**Poetry from Daily Life: It's OK if you don't know where you're going**

By Eric Ode

*This week’s guest on “Poetry from Daily Life” is Eric Ode, who lives with his lovely wife and his lazy cat in the little maritime community of Port Townsend, Washington. Eric says he enjoys a life full of commas — author, poet, songwriter, educator, jazz piano player. His poems have appeared in dozens of anthologies and on a Grammy nominated and a Grammy award-winning album. Eric’s latest children’s books include "Stop That Poem!" and "Otters, Snails and Tadpole Tails: Poems from the Wetlands" (Kane Miller Books). When asked for a unique fact about himself, Eric confided that he was once a street busker (performer) in Belfast (“for about seven minutes.”) ~ David L Harrison*

**Destination Unknown**

I’M NOT LOST. I’M EXPLORING.

Maybe the entire creating process is right there in that clever bumper sticker. Five words and the truth. You could sandwich them between two book covers and set them on the shelf labeled “The Craft of Creating.”

Creating begins with a hunger for exploration. And no creation can happen unless we are brave enough to set out while not fully knowing our destination.

I am constantly having to remind myself that this is true. I have a stubbornness (or an insecurity) that wants everything laid out on the table. A map with Point A labeled in bright red marker. Roads clearly highlighted, leading directly to Point B. Okay, now I’m ready to begin.

But the muse — or at least my muse — rarely lays things out so completely. And so, I often avoid creating because I’m not entirely sure where the poem or story or song is going.

It reminds me of my teaching years. While I was still an elementary classroom teacher, I became comfortable — maybe too comfortable — with the idea that every lesson should have a clear learning objective — a SWBAT (Students Will Be Able To). SWBAT label the water cycle. SWBAT identify key words in a math story problem. SWBAT identify a story’s setting.

Now, when I’m in the classroom, it’s as a visiting author/poet. And, thankfully, it has become much easier for me to accept the truth: The journey will reveal the destination. I enter believing that the best learning and the best, most unexpected results happen when the target is a little fuzzy. No, I don’t go into a classroom with zero idea of what we are going to accomplish. That’s a recipe for disaster! Clear expectations are still hugely important. But it’s the path and even, in many ways, the destination that I’ve learned to release. I’ve learned to keep my eyes and ears open for where a session organically takes us. Many of the best ideas only reveal themselves when they see we’ve put faith in the process. One image will build upon another. One word will spark a brilliant theme.

And that’s where we return to our own writing and creating. How do we begin? By beginning; by exploring. Where will we end up? Somewhere we could never have expected.

**THIS POEM BEGINS**

This poem begins

in the usual way,

with paper and pen,

and with little to say.

Just paper and pen

and some stammering thoughts;

my head in a muddle,

my courage in knots.

But this is the part

where an image drifts by.

I hold it, consider it,

give it a try.

Not bad, I decide,

but it’s only a start.

I search for the music,

the meaning, the heart.

Now here’s where I struggle

and worry and fight

and work with a faith

it will all come out right.

And here’s where it ends,

as it so often does;

a poem — a SOMETHING

where nothing once was.

Eric Ode is a children’s author, poet, award-winning songwriter, and educator. Learn more at his website, [www.ericode.com](https://www.ericode.com/).