

Starting the Creative Life Afresh

Creative expression is an inherent part of who we are. From a young age creative endeavours are encouraged. When we were children and said we were bored, our parents would pass us paper and textas and presume a child-like fascination with creating something out of nothing.

But something happened.

The paper and textas slowly disappeared, shifting to the back of the drawer over time as their use became infrequent until neglected.

For some, the joy of writing stories, poems, creating adventures from the spectacular vision of a child's imagination evaporated like a morning mist. Or you were told to commit your focus to an academic subject, as the creative arts were not considered appropriate or worthy of your time.

There are many reasons why you stopped being creative, but creativity can be reborn, resurrected and rejuvenated.

The following article is a three part journey:

Reflection – to ask you why your creative life has stopped,

Resurrection – to ask you if you need to stop your creative life and rebuild it, through to

Recreation – to ask you to become the creative person you know you are.

If you have lost connection to your creative spirit and need to recreate yourself, or if you need to shut down your creative life for a time to resurrect it, read on.

A creative life is a fulfilling life.

It's time to pick up the textas again.

Part 1: Reflection - Why Did You Stop Being Creative?

Have you paused to ask yourself why you stopped being creative?

Has your once prolific creative output reduced from a torrent to a dribble?

Is your well of creativity nothing but a cracked dust bowl with the skeleton of a broken bucket buried in the sand?

Stop and think about what stopped you from being creative. Get a pen and paper and write down the things you can identify that brought your creative life to a halt.

Here are five reasons you have stopped being creative (and a plea to start being creative again):

1. Logic and Reason Replaced Emotion and Passion

“Tap into your passion again.”

Once upon a time, when you were a child or a teenager, you were passionate about creating something: you wrote stories and poems or painted and drew comics and cartoons; composed music or performed in theatre.

Whatever endeavour fired your passion, you pursued it wholeheartedly, giving over any spare moment of time to be creative. It engaged you and gave you a sense of purpose. You understood creativity was a way of expressing your emotions, of engaging with the world and coming to terms with who you were.

But the passion and emotion you threw into creative endeavours was replaced with the cold push of logic and reason. Artistic, creative people were typecast as overly emotional, passionate; unreliable, unstable and highly illogical—“different”.

You were encouraged to put away childish things like art and music and writing to focus on more adult pursuits like science and mathematics. You were encouraged to focus on academic pursuits, to aim for university and further education, leaving little time for creativity. Art, music, writing were considered frivolous, a waste of time.

And your creativity withered and faded, left dormant in the soil, for all intents and purposes, dead.

But creativity is not an abandonment of logic and reason. It gives equal balance to the emotions and to logic and reason. What you create is a product of your logic, reason, emotion and passion.

Great art comes out of logical, reasoned thinking AND impassioned, emotive thinking.

2. Career Over Hobby

“Rediscover the joy of your hobby.”

What did you dream about doing as a child?

Did you want to be a painter?

Design clothes?

Did you want to be a writer?

Creativity is seen as a hobby, a pastime to be indulged in during holidays or the occasional weekend, not something you make a career from. It is not valued as worthwhile because, at best, it does not produce income, or at worst, costs money, time and effort.

The regularity of what we do for a living is a drain on our time and resources. If you have a family, there are still greater demands on your time. The chance to be creative is reduced, pushed out as a thing you do when you have the time or the inclination.

Therefore we put aside creative endeavours because our chosen career path dominates our time and resources, pushing creative endeavours to the periphery.

Being creative *is* something you make time for. But it is not a hobby to be done in spare moments; it is a vital extension of all facets of your life. It refreshes and rejuvenates.

3. Pragmatism Over Recreation

“Creativity is not neatly defined by a formula or pattern.”

When was the last time you did something creative simply because it felt good for you?

Or did you feel guilty, feeling like you should be doing something more productive?

Have you put pragmatism over the need for recreation and rest?

We are obsessed with knowing, with proving something through empirical data and evidence, hypothesis and conclusion. We do something because it is proven to be beneficial or productive.

Creativity does not easily fall into a pragmatic category therefore people are wont to give it up.

Creativity is a chance for recreation, to pause, to rest, to have a sabbatical.

Because you can.

Because you need to.

Your best reason to create is "[just because](#)."

4. Utilitarianism Over Culture

"Start with yourself then extend it to your family, your community, your society."

In Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" utilitarianism creates a consumptive culture: if it is not for the greater good, if it is not productive and beneficial, if it does not advance, it is not deemed worthwhile.

Culture is not measured in scientific or technological progress alone. It is measured in the greatness of art produced: poetry, art, philosophy, literature, film, drama are the benchmarks of a culture.

The paucity of good art needs addressing because we have reduced creativity and art to the equivalent of a fast food meal. Creativity and art are not about consuming and discarding, but producing a legacy, a future, a lifestyle. [Creativity can never be mediocre](#).

You have been marketed and sold a commodity, told that what you do must be utilitarian. You are the commodity, bereft of individualism that celebrates the beauty of simply creating for no other reason than you can.

The culture of a society, a community, a family and of an individual, is created consciously and unconsciously. If you do not participate and contribute to a creative culture, another culture will dominate.

Creativity can appear to be frivolous and wasteful, a solo production without discernible benefit to someone other than the creator, but it is precisely in these actions and creative acts that we question, provoke, celebrate, engage, discuss and create a diverse cultural landscape.

Take a risk and develop a positive, creative culture.

5. Structure Over Boredom

“Creativity brings life, a means of living in our fullness.”

Throughout our infant and adolescent lives, we are run by timetables. School provides a rigid structure, chronicling where we need to be at any given moment. A university timetable is less rigid, and a workplace gives broader latitude, yet the moments of our day are accounted for.

We fear boredom if our children are not engaged in a meaningful activity. [Boredom promotes creativity](#), allowing the subconscious time to percolate, compost and rejuvenate. Stimulus is good for the brain but it also needs to rest.

Have you filled your life with so many activities you do not have time to rest, to be bored in order to be creative?

Schedule some down time to be bored.

Creativity is not a tacked on adjunct to life; it is an integral part of it. To lessen its role in our lives is to diminish the fulfilment creativity brings. Creativity is not self-centeredness but a means of recreating yourself and the world around you.

If your creative life has died, will you dare be creative again?

If your creative life has stalled, decayed or dried up:

- Tap into your passion
- Rediscover the joy of your hobby
- Create something “just because”
- Build a positive culture of creativity
- Schedule time to be bored

Part 2: Resurrection – When To Shut Down a Creative Life (and when to take it up again)

As creative people, the idea of shutting down our creative life is akin to hacking a limb off or stopping breathing.

When was the last time you moved that limb you have suddenly become precious about? Took that breath you're now afraid you'll suffocate without?

While it might appear to be an act of destruction, the opposite thing to do, it may in fact be apposite.

Every so often you need to evaluate your creative life, check the map for where you are compared to where you are headed and work out whether you are lost in the Pit of Despair or frolicking in the ball pit at Ikea. If your creativity is not in the place you want it to be, you need some serious self-reflection.

Do you need to shut down your creative life?

Before you read on, take the time to ask yourself the following questions (and take a moment to write down your answers):

- Have You Lost the Passion?
- Are You Grieving A Loss?
- Does Your Work Suck?
- Have You Moved Away From Your Core Values?
- Has Your Creative Life Crossed Boundaries?
- Has The Well Run Dry?

Have You Lost the Passion?

Being creative is hard work. Every creative person will proclaim it loudly from the toilet cubicle (better resonance). We enjoy being creative because we are passionate about it. The passion drives us to continue, to persevere, to work through the tough periods. There is great joy in creating.

But without passion, you are continually giving of yourself and not feeding your own needs. There is more going out than what is coming in.

The reasons for the lack of passion are numerous, both internal and external; you will know what has taken away your love for creativity.

If you cannot bear the thought of writing or drawing or painting, of doing the thing you once would give up every spare moment to do, you have lost the passion.

Without passion, your creative work will suck you dry and spit out your withered carcass.

To find your passion again, shut down your creative life.

Are You Grieving A Loss?

Loss comes in varied guises: the loss of a project; the completion of something you invested heavily into; the breaking of expectations or the loss of a creative partner or colleague.

Loss of a creative life can be like a death in the family. You have to grieve what you have lost; remember what you have accomplished and celebrate the achievements.

It is natural to grieve after a loss. In order to deal with the grief and loss, shut down your creative life.

Does Your Work Suck?

This is tricky.

If you feel you are not developing and improving in your chosen creative field, you can evaluate your work against previous pieces you have produced. Or you can ask someone to objectively and critically evaluate your work..

You need to ask the hard question, “Does my work suck?”

If the overwhelming consensus is your work sucks, you have two choices.

Choice One: improve your skills. Enrol in a course, find a mentor, workshop your project, seek advice.

Choice Two: shut it down.

You may need to shut it down first, evaluate what you are doing and then improve your skills to resurrect your creative life.

OR, focus your creative energies elsewhere if what you are doing is truly not what you want to do.

Experiment with a few areas to see where your skills are best suited.

Have You Moved Away From Your Core Values?

It can be too easy to seek out the latest trend, jump aboard the bandwagon and ride shotgun. All the while you are moving further away from your original intentions and purpose.

Are you in the wrong creative field?

Are you writing short stories when you should be producing short films?

Are you painting when you should be writing?

Who are you and what do you want to be doing?

Are you doing it?

Why not?

There is nothing wrong with diversifying and experimenting, trying out new creative mediums, but if it takes you away from the core of who you are and what you do, it is time to shut it down.

Has Your Creative Life Crossed Boundaries?

Creative people can be obsessive and focused or ethereal and unreliable as they pursue a creative life.

If your creativity is taking over your life and interfering with relationships, if it is taking away from family and friends, it may be time to shut it down.

Creativity involves a sacrifice of time and effort, but not at the expense of you being a selfish pillock. Communicate what you want, negotiate the boundaries so all involved have a clear understanding of what is required.

It may require the drawing up of an agreement, stuck to the fridge as a constant reminder of each person's responsibilities.

Focus and dedication are important to the life of a creative individual, but if it crosses boundaries, shut it down.

Has The Well Run Dry?

Creative people speak of the "well of ideas," a place to draw inspiration: reading a book, watching a movie, visiting art galleries or taking a walk with the rabbit on a leash can fill the well of ideas.

A project needs time to develop, consciously, unconsciously and subconsciously. Ideas generate ideas.

Sometimes the creative well is dry because it has been drawn upon too many times without replenishing. The draining of ideas may have its source in a range of things: your own emotional state, external situations and circumstances, demands and pressures on your time, or relationships.

You need to refill the well by letting it refill in its own time from a trickle to a torrent. Feed yourself on good things like art and music, books and films. Fall in love with simple pleasures again. Leave the tools on your desk and have no regrets in leaving them alone.

If you are dry, shut down your creative life.

Death and Resurrection

The shutting down of a creative life may be an individual's choice or the result of external circumstances and situations, or a combination of both. Some may choose to leave the creative life altogether and never return. This is a shame because I believe creativity should be a part of everyone's life.

But how long should your creative life be shut down? Will it become a derelict building, boarded up, dilapidated, falling into ruin and fit for demolition?

If you shut down your creative life, will it be resurrected?

If the shutting down is a voluntary choice, you are giving yourself permission to step aside from a creative life. When you make that decision, embrace it. Grieve your loss and mourn the death.

Set a period of time for your creative life to be dormant: days, weeks, months, or even years and set a specific date to resurrect your creative life. The creative life is one that is inherently a part of you and brings benefit, but you need to return to the thing you fell in love with. It's like a relationship: you have to work at it.

Only then will you live a creative life to the full.

Do you need to shut down your creative life and resurrect it?

- Schedule a period of downtime.

During the dormant time clear your space; throw out what is not needed; purge the unwanted and irrelevant.

- Grieve when you need to grieve.
- Reclaim what you are passionate about and establish the core values of who you are.
- Set achievable goals and focus on one project.
- Establish the boundaries of your creative life and keep the well full of ideas.
- Always find ways to improve your work.

Part 3: Recreation – Becoming A Creative Person Again

At our core we are creative beings. If we have lost the creative core of who we are, we need to recreate ourselves like the phoenix is reborn from the ashes of itself.

Recreation of yourself and your creative life requires a new focus, a new perspective, a new challenge. It comes down to the core of who you are, your values, your purpose and the tools and skills you need.

The act of creating is a spiritual act, a divine unction to do something. The act of recreating yourself is therefore also a spiritual one.

It is time for recreation. Here's how.

Know Who You Are

Knowing who you are requires a bold, declarative statement. It requires a fundamental belief in what it is you do.

Get a pen and a piece of paper. Write down the following:
“I am a creative person.”

Repeat it. Write it down again. Say it in your head. Say it aloud.

This is who you are. You are a creative person. Creativity is manifested in each individual's life differently based on interests and skills.

How is it manifested in your life? How do you want it to be manifested?

Creativity exists to benefit you first. There is a fundamental need to create inherent in each one of us.

Embrace the fact you are a creative person.

Creativity Gives You Purpose

“I am a creative person.”

You identify creativity as a purpose in your life. It gives meaning to your life because in the act of creating it helps you make sense of the world.

Even if all you do is ask questions through your creative acts, you understand creativity gives you purpose. It provides a focus.

Creativity provides an opportunity to explore ideas, confront fears, confront negativity, promote positivity, birth beauty, truth and wisdom into the world.

Creativity brings you child-like joy in the act of creating.

Creativity is who you are.

Update Your Tool Box

What tools do you need to be creative?

Pens and pencils? Notebooks? Canvas, paint and brushes? Scissors? A ream of Post-It Notes? A camera? A stick of glue and tube of glitter?

Dust off the tools you have. Buy new ones if you abandoned a creative life and threw them away.

But, keep it simple.

As a writer I only need a pen (preferably an Artline 0.4 black felt tip pen) and a notebook (any cheap thing will do). I don't need fancy pens or paper; they will not make me write better. I don't use writing applications on my computer.

Work out what you want then whittle it down to what you *really* need. Don't go out splurging massive amounts of money.

As a drummer it is tempting to walk into a drum store or browse through catalogues and believe I need the latest and greatest or the most expensive.

But each time I am in the drum store I stop myself. I reflect on what I do have. I have the tools I need and they are good tools. I must master the tools I currently own. I need to focus on developing my skills to improve my technique.

What skills do you need?

Being creative requires very little skill at all. Pick up a pen, a piece of paper and a pair of scissors and hours of fun await you.

Take time to write a list of the skills you do have and those you want to cultivate. Part of your recreation is knowing what have and how to make the best of them. For some it may mean taking your skills further (or adding new ones) and that may require training, new information, a mentor, or professional classes to enable you to be excellent at what you do. It may involve enrolling in a community college or a university course.

Recapturing the Creativity

The beauty of creativity is its simplicity. There is much joy and wonder to be gained by creating simple things.

Creativity is about play, being child-like in our enthusiasm. The child-like simplicity of play is something we forget as adults. We grow, mature, develop sophistication and somehow forget the need to play. I suggest reading Jodi Cleghorn's post on [rediscovering creativity through the eyes of a child](#).

When recreating yourself, coming back to the very essence of who you are, come back with a sense of playfulness and joy.

In your recreation:

- Be playful
- Be adventurous
- Be spontaneous
- Be silent from time to time
- Be aware of wondrous things: the remarkable and the everyday
- Be observant
- Be proactive
- Be musical
- Be kinaesthetic
- Be you

This will feed your creative spirit and find expression in creative acts.

May your creativity be reborn from the ashes.

May you find your purpose in creative acts with a rekindled passion.

May you find the child-like joy in the simplicity of creating, and may it be playful and fun.

May your creative life be fulfilling.

About the Author

Adam is an English teacher and occasional drummer with an interest in literary pursuits, rhythmic permutations, theological amplifications and comedic outbursts.

He sifts through the ennui, minutiae and detritus of life and cataloguing them as potential story ideas. It's pretty much a pad of sticky notes on the fridge door.

Occasionally he finds loose change.

He exists on twitter as @revhappiness and writes flash fiction and blogs at <http://afulnessinbrevity.wordpress.com>

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