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 Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition of The
 Artist's Way

‘A fascinating and fun twelve-week-long programme of exercises and explorations to help you loosen up your artistic self ... Three times in the last decade I’ve committed to doing *The Artist’s Way* and each time I’ve learned something important and surprising about myself and my work ... Without *The Artist’s Way*, there would have been no *Eat, Pray, Love*’

ELIZABETH GILBERT

‘This is a book that addresses a delicate and complex subject. For those who will use it, it is a valuable tool to get in touch with their own creativity’

MARTIN SCORSESE

‘I picked this book up for the first time when I was 21 years old. It completely changed my life. I did it again ten years ago and the impact was again life-altering. Something in my soul was stirring me to come back to it. So ... here we go ... I’m excited to meet myself on this path again’

KERRY WASHINGTON, INSTAGRAM

‘I absolutely love this book ... It’s a really good starting point to discover what lights you up’

EMMA GANNON

—

‘This book has been revolutionary in my creative life. It’s a must-read for every artist’

ITO AGHAYERE, INSTAGRAM

—

‘Cameron has a knack for anthropomorphising emotions themselves and reframing negative thought ... As she has done for nearly three decades, Cameron is simply encouraging her readers to be a bit more open, more patient, and kinder to themselves’

NEW YORKER

—

‘I love it. A practical, spiritual, nurturing book’

RUSSELL BRAND

—

‘Unleashing our creative potential is the key to a more meaningful life’

PSYCHOLOGIES

—

‘If you have always wanted to pursue a creative dream, have always wanted to play and create with words or paints, this book will gently get you started and help you learn all kinds of paying-attention techniques; and that, after all, is what being an artist is all about. It’s about learning to pay attention’

ANNE LAMOTT

—

‘A classic that never loses its power’

AMANDA DE CADENET, INSTAGRAM

—

‘So inspiring’

REESE WITHERSPOON, INSTAGRAM—

—

This sourcebook is dedicated to Mark Bryan. Mark urged me to write it, helped shape it, and co-taught it. Without him it would not exist.

Hailed by *The New York Times* as ‘The Queen of Change’, **Julia Cameron** is credited with starting a movement in 1992 that has brought creativity into the mainstream conversation – in the arts, in business and in everyday life. She is the bestselling author of more than forty books, fiction and non-fiction; a poet, songwriter, filmmaker and playwright. Commonly referred to as ‘The Godmother’ or ‘High Priestess’ of creativity, her tools are based in practice, not theory, and she considers herself ‘the floor sample of her own toolkit’. *The Artist’s Way* has been translated into forty languages and sold over five million copies to date.

ALSO BY JULIA CAMERON

BOOKS IN THE ARTIST'S WAY SERIES

It's Never Too Late to Begin Again

The Artist's Way For Parents (with Emma Lively)

Walking in This World

Finding Water

The Complete Artist's Way

The Artist's Way Workbook

The Artist's Way Every Day

The Artist's Way Morning Pages Journal

The Artist's Date Book (illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)

Inspirations: Meditations from The Artist's Way

OTHER BOOKS ON CREATIVITY

The Prosperous Heart (with Emma Lively)

Prosperity Every Day

The Writing Diet

The Right to Write

The Sound of Paper

The Vein of Gold

How to Avoid Making Art (or Anything Else You Enjoy) (illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)

Supplies: A Troubleshooting Guide for Creative Difficulties

The Writer's Life: Insights from The Right to Write

The Artist's Way at Work (with Mark Bryan and Catherine Allen)

Money Drunk, Money Sober (with Mark Bryan)

The Creative Life

PRAYER BOOKS

Answered Prayers

Heart Steps

Blessings

Transitions

Prayers to the Great Creator

BOOKS ON SPIRITUALITY

Safe Journey

Prayers from a Nonbeliever

Letters to a Young Artist

God Is No Laughing Matter

God Is Dog Spelled Backwards (illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)

Faith and Will

Life Lessons

The Artist's Way provides a twelve-week course to guide you through the process of recovering your creative self. It aims to dispel the 'I'm not talented enough' conditioning that holds many people back, and will help you unleash your inner artist.

The programme begins with Julia Cameron's most vital tools for creative recovery – The Morning Pages, a daily writing ritual, and The Artist Date, a dedicated block of time to nurture your inner artist. From there, she shares hundreds of exercises, activities and prompts to help readers thoroughly explore each chapter. She also offers guidance on starting a 'Creative Cluster' of fellow artists who will support you in your creative endeavours.

Its step-by-step approach enables you to transform your life, overcoming any artistic blocks you may suffer from, including limiting beliefs, fear, sabotage, jealousy and guilt, and replace them with self-confidence and productivity.

Since its first publication, *The Artist's Way* has inspired millions of readers to demystify the creative process and open up opportunities for self-growth and self-discovery. A revolutionary programme for personal renewal, *The Artist's Way* will help get you back on track, rediscover your passions and take the steps you need to change your life.

'The queen of change'

THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE ARTIST'S WAY

A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity

JULIA CAMERON

**SOUVENIR
PRESS**

FOREWORD

How deeply *The Artist's Way* has affected so many people. Back in the early '90s Julia dared to claim that each and every person has within them a source of creativity, that it can be watered and it can bloom. How democratic! How American! That art is not just for the elite, the special few struck by lightning. What she says is liberating and true. There is a hunger out there—it continues to sell at a fast pace and be absorbed into our conscience. I've seen it on display in the obvious places—bookstores, art museums—but I've also seen it for sale on the shelf of a hardware store, a grocery counter, in a pharmacy, and at a map store. This secret of creativity has seeped over into odd nooks and crannies, out of closets, into bare sight.

Julia Cameron is my friend. We share the love of place—one of a writer's primary tools. We knew each other in Taos, New Mexico, where a deep source of our creativity sprung. I know her now also in Santa Fe, walking her dog through the chamisa.

One day when we were together and I was complaining about my life's trajectory, she turned to me with her blue eyes and soft smile and said, "I want to never stop opening up people's lives." And she practices what she preaches, writing plays, musicals, novels—and little known to many, bakes a terrific peach pie. She is also a deep and dedicated listener to a friend's woes.

Julia continues to grow her inner life. People feel this in the book's integrity. May *The Artist's Way* continue to enlighten, march on through the transience of politics, the zigzag shifts in our human life. May it continue to be available for a long, long time.

Natalie Goldberg

PREFACE

I am seated alone in a cafe, dining solo.

A woman approaches my table.

“Pardon me,” she says, “has anyone ever told you you resemble Julia Cameron?”

Startled, I reply, “I *am* Julia Cameron.”

Now it is the woman’s turn to be surprised.

“Oh my God,” she exclaims, “your book changed my life. It made me a novelist.”

“That’s wonderful,” I tell her, genuinely pleased.

“I bet you hear stories like mine all the time,” the woman says.

“In fact, I do, but it doesn’t take away the thrill.”

In 1992, I published *The Artist’s Way*, a book that I think of as a support kit for artists. Its popularity caught me by surprise. I thought I was writing a book for myself and a handful of friends. Instead, I wrote a book that spoke to millions. It had a central premise—we are all creative—and with the use of a few simple tools, we can all become more creative.

Creativity, I believed, was a spiritual practice. We had only to

open ourselves up to the Great Creator working through us. We became channels for spiritual energy to enter the world. Writing, painting, dancing, acting—no matter what form our creativity took, the Great Creator caused us to flourish. And so, encounters like mine in the cafe became commonplace.

The sentence is always the same: “Your book changed my life.”

“No,” I often reply. “You changed your life. You used the tools I laid out for you.”

I think it is important for people to own their own spiritual practice. My toolkit is simple, and it invites practitioners to embrace simplicity. A recent review of my latest book noted that the tools were “simple and repetitive.” I think of this as a good thing. The tools do not change book to book. The same simple tools that worked in *The Artist’s Way* work still, a dozen books later.

In my travels, I encounter practitioners who have used the tools for years. “I’ve done Morning Pages for fifteen years,” a man recently told me. His Morning Pages—three pages of longhand, morning writing, have filled journal after journal. He doesn’t give them up, because they “work.”

A woman tells me the second primary tool, Artist Dates, a once a week, festive, solo expedition, have given her a life of adventure.

Used together, Morning Pages and Artist Dates do transform lives.

“I’ve given your book to my mother and my sister,” a woman

tells me at a book signing. “It worked for all of us,” she says. “Now I want you to sign a book for my boyfriend.”

I ask his name, and write the simple phrase, “May our words be friends.”

I trust that the book will “work” for him, too. I have come to rely on the book. I trust that it is indeed life-changing.

“Julia, don’t you get tired of hearing our stories?” I am asked. The answer is no. Creativity is never tiresome. It is always an adventure, one I have been privileged to share.

“I was a very unhappy lawyer,” a Broadway actor tells me. “Then I used your tools. Now I am an actor—and a happy one.”

“I was what you called a ‘shadow artist,’ ” a thriving director tells me. “I was a producer until I used your toolkit, and emerged as a director. I’ve worked with your book three times, and each time has led to a breakthrough. Thank you.”

“Your tools felt natural to me,” a fine arts photographer tells me. “I used to create in spurts, but your tools have given me consistent productivity.”

“Before using *The Artist’s Way*, my life was very dramatic,” a poet tells me. “I was always waiting for inspiration to strike like lightning. Now I know that my creativity is a steady flow. I write poems regularly, and without high drama. The poems I write are just as good as any I wrote before.”

Sentiments like these make my years of teaching worthwhile. I

am delighted to have been of service. I receive heartfelt letters thanking me for my work and telling me of the changes it has wrought.

Occasionally, the thank-yous are more public. Novelist Patricia Cornwell thanked me in the dedication of her thriller *Trace*. Musician Pete Townsend cited *The Artist's Way* in his autobiography *Who Am I*. While it is thrilling to have celebrity endorsements, the book is perhaps at its best helping the lesser-knowns—and the help isn't restricted to creativity issues.

“Julia, I was drunk in the outback. Now I'm sober, and a Hollywood screenwriter,” one practitioner wrote me. It is not uncommon for users of the pages to face down difficult issues such as sobriety, childhood trauma, and obesity. The pages urge honesty in facing down demons.

Last fall I taught in Sedona a class of ninety people. On the second night, a meeting was convened for all who felt the impact of *The Artist's Way* on their well-being. Person after person cited breakthroughs to clarity and health. When it was my turn to share, I told the group that their recovery gave me great pride. I was grateful for their acknowledgement; grateful, too, for the many and varied strides they had taken toward mental, physical, and spiritual health.

“Julia,” I am sometimes asked, “aren't you afraid you are unblocking a lot of bad art?”

“No,” I reply. The opposite seems to be the case. The unblocked

art is often very fine, and I find myself thinking, “how could they have not known they were an artist?” And yet, many people do not know until they encounter my book.

Many artists have never received critical early encouragement. As a result, they may not know they are artists at all. Artists love other artists. Shadow artists are gravitating to their rightful tribe, but cannot yet claim their birthright. I urge them to step forward out of the shadows and into the sunlight of creativity.

Most of the time, when we are blocked in an area of our life, it is because we feel safer that way. The toolkit lends practitioners a sense of safety. As they learn to take small risks in their Morning Pages, they are led to larger risks. A step at a time, they emerge as artists. It has been a quarter of a century since the tools were first published. It gives me great satisfaction that the book continues to sell, and sell well. It reinforces my belief that we are all creative and have a hunger for further creativity.

INTRODUCTION

When people ask me what I do, I usually answer, “I’m a writer-director and I teach these creativity workshops.”

The last one interests them.

“How can you teach creativity?” they want to know. Defiance fights with curiosity on their faces.

“I can’t,” I tell them. “I teach people to *let* themselves be creative.”

“Oh. You mean we’re all creative?” Now disbelief and hope battle it out.

“Yes.”

“You *really* believe that?”

“Yes.”

“So what do you do?”

This book is what I do. For a decade now, I have taught a spiritual workshop aimed at freeing people’s creativity. I have taught artists and nonartists, painters and filmmakers and homemakers and lawyers—anyone interested in living more creatively through practicing an art; even more broadly, anyone interested in practicing the art of creative living. While using, teaching, and sharing tools I have found, devised, divined, and

been handed, I have seen blocks dissolved and lives transformed by the simple process of engaging the Great Creator in discovering and recovering our creative powers.

“The Great Creator? That sounds like some Native American god. That sounds too Christian, too New Age, too ...” Stupid? Simple-minded? Threatening? ... I know. Think of it as an exercise in open-mindedness. Just think, “Okay, Great Creator, *whatever that is,*” and keep reading. Allow yourself to experiment with the idea there might be a Great Creator and you might get some kind of use from it in freeing your own creativity.

Because *The Artist’s Way* is, in essence, a spiritual path, initiated and practiced through creativity, this book uses the word *God*. This may be volatile for some of you—conjuring old, unworkable, unpleasant, or simply unbelievable ideas about God as you were raised to understand “him.” Please be open-minded.

Remind yourself that to succeed in this course, no god concept is necessary. In fact, many of our commonly held god concepts get in the way. Do not allow semantics to become one more block for you.

When the word *God* is used in these pages, you may substitute the thought *good orderly direction* or *flow*. What we are talking about is a creative energy. *God* is useful shorthand for many of us, but so is *Goddess, Mind, Universe, Source, and Higher Power ...* The point is not what you name it. The point is that you try using it. For many of us, thinking of it as a form of spiritual electricity has been a very

useful jumping-off place.

By the simple, scientific approach of experimentation and observation, a workable connection with the flow of good orderly direction can easily be established. It is not the intent of these pages to engage in explaining, debating, or defining that flow. You do not need to understand electricity to use it.

Do not call it God unless that is comfortable for you. There seems to be no need to name it unless that name is a useful shorthand for what you experience. Do not pretend to believe when you do not. If you remain forever an atheist, agnostic—so be it. You will still be able to experience an altered life through working with these principles.

I have worked artist-to-artist with potters, photographers, poets, screenwriters, dancers, novelists, actors, directors—and with those who knew only what they dreamed to be or who only dreamed of being somehow more creative. I have seen blocked painters paint, broken poets speak in tongues, halt and lame and maimed writers racing through final drafts. I have come to not only believe but know:

No matter what your age or your life path, whether making art is your career or your hobby or your dream, it is not too late or too egotistical or too selfish or too silly to work on your creativity. One fifty-year-old student who “always wanted to write” used these tools and emerged as a prize-winning playwright. A judge used these tools to fulfill his lifelong dreams of sculpting. Not all

students become full-time artists as a result of the course. In fact, many full-time artists report that they have become more creatively rounded into full-time people.

Through my own experience—and that of countless others that I have shared—I have come to believe that creativity is our true nature, that blocks are an unnatural thwarting of a process at once as normal and as miraculous as the blossoming of a flower at the end of a slender green stem. I have found this process of making spiritual contact to be both simple and straightforward.

If you are creatively blocked—and I believe all of us are to some extent—it is possible, even probable, that you can learn to create more freely through your willing use of the tools this book provides. Just as doing Hatha Yoga stretches alters consciousness when all you are doing is stretching, doing the exercises in this book alters consciousness when “all” you are doing is writing and playing. Do these things and a breakthrough will follow—whether you believe in it or not. Whether you call *it* a spiritual awakening or not.

In short, the theory doesn’t matter as much as the practice itself does. What you are doing is creating pathways in your consciousness through which the creative forces can operate. Once you agree to clearing these pathways, your creativity emerges. In a sense, your creativity is like your blood. Just as blood is a fact of your physical body and nothing you invented, creativity is a fact of your spiritual body and nothing that you must invent.

MY OWN JOURNEY

I began teaching the creativity workshops in New York. I taught them because I was *told* to teach them. One minute I was walking in the West Village on a cobblestone street with beautiful afternoon light. The next minute I suddenly knew that I should begin teaching people, groups of people, how to unblock. Maybe it was a wish exhaled on somebody else's walk. Certainly Greenwich Village must contain a greater density of artists—blocked and otherwise—than nearly anyplace else in America.

“I need to unblock,” someone may have breathed out.

“I know how to do it,” I may have responded, picking up the cue. My life has always included strong internal directives. *Marching orders*, I call them.

In any case, I suddenly knew that I did know how to unblock people and that I was meant to do so, starting then and there with the lessons I myself had learned.

Where did the lessons come from?

In 1978, in January, I stopped drinking. I had never thought drinking made me a writer, but now I suddenly thought not drinking might make me stop. In my mind, drinking and writing went together like, well, scotch and soda. For me, the trick was always getting past the fear and onto the page. I was playing beat the clock—trying to write before the booze closed in like fog and my window of creativity was blocked again.

By the time I was thirty and abruptly sober, I had an office on the Paramount lot and had made a whole career out of that kind of creativity. Creative in spasms. Creative as an act of will and ego. Creative on behalf of others. Creative, yes, but in spurts, like blood from a severed carotid artery. A decade of writing and all I knew was how to make these headlong dashes and hurl myself, against all odds, at the wall of whatever I was writing. If creativity was spiritual in any sense, it was only in its resemblance to a crucifixion. I fell upon the thorns of prose. I bled.

If I could have continued writing the old, painful way, I would certainly still be doing it. The week I got sober, I had two national magazine pieces out, a newly minted feature script, and an alcohol problem I could not handle any longer.

I told myself that if sobriety meant no creativity I did not want to be sober. Yet I recognized that drinking would kill me *and* the creativity. I needed to learn to write sober—or else give up writing entirely. Necessity, not virtue, was the beginning of my spirituality. I was forced to find a new creative path. And that is where my lessons began.

I learned to turn my creativity over to the only god I could believe in, the god of creativity, the life force Dylan Thomas called “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” I learned to get out of the way and let that creative force work through me. I learned to just show up at the page and write down what I heard. Writing became more like eavesdropping and less like inventing a

nuclear bomb. It wasn't so tricky, and it didn't blow up on me anymore. I didn't have to be in the mood. I didn't have to take my emotional temperature to see if inspiration was pending. I simply wrote. No negotiations. Good, bad? None of my business. I wasn't doing it. By resigning as the self-conscious author, I wrote freely.

In retrospect, I am astounded I could let go of the drama of being a suffering artist. Nothing dies harder than a bad idea. And few ideas are worse than the ones we have about art. We can charge so many things off to our suffering-artist identity: drunkenness, promiscuity, fiscal problems, a certain ruthlessness or self-destructiveness in matters of the heart. We all know how broke-crazy-promiscuous-unreliable artists are. And if they don't have to be, then what's my excuse?

The idea that I could be sane, sober, and creative terrified me, implying, as it did, the possibility of personal accountability. "You mean if I have these gifts, I'm supposed to use them?" Yes.

Provisionally, I was sent another blocked writer to work with—and on—at this time. I began to teach him what I was learning. (Get out of the way. Let *it* work through you. Accumulate pages, not judgments.) He, too, began to unblock. Now there were two of us. Soon I had another "victim," this one a painter. The tools worked for visual artists, too.

This was very exciting to me. In my grander moments, I imagined I was turning into a creative cartographer, mapping a way out of confusion for myself and for whoever wanted to follow.

I *never* planned to become a teacher. I was only angry I'd never had a teacher myself. Why did I have to learn what I learned the way I learned it: all by trial and error, all by walking into walls? We artists should be more teachable, I thought. Shortcuts and hazards of the trail could be flagged.

These were the thoughts that eddied with me as I took my afternoon walks—enjoying the light off the Hudson, plotting what I would write next. Enter the marching orders: I was to teach.

Within a week, I was offered a teaching position and space at the New York Feminist Art Institute—which I had never heard of. My first class—blocked painters, novelists, poets, and filmmakers— assembled itself. I began teaching them the lessons that are now in this book. Since that class there have been many others, and many more lessons as well.

The Artist's Way began as informal class notes mandated by my partner, Mark Bryan. As word of mouth spread, I began mailing out packets of materials. A peripatetic Jungian, John Giannini, spread word of the techniques wherever he lectured—seemingly everywhere. Requests for materials always followed. Next, the creation spirituality network got word of the work, and people wrote in from Dubuque, British Columbia, Indiana. Students materialized all over the globe. “I am in Switzerland with the State Department. Please send me ...” So I did.

The packets expanded and the number of students expanded. Finally, as the result of some *very* pointed urging from Mark

—“Write it *all* down. You can help a lot of people. It should be a *book*”—I began formally to assemble my thoughts. I wrote and Mark, who was by this time my co-teacher and taskmaster, told me what I had left out. I wrote more and Mark told me what I had *still* left out. He reminded me that I had seen plenty of miracles to support my theories and urged me to include those, too. I put on the page what I had been putting into practice for a decade.

The resulting pages emerged as a blueprint for do-it-yourself recovery. Like mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or the Heimlich maneuver, the tools in this book are intended as lifesavers. Please use them and pass them on.

Many times, I’ve heard words to this effect: “Before I took your class, I was completely separate from my creativity. The years of bitterness and loss had taken their toll. Then, gradually, the miracle started to happen. I have gone back to school to get my degree in theater, I’m auditioning for the first time in years, I’m writing on a steady basis—and, most important of all, I finally feel comfortable calling myself an artist.”

I doubt I can convey to you the feeling of the miraculous that I experience as a teacher, witnessing the before and after in the lives of students. Over the duration of the course, the sheer physical transformation can be startling, making me realize that the term *enlightenment* is a literal one. Students’ faces often take on a glow as they contact their creative energies. The same charged spiritual atmosphere that fills a great work of art can fill a

creativity class. In a sense, as we are creative beings, our lives become our work of art.

SPIRITUAL ELECTRICITY

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES

For most of us, the idea that the creator encourages creativity is a radical thought. We tend to think, or at least fear, that creative dreams are egotistical, something that God wouldn't approve of for us. After all, our creative artist is an inner youngster and prone to childish thinking. If our mom or dad expressed doubt or disapproval for our creative dreams, we may project that same attitude onto a parental god. This thinking must be undone.

What we are talking about is an induced—or invited—spiritual experience. I refer to this process as *spiritual chiropractic*. We undertake certain spiritual exercises to achieve alignment with the creative energy of the universe.

If you think of the universe as a vast electrical sea in which you are immersed and from which you are formed, opening to your creativity changes you from something bobbing in that sea to a more fully functioning, more conscious, more cooperative part of

that ecosystem.

As a teacher, I often sense the presence of something transcendent—a spiritual electricity, if you will—and I have come to rely on it in transcending my own limitations. I take the phrase *inspired teacher* to be a quite literal compliment. A higher hand than just my own engages us. Christ said, “Wherever two or more are gathered together, there I am in your midst.” The god of creativity seems to feel the same way.

The heart of creativity is an experience of the mystical union; the heart of the mystical union is an experience of creativity. Those who speak in spiritual terms routinely refer to God as the creator but seldom see *creator* as the literal term for *artist*. I am suggesting you take the term *creator* quite literally. You are seeking to forge a creative alliance, artist-to-artist with the Great Creator. Accepting this concept can greatly expand your creative possibilities.

As you work with the tools in this book, as you undertake the weekly tasks, many changes will be set in motion. Chief among these changes will be the triggering of *synchronicity*: we change and the universe furthers and expands that change. I have an irreverent shorthand for this that I keep taped to my writing desk: “Leap, and the net will appear.”

It is my experience both as an artist and as a teacher that when we move out on faith into the act of creation, the universe is able to advance. It is a little like opening the gate at the top of a field

irrigation system. Once we remove the blocks, the flow moves in.

Again, I do not ask you to *believe* this. In order for this creative emergence to happen, you don't have to believe in God. I simply ask you to observe and note this process as it unfolds. In effect, you will be midwiving and witnessing your own creative progression.

Creativity is an experience—to my eye, a spiritual experience. It does not matter which way you think of it: creativity leading to spirituality or spirituality leading to creativity. In fact, I do not make a distinction between the two. In the face of such experience, the whole question of belief is rendered obsolete. As Carl Jung answered the question of belief late in his life, “I don't believe; I know.”

The following spiritual principles are the bedrock on which creative recovery and discovery can be built. Read them through once a day, and keep an inner ear cocked for any shifts in attitudes or beliefs.

Basic Principles

1. Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy.
2. There is an underlying, in-dwelling creative force infusing all of life—including ourselves.
3. When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open

ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives.

4. We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.
5. Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.
6. The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature.
7. When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God: good orderly direction.
8. As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle but powerful changes are to be expected.
9. It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity.
10. Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK FOR YOUR CREATIVE RECOVERY

There are a number of ways to use this book. Most of all, I invite you to use it creatively. This section offers you a sort of road map through the process, with some specific ideas about how to proceed. Some students have done the course solo; others have formed circles to work through the book together. (In the back of the book, you'll find guidelines about doing the work in groups.) No matter which way you choose, *The Artist's Way* will work for you.

First, you may want to glance through the book to get a sense of the territory covered. (Reading the book through is not the same as using it.) Each chapter includes essays, exercises, tasks, and a weekly check-in. Don't be daunted by the amount of work it seems to entail. Much of the work is really play, and the course takes little more than one hour a day.

When I am formally teaching, I suggest students set a weekly schedule. For example, if you're going to work a Sunday-to-Sunday week, begin by reading the chapter of the week on Sunday night. After you've read the chapter, speed-write through the exercises. The exercises in each week are critical. So are the morning pages and the artist date. (More about these in the next chapter.) You probably won't have time to complete all of the other tasks in any given week. Try to do about half. Know that the rest are there for use when you are able to get back to them. In choosing which half

of the tasks to do, use two guidelines. Pick those that appeal to you and those you strongly resist. Leave the more neutral ones for later. Just remember, in choosing, that we often resist what we most need.

In all, make a time commitment of about seven to ten hours a week—an hour a day, or slightly more if you choose. This modest commitment to using the tools can yield tremendous results within the twelve weeks of the course. The same tools, used over a longer period, can alter the trajectory of a lifetime.

In working with this book, remember that *The Artist's Way* is a spiral path. You will circle through some of the issues over and over, each time at a different level. There is no such thing as being done with an artistic life. Frustrations and rewards exist at all levels on the path. Our aim here is to find the trail, establish our footing, and begin the climb. The creative vistas that open will quickly excite you.

What to Expect

Many of us wish we were more creative. Many of us sense we *are* more creative, but unable to effectively tap that creativity. Our dreams elude us. Our lives feel somehow flat. Often, we have great ideas, wonderful dreams, but are unable to actualize them for ourselves. Sometimes we have specific creative longings we would love to be able to fulfill—learning to play the piano, painting, taking an acting class, or writing. Sometimes our goal is more diffuse. We hunger for what might be called creative living—an expanded sense of creativity in our business lives, in sharing with our children, our spouse, our friends.

While there is no quick fix for instant, pain-free creativity, creative recovery (or discovery) is a teachable, trackable spiritual process. Each of us is complex and highly individual, yet there are common recognizable denominators to the creative recovery process.

Working with this process, I see a certain amount of defiance and giddiness in the first few weeks. This entry stage is followed closely by explosive anger in the course's midsection. The anger is followed by grief, then alternating waves of resistance and hope. This peaks-and-valleys phase of growth becomes a series of expansions and contractions, a birthing process in which students experience intense elation and defensive skepticism.

This choppy growth phase is followed by a strong urge to

abandon the process and return to life as we know it. In other words, a bargaining period. People are often tempted to abandon the course at this point. I call this a creative U-turn. Recommitment to the process next triggers the free-fall of a major ego surrender. Following this, the final phase of the course is characterized by a new sense of self marked by increased autonomy, resilience, expectancy, and excitement—as well as by the capacity to make and execute concrete creative plans.

If this sounds like a lot of emotional tumult, it is. When we engage in a creativity recovery, we enter into a withdrawal process from life as we know it. *Withdrawal* is another way of saying *detachment* or *nonattachment*, which is emblematic of consistent work with any meditation practice.

In movie terms, we slowly *pull focus*, lifting up and away from being embedded in our lives until we attain an overview. This overview empowers us to make valid creative choices. Think of it as a journey with difficult, varied, and fascinating terrain. You are moving to higher ground. The fruit of your withdrawal is what you need to understand as a positive process, both painful and exhilarating.

Many of us find that we have squandered our own creative energies by investing disproportionately in the lives, hopes, dreams, and plans of others. Their lives have obscured and detoured our own. As we consolidate a core through our withdrawal process, we become more able to articulate our own

boundaries, dreams, and authentic goals. Our personal flexibility increases while our malleability to the whims of others decreases. We experience a heightened sense of autonomy and possibility.

Ordinarily, when we speak of withdrawal, we think of having a substance removed from us. We give up alcohol, drugs, sugar, fats, caffeine, nicotine—and we suffer a withdrawal. It's useful to view creative withdrawal a little differently. We ourselves are the substance we withdraw to, not from, as we pull our overextended and misplaced creative energy back into our own core.

We begin to excavate our buried dreams. This is a tricky process. Some of our dreams are very volatile, and the mere act of brushing them off sends an enormous surge of energy bolting through our denial system. Such grief! Such loss! Such pain! It is at this point in the recovery process that we make what Robert Bly calls a “descent into ashes.” We mourn the self we abandoned. We greet this self as we might greet a lover at the end of a long and costly war.

To effect a creative recovery, we must undergo a time of mourning. In dealing with the suicide of the “nice” self we have been making do with, we find a certain amount of grief to be essential. Our tears prepare the ground for our future growth. Without this creative moistening, we may remain barren. We must allow the bolt of pain to strike us. Remember, this is useful pain; lightning illuminates.

How do you know if you are creatively blocked? Jealousy is an

excellent clue. Are there artists whom you resent? Do you tell yourself, “I could do that, if only ...” Do you tell yourself that if only you took your creative potential seriously, you might:

- Stop telling yourself, “It’s too late.”
- Stop waiting until you make enough money to do something you’d really love.
- Stop telling yourself, “It’s just my ego” whenever you yearn for a more creative life.
- Stop telling yourself that dreams don’t matter, that they are only dreams and that you should be more sensible.
- Stop fearing that your family and friends would think you crazy.
- Stop telling yourself that creativity is a luxury and that you should be grateful for what you’ve got.

As you learn to recognize, nurture, and protect your inner artist, you will be able to move beyond pain and creative constriction. You will learn ways to recognize and resolve fear, remove emotional scar tissue, and strengthen your confidence. Damaging old ideas about creativity will be explored and discarded. Working with this book, you will experience an

intensive, guided encounter with your own creativity—your private villains, champions, wishes, fears, dreams, hopes, and triumphs. The experience will make you excited, depressed, angry, afraid, joyous, hopeful, and, ultimately, more free.

THE BASIC TOOLS

There are two pivotal tools in creative recovery: *the morning pages* and *the artist date*. A lasting creative awakening requires the consistent use of both. I like to introduce them both immediately, and at sufficient length to answer most of your questions. This chapter explains these tools carefully and in depth. Please read it with special care and begin the immediate use of both tools.

THE MORNING PAGES

In order to retrieve your creativity, you need to find it. I ask you to do this by an apparently pointless process I call *the morning pages*. You will do the pages daily through all the weeks of the course and, I hope, much longer. I have been doing them for a decade now. I have students who have worked with them nearly that long and who would no more abandon them than breathing.

Ginny, a writer-producer, credits the morning pages with inspiration for her recent screenplays and clarity in planning her network specials. “I’m superstitious about them by now,” she says. “When I was editing my last special, I would get up at 5:00 a.m. to get them done before I went in to work.”

What are morning pages? Put simply, the morning pages are three pages of longhand writing, strictly stream-of-consciousness: “Oh, god, another morning. I have nothing to say. I need to wash the curtains. Did I get my laundry yesterday? Blah, blah, blah ...” They might also, more ingloriously, be called *brain drain*, since that is one of their main functions.

There is no wrong way to do morning pages. These daily morning meanderings are not meant to be *art*. Or even *writing*. I stress that point to reassure the nonwriters working with this book. Writing is simply one of the tools. Pages are meant to be, simply, the act of moving the hand across the page and writing down *whatever* comes to mind. Nothing is too petty, too silly, too stupid, or too weird to be included.

The morning pages are not supposed to sound smart—although sometimes they might. Most times they won’t, and nobody will ever know except you. Nobody is allowed to read your morning pages except you. And you shouldn’t even read them yourself for the first eight weeks or so. Just write three pages, and stick them into an envelope. Or write three pages in a spiral notebook and don’t leaf back through. *Just write three pages ...* and write three more pages the next day.

September 30, 1991 ... Over the weekend, for Domenica’s biology project, she and I went bug hunting on the Rio Grande and Pott Creek. We collected water crawlies and butterflies. I made a crimson homemade butterfly net that was quite functional

although dragonflies eluded us to our dismay. We did not catch the tarantula strolling down the dirt road near our house. We just enjoyed spotting it.

Although occasionally colorful, the morning pages are often negative, frequently fragmented, often self-pitying, repetitive, stilted or babyish, angry or bland—even silly sounding. Good!

Oct. 2, 1991 ... I am up and have had a headache and have taken aspirin and feel a little better although still shaky. I may have that flu after all. I am getting to the bottom of a lot of unpacking and still no teapot from Laura whom I am sorely missing. What a heartbreak...

All that angry, whiny, petty stuff that you write down in the morning stands between you and your creativity. Worrying about the job, the laundry, the funny knock in the car, the weird look in your lover's eye—this stuff eddies through our subconscious and muddies our days. Get it on the page.

The morning pages are the primary tool of creative recovery. As blocked artists, we tend to criticize ourselves mercilessly. Even if we look like functioning artists to the world, we feel we never do enough and what we do isn't right. We are victims of our own internalized perfectionist, a nasty internal and eternal critic, the Censor, who resides in our (left) brain and keeps up a constant stream of subversive remarks that are often disguised as the truth. The Censor says wonderful things like: "You call that writing?"

What a joke. You can't even punctuate. If you haven't done it by now you never will. You can't even spell. What makes you think you can be creative?" And on and on.

Make this a rule: always remember that your Censor's negative opinions are not the truth. This takes practice. By spilling out of bed and straight onto the page every morning, you learn to evade the Censor. Because there is no wrong way to write the morning pages, the Censor's opinion doesn't count. Let your Censor rattle on. (And it will.) Just keep your hand moving across the page. Write down the Censor's thoughts if you want to. Note how it loves to aim for your creative jugular. Make no mistake: the Censor is out to get you. It's a cunning foe. Every time you get smarter, so does it. So you wrote one good play? The Censor tells you that's all there is. So you drew your first sketch? The Censor says, "It's not Picasso."

Think of your Censor as a cartoon serpent, slithering around your creative Eden, hissing vile things to keep you off guard. If a serpent doesn't appeal to you, you might want to find a good cartoon image of your Censor, maybe the shark from *Jaws*, and put an X through it. Post it where you tend to write or on the inside cover of your notebook. Just making the Censor into the nasty, clever little character that it is begins to pry loose some of its power over you and your creativity.

More than one student has tacked up an unflattering picture of the parent responsible for the Censor's installation in his or her

psyche and called that his or her Censor. The point is to stop taking the Censor as the voice of reason and learn to hear it for the blocking device that it is. Morning pages will help you to do this.

Morning pages are nonnegotiable. Never skip or skimp on morning pages. Your mood doesn't matter. The rotten thing your Censor says doesn't matter. We have this idea that we need to be in the mood to write. We don't.

Morning pages will teach you that your mood doesn't really matter. Some of the best creative work gets done on the days when you feel that everything you're doing is just plain junk. The morning pages will teach you to stop judging and just let yourself write. So what if you're tired, crabby, distracted, stressed? Your artist is a child and it needs to be fed. Morning pages feed your artist child. So write your morning pages.

Three pages of whatever crosses your mind—that's all there is to it. If you can't think of anything to write, then write, "I can't think of anything to write ..."
Do this until you have filled three pages. *Do anything until you have filled three pages.*

When people ask, "Why do we write morning pages?" I joke, "To get to the other side." They think I am kidding, but I'm not. Morning pages do get us to the other side: the other side of our fear, of our negativity, of our moods. Above all, they get us beyond our Censor. Beyond the reach of the Censor's babble we find our own quiet center, the place where we hear the still, small voice that is at once our creator's and our own.

A word is in order here about logic brain and artist brain. *Logic brain* is our brain of choice in the Western Hemisphere. It is the categorical brain. It thinks in a neat, linear fashion. As a rule, logic brain perceives the world according to known categories. A horse is a certain combination of animal parts that make up a horse. A fall forest is viewed as a series of colors that add up to “fall forest.” It looks at a fall forest and notes: red, orange, yellow, green, gold.

Logic brain was and is our survival brain. It works on known principles. Anything unknown is perceived as wrong and possibly dangerous. Logic brain likes things to be neat little soldiers marching in a straight line. Logic brain is the brain we usually listen to, especially when we are telling ourselves to be sensible.

Logic brain is our Censor, our second (and third and fourth) thoughts. Faced with an original sentence, phrase, paint squiggle, it says, “What the hell is that? That’s not right!”

Artist brain is our inventor, our child, our very own personal absent-minded professor. Artist brain says, “Hey! That is so neat!” It puts odd things together (boat equals wave and walker). It likes calling a speeding GTO a wild animal: “The black howling wolf pulled into the drive-in ... ”

Artist brain is our creative, holistic brain. It thinks in patterns and shadings. It sees a fall forest and thinks: Wow! Leaf bouquet! Pretty! Gold-gilt-shimmery-earthskin-king’s-carpet! Artist brain is associative and freewheeling. It makes new connections, yoking together images to invoke meaning: like the Norse myths calling a

boat “wave-horse.” In *Star Wars*, the name Skywalker is a lovely artist-brain flash.

Why all this logic-brain/artist-brain talk? Because the morning pages teach logic brain to stand aside and let artist brain play.

The Censor is part of our leftover survival brain. It was the part in charge of deciding whether it was safe for us to leave the forest and go out into the meadow. Our Censor scans our creative meadow for any dangerous beasties. Any original thought can look pretty dangerous to our Censor.

The only sentences/paintings/sculptures/photographs it likes are ones that it has seen many times before. Safe sentences. Safe paintings. Not exploratory blurts, squiggles, or jottings. Listen to your Censor and it will tell you that everything original is wrong/dangerous/rotten.

Who wouldn't be blocked if every time you tiptoed into the open somebody (your Censor) made fun of you? The morning pages will teach you to stop listening to that ridicule. They will allow you to detach from your negative Censor.

It may be useful for you to think of the morning pages as meditation. It may not be the practice of meditation you are accustomed to. You may, in fact, not be accustomed to meditating at all. The pages may not seem spiritual or even meditative—more like negative and materialistic, actually—but they are a valid form of meditation that gives us insight and helps us effect change in our lives.

Let's take a look at what we stand to gain by meditating. There are many ways of thinking about meditation. Scientists speak of it in terms of brain hemispheres and shunting techniques. We move from logic brain to artist brain and from fast to slow, shallow to deep. Management consultants, in pursuit of corporate physical health, have learned to think of meditation primarily as a stress-management technique. Spiritual seekers choose to view the process as a gateway to God. Artists and creativity mavens approve of it as a conduit for higher creative insights.

All of these notions are true—as far as they go. They do not go far enough. Yes, we will alter our brain hemisphere, lower our stress, discover an inner contact with a creative source, and have many creative insights. Yes, for any one of these reasons, the pursuit is a worthy one. Even taken in combination, however, they are still intellectual constructs for what is primarily an experience of wholeness, rightness, and power.

We meditate to discover our own identity, our right place in the scheme of the universe. Through meditation, we acquire and eventually acknowledge our connection to an inner power source that has the ability to transform our outer world. In other words, meditation gives us not only the light of insight but also the power for expansive change.

Insight in and of itself is an intellectual comfort. Power in and of itself is a blind force that can destroy as easily as build. It is only when we consciously learn to link power and light that we begin to

feel our rightful identities as creative beings. The morning pages allow us to forge this link. They provide us with a spiritual ham-radio set to contact the Creator Within. For this reason, the morning pages are a spiritual practice.

It is impossible to write morning pages for any extended period of time without coming into contact with an unexpected inner power. Although I used them for many years before I realized this, the pages are a pathway to a strong and clear sense of self. They are a trail that we follow into our own interior, where we meet both our own creativity and our creator.

Morning pages map our own interior. Without them, our dreams may remain terra incognita. I know mine did. Using them, the light of insight is coupled with the power for expansive change. It is very difficult to complain about a situation morning after morning, month after month, without being moved to constructive action. The pages lead us out of despair and into undreamed-of solutions.

The first time I did morning pages, I was living in Taos, New Mexico. I had gone there to sort myself out—into what, I didn't know. For the third time in a row, I'd had a film scuttled due to studio politics. Such disasters are routine to screenwriters, but to me they felt like miscarriages. Cumulatively, they were disastrous. I wanted to give the movies up. Movies had broken my heart. I didn't want any more brainchildren to meet untimely deaths. I'd gone to New Mexico to mend my heart and see what else, if

anything, I might want to do.

Living in a small adobe house that looked north to Taos Mountain, I began a practice of writing morning pages. Nobody told me to do them. I had never heard of anybody doing them. I just got the insistent, inner sense that I should do them and so I did. I sat at a wooden table looking north to Taos Mountain and I wrote.

The morning pages were my pastime, something to do instead of staring at the mountain all the time. The mountain, a humpbacked marvel different in every weather, raised more questions than I did. Wrapped in clouds one day, dark and wet the next, that mountain dominated my view and my morning pages as well. What did it—or anything—mean? I asked page after page, morning after morning. No answer.

And then, one wet morning, a character named Johnny came strolling into my pages. Without planning to, I was writing a novel. The morning pages had shown me a way.

Anyone who faithfully writes morning pages will be led to a connection with a source of wisdom within. When I am stuck with a painful situation or problem that I don't think I know how to handle, I will go to the pages and ask for guidance. To do this, I write "LJ" as a shorthand for me, "Little Julie," and then I ask my question.

LJ: What should I tell them about this inner wisdom? (Then I listen

for the reply and write that down, too.)

ANSWER: You should tell them everyone has a direct dial to God. No one needs to go through an operator. Tell them to try this technique with a problem of their own. They will.

Sometimes, as above, the answer may seem flippant or too simple. I have come to believe that *seem* is the operative word. Very often, when I act on the advice I have been given, it is exactly right—far more right than something more complicated would have been. And so, for the record, I want to say: pages are my way of meditating; I do them because they work.

A final assurance: the morning pages will work for painters, for sculptors, for poets, for actors, for lawyers, for housewives—for anyone who wants to try anything creative. Don't think they are a tool for writers only. Hooey. These pages are not intended for writers only. Lawyers who use them swear they make them more effective in court. Dancers claim their balance improves—and not just emotionally. If anything, writers, who have a regrettable desire to *write* morning pages instead of just do them, may have the hardest time seeing their impact. What they're likely to see is that their other writing seems to suddenly be far more free and expansive and somehow easy to do. In short, no matter what your reservation or your occupation, morning pages will function for you.

Timothy, a buttoned-down, buttoned-lip curmudgeon millionaire, began writing morning pages with a skeptic's scorn. He didn't want to do them without some proof that they would work. The damn pages had no label, no Dun and Bradstreet rating. They just sounded silly, and Timothy hated silly.

Timothy was, in street parlance, a serious player. His poker face was so straight it looked more like a fireplace poker than a mere cardsharp's defense. Practiced for years in the corporate board room, Timothy's invincible facade was as dark, shiny, and expensive as mahogany. No emotions scratched the surface of this man's calm. He was a one-man monument to the Masculine Mystique.

"Oh, all right ..." Timothy agreed to the pages, but only because he had paid good money to be told to do them. Within three weeks, straightlaced, pin-striped Timothy became a morning-pages advocate. The results of his work with them convinced him. He started—heaven forbid—to have a little creative fun. "I bought guitar strings for this old guitar I had lying around," he reported one week. And then, "I rewired my stereo. I bought some wonderful Italian recordings." Although he hesitated to acknowledge it, even to himself, Timothy's writer's block was melting. Up at dawn, Gregorian chant on the stereo, he was writing freely.

Not everyone undertakes the morning pages with such obvious antagonism. Phyllis, a leggy, racehorse socialite who for years had

hidden her brains behind her beauty and her life behind her man's, tried the morning pages with a great deal of surface cheer—and an inner conviction they would never work for her. It had been ten years since she had allowed herself to write anything other than letters and bread-and-butter lists. About a month into morning pages, seemingly out of nowhere, Phyllis got her first poem. In the three years she has used pages since, she has written poems, speeches, radio shows, and a nonfiction book.

Anton, grumpy but graceful in his use of the pages, accomplished unblocking as an actor. Laura, talented but blocked as a writer, painter, and musician, found that the morning pages moved her to her piano, typewriter, and paint supplies.

While you may undertake this course with an agenda as to what you want unblocked, the tools may free creative areas you have long ignored or even been blind to. Ingeborg, using the pages to unblock her creative writer, moved from being one of Germany's top music critics to composing for the first time in twenty years. She was stunned and made several ecstatic transatlantic calls to share her good news.

Often, the students most resistant to morning pages come to love them the best. In fact, hating the morning pages is a very good sign. Loving them is a good sign, too, if you keep writing even when you suddenly don't. A neutral attitude is the third position, but it's really just a defensive strategy that may mask boredom.

Boredom is just "What's the use?" in disguise. And "What's the

use?” is fear, and fear means you are secretly in despair. So put your fears on the page. Put anything on the page. Put three pages of it on the page.

THE ARTIST DATE

The other basic tool of *The Artist's Way* may strike you as a nontool, a diversion. You may see clearly how morning pages could work yet find yourself highly dubious about something called an *artist date*. I assure you, artist dates work, too.

Think of this combination of tools in terms of a radio receiver and transmitter. It is a two-step, two-directional process: *out* and then *in*. Doing your morning pages, you are sending—notifying yourself and the universe of your dreams, dissatisfactions, hopes. Doing your artist date, you are receiving—opening yourself to insight, inspiration, guidance.

But what exactly *is* an artist date? An artist date is a block of time, perhaps two hours weekly, especially set aside and committed to nurturing your creative consciousness, your inner artist. In its most primary form, the artist date is an excursion, a play date that you preplan and defend against all interlopers. You do not take anyone on this artist date but you and your inner artist, a.k.a. your creative child. That means no lovers, friends, spouses, children—no taggers-on of any stripe.

If you think this sounds stupid or that you will never be able to

afford the time, identify that reaction as resistance. You cannot afford *not* to find time for artist dates.

“Do you spend quality time with each other?” troubled couples are often asked by their therapist. Parents of disturbed children are asked the same thing.

“Well ... what do you mean, ‘quality time’?” is the usual weasely response. “We spend a lot of time together.”

“Yes ... but is it quality time? Do you ever have any fun together?” the therapist may press.

“Fun?” (Whoever heard of having fun in a rotten relationship like this one?)

“Do you go on dates? Just to talk? Just to listen to each other?”

“Dates? ... But we’re married, too busy, too broke, too—”

“Too scared,” the therapist may interrupt. (Hey, don’t sugarcoat it.)

It is frightening to spend quality time with a child or lover, and our artist can be seen as both to us. A weekly artist date is remarkably threatening—and remarkably productive.

A date? With my artist?

Yes. Your artist needs to be taken out, pampered, and listened to. There are as many ways to evade this commitment as there are days of your life. “I’m too broke” is the favored one, although no one said the date need involve elaborate expenses.

Your artist is a child. Time with a parent matters more than

monies spent. A visit to a great junk store, a solo trip to the beach, an old movie seen alone together, a visit to an aquarium or an art gallery—these cost time, not money. Remember, it is the time commitment that is sacred.

In looking for a parallel, think of the child of divorce who gets to see a beloved parent only on weekends. (During most of the week, your artist is in the custody of a stern, workaday adult.) What that child wants is attention, not expensive outings. What that child does not want is to share the precious parent with someone like the new significant other.

Spending time in solitude with your artist child is essential to self-nurturing. A long country walk, a solitary expedition to the beach for a sunrise or sunset, a sortie out to a strange church to hear gospel music, to an ethnic neighborhood to taste foreign sights and sounds—your artist might enjoy any of these. Or your artist might like bowling.

Commit yourself to a weekly artist's date, and then watch your killjoy side try to wriggle out of it. Watch how this sacred time gets easily encroached upon. Watch how the sacred time suddenly includes a third party. Learn to guard against these invasions.

Above all, learn to listen to what your artist child has to say on, and about, these joint expeditions. For example, "Oh, I hate this serious stuff," your artist may exclaim if you persist in taking it only to grown-up places that are culturally edifying and good for it.

Listen to that! It is telling you your art needs more playful inflow. A little fun can go a long way toward making your work feel more like play. We forget that the imagination-at-play is at the heart of all good work. And increasing our capacity for good creative work is what this book is about.

You are likely to find yourself avoiding your artist dates. Recognize this resistance as a fear of intimacy—*self-intimacy*. Often in troubled relationships, we settle into an avoidance pattern with our significant others. We don't want to hear what they are thinking because it just might hurt. So we avoid them, knowing that, once they get the chance, our significant others will probably blurt out something we do not want to hear. It is possible they will want an answer we do not have and can't give them. It is equally possible we might do the same to them and that then the two of us will stare at each other in astonishment, saying, "But I never knew you felt like that!"

It is probable that these self-disclosures, frightening though they are, will lead to the building of a real relationship, one in which the participants are free to be who they are and to become what they wish. This possibility is what makes the risks of self-disclosure and true intimacy profitable. In order to have a real relationship with our creativity, we must take the time and care to cultivate it. Our creativity will use this time to confront us, to confide in us, to bond with us, and to plan.

The morning pages acquaint us with what we think and what

we think we need. We identify problem areas and concerns. We complain, enumerate, identify, isolate, fret. This is step one, analogous to prayer. In the course of the release engendered by our artist date, step two, we begin to hear solutions. Perhaps equally important, we begin to fund the creative reserves we will draw on in fulfilling our artistry.

Filling the Well, Stocking the Pond

Art is an image-using system. In order to create, we draw from our inner well. This inner well, an artistic reservoir, is ideally like a well-stocked trout pond. We've got big fish, little fish, fat fish, skinny fish—an abundance of artistic fish to fry. As artists, we must realize that we have to maintain this artistic ecosystem. If we don't give some attention to upkeep, our well is apt to become depleted, stagnant, or blocked.

Any extended period or piece of work draws heavily on our artistic well. Overtapping the well, like overfishing the pond, leaves us with diminished resources. We fish in vain for the images we require. Our work dries up and we wonder why, “just when it was going so well.” The truth is that work can dry up *because* it is going so well.

As artists, we must learn to be self-nourishing. We must become alert enough to consciously replenish our creative resources as we draw on them—to restock the trout pond, so to speak. I call this

process *filling the well*.

Filling the well involves the active pursuit of images to refresh our artistic reservoirs. Art is born in attention. Its midwife is detail. Art may seem to spring from pain, but perhaps that is because pain serves to focus our attention onto details (for instance, the excruciatingly beautiful curve of a lost lover's neck). Art may seem to involve broad strokes, grand schemes, great plans. But it is the attention to detail that stays with us; the singular image is what haunts us and becomes art. Even in the midst of pain, this singular image brings delight. The artist who tells you different is lying.

In order to function in the language of art, we must learn to live in it comfortably. The language of art is image, symbol. It is a wordless language even when our very art is to chase it with words. The artist's language is a sensual one, a language of felt experience. When we work at our art, we dip into the well of our experience and scoop out images. Because we do this, we need to learn how to put images back. How do we fill the well?

We feed it images. Art is an artist-brain pursuit. The artist brain is our image brain, home and haven to our best creative impulses. The artist brain cannot be reached—or triggered—effectively by words alone. The artist brain is the sensory brain: sight and sound, smell and taste, touch. These are the elements of magic, and magic is the elemental stuff of art.

In filling the well, think magic. Think delight. Think fun. Do not

think duty. Do not do what you *should* do—spiritual sit-ups like reading a dull but recommended critical text. Do what intrigues you, explore what interests you; think mystery, not mastery.

A mystery draws us in, leads us on, lures us. (A duty may numb us out, turn us off, tune us out.) In filling the well, follow your sense of the mysterious, not your sense of what you should know more about. A mystery can be very simple: if I drive this road, not my usual road, what will I see? Changing a known route throws us into the now. We become refocused on the visible, visual world. Sight leads to insight.

A mystery can be simpler even than that: if I light this stick of incense, what will I feel? Scent is an often-overlooked pathway to powerful associations and healing. The scent of Christmas at any time of year—or the scent of fresh bread or homemade soup—can nourish the hungry artist within.

Some sounds lull us. Others stimulate us. Ten minutes of listening to a great piece of music can be a very effective meditation. Five minutes of barefoot dancing to drum music can send our artist into its play-fray-day refreshed.

Filling the well needn't be all novelty. Cooking can fill the well. When we chop and pare vegetables, we do so with our thoughts as well. Remember, art is an artist-brain pursuit. This brain is reached through rhythm—through rhyme, not reason. Scraping a carrot, peeling an apple—these actions are quite literally food for thought.

Any regular, repetitive action primes the well. Writers have heard many woeful tales of the Brontë sisters and poor Jane Austen, forced to hide their stories under their needlework. A little experiment with some mending can cast a whole new light on these activities. Needlework, by definition regular and repetitive, both soothes and stimulates the artist within. Whole plots can be stitched up while we sew. As artists, we can very literally reap what we sew.

“Why do I get my best ideas in the shower?” an exasperated Einstein is said to have remarked. Brain research now tells us that this is because showering is an artist-brain activity.

Showering, swimming, scrubbing, shaving, steering a car—so many *s-like-yes* words!—all of these are regular, repetitive activities that may tip us over from our logic brain into our more creative artist brain. Solutions to sticky creative problems may bubble up through the dishwasher, emerge on the freeway just as we are executing a tricky merge . . .

Learn which of these works best for you and use it. Many artists have found it useful to keep a notepad or tape recorder next to them as they drive. Steven Spielberg claims that his very best ideas have come to him as he was driving the freeways. This is no accident. Negotiating the flow of traffic, he was an artist immersed in an oncoming, ever-altering flow of images. Images trigger the artist brain. Images fill the well.

Our focused attention is critical to filling the well. We need to

encounter our life experiences, not ignore them. Many of us read compulsively to screen our awareness. On a crowded (interesting) train, we train our attention on a newspaper, losing the sights and sounds around us—all images for the well.

CONTRACT

I, _____, understand that I am undertaking an intensive, guided encounter with my own creativity. I commit myself to the twelve-week duration of the course.

I, _____, commit to weekly reading, daily morning pages, a weekly artist date, and the fulfillment of each week's tasks.

I, _____, further understand that this course will raise issues and emotions for me to deal with.

I, _____, commit myself to excellent self-care—adequate sleep, diet, exercise, and pampering—for the duration of the course.

(signature)

(date)

Artist's block is a very literal expression. Blocks must be acknowledged and dislodged. Filling the well is the surest way to

do this.

Art is the imagination at play in the field of time. Let yourself play.

CREATIVITY CONTRACT

When I am teaching the Artist's Way, I require students to make a contract with themselves, committing to the work of the course. Can you give yourself that gift? Say yes by means of some small ceremony. Buy a nice notebook for your pages; hire your babysitter ahead of time for the weekly artist dates. Read the contract on the preceding page. Amend it, if you like; then sign and date it. Come back to it when you need encouragement to go on.

—*Week One*

RECOVERING A SENSE OF SAFETY

This week initiates your creative recovery. You may feel both giddy and defiant, hopeful and skeptical. The readings, tasks, and exercises aim at allowing you to establish a sense of safety, which will enable you to explore your creativity with less fear.

SHADOW ARTISTS

One of our chief needs as creative beings is support. Unfortunately, this can be hard to come by. Ideally, we would be nurtured and encouraged first by our nuclear family and then by ever-widening circles of friends, teachers, well-wishers. As young artists, we need and want to be acknowledged for our attempts and efforts as well as for our achievements and triumphs. Unfortunately, many artists never receive this critical early encouragement. As a result, they may not know they are artists at all.

Parents seldom respond, “Try it and see what happens” to artistic urges issuing from their offspring. They offer cautionary advice where support might be more to the point. Timid young

artists, adding parental fears to their own, often give up their sunny dreams of artistic careers, settling into the twilight world of could-have-beens and regrets. There, caught between the dream of action and the fear of failure, shadow artists are born.

I am thinking here of Edwin, a miserable millionaire trader whose joy in life comes from his art collection. Strongly gifted in the visual arts, he was urged as a child to go into finance. His father bought him a seat on the stock exchange for his twenty-first birthday. He has been a trader ever since. Now in his mid-thirties, he is very rich and very poor. Money cannot buy him creative fulfillment.

Surrounding himself with artists and artifacts, he is like the kid with his nose pressed to the candy-store window. He would love to be more creative but believes that is the prerogative of others, nothing he can aspire to for himself. A generous man, he recently gifted an artist with a year's living expenses so she could pursue her dreams. Raised to believe that the term *artist* could not apply to him, he cannot make that same gift for himself.

Edwin's is not an isolated case. All too often the artistic urges of the artist child are ignored or suppressed. Often with the best intentions, parents try to foster a different, more sensible self for the child. "Stop daydreaming!" is one frequently heard admonition. "You'll never amount to anything if you keep on with your head in the clouds" is another.

Baby artists are urged to think and act like baby doctors or

lawyers. A rare family, faced with the myth of the starving artist, tells its children to go right ahead and try for a career in the arts. Instead, if encouraged at all, the children are urged into thinking of the arts as hobbies, creative fluff around the edges of real life.

For many families, a career in the arts exists outside of their social and economic reality: “Art won’t pay the electric bill.” As a result, if the child is encouraged to consider art in job terms at all, he or she must consider it *sensibly*.

Erin, a gifted children’s therapist, was in her mid-thirties before she began experiencing a haunting dissatisfaction in her work. Unsure what direction to take, she began adapting a children’s book for the screen. Midway through the adaptation, she suddenly had a telling dream about abandoning her own artist child. Prior to becoming a therapist, she had been a gifted art student. For two decades, she had suppressed her creative urges, pouring all of her creativity into helping others. Now, nearly forty, she found herself longing to help herself.

Erin’s story is all too common. Fledgling artists may be encouraged to be art teachers or to specialize in crafts with the handicapped. Young writers may be pushed toward lawyering, a talky, wordy profession, or into medical school because they’re so smart. And so the child who is himself a born storyteller may be converted into a gifted therapist who gets his stories secondhand.

Too intimidated to become artists themselves, very often too low in self-worth to even recognize that they have an artistic

dream, these people become shadow artists instead. Artists themselves but ignorant of their true identity, shadow artists are to be found shadowing declared artists. Unable to recognize that they themselves may possess the creativity they so admire, they often date or marry people who actively pursue the art career they themselves secretly long for.

When Jerry was still blocked as an artist, he began to date Lisa, a gifted but broke freelance artist. “I am your biggest fan,” he often told her. What he did not immediately tell her was that he himself dreamed of being a filmmaker. He had, in fact, an entire library of film books and avidly devoured special-interest magazines on filmmaking. But he was afraid to take steps to actualize his interest. Instead, he poured his time and attention into Lisa and Lisa’s art career. Under his guidance, her career flourished. She became solvent and increasingly well-known. Jerry remained blocked in his own behalf. When Lisa suggested he take a filmmaking course, he ran for cover. “Not everyone can be an artist,” he told her—and himself.

Artists love other artists. Shadow artists are gravitating to their rightful tribe but cannot yet claim their birthright. Very often audacity, not talent, makes one person an artist and another a shadow artist—hiding in the shadows, afraid to step out and expose the dream to the light, fearful that it will disintegrate to the touch.

Shadow artists often choose shadow careers—those close to the

desired art, even parallel to it, but not the art itself. Noting their venom, François Truffaut contended that critics were themselves blocked directors, as he had been when he was a critic. He may be right. Intended fiction writers often go into newspapering or advertising, where they can use their gift without taking the plunge into their dreamed-of fiction-writing career. Intended artists may become artist managers and derive a great deal of secondary pleasure from serving their dream even at one remove.

Carolyn, herself a gifted photographer, made a successful but unhappy career as a photographer's rep. Jean, who yearned to write feature films, wrote minimovies in her thirty-second commercial spots. Kelly, who wanted to be a writer but feared taking her creativity seriously, made a profitable career out of repping "really" creative people. Shadow artists all, these women needed to place themselves and their dreams stage center. They knew this, but didn't dare. They had been raised to the role of shadow artist and would need to work consciously to dismantle it.

It takes a great deal of ego strength to say to a well-meaning but domineering parent or a just plain domineering one, "Wait a minute! I am too an artist!" The dreaded response may come back, "How do you know?" And, of course, the fledgling artist does not *know*. There is just this dream, this feeling, this urge, this desire. There is seldom any real proof, but the dream lives on.

As a rule of thumb, shadow artists judge themselves harshly, beating themselves for years over the fact that they have not acted

on their dreams. This cruelty only reinforces their status as shadow artists. Remember, it takes nurturing to make an artist. Shadow artists did not receive sufficient nurturing. They blame themselves for not acting fearlessly anyhow.

In a twisted version of Darwinian determinism, we tell ourselves that real artists can survive the most hostile environments and yet find their true calling like homing pigeons. That's hogwash. Many real artists bear children too early or have too many, are too poor or too far removed culturally or monetarily from artistic opportunity to become the artists they really are. These artists, shadow artists through no fault of their own, hear the distant piping of the dream but are unable to make their way through the cultural maze to find it.

For all shadow artists, life may be a discontented experience, filled with a sense of missed purpose and unfulfilled promise. They want to write. They want to paint. They want to act, make music, dance ... but they are afraid to take themselves seriously.

In order to move from the realm of shadows into the light of creativity, shadow artists must learn to take themselves seriously. With gentle, deliberate effort, they must nurture their artist child. Creativity is play, but for shadow artists, learning to allow themselves to play is hard work.

Protecting the Artist Child Within

Remember, your artist is a child. Find and protect that child. Learning to let yourself create is like learning to walk. The artist child must begin by crawling. Baby steps will follow and there will be falls—yecchy first paintings, beginning films that look like unedited home movies, first poems that would shame a greeting card. Typically, the recovering shadow artist will use these early efforts to discourage continued exploration.

Judging your early artistic efforts is artist abuse. This happens in any number of ways: beginning work is measured against the masterworks of other artists; beginning work is exposed to premature criticism, shown to overly critical friends. In short, the fledgling artist behaves with well-practiced masochism. Masochism is an art form long ago mastered, perfected during the years of self-reproach; this habit is the self-hating bludgeon with which a shadow artist can beat himself right back into the shadows.

In recovering from our creative blocks, it is necessary to go gently and slowly. What we are after here is the healing of old wounds—not the creation of new ones. No high jumping, please! Mistakes are necessary! Stumbles are normal. These are baby steps. Progress, not perfection, is what we should be asking of ourselves.

Too far, too fast, and we can undo ourselves. Creative recovery

is like marathon training. We want to log ten slow miles for every one fast mile. This can go against the ego's grain. We want to be great—immediately great—but that is not how recovery works. It is an awkward, tentative, even embarrassing process. There will be many times when we won't look good—to ourselves or anyone else. We need to stop demanding that we do. It is impossible to get better and look good at the same time.

Remember that in order to recover as an artist, you must be willing to be a bad artist. Give yourself permission to be a beginner. By being willing to be a bad artist, you have a chance to be an artist, and perhaps, over time, a very good one.

When I make this point in teaching, I am met by instant, defensive hostility: “But do you know how old I will be by the time I learn to really play the piano/act/paint/write a decent play?”

Yes ... the same age you will be if you don't.

So let's start.

YOUR ENEMY WITHIN: CORE NEGATIVE BELIEFS

Most of the time when we are blocked in an area of our life, it is because we feel safer that way. We may not be happy, but at least we know what we are—unhappy. Much fear of our own creativity is the fear of the unknown.

If I am fully creative, what will it mean? What will happen to me and to others? We have some pretty awful notions about what

could happen. So, rather than find out, we decide to stay blocked. This is seldom a conscious decision. It is more often an unconscious response to internalized negative beliefs. In this week, we will work at uncovering our negative beliefs and discarding them.

Here is a list of commonly held negative beliefs:

I can't be a successful, prolific, creative artist because:

1. Everyone will hate me.
2. I will hurt my friends and family.
3. I will go crazy.
4. I will abandon my friends and family.
5. I can't spell.
6. I don't have good enough ideas.
7. It will upset my mother and/or father.
8. I will have to be alone.
9. I will find out I am gay (if straight).
10. I will be struck straight (if gay).
11. I will do bad work and not know it and look like a fool.
12. I will feel too angry.
13. I will never have any real money.
14. I will get self-destructive and drink, drug, or sex myself to death.

15. I will get cancer, AIDS—or a heart attack or the plague.
16. My lover will leave me.
17. I will die.
18. I will feel bad because I don't deserve to be successful.
19. I will have only one good piece of work in me.
20. It's too late. If I haven't become a fully functioning artist yet, I never will.

None of these core negatives need be true. They come to us from our parents, our religion, our culture, and our fearful friends. Each one of these beliefs reflects notions we have about what it means to be an artist.

Once we have cleared away the most sweeping cultural negatives, we may find we are still stubbornly left with core negatives we have acquired from our families, teachers, and friends. These are often more subtle—but equally undermining if not confronted. Our business here is confronting them.

Negative beliefs are exactly that: beliefs, not facts. The world was never flat, although everyone believed it was. You are not dumb, crazy, egomaniacal, grandiose, or silly just because you falsely believe yourself to be.

What you are is scared. Core negatives keep you scared.

The bottom line is that core negatives—personal and cultural—always go for your jugular. They attack your sexuality, your

lovability, your intelligence—whatever vulnerability they can latch on to.

Some core negative beliefs and their positive alternatives are listed below.

Negative Beliefs

—

Artists are:

drunk

crazy

broke

irresponsible

loners

promiscuous

doomed

unhappy

born, not made

Positive Beliefs

—

Artists can be:

sober

sane

solvent

responsible

user-friendly

faithful

saved

happy

discovered and recovered

For example, in a female artist, the artists-are-promiscuous cliché may have in its place a personal negative: “No man will ever love you if you are an artist. Artists are either celibate or gay.” This negative, picked up from a mother or teacher and unarticulated by the young artist, can constitute grounds for a powerful block.

Similarly, a young male artist may have the personal negative “Male artists are either gay or impotent.” This notion, picked up

from a teacher or from reading too much about Fitzgerald and Hemingway, may again create a block. Who wants to be sexually dysfunctional?

A gay artist may have yet another spin on the ball: “Only heterosexual art is really acceptable, so why make my art if I have to either disguise it or come out of the closet whether I want to or not?”

Stripped to their essence, our multiple negative beliefs reveal a central negative belief: we must trade one good, beloved dream for another. In other words, if being an artist seems too good to be true to you, you will devise a price tag for it that strikes you as unpayable. Hence, you remain blocked.

Most blocked creatives carry unacknowledged either/or reasoning that stands between them and their work. To become unblocked we must recognize our either/or thinking. “I can either be romantically happy *or* an artist.” “I can either be financially successful *or* an artist.” It is possible, quite possible, to be both an artist and romantically fulfilled. It is quite possible to be an artist and financially successful.

Your block doesn’t want you to see that. Its whole plan of attack is to make you irrationally afraid of some dire outcome you are too embarrassed to even mention. You know rationally that writing or painting shouldn’t be put off because of your silly fear, but because it is a silly fear, you don’t air it and the block stays intact. In this way, “You’re a bad speller” successfully overrides all computer

spelling programs. You *know* it's dumb to worry about spelling ... so you don't mention it. And since you don't, it continues to block you from finding a solution. (Spelling fear is a remarkably common block.)

In the next part of this week, we will excavate your unconscious beliefs by using some logic-brain/artist-brain learning tricks. These may strike you as hokey and unproductive. Again, that's resistance. If internalized negativity is the enemy within, what follows is some very effective weaponry. Try it before discarding it out of hand.

YOUR ALLY WITHIN: AFFIRMATIVE WEAPONS

As blocked creatives, we often sit on the sidelines critiquing those in the game. "He's not so talented," we may say of a currently hot artist. And we may be right about that. All too often, it is audacity and not talent that moves an artist to center stage. As blocked creatives, we tend to regard these bogus spotlight grabbers with animosity. We may be able to defer to true genius, but if it's merely a genius for self-promotion we're witnessing, our resentment runs high. This is not just jealousy. It is a stalling technique that reinforces our staying stuck. We make speeches to ourselves and other willing victims: "I could do that better, if only ... "

You could do it better if only you would let yourself do it!

Affirmations will help you allow yourself to do it. An

affirmation is a positive statement of (positive) belief, and if we can become one-tenth as good at positive self-talk as we are at negative self-talk, we will notice an enormous change.

Affirmations help achieve a sense of safety and hope. When we first start working with affirmations, they may feel dumb. Hokey. Embarrassing. Isn't this interesting? We can easily, and without embarrassment, bludgeon ourselves with negative affirmations: "I'm not gifted enough/not clever enough/not original enough/not young enough ..." But saying nice things about ourselves is notoriously hard to do. It feels pretty awful at first. Try these and see if they don't sound hopelessly syrupy: "I deserve love." "I deserve fair pay." "I deserve a rewarding creative life." "I am a brilliant and successful artist." "I have rich creative talents." "I am competent and confident in my creative work."

Did your Censor perk its nasty little ears up? Censors loathe anything that sounds like real self-worth. They immediately start up with the imposter routine: "Who do you think you are?" It's as though our entire collective unconscious sat up late nights watching Walt Disney's *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* and practicing Cruella DeVille's delivery for scathing indictments.

Just try picking an affirmation. For example "I, _____ (your name), am a brilliant and prolific potter (painter, poet, or whatever you are)." Write that ten times in a row. While you are busy doing that, something very interesting will happen. Your Censor will start to object. "Hey, wait a minute. You can't say all

that positive stuff around me.” Objections will start to pop up like burnt toast. These are your *blurts*.

Listen to the objections. Look at the ugly, stumpy little blurts. “Brilliant and prolific ... sure you are. ... Since when? ... Can’t spell. ... You call writer’s block prolific? ... You’re just kidding yourself ... an idiot ... grandiose. ... Who are you kidding? ... Who do you think you are?” and so on.

You will be amazed at the rotten things your subconscious will blurt out. Write them down. These blurts flag your personal negative core beliefs. They hold the key to your freedom in their ugly little claws. Make a list of your personal blurts.

It’s time to do a little detective work. Where do your blurts come from? Mom? Dad? Teachers? Using your list of blurts, scan your past for possible sources. At least some of them will spring violently to mind. One effective way to locate the sources is to time-travel. Break your life into five-year increments, and list by name your major influences in each time block.

Paul had *always* wanted to be a writer. And yet, after a brief flurry of college creativity, he stopped showing his writing to anyone. Instead of the short stories he dreamed of, he kept journal after journal, each following the last into a dark drawer far from prying eyes. Why he did this was a mystery to him until he tried working with affirmations and blurts.

When Paul began writing his affirmations, he was immediately shaken by an almost volcanic blast of disparagement.

He wrote, “I, Paul, am a brilliant and prolific writer.” From deep in his unconscious there erupted a spewing torrent of self-abuse and self-doubt. It was numbingly specific and somehow *familiar*: “You’re just kidding yourself, a fool, no real talent, a pretender, a dilettante, a joke ... ”

Where did this core belief come from? Who could have said this to him? When? Paul went time-traveling to look for the villain. He located him with great embarrassment. Yes, there was a villain, and an incident he had been too ashamed to share and air. A malevolent early teacher had first praised his work and then set about a sexual seduction. Fearful that he had somehow invited the man’s attention, ashamed lest the work really be rotten too, Paul buried the incident in his unconscious, where it festered. No wonder secondary motives were always a fear when someone praised him. No surprise he felt that someone could praise work and not mean it.

Boiled down to its essentials, Paul’s core negative belief was that he was only kidding himself that he could write. This belief had dominated his thinking for a decade. Whenever people complimented him on his work, he was deeply suspicious of them and their motives. He had all but dropped friends once they had expressed interest in his talents; he had certainly stopped trusting them. When his girlfriend, Mimi, expressed interest in his talents, he even stopped trusting her.

Once Paul brought this monster up from the depths, he could

begin to work with it. “I, Paul, have a real talent. I, Paul, trust and enjoy positive feedback. I, Paul, have a real talent. ...” Although such positive affirmations felt very uncomfortable at first, they rapidly allowed Paul the freedom to participate in the first public reading of his work. When he was widely praised, he was able to accept the good response without discounting it.

Turn now to your own list of blurts. They are very important to your recovery. Each of them has held you in bondage. Each of them must be dissolved. For example, a blurt that runs, “I, Fred, am untalented and phony” might be converted to the affirmation “I, Fred, am genuinely talented.”

Creative Affirmations

1. I am a channel for God’s creativity, and my work comes to good.
2. My dreams come from God and God has the power to accomplish them.
3. As I create and listen, I will be led.
4. Creativity is the creator’s will for me.
5. My creativity heals myself and others.
6. I am allowed to nurture my artist
7. Through the use of a few simple tools, my creativity will flourish.
8. Through the use of my creativity, I serve God.

9. My creativity always leads me to truth and love.
10. My creativity leads me to forgiveness and self-forgiveness.
11. There is a divine plan of goodness for me.
12. There is a divine plan of goodness for my work.
13. As I listen to the creator within, I am led.
14. As I listen to my creativity I am led to my creator.
15. I am willing to create.
16. I am willing to learn to let myself create.
17. I am willing to let God create through me.
18. I am willing to be of service through my creativity.
19. I am willing to experience my creative energy.
20. I am willing to use my creative talents.

Use your affirmations after your morning pages.

Also use any of the creative affirmations listed.

+ TASKS

1. Every morning, set your clock one-half hour early; get up and write three pages of longhand, stream-of-consciousness morning writing. Do not reread these pages or allow anyone else to read them. Ideally, stick these pages in a large manila envelope, or hide them somewhere. Welcome to the morning pages. They will change you.

This week, please be sure to work with your affirmations

of choice and your blurts at the end of each day's morning pages. Convert all blurts into positive affirmations.

2. Take yourself on an artist date. You will do this every week for the duration of the course. A sample artist date: take five dollars and go to your local five-and-dime. Buy silly things like gold stick-'em stars, tiny dinosaurs, some postcards, sparkly sequins, glue, a kid's scissors, crayons. You might give yourself a gold star on your envelope each day you write. Just for fun.
-

3. Time Travel: List three old enemies of your creative self-worth. Please be as specific as possible in doing this exercise. Your historic monsters are the building blocks of your core negative beliefs. (Yes, rotten Sister Ann Rita from fifth grade does count, and the rotten thing she said to you does matter. Put her in.) This is your monster hall of fame. More monsters will come to you as you work through your recovery. It is always necessary to acknowledge creative injuries and grieve them. Otherwise, they become creative scar tissue and block your growth.
-

4. Time Travel: Select and write out one horror story from your monster hall of fame. You do not need to write long or much, but do jot down whatever details come back to you—

the room you were in, the way people looked at you, the way you felt, what your parent said or didn't say when you told about it. Include whatever rankles you about the incident: "And then I remember she gave me this real fakey smile and patted my head. ... "

You may find it cathartic to draw a sketch of your old monster or to clip out an image that evokes the incident for you. Cartoon trashing your monster, or at least draw a nice red X through it.

5. Write a letter to the editor in your defense. Mail it to yourself. It is great fun to write this letter in the voice of your wounded artist child: "To whom it may concern: Sister Ann Rita is a jerk and has pig eyes and I can too spell!"
-

6. Time Travel: List three old champions of your creative self-worth. This is your hall of champions, those who wish you and your creativity well. Be specific. Every encouraging word counts. Even if you disbelieve a compliment, record it. It may well be true.

If you are stuck for compliments, go back through your time-travel log and look for positive memories. When, where, and why did you feel good about yourself? Who gave you affirmation?

Additionally, you may wish to write the compliment out