

Appreciate These Days

by Steven Pressfield

I had a literary agent when I was in my twenties named Martin Fabrikant (that's his fictional name). This was the 1970s in New York City. I was driving a cab and living on ramen noodles and Dr. Pepper. I had never had anything published. It didn't look like I ever would.

Marty was Dutch. He was a death camp survivor. He was in his late seventies then. His attitude boiled down to three thoughts. "Appreciate life. Never complain. Work hard and do your best." Marty had one other mantra. "Talent is bullsh*t."

"I've seen a million writers with talent. It means nothing. You need guts, you need stick-to-it-iveness. It's work, you gotta work, do the freaking work. That's why you're gonna make it, son. You work. No one can take that away from you.

"And I'll tell you something else," Marty said to me one day when I was at my lowest. "Appreciate these days. These days when you're broke and struggling, they're the best days of your life. You're gonna break through, my boy. And when you do, you'll look back on this time and think this is when I was really an artist, when everything was pure and I had nothing but the dream and the work."

If you are a health care professional, a caregiver, or a first responder during these pandemic times, please permit me to make a prediction.

You will look back on these days the way Londoners looked back on the Blitz. They will be the best days of your life ... when you were called upon to set self aside and give all you had to succor and to save others.

In a way, those post-COVID days will be challenging for you because you will never again (unless you're very lucky or very brave) find your hours so dense with meaning and so critical to your sisters and brothers in need and to the greater scheme of things.

I salute you and I envy you.

"Appreciate these days ... they're the best days of your life ... when everything was pure, and you had nothing but the dream and the work."

A Note from Joe

It's been said that fictional characters can be more real than real people because they can be distilled to the essence of who they are meant to be. Fictional villains don't have to mow their lawns during the weekend – they can focus their entire being on pulling off the next bank heist. Fictional heroes don't need to worry about getting their taxes in on time – they can focus their entire being on catching the villains who pulled off the last bank heist.

In his fictional masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien said of Gandalf the wizard that he would show up where he was most needed and least expected. Especially during a crisis situation like that created by Covid-19, that is Job #1 for a leader. You show you care by being there. You show up in the emergency department on a busy Friday night with pizza. You gown up and mask up to check in with the Covid ICU team, show up in the cafeteria during the noon rush and at the environmental services huddle that starts the day.

In *Gates of Fire*, his fictional recounting of the epic Battle of Thermopylae, Steven Pressfield gives the best definition of servant leadership I have ever seen in his description of Spartan King Leonidas:

A king does not abide within his tent while his men bleed and die upon the field. A king does not dine while his men go hungry, nor sleep when they stand at watch upon the wall. A king does not command his men's loyalty through fear nor purchase it with gold. He earns their love by the sweat of his own back and the pains he endures for their sake. That which comprises the harshest burden, a king lifts first and sets down last. A king does not require service of those he leads but provides it to them.

Is it any wonder that all 300 Spartans fought to the death against the invading Persian army, side-by-side with their King.

Steven Pressfield is the bestselling author of *Gates of Fire*, *The War of Art*, and more than a dozen other books. His latest book is *A Man at Arms*.

[Website](#)

*Steve Pressfield and Joe Tye
taking a break from writing*

