

Tech Check

by Joy Jones



Photo courtesy Joy Jones

Key in the ignition, release emergency brake, put car in gear, then... just as I was reaching for the radio, something quiet inside me said, "Don't turn it on."

Before getting in the car, I had been idly thinking about my current work-in-progress, a middle-grade novel about a girl who starts a Double Dutch team. I was mulling over what to have my characters do next, and also wondering when I'd have time to write it all down.


Fortunately, I listened to that little voice that said to keep my environment quiet and allowed my novel's plot to play out in my mind. I rode in silence and got some good ideas. I was able to retain my plans until I put my pen to the page. But had I turned on the radio, all of those thoughts would have been crowded out or lost altogether.

Once at home, I found myself responding to that same gentle urge. Maybe I won't turn on the TV just yet. This inclination spread to all my electronic entertainment. Not checking email quite so often, resisting the urge to browse YouTube. The result? A richer creative energy and a more prolific output. Without a lot of technology on my brain, ideas for my writing arise more easily and stick around longer.

Some years ago, I taught playwriting to middle school students. I would routinely start the semester with a no-TV/radio/Internet assignment. For four consecutive days, I prohibited them from any electronic entertainment. Parents had to sign off on their abstention. This was to forestall students from saying, "I can't come up with anything to write. I don't have any ideas for a play." Escaping the pull of the electronic universe instead of having their heads filled with the words and pictures of others freed up their imaginations.

Both artists and mental health professionals recognize the value of cutting back. Licensed clinical social worker Diane Broadnax puts her family on periodic tech time-outs because technology usage can become addictive in much the same way as drugs. "In fact some may argue that technology is even harder [to avoid] because it's so ingrained now in our society and so promoted that it's hard to pull away from it," she said in an interview with me.

But the effort to disengage is worth it. Julia Cameron, author and advisor to artists everywhere, recommends total media deprivation for a temporary period—not just radio, TV, and computer, but no reading either, neither electronic nor print. As she states in her book *THE ARTIST'S WAY*: "It is a paradox that by emptying our lives of distractions we are actually filling the well... Our reward will be a new outflow. Our own art, our own thoughts and feelings will begin to nudge aside the sludge of blockage, to loosen it and move it upward and outward until once again our well is running freely."

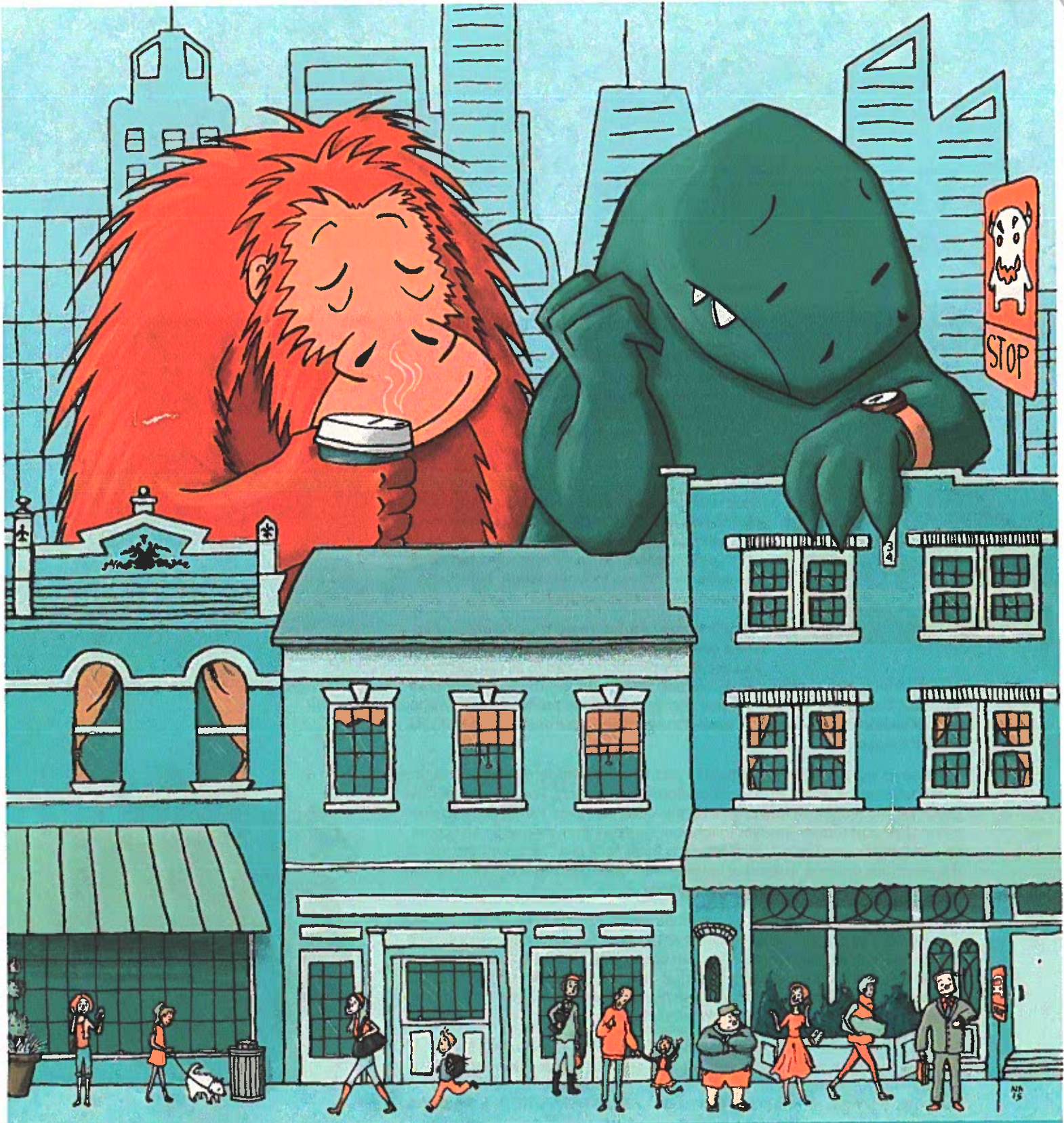
So what will you do? Watch the latest episode of *The Big Bang Theory*? Or pull out your journal? Find out what's trending on Twitter? Or do the revision on your article? I know you love riding in the car, singing to your favorite music, but what might happen if you sat in silence? You might just complete that manuscript! 

Joy is the author of the picture-book *TAMBOURINE MOON*, illustrated by Terry Widener and published by Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing. Thanks to her self-imposed tech checks, Joy is one chapter away from completing her manuscript *ONE JUMP AHEAD*, a middle-grade novel about Double Dutch. Visit her online at joyjonesonline.com.

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