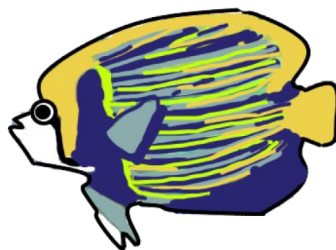


Hyperfocus is a Writing Superpower

Sat at his computer, behind a newspaper, playing chess on his little chessboard against Kasparov via Teletext, my Dad would disappear for hours. *Dad*, we'd say, to alert him to the fact Countdown was about to start. *Dad*, we'd say with a tad more urgency as someone was at the door. *Dad!* we'd yell, irritation setting in, as the cat hacked up a sicky furball. **DAD!** He'd blink, lightly frown, shrug at our red, hostile faces. 'I didn't hear you,' he'd say.

He wasn't lying. From an outsider view, someone in hyperfocus seems to be extraordinarily rude. Worse than rude, downright ignorant, thoughtless, mean. They must think very little of the other person to ignore them like that.

But now let me explain what it's like from the inside. As I write this blog I am, as I usually am, on the sofa, under several cats. There's the racket of building work outside and children stomping about. My husband is playing music I don't like. And yet, as soon as I start typing, it all fades to nothing. Absorption is immersion. I'm in the depths of the ocean with all the beautiful, colourful words. I have one of those old diving helmets on. The ocean is silent, but completely captivating.



You can call to me, I won't hear. Hours go by. Lunchtime comes and goes. I may become aware I'm thirsty or need the loo. *I'll just write this little bit.* Another hour passes. The need for sustenance evolves into hunger pangs and a dry mouth. You pat me on the shoulder. I

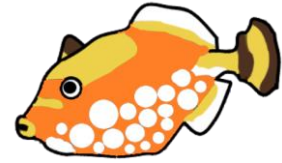
look at you and appear to listen to what you're saying. But I'm only just surfacing, that slow ascent out of the water to avoid the bends. My helmet is still on. I don't hear anything you just said.



Sometimes the call of words pulls me back down again. A cup of tea arrives. It goes cold. The need to pee becomes an emergency. I surface at last and yank off my helmet. You tell me, in a slightly annoyed way, that tea is ready. I'm surprised you cooked me eggs. 'But I asked you if you wanted eggs,' you say. You did? Oh. I never heard.

This is, like it was for my dad – and sister too – hyperfocus at work: a peculiar ability to intensely and deeply concentrate on a task. It's sometimes thought to be a trait in ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) – something I don't have – and autism. Research into it is exceptionally and surprisingly limited. I write this in case it's of interest to others and also as a way to celebrate it. I see it as a gift, although many may view it as a "problem", especially when the focus is on less desirable activities or it's a continuous state.

So how is it a superpower for me? There's a great deal of patience required to live with me, to not take my 'absences' personally, to not get angry that I haven't responded. I neglect basic self-care, annoy the people who matter most to me – just as my dad annoyed all of us growing up. But, ah, I finished that book. And I can tell you in good detail the news item I just read. I wrote – wow, pages. I edited a whole chapter. I got things done. That's why it's a superpower. Hyperfocus essentially means *productive*. I have never understood why people procrastinate or say they sit staring at their laptop, getting nothing down. I'm not saying what I write is a masterpiece – far, far from. If only hyperfocus meant brilliance. It doesn't. But it does mean I can work intensively and not get distracted.



Hyperfocus for me is about words. I am an artist too and hyperfocus doesn't exist in my painting world. For instance, I know writers who have soundtracks they play when writing books. That would be entirely pointless to me, who hears nothing when writing. However, when painting, I do hear. I can put on Spotify and sing along. I can hold a conversation. I am focussed but I'm never hyperfocussed. My pictures are the surface. My words are the beneath.

Hyperfocus is a gift to me. Just don't try and speak to me when I'm there.

