



CELEBRATING *Our* CREATIVITY

*“Inside you there’s an artist you don’t know about. . . .
Say yes quickly, if you know it, if you’ve known it from
before the beginning of the universe.”*

 Rumi

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST IS ENTHRALLED AS AUSTRALIAN TRIBESMEN WHO HAVE GATHERED FOR A MAJOR RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL CREATE SPECTACULAR GROUND PAINTINGS. EAGERLY AWAITING THEIR HOLIDAY, HE WATCHES THE TRIBESMEN PAINT INTRICATE DESIGNS NOT ONLY ON THE GROUND BUT ON THEIR BODIES AND ON BARK AS WELL. ONE MORNING, AT THE END OF THREE WEEKS, THEY ERASE EVERYTHING THEY HAVE DONE, PACK UP, AND RETURN HOME TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CLANS. THE ANTHROPOLOGIST, AMAZED, REALIZES THAT THE ABORIGINES' ART WAS NOT PREPARATION FOR THEIR FESTIVAL; THIS CELEBRATION OF CREATION WAS THE FESTIVAL.

BY ANI TUZMAN

Tibetan monks carve icons out of iced butter at the New York Museum of Natural History. They work for days, even weeks, on one carving. When a carving is finished, they remove the ice. Gazing peacefully, they let the sculpture melt. A woman observing the monks is moved by her realization that we all have the capacity to create again and again and again, for the sheer pleasure of creating.

Each of us is creating all the time. Many of us have been raised to believe that there are the artists and then there's *the rest of us*. Creativity is as natural and vital to each of us as our breathing. Our creative expression takes so many forms, from sculpture to the meals we offer, from buildings to conversations. As well as our outer creations, we create our moment-to-moment experience of life. We can become more conscious of the creative power within us and of the countless ways we can be—and are—creative.

A man brings home a bouquet of flowers on no particular occasion. He takes his time arranging the fragrant white freesia, dark-throated pink tulips, two small yellow roses, and the stems of the star of David. After some consideration, he places the transparent turquoise vase on a round table near a window, where sunlight plays on the water.

A teenage girl bounding enthusiastically out of her bedroom surprises herself and her family when she announces that she wants to make dinner, dessert included. She hums to herself at the stove as she adds ingredients to her creation.

It isn't always necessary to have a finished product as a measure of our creativity. One of the primary products of our creativity is our joy. Creativity is an inner experience of aliveness, of connectedness with life, of power and exuberance. It emerges in stillness; it erupts with enthusiasm and flourish. There is mystery in the creative process; sometimes it feels as if we are joined, inspired by something that is beyond our rational mind, our personal knowledge or skill. We are inspired, surprised. Delighted.

The opportunities to be creative are unceasing. We choose them and they choose us. A young boy, kicking his boots off after school, asks his mother a question it seems he has been pondering for hours. *Why are there laws in the world?* She stops herself from blurting out a rote answer without pondering first herself. She remembers when his older brother, years before, asked her why God made guns, if guns can kill. How important it had been to take her time then. Now, drying her hands on a kitchen towel, she pauses to search inside herself for an answer that will not "wrap it up" for her young son but will lead him to his own answers and to more questions—an answer that will feed his creative fire.

Our personal creativity has its source in the universal energy that has created all life. Every time we experience our creativity we dip into the wellspring of our being, which is fed by an eternal spring. In the same way that a wave is not separate but is part of the sea, our creative impulses rise from the vast ocean of creative consciousness. Julia Cameron, speaking of this creative force in her book *The Artist's Way*, says, "Looking at God's creation, it is pretty clear that the creator itself did not know when to stop. There is not one pink flower or even fifty pink flowers, but hundreds. Snowflakes, of course, are the ultimate exercise in sheer creative glee. No two alike." It is our nature to be creative, and our capacity to be creative is infinite.

Images we have held on to, such as the author anxiously bent over a manuscript, images of isolation, addiction, and poverty, reveal the supposed cost of great creativity. These images limit us. We don't need to pay for our creativity with pain. On the contrary: The experience of our creativity renews us, refreshes us. Creativity brings joy. There is struggle and pain in the denial of our creativity; we pay a price for that, often a lack of health and vitality.

We push a part of ourselves away when we compare ourselves unfavorably to others, when we doubt and think of ourselves as unimaginative, incapable, unworthy, inadequate—believing creative expression to be for others. Our sense of limitation can be changed, however. We can discover and appreciate our creative expression. We

can find and celebrate our creativity, acknowledge it, see it, feel it, in the smallest of gestures, in the way we place the food on the plate, in the choosing of the colors we wear, in the placement of a crystal on the windowsill. The more we recognize creativity in ourselves, in nature, throughout our world, the more we can welcome its flow in



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our lives. As we open to it, our inner creativity itself starts leading us into new forms of discovery and expression; we are drawn to dance or make music, to write or make art.

As children we knew our creativity intimately. Creativity and play are kin. When I was a girl, I drew houses in our dirt driveway. It was best to do just after a rain that would saturate the sand in the driveway so it glistened and was the perfect texture for making lines in. My stick had to be just the right stiffness, and the right length, so I wouldn't have to lean over too much. First, I would trace the outside of the house, then trace the rooms in it—outlining the furniture: sofas, beds, tables, the refrigerator. I drew it as if from an aerial view, like some kind of special architect, I thought. And I drew with confidence. (It was years later that I was told I couldn't really draw—that I wasn't *an artist like so and so*.) After finishing the house in the sand, I would enter it, spending hours in silent or out-loud conversations with its inhabitants and visitors, all of whom I enacted.

Children's play feeds their spirits as much as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or a bowl of rice feeds their growing bodies. Play feeds us all. As adults, we can find our own ways of playing. We don't have to separate play from work, to wait until we have come home from work, or until the weekend, or until the children are in bed. We can

invite the spirit of play and creativity into all aspects of our lives and see what happens. We don't have to wait—not another moment—for the ideal course or for someone to tell us it's okay. The poet Rumi said: "Inside you there's an artist you don't know about. ... Say yes quickly, if you know it, if you've known it from before the beginning of the universe." We can say yes right now. Even if we have said it before. We can say it again and again.

We open to our creativity when we do what we are doing with love, with care and attention, with enthusiasm. Maybe we need to slow ourselves down a little bit. To trust ourselves to find *our way of doing it*, whether it's writing, bathing, or relaxing. Loving what we are doing and doing more of what we love awakens our creative spirit.

Creativity is everybody's gift. There is a saying: *Life is God's gift to us and what we make of it is our gift to God*. Living is the ultimate creative act. Waking each day, choosing our actions, choosing to act with love, seeking inspiration rather than discouragement, faith rather than doubt, kindness rather than despair. These are creative actions; these are courageous actions; these are available actions, available to all of us. Life gives us endless chances to be creative, to make our earth more beautiful, to make our days more beautiful, for ourselves and each other. It's a joint creative endeavor. Like the Bushmen who gather to create their offerings, we come to our workplaces, to our families, our schoolrooms, our blank pages and canvases, ready to add our brush strokes, our unique designs, to the celebration of life. ❖



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