphere.
6. **Experiential Archives.** There is no substitute for being there and doing the thing itself. This category includes "walking the ground," re-enacting the event in question, performing an activity, doing a "ride-along," handling artifacts, wearing clothes and gear, immersing yourself in the activity about which you are writing. For a novel about Paul Revere, not only did I walk ten miles of the rising and twisting "Battle Road" as the British troops had done in April 1775, I also learned to ride English-style on a cross-country track, climbed two hundred feet of precarious stairs and ladders into the narrow wind-swayed tower of the Old North Church from which lanterns were hung to warn the Patriots across the Charles River, practiced loading and firing a musket early on a cool morning when the burnt powder hazed the air and stung my nostrils.
7. **Archives of Memory and Imagination.** Clearly the memoirist must consult memory in a fairly comprehensive way. But it's up to any writer to somehow intuit the connections among all the various disparate elements of knowledge, to extrapolate from known facts to create plausible scenarios and fill in missing scenes, to daydream our way inside others' lives and find empathy for people utterly unlike ourselves in their religion, race, historical period, political beliefs, and so on. You sort out what makes sense, cross-referencing "facts" to triangulate both the truth of event and the larger truth. Here is where the writer's creative judgment finds its broadest play-mapping the shapes of pieces, recalling hundreds of bits and pieces and putting two and two together, discovering the meaning of the treasure that has been looted from all the other archives.

Remember:

- Everything you find out is valuable-even gaps and missing pieces, what should be but isn't in the record.
- You often don't know which discoveries will make it into the finished work: research is a process of harvesting whatever facts and sensory impressions you can and sorting them all out once you have a more coherent sense of where it all leads. Nothing is irrelevant.
- There is almost always more than one way to find out something-be persistent.
- *Know thyself.* That is, know it firsthand-don't take the word of a third or even second-hand source.

Organization and the Drama of Design

All of the above begins with attention to *design*-not just of the finished piece, but of the experience of finding out and writing the story in whatever form. During the research phase, you the writer are yourself the main character in a drama of discovery, epiphany, and creation. That is, you act to fulfill a desire-to know-and overcome all the obstacles to achieving that knowledge, along the way suffering reversals and recognizing new truths, until you arrive at an important insight, one that changes you and enlightens the reader.

So shape and plan your research experience as you will the project itself. Include a set of goals, a timeline, and a budget.

And before you conduct your first interview or visit your first special collection, get organized. Set up a "headquarters": a place to gather artifacts, collect files, store books, tapes, and photos. A place with a phone and a keyboard and Internet access. A place where you can keep both the tools and the fruits of your research sorted out and accessible. If you have a piece of information but can't locate it, it's of no use to you.

On the road, your "headquarters" might be a hotel room or your car-or even a backpack. Think of it as a working platform. Choose a hotel room that has a table or desk and a business center that makes photocopies. Stock your car with the things you'll need both to conduct your research (extra batteries for your digital camera or recorder, binoculars, pens and notebooks, etc.) and keep you comfortably in shape to work (bottled water, a cooler of healthy food, maybe a folding chair).

Create in this headquarters a system for gathering, sorting, and storing your research so that you can find whatever part of it you need when the time comes:

- A set of hard files. Lots of small files are more useful than one or two gigantic folders. I routinely designate a new file

for each person I interview, for example, along with separate files for each discrete place, event, concept, or item relevant to my project—all alphabetized and many filed twice—cross-referenced. And a "dump" or miscellaneous file for anything that doesn't fit into any obvious category.

- Hard copy transcripts of all interviews and field notes (yes, I type my scrawled notes at the end of each day, or their meaning evaporates in a day or two as surely as if they've been written in disappearing ink).
- Electronic copies of transcripts and typed notes—on the hard drive of the laptop, on a removable flash-drive, e-mailed as attachments to your server, etc. Hard drives crash, laptops get stolen all the time, and zip-disks or flash-drives can be lost or accidentally ruined. If it's important, back it up.
- A "contacts" file of key sources—again kept in several locations: hard drive, notebook, Blackberry or PDA, etc.
- A log sheet for interviews. Each log contains the name of the subject (interviewee), the date and place of the interview, and a notation of whether the interview has been transcribed or exists only in notes. Electronic and hard copy. The date is important, because months later it tells you the order in which you learned certain information—and you may need to re-interview a subject based on discoveries that came later.
- A set of photo or art files, kept either separately or incorporated into your other files. Digital graphics files are wonderful tools, easily created with a scanner. Then you can take your entire photo collection on the road inside your laptop, and leave the priceless originals at home in a safe place.
- A safe, secure place for artifacts—artwork, clothing, souvenirs, whatever. Make a note to remind yourself why you collected it.
- All of this preparatory organizational work may seem dull, but once you're on the project it will save you countless hours of fruitless rummaging, and will create the scaffolding on which you can create without the constant anxiety of feeling overwhelmed by your material.

Once you've organized a headquarters and devised a way to keep close track of what you discover, draft a plan for your research, keeping in mind two contradictory truths:

1. The order in which you seek out sources will determine the order in which you make discoveries, which will shape both the experience and the finished piece. There is probably some ideal Platonic order of discovery for any project.
2. But the constraints of time and budget, as well as the inherent messiness of the process, probably means that you will never know what that order is. This is a good thing—it takes tremendous pressure off you to create the perfect plan. All you need is a sensible plan, one that you can change as your project evolves. For instance, well into your research, you may need to revisit an archive where you started, since in the meantime you have discovered new information that will lead you to look for something else you didn't even know about before.
3. Research is a dynamic process, one discovery leading to another, and it takes place in the real world, which foils all neat plans: promising leads can disappoint, money can suddenly run out, or an unexpected source can show up when you least expect. While researching *Secret Soldiers*, which presented the difficulty that so much of the information essential to the story had been classified top secret that it had been destroyed or hidden away, one day out of the blue the phone rang and the voice on the other end—belonging to a man I'd never met—said he'd heard I was working on this book. Yes, I said, wondering how in the world he'd learned that. He asked, would I like some photographs? His stepfather had been the unit's official photographer and kept dozens of beautiful plates, one of which became the cover of the book.

Part of the fun of research is that it is messy and surprising. For every setback that ambushes you, an amazing unanticipated discovery falls into your lap.

For most projects, you are probably well-served by doing some basic, grounding research, so that you understand the broad outlines of the thing and some obvious avenues to explore. *If you don't know where to begin, begin somewhere.*

A good plan includes a timeline—as loosely or tightly conceived as your personality requires—and a realistic budget. You want to make at least an educated guess about how long this is going to take and what it is going to cost—including *opportunity* cost (what you might be doing instead) and lost wages.

The timeline will include the big picture—target dates for visiting certain archives or completing relevant travel—and also more local details: on a certain day, which hours will be spent interviewing, transcribing, in transit, reading, photocopying, walking the ground, etc. And a good timeline includes down time—those precious hours or days when you get the voices out of your head and relax, or do personal business unrelated to the project.

Writers mostly hate to think about money, but practically speaking, it's just another resource (like time, talent, passion, and good health) that allows us to do our work. Can you realistically afford to finish the project-or will you be forced to abandon it halfway through? This matters not just when you are selling a nonfiction book proposal (the advance on which will bankroll the rest of the research) but in any piece of writing. You don't want to be left wondering how the story would have turned out, if only you could have seen it through. This is fatal to your morale.

Even a skeletal budget can give you the following advantages:

- The best chance of finishing the project.
- If your budget shows the project to be too expensive, a chance to figure out alternative ways to pursue it-e.g., conducting certain interviews via phone rather than face-to-face, or borrowing rather than buying certain tools, or lengthening your timeline so you don't have to take unpaid leave from your job.
- Not wrecking your life. The whole point of pursuing a writing project through research is to create something beautiful, worthwhile, and true. You don't want to ruin your health or your marriage over it. Knowing the likely costs ahead of time helps you manage the financial, emotional, and physical risks.

Issues that seem merely financial often have wider implications for the work. If you are interviewing scientists at a conference but can't afford to stay at the downtown conference hotel, you may miss spontaneous arguments at the bar that go to the heart of what you are trying to discover. Traveling on the cheap to a Third-World locale, if you can't afford a "fixer" to help negotiate sketchy situations, you may expose yourself to unnecessary physical danger.

A useful budget might include items such as the following:

- Transportation-airfare; gas and tolls; bus and train tickets; fares for shuttles, boats, taxis; a rental car.
- Associated travel costs-visas, inoculations, repairs, parking, special permits and insurance, departure taxes.
- Food-both at restaurants and what you carry with you.
- Lodging, including tips and taxes.
- Other gratuities (and there are usually plenty).
- Any costs you plan to absorb on behalf of interview subjects, such as meals or drinks.
- Admissions fees, registration fees.
- Clerical charges-copying, mail, telephone, photo-processing.
- Tools and supplies-camera, film, computer disks, maps, batteries, notebooks, etc.
- A fudge factor of at least 10%. (More, if you lack precise figures for other costs.)

Keep a careful log of expenditures (use an expense log notebook, available at any stationery store) and save all receipts, noting on each what it was for. See your accountant before you embark on a project to learn what expenditures might be tax deductible. But when in doubt, save the receipt and note the expenditure. Sort it out later.

Seduction and Price Tags

The great trap of research is that it can seduce you into spending months and years in pursuit of facts and evidence and dampen the urgency to write. Researching is great fun, and it offers lots of moments of instant gratification. Writing is hard and seems to take a long time to produce even a grudging sense of satisfaction, let alone publication, fame, and glory. At some point, you must declare the research phase finished-even if it is not quite. This is where your plan can help. I vividly recall my plan for *Cape Fear Rising*, a novel about a white supremacist coup in 1898. After a carefully annotated twelve-month calendar of visits to special collections and significant locales where events had unfolded, I had noted on a certain date: Begin Writing Novel. At three-month intervals after that date, I had specified deadlines for finishing the various parts of the book as I had envisioned it.

Like most writers, I balked-surely there was more to learn, important things I had not yet discovered, sources still to be mined. But I stuck to my plan, and of course allowed myself to re-visit archives, to do extra research whenever I encountered a gap of events or logic or personality that I could not cross in words. So as on most long projects, it became a process of writing as far as I could go and then returning to the well and feeding that back into the writing.

The other great temptation for the researcher is to leave the price tag on the research. That is, once you begin writing in whatever genre, remember that most of what you learned in your research will not be part of the piece. Even a book doesn't contain enough space for the boxes of data, the hundreds of maps and photographs, the dozens of filled notebooks, and so on

that you have collected. Before I had written a word of the first draft of *Secret Soldiers*, I already had amassed a hundred thousand words of typed interview transcripts, not to mention thousands of pages of classified documents, in addition to my own notes.

Art relies on selection, after all. What you wind up using is the tip of the iceberg, but because you have learned all the rest you can use it with judgment and nuance, picking the one detail out of scores that will evoke the truth of the matter. You will leave out most of your research, often including those secrets that were the most difficult to discover. It doesn't belong in the piece just because you discovered it. The research is *your* burden, not the reader's. Its purpose was not to fill the book but to inform you, to teach you what you needed to know in order to make sense of the person or event.

I love research-not just the pure process of being on a mission of discovery, but the way it opens me, broadens my thinking, knocks down my preconceptions, re-calibrates what I think I know for sure. As I noted right at the beginning, research out into the world invariably carries you the writer back into yourself. Listening to Ellsworth Kelly expound so eloquently upon his development as an artist, I could not help wonder, "What do I think is beautiful, and why? How do I perceive forms in the world? What exactly is my aesthetic?"

Standing in a country meadow just after daybreak as a musket socked me in the shoulder and I watched a half-ounce lead ball punch a thumb-sized hole in a steel sign fifty yards away, I revised totally my idea that Revolutionary-era warfare was somehow picturesque and less lethal than our modern kind-a fact brought home to me again reading the grisly autopsy report of Crispus Attucks, shot twice with the same kind of musket during the so-called Boston Massacre. How did the farmers on Lexington Green find the courage to stand up to such firepower, and would I have showed even a small portion of their courage?

The answers you find in the world beget the questions you ask of yourself, and the act of writing is the final, most crucial phase of research, the phase during which you interrogate what you have learned, delve into yourself and order the facts of the world, as you have discovered them, into meaning.

AWP

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