

How I Wrote The Process



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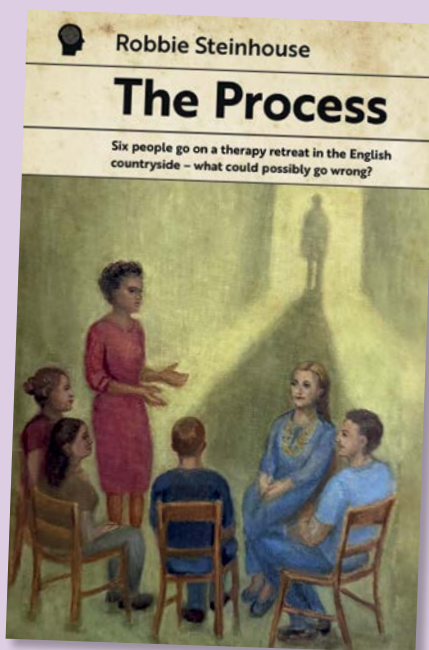
During the first lockdown in 2020, I had time on my hands, so I set an intention of finding a new audience for my NLP trainings. Could I write a book offering the fun experience of a thriller-style novel where the reader could also experience, vicariously, some powerful NLP techniques?

I had no experience of writing novels, so I began by creating a series of fictional examples of the classic NLP-style teaching processes, where a trainer does a demonstration of a technique with a participant in front of an audience. I wanted to showcase my own techniques, so all the demos were ones I created and have used in my trainings. And I created a bunch of diverse characters: five students and a therapist called Louise.

I especially liked that fiction enabled me to share the hidden incongruity between inner dialogue and what is said out loud. I often notice that students say one thing but their body language implies they are saying something quite different to themselves. I had a lot of fun writing dialogue including these types of funny 'inner comments'.

It all proceeded quite quickly and within a couple of months the novel was completed. Sadly, it was therapy-dense, had no real plot and was unreadable.

Erickson said, "You can pretend anything and then master it." I realised that I didn't know how to write fiction, and if I wanted to learn how to do it I needed to model some authors. So, I took a creative writing course with Marian Keyes (the author of *Rachel's Holiday*, about rehab). She imparted to me just how hard writers work to produce their books. I also read George Orwell's *Why I Write* (kindly gifted to me by my daughter Emily) who shared common sayings not to use; for example, "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" is so overused it no longer produces a visual image in a reader's



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mind. In Stephen King's *On Writing*, he says, "Writers are readers" so I began to read far more widely, including all twenty in a series of detective novels by John Connolly. I also listened to a selection of interviews with well-known authors on the BBC's *Desert Island Discs*, along with a series of interviews on Amazon.

My father had a close friend, Al Alvarez, who was a famous writer. I had known him since childhood, and I met him in 2006 to get some tips when I was writing my first book. "Don't write for other people, write for yourself," he said, and this continues to prove excellent advice. (My first book was *Think Like an Entrepreneur*, published in 2008, and he gave me a testimonial for it).

During my research I found many examples of writers inhabiting the 'consciousness' of their characters, sitting back and letting that character

An 'NLP' Novel

write sections of the book themselves. This happened to me too, and I wonder if practising second position over the years helped me develop this 'muscle'? I found that much of the content I planned to write was being amended by the 'input' of the characters and I found this new activity very enjoyable.

I pride myself on being able to convey complex ideas in a way that anyone can understand and I wanted to write a 'page-turner'. But this was far harder than I thought. A great quote from Blaise Pascal comes to mind: "I have made this letter longer than usual, because I have not had time to make it shorter." Stephen King also cleverly reworded a famous saying: "To write is human; to edit is divine!" I used MS Word's 'Read Aloud' feature, which includes downloads of good human voices. As I have an auditory preference, I became my own editor by listening, then rewriting, relistening etc. A classic TOTE.

As I said, the original book was unreadable so, with my new-found knowledge, I fully restructured it and reduced the number of NLP-style demos. Recalling that many modern writers switch between two or more narratives, repeatedly and frequently, throughout their books, I thought it would be nice to have a character who lived near the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) in the 1960s, so I created the character of Jacob, a holocaust survivor and fast-food entrepreneur who founded *The Process*. I wove in his life story, starting in 1930s Germany over an eighty-year period, interspersed with scenes from a five-day retreat in a country mansion hotel in Devon, featuring Louise and the participants going through the various techniques.

In the novel, Jacob's therapy journey started when he became a client of Eric Berne, the founder of Transactional Analysis. Berne knew Gregory Bateson,

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who introduced him to Jacob in 1970. Bateson persuaded Jacob to travel (during which he found a new purpose, and the plot thickened...), before returning to UCSC and attending the beginning of NLP University in the early 1990s with Robert Dilts, Judith Delozier and Todd Epstein. This so inspired him that he gave up his business and qualified as a therapist. He then created *The Process*, a franchise therapy model he started teaching at the Esalen Institute in nearby Big Sur, and he rolled out franchises across the world.

I had attended a famous therapy-style retreat about twenty years ago called the Hoffman Process (created in the 1970s by Bob Hoffman, also at the Esalen Institute).

Although it would have been plagiarism to share any of the content of this course, I could share the environment and business model: a nice country hotel with a group of disparate people, doing various processes, which could ultimately lead to you gaining some kind of franchise. Much like an NLP training!

So, putting this all together – with some hidden nefarious activities and plot twists – I had the makings of a novel. The

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long work of editing could finally begin. It was eventually ready for publication last summer.

Modelling writers and editing is certainly divine, but hopefully now I know how to make writing my next novel an easier ride – I understand the process! I hope it conveys some of my ideas to the NLP community and I also want it to open a door to the non-psychology audience. From the feedback I am getting, that seems to be happening.

Many thanks to my wife Anna Steinhouse for the amazing cover painting, and thanks also to Gill Mills for the great audio version, especially the way she uses her voice for embedded commands. Do check it out! ■

