

*Inspirations and invitations for writers, artists,
and other creative minds*

DEEP
CREATIVITY
SEVEN WAYS TO SPARK YOUR
CREATIVE SPIRIT

Deborah Anne Quibell, PhD; Jennifer Leigh Selig, PhD;
and Dennis Patrick Slattery, PhD

FOREWORD BY THOMAS MOORE, PHD, AUTHOR OF *CARE OF THE SOUL*

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FOREWORD

The very word *creativity* stirs the heart of those, like me, who are in love with the creative life. We not only have a desire to be creative in all that we do, but we also want creativity to give meaning to our lives and help set us apart. The word has a glow and a pulse and is something to which we can dedicate our lives.

A day that goes by without some creative work is a dull day for me, even a sad one. I always have an itch to write some words or put some notes on a musical score. Some days, even if all I can manage is a paragraph in a new book, I feel somewhat satisfied. I can sleep without squirming through the night.

James Hillman, my old friend and a guide to the three authors of this book, once commented that creativity as such doesn't exist. It is always qualified by the fantasy we bring to it. Some, he said, have young spirits that see creativity as a flight of fantasy wishing to make a world of wonders. For others—I think of Igor Stravinsky saying that he wrote music as a cobbler fixes shoes—creativity is hard work, nothing fancy or wondrous about it. And for other people, creativity is the purpose of life. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, we can participate in the creation of the world.

This inventive book deepens our understanding of what it is to be creative. The authors are depth psychologists wanting to go deep and go beyond the popular idea that creativity is novelty. Popular media often imagine the creative person as a melodramatic, perhaps tormented, musician or painter inspired by his or her passion. This image keeps the creative life at a distance from the ordinary person and in exaggerating the creative role actually belittles it.

The book begins by showing how creativity is related to love—passionate love that doesn't have to be melodramatic. To be creative is to love sounds and sights and words and colors. It is a matter of the heart, and the creative person has to be willing to work from the heart, which is not always easy to control or to predict. Working from the heart, it is difficult to trust what appears. Just because you love some quality or fresh idea doesn't mean that it's good and that it helps your project. You have to learn about the heart and become familiar with its ways, knowing better what to expect from it and how to trust it.

One of the pleasures I get from this book is how the trinity of three authors works as one. Often, when a book has several authors, they have little to do with each other, and as a reader you bounce back and forth between one and the other. No so here. These authors share a deep view of things, a set of metavalues that supports the important differences in their approaches and styles. Three different perspectives with a common base work very well to make the discussion of creativity creative.

The secret to the success of this book may be that all three authors pay attention to style. Their prose is not flat and simply informative, as is often the case in books on aesthetics. They appreciate stories and tell stories from their lives well. They are also highly educated and make references and quotes with originality and taste. Taste is an essential element in creativity and helps make this book stand out.

When I was a young man, around fourteen or fifteen, I was trying to be a classical musician. I went to a Catholic church where the music was dreadful. It was badly chosen and badly played. Then one day, after years of lugubrious sounds that could hardly have been called music, a young organist appeared. He had been highly trained in Belgium and was a skilled singer and keyboardist. I remember sitting in the church during a slow period of the Mass, hearing an extraordinary performance of a Bach fugue. I couldn't contain my excitement.

I took lessons with the organist. I wanted to learn how he played Bach so powerfully. One day I asked him what I could do to make sure that my taste in music and the arts would remain at a high level. Just listening to him play was a lesson in taste. He assured me that my love of Bach and concern to play it well would not leave me. He told me to trust myself and simply listen to good music and good performances.

This was an important lesson for me about the creative life. I apply it to writing as well as music. You develop taste by studying the masters. This is such an old-fashioned thing to say, and yet I think it's true. Bach used to write out scores of composers he admired. Serious painters copy artists they consider their own masters. Each of us could be more creative, not just by adopting the pose of the creative person but by studying hard and letting our own genius emerge over time.

We need a depth approach to the creative life because the temptation is to soar like Icarus basking in the sun. Creativity also thrives in the shadows and in the depths. This book courageously invites us to realign our thinking about the creative life, completing the usual skyward view by getting us back in touch with creativity's roots. What a difference it would make to create from our depths rather than our idealizing hopes. We could picture our fresh ideas rising up from the ground like vegetables rather than sunbeams shooting down from high above. This is organic, grounded, fertile, nourishing creativity that the world needs now more than ever before.

THOMAS MOORE, PHD

Author of the *New York Times* best seller *Care of the Soul*

INTRODUCTION

Call into your mind for a moment the water strider, also known as a pond skater or a water skipper—the long, slender-bodied insect that glides and darts across the surface of the water, be it a pond, a lake, a river, the ocean, maybe even your childhood swimming pool. Being a creative these days can often feel like being a water strider.

I (Deborah) came into my creative life at a time when the demand for content (and *more* content and *more* content) was placing huge and exhausting expectations upon many creatives to “keep up.” Artists, especially among my generation (I’m in my thirties as I write this in 2017), are often pushed into a frenetic style of creativity designed to please what I’ve come to call the “insatiable online content monster.” Online magazines need multiple articles a day, and each time I get accepted to write for a new one, the word count seems to drop. “People don’t have the attention span to read much anymore. We need short, catchy pieces,” an editor once wrote to me. I was writing an article on trauma and was expected to do it in 500–800 words. If you’re a photographer, your image may be a shared sensation one day and fade into oblivion the next. People may visit your social media page not to witness the beauty and artistry of your work but to see how many “followers” you have. I once had a social media guru tell me that most unknown writers who gain a successful following usually post three to four times *a day* or every four hours. This frenetic pacing calls for skating across the surface, darting from one post or blog or social media site to the next, never landing in any one place for very long. As creative water striders, we risk losing the necessary time for reflection, for depth, for pause, for submerging into the darkness of unknown waters and reemerging with a splash, a song or a poem or a painting in tow.

Perhaps the idea of this book began as an unconscious response to this surge of a more “surface” style of creativity that I was beginning to notice and live within. A rebellion of sorts against the rushed demands that were creeping into my own creative life. Once I became consciously aware of the toll these shallows could take, I longed to enter into a deeper conversation about the wellspring of creativity. I began to identify, in my own creative life, certain eternal “ways” to access or evoke inspiration. These ways would end up serving as the seven parts of this book: “The Way of Love,” “The Way of Nature,” “The Way of the Muse,” “The Way of Suffering,” “The Way of Practice,” “The Way of the Sacred,” and “The Way of Art.”

I knew from the start of this project that I wanted it to be a collaborative, multivoiced volume, an intimate series of reflections that could possibly enhance our collective understanding of creativity and our process(es) of inspiration. I hoped the volume would levy a challenge to the current cultural conversation that rewards skating the surface by offering instead the antidote of diving into the depths—if you will indulge me the metaphor, I wanted to be a dolphin, not a water strider. So I set about to gather my pod.

At first glance, Dennis, Jennifer, and I are an unlikely bunch of collaborators. We were all raised in different parts of the United States and during the two-year process of writing this book, we were geographically distant from each other, meeting only once in person. We’re also scattered across different age spectrums. Without planning for this, we noticed that we are about twenty years apart in age (spanning our midthirties, midfifties, and midseventies), which we came to see as a lovely spectrum of experience. And while we are geographically and generationally diverse, what binds the three of us together, beyond our commitment to creativity, is a background steeped in depth.

We initially connected through Pacifica Graduate Institute, where Dennis and Jennifer have been much beloved professors, and at the time of writing this book, I was there completing my doctoral studies. Pacifica is a small private graduate school in Carpinteria, California, that offers masters and doctoral programs in the tradition of depth psychology. *Depth psychology* is a term associated with Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung that indicates those psychologies that take seriously the presence of the

unconscious aspects of psyche and seek to develop ways to make the unconscious more conscious. Depth approaches are open and attuned to the subtle and transpersonal aspects of our human experience, paying special attention to what lies below the surface of our conscious awareness.

Depth psychologists have a special relationship to creativity: We believe in a psyche that is inherently creative, that is in fact creating all the time—creating dreams, fantasies, images, moods, slips of the tongue, and unexpected ideas. The inspiration that seems to drop upon us from nowhere can instead be envisioned as arising from the depths of our own soul and the soul of the world around us.

It seems important to explore this notion of soul a bit further, before we dive in collectively to our creative work. In depth psychology, we see soul as “a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint toward things rather than a thing itself.” I stole these words from James Hillman, the founder of archetypal psychology and the author of *Re-Visioning Psychology*. This perspective enables reflection, depth, significance, and meaning in life’s many moments. It dissolves literalism and enables us to connect to the invisible aspects of our existence, present in each event. Thus, soul is not a metaphysical concept or entity but is, again according to Hillman, explored as “that unknown component which makes meaning possible, turns events into experiences, is communicated in love, and has a religious concern” (note that *spiritual* can be substituted for *religious* in this quote). In *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*, American depth psychotherapist and author Thomas Moore (who graciously contributed to this book by writing the foreword) stated clearly that “soul is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance.” What we see in Hillman’s and Moore’s writing is that the very nature of soul eludes a specific definition. Rather, it’s a perspective we take in viewing the world (you’ll see this clearly in our essays in “The Way of Nature” section) and a quality we experience (you’ll see this perhaps best illustrated in our essays in “The Way of Love” section).

It is only natural, then, that three depth scholars speak to and call for a creativity that engages this soul, values this unconscious, and springs from this wisdom of forming a

collaborative relationship with what lies below the surface of our conscious, everyday lives. You will see the influences of C. G. Jung, James Hillman, and other depth psychologists weave their way in and out of our work. Jung had his own fascination with the creative process. In his essay “Psychology and Literature” he wrote, “The creative urge which finds its clearest expression in art is irrational and will in the end make a mock of all our rationalistic undertakings.” We find his observation wise and have no desire in our volume to psychoanalyze away this often irrational urge but rather prefer to dive straight into the mystery of creativity and its sources and to excavate the extraordinary from the ordinary.

And this is exactly what we did. Imagine three dolphins swimming side by side in the ocean. One of us would call out the topic, e.g., “the way of love,” and all three of us would dive into our own slice of the sea, the waters where our conscious and unconscious swim, and we would write our essays from our own depths. This we considered the work of soul, which moves downward into the depths of experience for meaning. And then, just like dolphins, we would breach the surface, which for us meant bringing our individual essays into the air to give them life. We took eager delight in reading each other’s essays, smiling at the points of unexpected convergence, while, more often, relishing those places of absolute divergence—those places that revealed the idiosyncratic manner each of the seven ways worked within us. This we considered the work of spirit, which reaches upward much like fire to where our individual flames, sparked by each of the seven ways, also sparked each other.

So what *is* “deep creativity”? We use this term to capture, invoke, and (re)inspire a style of creativity that is not horizontal, skating the surface of experience like the water strider, but instead is vertical, moving down into the depths of one’s soul and coming up with a spirited creative expression. Deep creativity focuses as much on process as it does output, maybe more so. This is why we invite you to engage with this book in an unscripted way—evoking process and allowing yourself to dive in at any stage, moving in and out as you feel called, moved, guided, or inspired. Perhaps you feel called to begin at page 1 and continue on, step by step, to the end. This is perfect. Perhaps you are immersed in a period of suffering or hold an intense curiosity about the muse, so you

jump in there—that’s perfect too. In deep creativity, we engage intimately with whatever and whomever is in front of us. We fall deeply into the experiences of life that are immediately available, and we allow them to spark our artistic spirit. Then that artistic spirit collides and colludes with our creative soul to form a creativity that is rich, intense, diverse, and often unexpected.

We believe that deep creativity can be cultivated. It’s *a way of being* in the world, *a way of seeing* the world, and an enchanted way at that. We open the book by offering fifteen principles of the meaning of deep creativity, but really, the entire book is an effort to sketch out its parameters and its potential contributions to enhancing our creative lives. Thus, we’ve added some text boxes to our essays to point to those places where we’ve enacted the elements of deep creativity, completely organically, since we came up with the principles *after* we had written our essays.

This book does not provide a set of guidelines but rather an invitation to explore the waters of deep creativity, as they call to you. It is both demonstrative (an example of the very philosophy and practices it calls for) through our individual creative essays and inspirational through the exercises and meditations offered that will deepen your own creative process. I’ve written introductions and conclusions to each of the seven ways. The introductions invite you to “breathe into” each way before you begin, to prepare your soul-space for the reflective essays that follow. The conclusions “breathe out,” capturing some of those points of convergence and connecting the essays to the idea of deep creativity.

Artistic expression is often accompanied with fierce judgment, isolation, and competition. What writing this book validated for me is how we as artists and creatives can truly inspire, spark, enliven, shape, and magnify one another. We hope to extend that to you as well—we’ve thought of you at every step along the way. Each essay ends with us inviting you to join us in reflection. We think of these as “café moments,” where we’ve just finished telling you a story over a cup of coffee, and we turn to you and ask, “What about you? Has this ever happened to you in your creative life?”

Following those café moments, we’ve included what we might call “studio moments,” where we invite you to join us in a creative practice. There are twenty-one practices in

all (we've included a list of them in the back of the book so you'll have them all in one place). We've tried to be suggestive in these practices rather than prescriptive because, as we define one of the principles of deep creativity, the soul is idiosyncratic, meaning it's deeply individual and individualistic in its processes. If our suggested practices and processes work for you, great! If you tweak them to make them your own, that's great too.

We offer these reflections and practices with the hope that, as Jennifer writes in the suggested practice following her essay on love, they'll shake and rattle a good idea from your bones, which is another way of saying we hope they'll spark your creative spirit.

Ready? Then let's dive in!

DEBORAH, with JENNIFER AND DENNIS

NOTE

The "Breathing In" and "Breathing Out" pieces in this book are written by Deborah, and the reflective essays are authored in the following order for each part—Deborah, Jennifer, Dennis.

FIFTEEN PRINCIPLES OF DEEP CREATIVITY

We offer you fifteen principles of deep creativity, which you'll see referenced in text boxes throughout the work.

The danger with any list like this is that it suggests definitiveness and comprehensiveness. Since this is neither definitive nor comprehensive, we did not title this section "The Definition of Deep Creativity." Rather, we chose the word *principles* to suggest our fundamental thoughts, the underpinnings of the union of depth psychology and creativity. These are themes rather than definitions; these are convictions rather than truths; these are perspectives rather than facts. They are the way we see the creative world and our place within it, and we offer that vision to you.

1. ***Deep creativity is idiosyncratic.*** We are each unique, even peculiar beings, and our creativity is heightened when we express our individual voice and vision.
2. ***Deep creativity is archetypal.*** Within our individual psyches live deeply etched, universal, mythological patterns, and our creativity is enriched when we enter into more conscious partnership with those patterns.
3. ***Deep creativity is alchemical.*** We transform ourselves as we create the world anew and renew the world as we recreate ourselves.
4. ***Deep creativity is receptive.*** We open ourselves up to the world, we take everything in, we make ourselves available for inspiration.

5. ***Deep creativity is responsive.*** We offer our own voice, our own creative responses.
6. ***Deep creativity is emotional.*** When we are moved emotionally, we move to create.
7. ***Deep creativity is healing.*** Our creative acts may heal ourselves; when we share our creative products, they may be healing for others.
8. ***Deep creativity is aesthetic.*** We pay special attention to where beauty calls us, and we hear her call everywhere.
9. ***Deep creativity is autonomous.*** Our psyches create all the time and often much to our surprise.
10. ***Deep creativity is attentive.*** What we see is what we get to create with; therefore, we hone our attention.
11. ***Deep creativity is mysterious.*** We are partially unconscious human beings, a mystery to ourselves at times, creating in partnership with the Great Mystery.
12. ***Deep creativity is participatory.*** Call it God, call it the gods or goddesses, call it the Muse, the Force, the Source, the Universe—whatever you call it, it creates along with us; we do not create alone.
13. ***Deep creativity is reciprocal.*** We are both subject and object, both seer and seen, our I creating with and for a Thou who is creating with and for our I.
14. ***Deep creativity is embodied.*** When we come to creativity, we come *with* our senses, and we come *to* our senses.
15. ***Deep creativity is ensouled.*** We are ensouled beings creating with and within an ensouled world.

PART ONE

**THE WAY OF
LOVE**

BREATHING INTO LOVE

All the things that truly matter, beauty, love, creativity, joy and inner peace, arise from beyond the mind.

—ECKHART TOLLE, *The Power of Now*

What is this place “beyond the mind” that spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle writes of? Does it exist? If so, how do we access it?

It is no secret that love has the potential to obliterate the mind—to take us beyond mental concepts, break down our carefully constructed ideas, and transport us to a place that defies our intellectual ideas of reality. Love does not remain linear or logical. Love is made of stories. It is made of images, of memories, and of moments. Love is made of the body. Love is made of pain and ecstasy, of raw emotions, of surprises and encounters.

In her book *Eros and Chaos*, Jungian author Veronica Goodchild writes about this experience beautifully: “Every new deep love undoes us so, loosens our limbs, sets us aflame. When we fall under the spell of this cosmic mystery it is like falling through the cracks of a world into a new universe.”

I think every one of us has been “undone” by love at some point in our existence. We have entered into this new universe at one time or another. And upon entry, we find ourselves inspired, alive, awakened, and connected in new ways. Sometimes, we become lunatics—losing our minds quite literally and coming into close contact with our own demons, who lurk (sneakily) in the dark corners or peripheral regions of the heart. At other

times, we become the best version of ourselves—pushing the boundaries of possibility and coming into close contact with our own divinities, who reside at the illumined core of the heart. Whatever happens and however it transforms us, love is, without a doubt, a giant and cosmic mystery. Try to define it literally and frustration is sure to follow.

In fact, this may be a good way to begin an exercise of breathing into love. Before reading on, it may be an interesting creative exercise to pause and try this for yourself. Find a pen and paper or some paints or a camera or clay (whatever your artistic material may be) and spend some time contemplating what love is to you and how you would define, show, or describe it. It sounds simple, but when we try to show or describe aspects of our existence that are beyond description, we are immediately pulled into a creative mode of feeling and thinking. We move beyond our mind. Love can never truly be captured literally or rationally. Love, at its very essence, is creative.

Love is the connective energy that (somehow) allows us to know what cannot be known. It is the greatest of mysteries that connects us all and moves us to our most ecstatic—and also our most agonizing—experiences of being. Love makes us aware that there is so much more to life than meets the eye. Many mystical teachings say that it is in love that we brush against the face of the Divine. In its revelation and mystery, there is something undeniably divine about love. We cannot approach or bear witness to love without touching upon the ineffable. And when we touch upon the ineffable, it brings us to our knees. It humbles us.

Powerful examples of this are typically not hard to find. Speak to new parents and while you hear echoes of pride for their new baby, there are hushed tones of humility running through every word. Listen to an aging and successful man tell you about the last words he spoke to his father, and you will find overwhelming humility in the tremble of his voice. Watch the invincibility of a powerful business woman dissolve as she sits beside her sick child. And please, I beg of you, notice the glowing, trembly eyes of a bride or groom when the other is speaking of the moment they fell in love.

There are certain aspects of our human existence that move us beyond the mind and into the vast field of the heart. And underneath the particular circumstances, these

moments have everything to do with love. Like a stream, love runs beneath many of our human stories, big and small, lasting or fleeting.

When we look deeply, we find that these love stories are not written of literal or descriptive language. These stories are not found in paint-by-number coloring books or how-to magazine articles. Somehow, love always escapes being captured. But it is the pursuit that has inspired artists and poets and writers and creatives from time immemorial.

When we, as artists, need materials for our craft, we may want to look into the tales of our love and the palette of our loving. We may want to peer into our heart-puncturing moments—ecstatic and agonizing. We must be willing to enter the dark corners of our heart, hunting for the demons that live within and around our stories and images of love . . . while also invoking the divinities that live amidst and among those same love stories and images (or perhaps altogether different ones). This is one way we begin to breathe into love to inspire our deep creative process.

But here's the catch: we welcome (and dare I say love) whatever and whomever appears. Shall we begin?

The Gasp: Falling in Love with the Particularity of Things

Deborah

You don't have to know any secrets.

The beauty of the poppy is the poppy.
The magnificence of the bee is the bee.
The radiance of the oak is the oak.

Don't search for anything
that is not immediately presented to you.

Be with things as they are,
and they will reveal themselves further.

Don't get caught in your pilgrimage
and forget how to *gasp*.

Love has left
our constructed conversations
and is simply waiting
to be found
in the holy particularity
of things.

I once asked a painter why *this* particular scene for his painting (above all the others). He responded, without hesitation, “I fell in love with the way the light hit the surface of the water.” That was it. Simple. Direct. And yet, as he spoke, I felt as if he was revealing the central secret of a great love affair.

In a similar vein, when interviewed about the raw beauty of his film *The Revenant*, director Alejandro G. Iñárritu responded, “The secret is the light, shooting when God speaks, when everything at that time of day is like seeing Caravaggio in a museum, you are experiencing a beauty in your body and soul and eyes.” He did not speak of film theory, technique, equipment, or editing. He did not speak about the particular location, actors, or film crew. He spoke instead about natural light, about finding that mysterious time of day “when God speaks.”

Many spiritual traditions tell us that God—whatever our conception of God may be—speaks through manifested creation. There is a famous story about Buddha teaching to a large gathering of students. The followers and disciples gathered in anxious anticipation, awaiting the wisdom and insight of the Great Teacher. But Buddha did not say a word the entire sermon. He simply held up a flower to the crowd. Amidst a confused gathering, one monk smiled a large, glowing smile. It is said that he is the only one to have understood the lecture.

Perhaps Buddha was teaching his disciples that we don’t need complex scripture or secret techniques to touch the mysterious and ineffable aspects of our existence. We don’t need to look *above and beyond* what is immediately present to us. We simply need to look *around*, to look *closer*, to pay attention and recognize that the opportunity to access the “gasp” of love is usually not far away.

GASPING

Along the creative’s path, the smallest of things demand our *gasp*, our loving attention, our fixed gaze, and our compassionate noticing. To gasp is to take in or breathe in the world around us. In depth psychological language, this is known as the primary aesthetic response of the heart. Within this primary response, beauty or aesthetics is not defined

by what is pleasing to the physical eye, taste or form. Beauty is found in the *particularity of things*. In one of my favorite books, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*, James Hillman defined this as “the luster of each particular event—its clarity, its particular brightness: that particular things appear at all and in the form in which they appear.” Being fiercely open to this notion of beauty, I believe, holds a major key to unlocking the creative potential hidden within the heart of the true artist. As artists, we cannot forget how to gasp. Awe and wonder are our comrades, our closest companions to keep ever alive. Even amidst a modern world that is barely breathing. The famous Sufi poet and mystic Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi writes about two ways of breathing. One is constricted and shameful. The other takes you all the way to infinity. This way is the breath of love.

The sense of wonder that springs from the heart—this breath of love that takes us all the way to infinity—allows each thing or figure we encounter in the world around us to reveal itself further. And we don’t look past what is immediately presented to us to discover some deep, hidden meaning or complex significance. That may come, naturally, as a by-product of our intimacy with whatever is in front of us, but (in a true encounter) we hold off any immediate need for interpretation or meaning-making as much as possible. When we interpret or make sense of something too quickly, we lose that primary aesthetic response. We shift from the feeling waters of our heart to the explanatory tides of our head. We sacrifice wonder for intellectual interpretation.

When Buddha held up the flower to the crowd, I imagine that he wasn’t looking for a complex interpretation on the symbolism of a flower. The flower was simply a flower. And it was miraculous, mysterious, and undeniably lovely in its particular form just as it was—an object worthy of our gasp, our attentive noticing. It was one particular and single manifestation that holds and reveals deeper significance only once we breathe it in, seek intimacy with it, and allow its loveliness to unfold in its own right.

The power of this aesthetic response came to me not through a flower (though, don’t get me wrong, I have gasped at many a flower in my lifetime) but through an unexpected encounter with snow—a thin layer, to be exact, dusted lightly on the sleeping Amsterdam scene below my living room window one cold and early December morning. I stood at

the windowsill for what seemed like hours, captured by a simple beauty in my body and soul and eyes. The snow—like the light for Iñárritu or the flower for the smiling disciple—was as magnificent as any creature or creation I had encountered. I was not thinking, in those moments, of snowy metaphors or what this scene symbolized in my own life. It didn't feel like a sign for me to interpret or a message that held a hint to my inner landscape. *The snow was snow.* And how particularly lovely this snow was. As the painter had with the light upon the water, I had fallen in love with the snow upon the city. And instead of grabbing my paintbrush, I grabbed a wrinkled piece of paper upon my desk to scribble the beginning threads of a poem, which would remain as a humble nod to our beautiful moment of meeting.

**Deep creativity
is aesthetic.**

I fell asleep and when I awoke,
 I tiptoed to the window so as not to wake the sleeping snow.
 I wanted to inquire of her arrival,
 etch the stories that have passed since we last conversed,
 scold her for being absent and withdrawn.
 But thought I should not disturb the lullaby she was already humming
 in the drowsy chambers of my heart.
 She had seduced time with her alluring caress
 and lay like a blanket upon my eyes and the road beneath them.
 She turned the relevance of my wandering mind to vapor.
 And left me perched only upon
 this single moment
 of our holy reunion.

As creatives, it is essential to remember that love extends far beyond the premises of a relationship between two people. The potential for love (and thus, the creative surges that love often brings) lies within the *attentiveness* of our own hearts. We don't have to wait for the big love stories to serve as inspiration for our creativity—those “life-defining” moments of love or loss that feel publicly important or overtly significant. Instead, we pay particular attention to the small love stories that happen every day. We understand

that significant moments are created by the attention we give to them, and importance is something we impart by truly *noticing* what is before us.

THE ATTENTIVENESS OF THE HEART

My first training in attention was in primary school. My mind liked to wander, to think of all sorts of imaginative things, to take small trips to enchanted places and to converse with all kinds of magical creatures. In these moments, my teacher would notice a distant look in my eyes, and sternly command, “Deborah, pay attention!”

Attention became a concentration of my mind onto a single topic at hand, a contraction, a rope tied around the fluid movements and darting joys of my imagination. It was a discipline that asked for my full occupation and demanded I exercise a sense of *will* to keep distraction at bay. I posit this is a very different form of attention than that of the heart. The attention of the heart asks for imagination and the body to become deeply involved in our attentiveness, as great allies rather than enemies that must be kept under strict surveillance and control. I think of Iñárritu here, again, when

**Deep creativity
is attentive.**

he spoke of the light. He spoke of feeling a beauty in his *body* and soul and eyes. The attention of the heart asks for us to open to the visible and invisible others within and around us, not to block them out. The light was as much a figure of his film as was Leonardo DiCaprio, his leading star. But this kind of noticing asks for a different kind of attentiveness—an attentiveness that comes not from the *will* of the mind but from the *willingness* of the heart.

Within the willingness of the heart, paying attention becomes wide instead of narrow, welcoming instead of restrictive, and deeply connected to the wisdom and sensations of the body. It does not emerge from the straight stems of concentration but from the vast, soft, and open fields of awareness.

The path of yoga can be helpful here in understanding the distinction between concentration (known as *dharana* in Sanskrit) and awareness (known as *dhyana*). While there are differing perspectives on the meaning of each term, my teacher tied each of

these practices or faculties to a particular chakra or energetic center. Dharana, or concentration, is a faculty of the *ajna* chakra. In Eastern philosophy, this energetic center is located between the eyebrows and has to do with the mental body, focus, concentration, and willpower, among other things. The literal translation of *ajna* is “command.” This center directs, focuses, and envisions. In contrast, dhyana, or awareness, is a faculty of the *anahata*, or heart chakra. This energetic center is located at the center of the chest and has to do with love, attentiveness, and noticing. Staying open and “unstuck.” In fact, the literal translation of *anahata* is “unstuck.” It has also been translated to mean “pure” or “clean, stainless.” The name signifies, in itself, the state of freshness and purity that comes when we remain in a fluid state of openheartedness. When we remain “unstuck,” we are able to pay attention to what is around us (not only the chaos within us). We are able to let others in to our heart uninhibited by our own agendas and expectations. We are able to access Rumi’s breath of love that leads us to infinity.

As mentioned, the heart does not distinguish, noticing some things and blocking others out. As artists, we are supposed to breathe the world in, to give the world full access to our hearts. To allow things that others wouldn’t notice or find important to hold us captive. For a few years now, I have lived in Amsterdam—a city that I adore. It is fall as I write this, and I have just come in from a long walk with a friend. While sitting in a square outside, drinking coffee that was dark brown like the earth, I noticed my hands were cold with that particular kind of cold that comes with autumn—that particular kind of cold that makes you dream of mittens and warm log fires, but not that particular kind of cold that keeps you inside. This is the kind of cold whose freshness just barely outweighs your discomfort, whose crispness justifies your slightly numb fingertips. I smiled as I thought to myself, “I think I just fell in love with a particular kind of cold.” How peculiar. And how lovely.

I’ve learned to pay attention to peculiar moments, and I believe one understanding of “love” is to give something or someone the full attention of my heart. This full attention does not imply singular focus or any sort of interpretation or result-oriented process. It does not ask me to, literally, make sense of anything at all. It simply suggests that something is worthy of my recognition, of my awareness.

It seems also important to note, here, that the attentiveness of the heart is courageous, willing to pay attention to the shadows, as much as the light. The attention of the heart loves to find beauty in the particularity of things—in faces, shapes, scents, sounds, and movements. All of them peculiar and beautiful, in their own particular way. It looks for the details that make something ordinary all of a sudden extraordinary.

Within the attention of the heart, we are called to notice each particular detail of an experience, to expose ourselves to whatever (or whomever) is around us and cultivate a burning curiosity and desire to know as much as we can about whatever (or whomever) we encounter each day. The word *encounter* comes from the Latin *incontra*, which means “in front of.” The word implies a coming upon something, a meeting that holds impact. Experiences turn into encounters when we meet them in an open and receptive way, with the courage and attentiveness of the heart to feel into all of what stands before us.

In an authentic encounter with the Other, we find new aspects of our creative selves emerge in the relationship or dialogue. The Other, when truly encountered, can no longer be dismissed. To use the words of the wise Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, the *It*

**Deep creativity
is participatory.**

becomes a *Thou*. As artists, we cannot live in a world of *Its*. We are called to become intimate with all of the faces, figures, and *Thous* that appear around us and treat them not as an object for our own use and creative flight but as the subject and characters of our artistic endeavors. We should beg to know them. Seek intimacy. Bring them in close. And allow our art to bring *them*, and our relationship to them, more fully into being, into life. This is how we fall in love, and our works of art become love letters to the world, anthologies to the particularity of things. Yes, *things*.

In the field of depth psychology, we often use the term *anima mundi*, which refers to the soul of the world. This concept suggests that the world (and everything in it) is ensouled, is alive, and thus loveable. All things have soul, and thereby ask for us to relate

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is ensouled.**

to them as such. A great mistake that we make is to place all of our immense potential for loving—the heart’s entire spectrum of possibility—into one single person. There are

all sorts of things, all around us, that deserve and ask for our love and attention, should we choose to participate.

We are not the only ones speaking.

The world has much to say
should we entertain the idea
that language extends
far beyond our human tongue.

On Tuesday, the leaves
wouldn't stop chattering to me
about their tales
of transformation,
and how on some days
the rushing humans
don't even listen
to their yellow swan songs,
their orange exclamations
and red crescendos
that come just moments
before their great fall
from Branch to Earth.

They worry
of drying unnoticed,
of a brown crunched existence,
of being stepped on
and raked up
without a prior nod
to their autumn splendor.

"We wouldn't mind so much
if you people offered us
the attention of your heart

for just a few weeks,
and listened, closely,
to our alluring adieu,”
they told me.

I told them I would try,
before it's too late,
to send their message out
through my poetic medium.

(I hope it works!)

As artists, indeed, it seems messages are everywhere. This poem I wrote about autumn is an invitation to recognize the sense of soul or aliveness within the simplest of daily things. The famous Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh once wrote, “It is good to love many things, for therein lies true strength, and whosoever loves much, performs much and can accomplish much.” This famous line is written on the walls of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. A powerful message not to be forgotten. When we love much, there is no shortage of inspiration for our creativity. It seems to be everywhere. But it also demands a lot from us as artists.

THE COURAGE OF THE HEART

Even though inspiration—when tied to the attentiveness of the heart—seems to be everywhere, it is not always pleasant. Awe is often associated with wonder, but awe can also appear as terror, confusion, and despair. When we look around, and breathe the world in, there is beauty to be found but also toxicity. Loving much demands much. It demands letting the world in. And this is not always an easy task. It can be painful and wrenching. Risky. But, I suppose, this is the risk we take as artists and lovers of the world. We have to take the grime with the gold, to allow things to be as they are and attempt to form an intimate relationship with whatever takes hold of us. Even when it

is deeply uncomfortable. Vulnerability and receptivity become essential in true love and true creativity.

It was early in the morning. Dark. The kind of early where the sharp clarity of the day hasn't yet appeared, and the barrier between my inner world and outer world remained hazy. I stumbled into the living room and began to scroll through my feed on Facebook. The first video I came across punctured my heart—but not the awe kind of puncture. The really sore puncture that comes with nausea and bursts of pain, with anguish and deep, unedited despair.

The video showed a group of Broadway stars, directors, producers, musicians, choreographers, designers, and technicians gathered in Times Square in front of an NYPD station, peacefully and artistically protesting police violence and the death of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man who died in an extended choke hold during a police arrest.

As one actor and artist, Daniel J. Watts, rolled off inspired, powerful words, the group hummed a hauntingly beautiful sound that seemed to rise from the depths of their hearts, as they pounded their chests. Over and over they pounded their chests. With their fists, they pounded their chests. With conviction, they pounded their chests. This performance was love as creativity, and creativity as love. The two could not be separated.

The pain that hit me in that moment was immense. I could not hold the overwhelming image of injustice. Eric Garner's voice saying over and over, "I can't breathe" bounced like a pinball from the walls of my brain to the center of my chest. I began to pound it like the protestors. I pounded my chest to ensure there was a heart in there. I pounded my chest to try to release some of the excruciating pain and pressure. And it was excruciating. For a moment, I wanted to shut all the doors to my heart and nail wooden boards across the windows. This was too much.

But, somehow, the courage of the heart began to rise. The pain was surfacing from a well deep within me and, no matter how tempted I was to try, I knew I could not keep it down. Instead of locking the gates, I summoned the courage to love through art, and words came pouring out with my tears. Words whose aim was to stand next to the protestors, still humming and pounding their chests. Words that were my way of honoring

a man I had never known. Words that came straight from the attention and courage of my heart out into the world—a world that, like a lover, had betrayed me. These words were my attempt to not shut down, to continue a conversation that I didn't particularly want to have but knew was necessary.

I don't believe it is a mistake that *art* is the last three letters of the word *heart*. I don't believe we can separate our heart from our artistic work in the world. For art to be impactful, it must spring out of and return us to our most creative and life-giving organ. These words swelled out of my heart after witnessing cruel injustice in the world. It was my way of joining the artistic protest that summoned me. If we are truly looking to love as a source for creative inspiration, we cannot pick and choose. We cannot hold the roses without the thorns. We charge forward, thorns and all. I suppose this was my charge. This poetic piece ended up being published and shared widely on the Internet. Sharing it now, with you, seems an apt way to end this essay—offering a battle call for heart-centered and deep creativity . . . demonstrating that when we love through our creative endeavors, our art becomes part of deeper, more essential conversations. Our art not only speaks of love but *becomes* the way we love.

POUND YOUR CHEST. EVERYONE. POUND IT.

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And it will no longer stand for indecency and injustice. It will no longer stand for cruelty.

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And it is holding its resignation to our human clan. It is searching for something more. This won't do.

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And it wants to rebel. To stand unwaveringly for love. For peace.

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And it is demanding a new story to be written and lived. This one is dead. It cannot go on.

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And it doesn't care one ounce about race or species. It is soaked with grief. Enough. ENOUGH!

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And it wants a voice. A voice that speaks of dreams, mountaintops, equality, and the simple truth of Goodness.

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And even though it is tired, it carries enormous strength. The strength that is needed for change. Real Change.

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it. There is a heart in there. And we cannot waste another second. Too much depends on its awakening . . .

Pound your chest. Everyone. Pound it.

There is a heart in there.

There is a heart.

A heart . . .

EXERCISES

Deborah invites you to these reflections.

- ➔ When in your life have you been emotionally and physically arrested by something so beautiful, or terrible, that it stopped you in your tracks? Did you pay homage to this moment by creating something? Might you now?
- ➔ When has love required great courage from you, the courage to stay present, to not look away?

- ➔ What moments in your life have you experienced the greatest openness of your heart? Have any of these moments shown up in your art?

Can you create something from these reflections?

Deborah invites you to this practice.

A HUMBLE NOD

In my essay, I talk about the importance of noticing *the particularity of things*, practicing a certain kind of *attention of the heart*. Sometimes those things grasp us, like the snow grasped me that December day in Amsterdam. That's what we mean by the autonomous nature of deep creativity, where we are grasped, where we then gasp, and our creativity gushes forth.

But we don't have to wait to be grasped. We can consciously enter into an encounter with the Other in order to notice its particularity. I'm sure you've done this when you've fallen in love with another person. Perhaps it is the curve of the small of her back or the cleft in his chin that you've memorized until you could sculpt that curve or that cleft by heart, if you had such a skill.

I invite you to do the same with a thing, with an object, with an Other.

1. First, choose something to grasp. I suggest finding something in your immediate surroundings, something you've never paid much attention to, a familiar object you live with daily but don't notice much.
2. Carve out time to sit with this being (I'm calling it a being because one tenet of deep creativity is that everything is ensouled). Really sit, when you are without distraction or other demands upon your time.
3. Now, notice. Notice everything about this being. Notice with all five of your senses. When you think you've noticed everything about it, notice again. What makes it particular? What makes it peculiar?

4. If you're comfortable, you might want to enter into a dialogue with the being, or if that's too much of a stretch, you may simply wonder about it. Does it have a name? What has it seen in its lifetime? What stories might it tell? How does it feel, being noticed by you?
5. With heart now open to this being, consider creating something from your experience. Perhaps, like I did with the snow, you'll write a poem. Perhaps you'll draw the being or sketch a graphic comic strip of your encounter. Perhaps you'll sing it a song. It doesn't have to be much—just a humble nod to our beautiful moment of meeting.

Love, Death, and a Loaded Gun: Meditations on Creative Immortality

Jennifer

When I was twelve years old, I was shot dead center in the forehead by a gun held two inches away.

The story of how I came to be shot is embarrassing. I've toyed with changing the details to spare myself your judgment, but you were once twelve too, yes, and perhaps did a stupid thing or two.

Not as stupid as shooting someone point-blank in the middle of the forehead, but that's his story to tell, not mine. He pulled the trigger that changed my life, and perhaps his life too. You'd have to ask him about that. We no longer speak, not because he so senselessly shot me in the head an inch above my nose. Our friendship could survive that, but it would not survive high school.

Still, you should know, his name was Tim, and we were in sixth grade.

I was a curious child. That statement is true, but there's a truer adjective, if I'm being honest. I was a snoop child. I didn't understand adults, and I wanted to understand adults, and one of the best ways to do that is to snoop. Lift up a mattress by your dad's side of the bed, find out that men like women with big boobs who lick their lips like there's still some fantastic bit of dessert in the corner. Open your teacher's file cabinet, the one that has the small clutch she carries to the bathroom, which is not the purse she brings to school, and find out that adults become much more mellow around kids when they smoke tiny cigarettes that make them need to brush their teeth and use Visine.

Open your next-door neighbor's closet and find out that women sometimes buy other women's hair if they don't have enough of their own.

The woman's name was Alice, and her husband's name was Sam. He was old and bald, and, apparently she was too, judging by the sheer number of ghost-white bewigged manikin heads lined up in her closet. They were my next-door neighbors, and they had a cat, which necessitated a house sitter when they revved up the retirement RV. And house-sitting meant I had responsibility for the whole house, yes, not just the cat, so it was only right that I open all the closets and cupboards and drawers and medicine cabinets to make sure everything was sitting just as it should.

The wigs . . . well, the wigs were too much to let sit in the dark on Styrofoam ghouls, and I wanted to understand adults, remember? The wigs whispered to me the secrets of being a sixty-five-year-old woman who still cared enough about her hair to wear someone else's, and who could judge me—not you, don't forget, for you were twelve once too—if I slipped those wigs on one at a time, and yes, her housecoat too, because an old lady wig on a lithe young girl in a tube top and short shorts helps you understand nothing but the absurdity of life, and you already know that or you wouldn't be trying to understand adults to begin with.

So you admire yourself in the bathroom and spray your neck with some old lady rose-water perfume and pretend you are getting ready for bed with crotchety Sam, but by the time you get to bed, he's already snoring, which he will deny in the morning as all men do. So you lie down on your side, but you're not tired yet so you open the nightstand drawer expecting to find your Bible, but instead you discover a few things that pull you out of the drama. You bolt up, your wig falls back on the pillow, and you wonder what in the world a prodigious pink rubber penis is doing beside Alice's side of the bed. And a purple tube that shakes when you turn the base. And some dice without numbers but pictures instead, pictures of a man and a woman having sex in ways you haven't even seen in your dad's magazines. And something slickery called K-Y Jelly, which doesn't look like anything you'd want to spread on your toast. You have questions that need answers, but you can't ask an adult, so you go to the only person you can ask: a twelve-year-old boy named Tim.

Not you. Me. You probably would have noticed the gun in the drawer, but I honestly don't remember registering it. It was small, smaller it seemed than the gargantuan pink rubber penis, smaller than the purple vibrator, and I was less curious about the gun because I knew what that was for, but the rest of the sex stash, hey Tim, what do you think they do with all this?

He wasn't thinking. Something possessed Tim. Something primal in his male psyche made his pupils enlarge at the sight of the gun and *He. Must. Shoot. It. Now.* He lifted the gun, put it two inches away from my forehead, and pulled the trigger.

The blast was deafening. The pressure blew me backward.

To his credit, I will admit it didn't look like a real gun, but then again, we were twelve years old and our exposure to guns was rightfully limited.

Not that limited though. Our whole class had taken a hunter's safety course the year before. It was drilled into our heads: *guns are not playthings.* But then again, Tim wasn't playing. Tim wasn't even Tim. Someone, some *thing*, had overtaken him.

I would be dead today if Sam and Alice had a gun by their bed that shot bullets, not blanks.

I can't say I understood much about adults that day, but I understood something about life, and that was death. I understood that death can literally occur in the blink between the blink of the eyes. My eyes were open. He shot me. My eyes were closed. The gun shot blanks, not bullets, so I would open my eyes again, eyes open now to the sheer stark possibility of my sudden death.

I was raised a Christian, so it was natural for me to think of heaven as I lay splayed on Sam and Alice's bed, sure by the sound of the gun and the impression of a circular hole on my head that I was dead. Eventually I opened my eyes, and all I could see was a sea of white, which turned out not to be heaven but Sam and Alice's ceiling. And that is how I came to love the world—not the next world but this one—this beautiful world where a ceiling can look like heaven and a gun can shoot blanks, not bullets, and where a boy can fall to his knees and ask for forgiveness and a girl can rise to her feet and taste life for the first time, this glorious, absurd, inexplicable thing called life, which is given its meaning, its urgency, by death. My near-death experience seared into my soul the

sacredness of life and a sense that even if I lived to be a very old wig-wearing woman, it would never be enough time to drink it all in.

I vowed to never have a near-life experience.

I still went to church, though I found its emphasis on the afterlife to be misplaced. Plenty of time for that later—I had this life to attend to. I searched for a place to pour my religious instinct into, a container larger than Christianity.

I found it one night, at church camp, of all places.

We were sitting around the fire in a large circle. We were saying goodbye, and we were crying, some of us, because God gave us an excuse to love each other unabashedly in a way that we teenagers couldn't do in the secular world to which we were returning, reluctantly, the next morning. We were holding hands, and we could feel the spirit and it was holy, but I knew it wasn't God the Father from that week's teachings whose presence I felt. What was it? I cocked my head to the right and looked deeply into the eyes of the boy whose left hand I was holding. I loved him. I cocked my head to the left and looked deeply into the eyes of the girl whose right hand I was holding. I loved her. I loved everyone in that circle, and I loved the feeling of love, and suddenly I understood why people said, "God is love," and I found my new religion.

Love as God.

At first, I served my god as any lovesick teenage girl would—I wrote poetry. Correction—I wrote very bad poetry. I wrote bad poems for the boys I loved, and I wrote bad poems for the girls I loved, and I didn't share them with either, because I had it in my head from watching the adults around me that love was something you kept quiet in your heart. After all, I never opened a file cabinet or a closet or a nightstand drawer and found love inside. So I kept my poetry locked up in a small box, for all the wrong reasons.

And then, something terrible happened. One of the girls I loved died suddenly when an eighteen-wheeler blasted through a red light at sixty-five miles per hour and hit her compact car in the intersection. Dead, in the blink between the blink of her eyes.

We had gone to lunch together just two days earlier. I wanted then to tell her how much I loved her, but I did not. Nor did I bring her any of the poems I had written for her. Instead, I played a song for her in the car, a song that admonished us to appreciate

the dance of youth while we have the time. How I wanted a while with her; how I wanted that dance. She loved the song, and I promised to make her a copy of it and give it to her the next time we met.

After we ate, she laid down money for the check. Let me split it with you, I said. No, she replied. I'll get this one. You can get the next one.

There was no next one.

The song was "Forever Young." Which she would be, dead two days later at seventeen. I vowed to never again have a near-love experience.

And so it was that love became the fuel that fed my creative fire. A few bad poems turned into a boxful, and many of them found their way into the hands of others, and some into their hearts. Everything I've written is either a call for love or a response to love, is either an homage to love or an expression of love. Poems and prose, essays and a dissertation, newspaper articles and book reviews, and my public writings all with love as their through line, and, too, countless pages of private writing in my journal processing new loves and newly lost loves and near loves, paragraphs that chronicle countless failures at love and futile frustrations with the vicissitudes of love, words that soar with hope and descend with despair but always rise again. My cup may not always overflow with love, but my pages do. And thus, my writing becomes a form of worship, my pages both propitiation and supplication before the god of love.

Before love as God.

The ancient Greeks understood the connection between God and love, and they gave Eros a place in their pantheon. The Romans would rename him Cupid, but wipe the picture of a fat baby with an arrow out of your mind, and return to Eros, a shirtless, chiseled Channing Tatum or (insert your mortal man crush of choice).

There are three facets of the mythology surrounding Eros that I want to take up here as particularly pertinent to the creative process, though I know mythologists like my friend Dennis can doubtless double down and still have lessons to spare. These three come from the myth of Eros and Psyche. Psyche, whose name translates to Soul, was a beautiful mortal, the most beautiful in all the land, so beautiful that Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, was threatened by her. In the myth, Aphrodite calls for her son, Eros,

to take revenge upon Psyche, but Eros falls hopelessly in love with her instead. And she does with him as well, and eventually (I'm skipping all the trials and tribulations in between—I'll get to them later) they marry, and they have a child named Joy, or in other iterations and translations of the myth, Pleasure. The gods smile upon their union, and in honor of it, they grant Psyche the status of an immortal, so the marriage of Soul and Love lives forever with Joy or Pleasure.

**Deep creativity
is archetypal.**

The first wisdom pearl we can string from this myth is that when we marry our beautiful souls with what we love, we create something joyous or pleasurable. This requires a kind of radical permission, the permission to let our Psyche comingle with Eros and do something, anything, that brings us Joy and Pleasure, despite the opportunity costs of Time and Money. For me, for a time, it was writing poetry, pouring love out of my soul onto the page. For my friend Michael, it is playing his guitar outside at night, hoping to please the stars. For my friend Sonia, it is using an old quill pen to stencil calligraphy on cards that she sends out for birthdays and holidays. For my friend Peter, it is collecting photographs of amazing ancient trees and posting them on his Instagram page. None of us make any money doing this—we don't have the Midas touch on our creative ventures (a different myth entirely!)—but instead, we have the Eros touch upon our souls, and we create for the pleasure it affords us.

**Deep creativity
is aesthetic.**

The second wisdom pearl for the creative life swirls around the part of the tale where Psyche is granted immortality so she can be with her beloved Eros forever. Now I don't want to get too romantic here, suggesting that our creative products are immortal. They are not, as far as I can tell, because it would be vain to think it is so, given the fact that we are not gods. The Royal Library of Alexandria is a case in point. It was the largest and most significant library in the world, operating from the third century B.C. until the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 B.C. The library was dedicated to the Muses, the goddesses of inspiration and education, and it burned down, and a great number of original creative works were destroyed. We think that can't happen today, given our digital age (how can the Internet burn down?), but I'm not convinced the website I created to house

my original creative works is immortal. Certainly my “domain” will burn down when my credit card “expires” or when I expire and fail to renew.

Caveats about our own creative immortality aside, the act of creation itself is a striving toward immortality, at least symbolically. Psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton coined the term *symbolic immortality* to name this striving, defining creative immortality as one of five symbolic modes. Other psychologists before and after Lifton have connected creativity, immortality, and the denial of death, but it was all there in the myth to begin with, when the union of Eros and Psyche assured immortality to their creative issue, so to speak.

But before there was joy and immortality, there were the trials I promised you. The third wisdom pearl is about the trials themselves. In the myth, Eros only comes to Psyche at night, and she isn’t able to see his face. When she tells her sisters about the ecstasy of these night encounters, she shares her agony over his forbidding her to see his face. In their terrible envy, her sisters fill Psyche with doubt—maybe he’s a hideous beast. Maybe that’s why he won’t let her see his face. Maybe he is going to kill her. Tormented now, Psyche must see him, and when he comes to her one night, she brings out a lamp. Not a hideous beast—the most beautiful man she has ever seen. Too late. He flees, betrayed.

In order to win Eros back, Psyche is given three seemingly impossible tasks by Eros’s mother, Aphrodite. Though Psyche despairs over ever completing these tasks, she labors away faithfully and eventually succeeds at all three, earning back the trust of Eros and restoring their relationship.

So too for us, as creatives, love does not always come easy and can sometimes be a terrible and tortuous process. Our souls will be tested and tried to see if we’re true. Successful completion is not a given. Completing that memoir will seem impossible. Editing that film will seem endless. Working that canvas trying to wring out a little beauty from the brush will seem improbable at best. Just getting up in the morning and facing the page, the screen, the canvas, again, will seem so daunting that we pull the comforter over our heads and silently scream. We must do our labors—we must put in our hard labor—we must earn the joy that comes at the end of our labor, when we give birth and we hold our baby in our hands—the completed memoir, the final version of the film, the signed

painting. We earn the trust of our Eros, our muse partner, and maybe, in some small way, we do become a little bit immortal in the process as we please the gods of creation.

**Deep creativity
is participatory.**

This garden I am growing here, where Eros and Psyche flower alongside Beauty and Pleasure and Joy, near Death and Immortality, adjacent to Labor and Creation, this garden was seeded in the moment I was shot point-blank in the forehead by a gun held two inches away. I was twelve years old, and my immanent destruction led to my impulse toward consummate creation. I never wanted to leave my life unlived or unloved. I married my psyche to Eros and devoted my creativity to love.

Though the myth of Psyche and Eros has been a guiding one for me and my relationship to my creativity, I did get caught up once in another myth—the wrong myth—seduced by Midas for a while in my early twenties, as I leaned toward a career that promised cash at the expense of my creativity. Suffice it to say, it would not have been a labor of love, that career, but there I was, in college working toward the degree. It was another near-death experience that pulled me back to my senses, and it was another boy who facilitated it: my boyfriend John. We were skiing on a terribly nasty stormy day during winter break when we should have just packed it up and gone home, but the lift tickets were expensive, and we were determined to enjoy ourselves, damn it, stubborn and stupid both. We were racing recklessly downhill, no skill involved because it was pointless to fight against the weather and conditions, when John took a sudden and harsh fall in front of me. Had I not turned immediately, I would have plowed right into him, the tips of my skis slicing and dicing him, and so I turned to save his life and almost lost mine as I headed straight for a grove of trees at God knows how many reckless miles an hour.

To say I broke my knee when I fell is an understatement, though that's what I told John when I opened my eyes and saw the bottom part of my leg at an unnatural 45-degree angle away from the top part. I destroyed my knee, but I saved my life, and it was my life that I had plenty of time to contemplate in the three months I lay in bed recovering. The familiar thought—"I could have died"—led me back to the question, "How do I want to live?" I decided to give myself fully over to my love of literature and let that be what

I do. I changed colleges and I changed majors. Three years later, I walked into my own classroom as a teacher—and over thirty years later, I am still so in love with what I do.

Two roads literally diverged on that ski slope, the road straight downhill and the road off to the side, and I couldn't travel both, but oh the difference that second road made. I thank my knee, a noble sacrifice that enabled me to pursue a career I have loved, which in turn has ennobled my life because it has allowed me to labor creatively every working day, and it has helped me to grow as a writer by learning to become a more discerning reader. It has allowed me to share my love of literature and later, as a psychology professor, my love of the psyche, two subjects of my love, and it has given me many objects to love, known to most people by the noun "students" but known to me as "Friends" with the capital F, the way Rumi and other Sufi poets use the term to designate the divine Other.

James Hillman, in his book *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, weighs in on that old debate about fate. Fate, he writes, "causes only events that are unusual, that oddly don't fit it." Fate "intervenes at odd and unexpected junctions, gives

**Deep creativity
is mysterious.**

a sly wink or a big shove." Getting shot in the head, experiencing the death of a dear friend while so young, nearly dying myself in that ski accident, those were fate's big shoves, pushing me into a deeper relationship with love and death. Fate lead me toward Eros, taught me to hear and heed the call of love. And when my real death is upon me, I'll know that I at least touched the hem of the skirt of immortality, which is perhaps what we're all ultimately seeking to experience as we till the gardens of our creative soil/soul.

EXERCISES

Jennifer invites you to these reflections.

- ➔ How has fate intervened with unusual or odd events that led you toward the road of your own creativity? When have you been given big shoves or sly winks that were meaningful to the development of your own creative voice and vision?

- ➔ Someday you will be on your deathbed (may it be a comfortable one and far off in the future). What can you do now to ensure you won't have any creative regrets then?
- ➔ Reflect back on a time when love has been the fuel that's stoked your creative fires. What were the circumstances? Did you create out of longing? Out of unrequited love? Out of love lost or love newly found?

Can you create something from these reflections?

Jennifer invites you to this practice.

THE IMMORTALITY PROJECT

In my essay, I write about the desire of many (most?) creative types for a form of immortality, whether that's the psychological and symbolic immortality that Robert J. Lipton writes about or the mythological immortality present in the myth of the union of Psyche and Eros. In the latter, through the combination of Soul and Love, I discuss how Joy is created, and Soul is given immortal life.

I want to suggest the following practice, but only for those things you have created with love or that you want to share with others out of love (for them, or love for what's been born of your creative process). I want to suggest you do something to make your art immortal.

(Note: This exercise will assume some part of you is striving toward immortality. If this doesn't sound like you, I invite you to read through this exercise anyway. It still might shake a good idea from your bones. Also note: Some of you already have your own immortality projects. I still encourage you to rattle your own bones as well and maybe try something new.)

1. Moving toward making our art "immortal," we have to soften our mind around the philosophical debate about what makes anything immortal or even whether immortality can actually be achieved. We move from the abstract

philosophical to the very personal by asking the question, “If I were on my deathbed, what would make me feel like something I created was immortal?” I suggest you write the answer down in your journal before you continue.

2. There are many conceivable answers to the above question. Let me list a few I’ve heard others tell me; if any of these resonate with you, you can add them to your journal.
 - a. If I passed it on to a child or someone in a younger generation
 - b. If I got it published
 - c. If someone photographed or filmed what I did
 - d. If there’s a recording left behind
 - e. If it was in the newspaper and/or shared on the Internet
 - f. If it nourished the earth in some way that would further sustain it

3. Now, think about something—even one *small* thing—that you can do to assure yourself some creative immortality. Here are two ideas:
 - a. I don’t know how immortal the Internet is, but I do know there’s never been an easier time to get our work “out there” and take control of our own presentation and promotion. Any one of us can record our creative products and put them on a site like YouTube. This works across disciplines, of course. If the garden is your creative outlet, you can video record yourself walking through the garden, showing us the sights. If cooking is your creative outlet, you can record yourself cooking and/or you can take photos of your best dishes and set them to music in a slideshow. If you’ve written poetry, consider creating a short video of you reading the poem. Everyone can self-publish their own books or even essays or short memoir pieces, and that goes for music and films

too. We don't have to wait for a publisher or agent or promoter to see value in our work—we can become these things for ourselves.

- b. If leaving something behind for children is important to you, think about what it is that brought you joy as a child and how you might promote that experience for other children. Did you come alive at a summer camp for the arts? Could you find one to support? If reading brought you such joy as a child, could you volunteer for local literacy groups? If it was painting, could you donate supplies to your local elementary school? Could passing on these gifts bring you a sense of immortality, of paying creativity forward?

Creating Love through the Love of Creating

Dennis

How can we help not returning, as we age with experience, to some earlier image that we have carried for decades and which now emerges slowly in the lake of our lives to see how and where it might fit in the scheme of our story? Here is mine.

In the second or third grade at Holy Cross elementary school in Euclid, Ohio, I sat across from Joan J., the sweetest girl in the class with a blonde ponytail that, when it swayed from side to side, made my legs tingle. I would steal glances her way all day and give thanks that we had been assigned seats next to one another. My crush on her knew no bounds. On Friday afternoons, our teacher, an Ursuline nun, allowed us to crayon or draw for the last ninety minutes of the school week. We welcomed this break in the regular schedule and from the rigors of math, English, social studies, and geometry. If I can call what I felt for Joan love, then I know that such a strong emotion for her found its way into my art. Even at such an early age, I felt the deep surge of what being inspired can engender. My experience of crayoning was heightened considerably just by being in Joan's presence, her ponytail motionless as she concentrated on her trees emerging from the coarse manila paper.

We were to work on the colors of the fall trees making their annual splash in October along the shores of Lake Erie and into our neighborhoods. Joan, an artist already at her young age, was busy, head down, crayoning into life magnificent elms, maples, and oak trees with the wild colors of fall that entertained us into winter's first storm.

Happily busy with my own trees, I paid less attention to the realism outside the window, content rather to color them with more original designs—until Sister came down the aisle and surveyed my work. Embarrassed, I kept my head down hoping she

would say nothing and move on. No luck there. “Dennis, look at your trees and then look at Joan’s over there. Hers look like real trees, but yours don’t. No fall trees I know look like what you have there.” Damage done, she moved on. Crushed, I continued to finish the scene, but all joy and interest had drained from what I was doing; love evaporated, desire dissipated, and I found myself in some mechanical funk just wanting to finish this catastrophe and go home. I no longer loved what I was doing, and I resented the color of fall trees for their consistency, along with my own inconsistent talent. I was also ashamed that Joan had heard everything my teacher said to me.

When I reflect on this vignette that stopped me from painting or drawing for almost sixty years, I realize that maybe there is something beneath creativity that powers it, including love. It is our feeling of originality that inspires creativity, and, depending on how faithful we can be to our own gifts, love will motivate creativity. As we live, we detect which styles of being and doing allow us to be faithful to our original gifts and to our gifts of originality. Ignoring or sidelining these unique qualities that inhabit us, and out from which our creativity flows in a stream or a trickle, is a significant betrayal of who we are, coupled with what we wish to make of ourselves to leave some imprint on the world’s soil. The story I related above, now shaped in memory to reveal to me decades later what it means, illustrates how learning to trust and love one’s own originality is an enormous influence on how we shape our own history as well as create ourselves into the world.

**Deep creativity
is idiosyncratic.**

The poetic muse has been a staple in my own career, both in teaching many classics of world literature to explore their sustained wisdom and in my own creative pursuits—painting, fashioning works from clay, and writing fiction and nonfiction. Their creations have been as essential to me as breathing. Suffocating the creative impulse is thus one of the most devastating tyrannies an individual can self-inflict or have inflicted on him or her by another. With the above experience in mind, I turn to one of my great poetic mentors, Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), to deepen our understanding of the intimate fidelity between love and creativity.

The son of a well-off and formidable family in Florence, Dante, at about the age I was when I fell in love with the motion of Joan’s ponytail, meets a young woman, Beatrice

Portinari on the streets of Florence. Reports suggest he had a brief conversation with Beatrice. He does not see her often after this initial encounter, but that first meeting permanently altered something in his heart and soul. Beatrice subsequently dies at an early age some years later, which devastates the poet. But while she's still living, Dante begins as a young man to write a series of sonnets to her and to the power of love itself; what he then circulates in manuscript form he calls *La Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*) to a few friends in Florence.

Now while he does not know Beatrice especially well, her presence in his life nonetheless encourages such a depth of love, both spiritual ecstasy and physical attraction, that it changes the young poet permanently. His meeting with her opens him to both his originality and his creativity. As a result of their meeting, he is compelled to write poetry; the result is a collection of some thirty-three sonnets on love, with accompanying prose interpretations. His initial desire stems directly from the love that accompanies him wherever he goes: "Then it happened that while walking down a path along which ran a very clear stream, I suddenly felt a great desire to write a poem, and I began to think how I would go about it. . . . Then, I must tell you, my tongue, as if moved of its own accord, spoke and said: *Ladies who have intelligence of love*. With great delight I decided to keep these words in mind and to use them at the beginning of my poem," he writes in *La Vita Nuova*.

I have been moved by this moment in the life of the artist—any of us, really—wherein love ministers to some deep desire to express our own originality. Dante's career as a poet begins right here, in the natural order by a clear running stream. We remember that he has not yet even thought of writing his *Commedia*, or *Divine Comedy*; he is still in the gestation period where something is beginning to flower—love's expression in the creative act in a moment of grace. Grace, courtesy, gratitude, and pleasure are the faces of love when it is incarnated in a creative act. Every day of our lives can be an opportunity to express grace in action. Living an authentic life as an expression of our originality, whether we crayon trees the "wrong" color or write poetry for ourselves or others, puts us in touch with our most valued motives as well as with the well of creativity that is available to any who are vulnerable enough to encourage its presence.

The mythologist Joseph Campbell built a career on this revelation, this intuitive response to life. His *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, published in 1949, brought mythical thinking into the respectable realm of public conversation. His “call to adventure” mantra soon took off. Now many emotions can prompt this voice, this summons to a vocation, to the vocative, but the one that seems to dominate so many is love, sometimes in the form of desire or curiosity or a wish for completion or self-definition. Most importantly, if this call to create is accepted and not refused—and the world is loaded with individuals who said to the call, “No, not now; I’m busy. Call back later”—then the next gesture is to yield to the call, which is to submit always to something larger and bigger than oneself. One yields to a vocation and vacates the familiar life one has adopted. Love here provokes a creative decision, a daring leap into the unknown. Most importantly, it is a summons that is ours alone, not another’s. One of the most painful realizations a human being can face is to reflect late in life that the call we followed was not our own but another’s. It’s painful too to reflect on when we refused a call that could have enriched our lives.

**Deep creativity
is archetypal.**

I believe love prompts the venture to create, to make an impression on life, to give voice through a creative response to one’s own uniqueness. God bless my earlier teacher; Sister meant well, but in her critique, she diffused for many years my own desire to create what I saw, not what others found their own way to express. I think she may have confused the conformity of the product with the originality of the process. Failing to discern the difference between these two elements can snuff out the beginning rustlings of a calling.

To return to the story of Dante’s calling: his great discovery at this moment, as the line of poetry is delivered to him and his tongue moves on its own, is perhaps his greatest discovery, prompting him to eventually write a poem of over 14,000 lines in terza rima rhyme to elucidate that love has its own unique form of intelligence, that love has an intellect and so knows the world in a particular way. Such a discovery is what his *Commedia* expresses and what he spends the rest of his life shaping. It makes me ask: Can we create if we do not love? My response would be no, or not very well. Love catalyzes creativity and creativity in turn emerges, as a child from its mother, in allowing and accepting one’s originality to flower and flourish. In his grand poem, which *La Vita Nuova* kick-starts,

**Deep creativity
is emotional.**

Eros and Agape kiss the face of epistemology—that to love is to know, that love knows in a unique and satisfying way. Love expands my awareness of how the world is suffused with Primal Love—Dante’s term for the Godhead—that causes the motion of everything created as well as the emotions that spur creativity.

The very last sonnet in *La Vita Nuova* is worth considering before we leave Dante’s world. When he finishes writing it, he adds a final prose observation: “After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way. . . . I hope to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman”—the blessed Beatrice who “in glory” contemplates “the Lord of graciousness,” which is Love himself.

I ask at this juncture: What stirs each of us in the creative act? What must congeal or find an accord or an attunement in us, even in the midst of heartaches, losses, and afflictions, to transport us to the still center of our being, which is the unique “little Tahiti in my soul,” as Ishmael proclaims it in crafting his white-whale narrative, *Moby-Dick*?

LOVE WHAT I CREATE AND/OR CREATE WHAT I LOVE?

About three years ago, at age sixty-eight, perhaps driven on an unconscious level to revisit that third-grade classroom across from Joan J. where I crayoned my special fall trees after over fifty-five years, I began to paint again. I did not know at the time that part of my impulse to begin painting classes given by one of my former students at a Catholic university in San Antonio was to reconcile the creative part of my soul with that earlier incident by facing it, brush and tubes of acrylic colors at the ready, and wearing a green apron. Perhaps too, a greater authentic love for myself was also a coconspirator in the enterprise. What I also remembered I loved was the act of creating images on a blank sheet of paper or, now, on a canvas, without words. The excellent American painter David Hockney, in a recent interview at age eighty, claimed that the desire to create pictures is one of the most basic and sustained impulses in the human being. I sense that he is

BREATHING LOVE OUT

There is no prescribed way to breathe love out into our creative lives—just as there is no prescribed path to use any of the “ways” highlighted in this book. Love will always push us into uncomfortable places—blissfully uncomfortable places and excruciatingly uncomfortable places. And perhaps one of our tasks, as artists of deep creativity, is not to run from the discomfort but instead to allow love to make our poems and our paintings and our music and our movements and our prose a bit messy. (Okay, sometimes, very messy.) *Deep creativity is autonomous*, we suggest, and sometimes the soul just wants to make a mess—and what better way to mess with us than through love?

It seems important, as we breathe out of this section, to remember that a creativity of depth allows things to be rearranged. It understands that the most captivating relationships in our lives often start out in frazzled and disordered places. Someone or something climbs inside of us and moves everything around. Our work changes; priorities get displaced; some close companions get left behind, hitchhiking along a dusty road; or, sometimes, it is we who get left behind . . . thumb up and trembling . . . waiting in the blistering sun for the next gesture of human dignity and risk.

We can spend hours or days or years trying to put everything back into place again, and yet some part of us understands that we will never be the same again. Love has permanently rearranged the particles of our being, and thus our artistic life. We are not the same painter or writer or dancer we were before. And we never will be. We are probably a little less perfect, a little more messy, full of wrenching questions

and torturing frustrations. But great art is (typically) not orderly, and one thing is for sure—it is always imperfect, as Dennis pointed out at the end of his essay. But these imperfections are a moving (and essential) part of the creative process, the creative process that calls us to share something so deeply authentic and vulnerable and raw about ourselves with others.

It is no secret that love demands a lot, but it also rewards us greatly should we invest ourselves and allow time for it to mature and blossom. As artists of depth, we are not only called to look into our tales of love and longing for artistic inspiration. We are not only called to widen our gaze and attentiveness to include love beyond the confines of human relationships. Of course, these are powerful tools and approaches, always available to us. But, we are also called to forge a long-term relationship to our creativity itself. We must begin to ask ourselves questions like, “What do I truly love about my creative life? How can I love my creativity more deeply or consciously? Do I spend as much time nurturing my art and creative work as I do my most precious relationships?” And an even more powerful question to pose in particularly reflective moments is, “Who, or what, is my creativity in service to?”

In modern circles, creativity is often in service to outward success, money, deadlines, demands, our boss, or our own ego. This completely changes the energy and intention of our creative force. Imagine if our creativity was instead in service to love, humanity, good will, and internal transformation. What would that change? How would our creative lives look different? Or would they look different at all?

In Jennifer’s essay, she reminded us that our art can become a powerful form of loving—“both propitiation and supplication before the god of love.” And I ended my piece with an offering—a deep poetic call for social justice and change—to that same god, the god of Love.

Deep creativity is participatory. So what’s it like to participate in creation with the god of Love? This god of Love will always call us beyond and below the surface, will push our creative capacity to exciting and terrifying places. This god of Love will hold our hearts captive in an ever-unfolding and complex relationship with whatever is in front of us and with our own creative processes.

At times, we will want to give up and leave the god of Love behind with the thunderstorms, typhoons, and raging lunatics. And at other times, we will forge forward into the wind, with a sword, knowing that we will never know the full madness nor the full miracles of our deep creative potential without placing ourselves at the mercy of this great, mysterious god.

At least, if you're reading this book, you know you're not going at it alone. We are just as mad (and miraculous) as you, and we cannot wait to see what offerings of love you leave along the deep creative way.

"Have I gone mad?"

"I'm afraid so, but let me tell you something, the best people usually are."

—LEWIS CARROLL, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

