



Writing Tips & Advice

from the desk of **Ellen Hagan**

Writing is a journey and I think of my work as part poet and part documentarian. I am thinking about how we collect stories and ideas. When I set myself up with my journal or at my computer, I am carrying those tall tales, words, and visions with me that I have held onto along the way. Writing *All That Shines* allowed me the space to explore identity, landscape, my Bluegrass home, music and most of all friendship and love. I had been gathering those stories for years before they found a home in the novel. We are held together by these adventures, and we are all the time recording history with each other. This is the work I am always looking to do as an artist and author. How can I listen closer, pay more attention, hone my skills, and build community as a storyteller?

In my life, with my writing, and with my students, I am continuously thinking about the best questions and prompts to get us to the heart of what we want to say. Some of my current favorites are:

- What are you most curious about?
- What or who do you love?
- What stories from your childhood need to be told?
- If you were to create a map of your life, what people or places belong on it?
- Where is home and how do you get there?
- Make a list of your most favorite places to disappear. Now, write down the places where you appear most brilliantly.
- What songs are on the playlist of your life?
- You are throwing a celebration for yourself – who is on the guest list? What stories do you want told to the crowd? What food will be served?
- What recipes have been passed down to you? Which ones will you pass down to others?
- How do you want to be remembered? How will you remember the people you love?

I am always jotting down questions and asking my family, friends, and students to do the same. We are in partnership as learners. What are you obsessed with? What can you not stop thinking about? Write it all down. Share it. Send it in a letter or email or text message to friends. Find out what they are thinking too. Creating art is a gift and it is possible for all of us. Write, craft, share, ask questions, listen, pass on. I cannot wait to share *All That Shines* with you all, and I cannot wait to read your words and hear all the stories you are working on too!

