**Finding Your Voice,** excerpt from *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott

When people shine a little light on their monster, we find out how similar most of our monsters are. The secrecy…the fact that these monsters can only be hinted at, gives us the sense that they must be very bad indeed. But when people let their monsters out for a little onstage interview, it turns out that we’ve all done or thought the same things, that this is out lot, our condition. We don’t end up with a brand on our forehead. Instead, we compare notes.

We write to expose the unexposed. If there is one door in the castle you have been told not to go through, you must. Otherwise, you’ll just be rearranging the furniture in rooms you’ve already been in. Most human beings are dedicated to keeping that one door shut. But the writer’s job is to see what’s behind it, to see the bleak unspeakable stuff, and to turn the unspeakable into words—not just into any words but if we can, into rhythm and blues.

You can’t do this without discovering your own true voice, and you can’t find you true voice and peer behind the door and report honestly and clearly to us if your parents are reading over your shoulder. They are probably the ones who told you not to open the door in the first place. You can tell if they’re there because a small voice will say, “Oh, whoops, don’t say that, that’s a secret.” or “That’s a bad word,”…So you have to breathe or pray or do therapy to send them away. Write as if your parents are[n’t looking]…The truth of your experience can *only* come through in your own voice.