

Steinbeck: A Life In Letters
The Viking Press 1975

Robert Wallsten wrote Steinbeck that he was experiencing a kind of stage fright about actually starting to write a biographical work, which he had been researching for a long time, on the actress Dame Judith Anderson.

To Robert Wallsten

Villa Panorama
Capri
February 13-14, 1962

Dear Robert:

Your bedridden letter came a couple of days ago and the parts about your book, I think, need an answer. By the way, Elaine has a better title than mine. Hers is—There is Nothing Like a Broad, by Dame Judith Anderson.

Now let me give you the benefit of my experience in facing 400 pages of blank stock—the appalling stuff that must be filled. I know that no one really wants the benefit of anyone's experience which is probably why it is so freely offered. But the following are some of the things I have had to do to keep from going nuts.

1. Abandon the idea that you are ever going to finish. Lose track of the 400 pages and write just one page for each day, it helps. Then when it gets finished, you are always surprised.

2. Write freely and as rapidly as possible and throw the whole thing on paper. Never correct or rewrite until the whole thing is down. Rewrite in process is usually found to be an excuse for not going on. It also interferes with flow and rhythm which can only come from a kind of unconscious association with the material.

3. Forget your generalized audience. In the first place, the nameless, faceless audience will scare you to death and in the second place, unlike the theatre, it doesn't exist. In writing, your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person—a real person you know, or an imagined person and write to that one.