



Cunningham, who wrote *The Hours* and was my mentor in graduate school, liked to talk about his book while he was writing it and say it was a silly little book in which nothing happens. But whole lives are lived on those pages. It's a stunning work, and it won the Pulitzer Prize. His writing always inspires me for its beauty and honesty. If he wrote shopping lists, I'd read them.

**RB:** What kind of advice can you give to someone who's interested in pursuing a career or profession in writing?

**JK:** Learn enough about writing so you can create a burning-hot resume, then sprint to business school. Writing is lonely and hard. Why suffer?

But, ok, if you're one of those who likes to suffer, and some people do, then be a cockroach (write that on a Post-it™ note and keep it on your computer monitor. Or better, your nose). Every day someone will tell you something to the equivalent of, "perhaps it'd be best if you hung up your skates," or something less polite. Or you'll write and write and write and feel like no matter how hard you try, you're not going anywhere. I know a lot of writers who publish their work, and not all of them are the best in the business.

Of course having talent never hurt anybody, but the ones left standing at the end of the day aren't necessarily the most talented, but those who can keep getting rejected and remain steadfast. Look at J. K. Rowling—she was rejected by something like 30 publishing houses for *Harry Potter*. It happens that these books are wonderful, but if instead of being tenacious—a true English cockroach—she had run home, eaten bonbons and gotten a desk job at an insurance company, we wouldn't have had those books and the literary world wouldn't be nearly as rich today.

**RB:** Many readers of this article actively encourage students to pursue activities that involve creative writing. In your capacity as a teacher of creative writing, what kinds of activities would you suggest to these students?

**JK:** Be a detective. Snoop through people's lives. Be curious. Eavesdrop at parties; take notes everywhere



Photo: drunkenboat.com

you go; write down observations on what you see and smell—how the sky looked that one day, what people do in elevators, faces we make at babies, etc. Write every day even if you don't want to—especially if you don't want to—in a journal that you never, ever show to anybody because showing it to someone, even someone who loves you, invites her judgment, which kills creativity. Write every day, and enjoy knowing you're always creating something, even if you're just taking notes. It gives a person purpose to remember this. And make sure once

*continued on p. 36...*

