

CULTIVATING SUSTAINABLE CREATIVITY

A free e-book gift of gratitude by Laraine Herring



Thank you for signing up for my mailing list! I look forward to connecting with you!

The short essays and exercises contained in this e-book come from a book project I started a few years ago. The book, like most books I write, evolved into something different that no longer had space for these particular pieces. But I didn't want to hoard them in a Dropbox file. I wanted them to be able to make their way into the world, and I am grateful that you've found them.

The world needs its artists now more than ever. We have a responsibility to create the conditions necessary to bring our work out into the world. No one will do that for us. To try and make a life as an artist—writer, painter, dancer, sculptor—in this crowded, loud age requires discipline, courage, passion and compassion.

May you always find your way underneath the noise to the place where you hear the whisper of your own voice. May you remember others are on this path with you—both living and dead—and that art, in all its forms, matters profoundly to this planet and her people.

Be well,

Laraine

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GHOST TOWN

An idea, like a ghost, must be spoken to a little before it will explain itself.

- Charles Dickens

Many opportunities to die present themselves on

Arizona State Route 89A on the way to the ghost town of

Jerome. White crosses, plastic flowers, poems, and rock

sculpture hold the spaces where drivers took one of the many

hairpin turns too quickly, or too drunk. Emerging from the high desert of Prescott through Prescott National Forest at 8000 feet and then exploding into the Verde Valley, SR 89A ensures that only the most diligent, committed explorers make it to Jerome.

Perhaps it is this risk that makes Jerome so compelling. Perhaps it is the ten miles of switchbacks that make you grit your teeth and grip the steering wheel that are essential to evoke the spontaneous release of breath that occurs when you complete the final turn and climb the last hill. The town opens up for you; its buildings literally clinging to the sides of hills, foundations crumbling and windows gazing glassless onto the expanse of the Verde Valley, which to the uninitiated could be the Grand Canyon. You can see the snow-tipped San Francisco Peaks as clearly as your own dashboard, though they are nearly one hundred miles away. When you exhale, relax your grip on the wheel, and start to take in the ghost town, you may first see a collapsing house on your left with a faded “Re-Elect Ray Nagin” sign hanging in the empty window. Or, you may see a Buddha sculpture made of rusted pans and

utensils. You may notice the Haunted Hamburger restaurant, its deck thrust out over the street below. Or, perhaps the gaze settles on a pair of cats—one gray, one orange—walking over the exposed ceiling beams of a house whose walls have become a garden of vines and bird’s nests.

Today, on a Tuesday, there are no parking spaces available. The ghosts have to make room for the living people. Faded prayer flags flap outside the window where I’m sitting with a cup of coffee and my notebook in the basement of what used to be the New State Motor Company, which boasted Clean Ladies’ Restrooms and same day auto service. Receipts are tacked to the walls behind a glass case, most from 1929, Jerome’s boom year, where the population peaked at 15,000, and the United Verde Copper Company was sure the copper mine would never cease to yield its gifts. A battery recharge was \$2.00. One quart of oil was twenty-five cents. Six gallons of gas a meager \$1.80.

Four times in the late 1800s, fires destroyed Jerome, and on February 5, 1903, the *New York Sun* declared Jerome to be, “the wickedest town in the west.” The copper mining work was hard. Men came from everywhere. Chinese, Italians, Mexicans, Slavs, Irish, Russians, and more inhabited the town. Prostitution came hand in hand with mining, and saloons did a robust business. The Holy Family Catholic Church, “The Miner’s Church”, established in 1894, still offers twice-weekly Mass, clinging to life and its precarious position on the side of a hill overlooking the Jerome Fire Station.

In 1950, the mine that would never die died, and by 1955, the population was less than fifty. Jerome had become one of the many boomtowns across the southwest and west that had been exhausted by mining. Land has a strange way of pushing humans along when they've overstayed their welcome, and Jerome was no exception. Copper, the gift of the earth, quickly became the town's undoing.

For decades, Jerome was home to cats, tumbleweeds, and a still bubbling stream of water pouring from the mine's wells. Water, the true gift of the desert, had not forsaken Jerome. In the intervening decades, Jerome became home to an ashram and a hippie commune. Then, bit by bit, the artists came, lured by the light, the next to nothing rents, and the clean, dry air—a far cry from the dark soot of the atmosphere when the mine operated. The light in Jerome is more the pink and yellow light of New Mexico than the starker white light common in most of Arizona. The climate is mild and the sun shines nearly every day.

The abandoned buildings transformed into art studios, jewelry designers' homes, bistros, and textile studios. The Jerome High School now houses floors of artists' spaces and galleries. The infamous Fashion Saloon where ladies of the night met the miners is now a historical museum.

But everything hasn't been developed. Across from the Holy Family Catholic Church are rows of large houses, many now apartments. In between two of these buildings is

a ruin of a once magnificent mansion. Ivy has claimed the stairs, the yard, and what is left of the walls. The roof is only a few rotting beams. You can peer directly into the house from the dirt street that runs above it. The *No Trespassing* signs haven't stopped the cats from perching on a brick from the crumbling fireplace or curling into welcome mats in the now empty doorframe.

When you drive through the town today, you'll dodge tourists with cameras, Keens, and sun block. But if you get there in the early morning before the shops open, you'll see the animals coming out, the chickens and roosters pecking through the streets, the backyard gardens of found art – discarded pottery shards that sparkle in the light, statues made of glass bottles, a blue bistro table housing a very large bamboo plant. The locals come out—the population now slightly over 200—to go to the post office, take a walk, sweep a storefront. Artists of all media have spaces here – Raku to digital art to jewelry to clothing designs. One of a kind, world-class art sits side by side with the expected tourist goods of Jerome Ghost Town T-shirts and memorabilia documenting surviving the treacherous SR89A.

Patrick Lincoln, digital artist now living in Jerome, says in his artist's statement, "In July, 2010, I will be sixty-two years old with no wife, no pets, no plants, no progeny, no MBA, no 401K, no BMW, no health, life or dental, no house, but I got a pocketful of poems, a heart full of art and one hell of a head of hair...every time I tear a poem from the chaotic abyss of my mind, and every time I find the focus of light, color, shape, shadow and form to nail down a painting, and every time I build a rock wall, I

feel within me the metaphysical “click” of simple rightness that echoes harmonies of the creator of all, and that is all that prevents me from running through the night buck naked on all fours and howling in sheer madness to the moon at the beauty and horror and the terror and the magnificent joy of it all.”

The community of artists has repopulated Jerome with color, light, sound and stories. They’ve not asked the ghosts to move out. They’ve not brought beige housing developments or corporate strip malls or parking garages. They brought art.

The town of Jerome hugs the side of a mountain. The buildings slide down a little more each year. A chair rests precariously, facing the Verde Valley, in the empty Re-Elect Ray Nagin house. I like to think from time to time someone still sits in it, enjoying the transience of the wind through the collapsed walls, the shifting earth beneath him, mountains and cliffs that will long outlast him stretching as far as he can see.

This is what it means to make art – to sit in an unbalanced chair and imagine who and what has been there before; to imagine what could be, and to know in your very bones, that everything is in transition. The writer is a listener, and the entire planet holds our stories. Where art flourishes, when language and stories sing to life on our breath, the dead will stand up, hold our hands, and gratefully share their stories with us. Always keep your hands open, your eyes softly focused, and your ears at

attention. That whisper of wind that traces the hairs on your neck might just be your next novel. Don't be caught asleep when the telling starts.

THE SOUND OF ONE HEART BEATING

*He learned his art the only way
an artist ever learns—
by probing the secrets of his own
vast heart.*

- John Dunning

I fell in love with the neurotic, needy, and hopelessly romantic character of Ally McBeal. For those of you who don't know the show from the late 1990s, Ally is a young, insecure, brilliant lawyer searching for Mr. Right, whom, as the fates

would dictate, she'd already met, been involved with and lost many years before. In one of the episodes, she talked about wanting to have a soundtrack to her life. She took a step forward into the street and a song began. Nope. The song screeched to a stop. Wrong one. She took another step forward and a different song began. Not this one either. She continued stepping and stopping, unwilling to take a complete stride until the right song for that moment in her life arrived and she could move, the music of *her* moment holding her up. One by one, she imagined the soundtracks for the other characters on the show and the people she passed on the street. The scene took on both a symphony and cacophony of sounds, rhythms, emotions and a lightness that accompanied the people who walked with music. The characters didn't have their iPod ear buds in, listening to whatever was next up on their play list. The buoyancy of the steps came from the characters responding to the sounds their inner ears were hearing. The songs rejected were not bad songs, just not the right songs for the character's present moment. When we're in alignment with our intuition, we step forward only when the music is right – not

when it is just close enough. Not when it is the song we wish it could be or the song that we think works for others.

Do you remember when you first started noticing bodies? Not in a sexual way, but in a curious way, like when a new kitten is introduced into a house with another cat and they slowly approach one another. *What are you? You're like me, but you're different.* Do you remember noticing faces? Perhaps noticing someone's nose is smaller than your own, someone's eyes greener or jaw more narrow. Then, maybe you noticed hands, fingernails, elbows, feet. We can become so intimately connected with our own bodies that we forget everyone may not be short-waisted, or have a turned in pinky toe, or be nearsighted. Too often, when we begin noticing the differences in others, we use those differences to create barriers and to judge our own bodies. "I'd be happy if I had her hair, or her body type, or his six-pack abs." The differences between us no longer become variations of the theme of a human body, but reasons to dislike and destroy the other or ourselves.

But in the very beginning, the moment you emerged as a baby human, there was nothing and no one to compare your experience with. There was no other, only you, and while this natural oblivion to everything else is normal in infancy and toxic in adulthood, there are qualities from those earliest of days that can be beneficial for cultivating your inner landscape and relationship to writing. A time when, assuming you had a reasonably stable home, you cried when you felt like it, smiled when you wanted to, slept when you were tired and woke up when you were ready. You ate when you were hungry and stopped when you were full. Your body, brand new that it was, knew precisely what it

needed and how to ask for it to maintain its balance. The infant didn't need to read a book on how to be a healthy baby, or how to make the transition out of the womb and onto planet earth. Infants don't consult their astrologers, priests, or therapists to make sure their needs are worthy and worthwhile. The baby, for a few precious days or weeks, is fully embodied. She hasn't yet learned to adjust its needs to her circumstances, or ignore them to gain attention and approval from a primary source.

Now, to live in a safe and reasonably organized society, we can't go around acting on our every impulse, no matter how authentic it might be in the moment. We can't always have what we want when we want it. We all must adapt, modify, and compromise for the larger benefits of living in a community. However, when you're writing, when you're creating, when you're stepping outside of community and going where only you can go, you'd do well to leave behind some of the trappings of society and become wilder – less civilized. Return to those first few days of life. Step away from what “they” told you to do or be or behave and reconnect with your inner rhythms, needs, and questions. I am not saying to go out and cause harm to others or infringe upon the rights of another human being. I'm asking you to make a reconnection with your own internal barometer.

When you are writing, there is only your heartbeat—your rhythm—and when people lament about trying to find their voices, what they're ultimately talking about is their rhythm. Over a lifetime we forget how to hear it. We can forget that it's that little bit of wildness in us that has something to bring to the page. We create our stories not from regurgitating what we're currently reading, hearing or assimilating, but from bringing

forth our own unique sound—the way we see and apply language to a summer monsoon storm, no matter how many other people have written about the thunder.

A writer doesn't need to go to the top of a mountain and roll shut the stone in front of the cave to hear her own heart. What she must do is learn to discern among the various places and purposes she has in a many-faceted life. The average person has no problem differentiating between what is appropriate behavior and responses in a variety of life circumstances – the airport security line, dinner with the in-laws, lunch with your oldest, closest friend, a romantic weekend with your lover, a presentation to the board of directors at your workplace. We are highly adaptable creatures. We know intuitively which skills and behaviors will achieve the greatest harmony in different circumstances. Even if we're relating the same anecdote, we'll shape that anecdote to fit the intended audience: one version for our colleagues, one for our best friend, one for our mother.

When we enter the metaphoric cave to write, we have to leave those various personas at the door and proceed down the spiral staircase, naked and wobbling. We adapt to the needs of the cave, which are different from the needs of the subway platform. The darkness and dampness of the cave doesn't want your directed, aggressive sales pitch, your sweet words of seduction, or your words of reprimand to an unruly child. The cave wants you soft and sticky, flexible and fleshy, and more than a little blind. It wants you to feel your way along its jagged and smooth edges with open palms, stopping to run your fingers along the tip of a stalagmite. It wants you to hear the bats and rather than shoo them out, understand that you've entered their world. You're the guest at the door and the

rules from your world no longer apply. Here, you are beyond self, and the tools and skills that assist you in civilization won't help you here. The armor you carry (both necessary and superfluous) won't protect you here, and there is no place for the over-identification with any persona, any ideal, or any preconception.

If you enter your writing time dragging along any of the constructs of your other world, you'll find yourself burdened, struggling to eke out the words from beneath the expectations you've placed on them. You'll find yourself frustrated, blocked, and possibly angry. If you over-identify with any of the roles you play in your life; for example, if you believe you *are* an accountant, you'll not realize that you can drop that construct at will. It's very difficult to be an effective brain surgeon using the same tools and vocabulary that makes a person an effective psychologist. We won't be as effective in our lives if we always dress in our pajamas, and conversely, it's difficult to get a good night's sleep in a ball gown, control-tops, and stilettos. The accessories of a life in the outer world don't fit in the inner world. To try and bring them in is as foolhardy as going swimming in the ocean in a tux.

Underneath all the trappings is your solitary heartbeat, your soundtrack. Drop everything else at the mouth of the cave. Your time to write, to connect with your creative source, is as much a part of your life as your time to go to the office or have dinner with your family. It is *part of* a life, not something you have to fly far away to find, or quit your job to access or take psychotropic drugs to see. When the writing has to compete with the messiness of your PTA meetings, your sales reports, your lesson plans, it has trouble

communicating with you because it uses a different language than those activities use. And since—and this is really important—your book, poem, essay, song, *is not representative of life*, to try and make a novel a literal climb up the South Rim of the Grand Canyon is a waste of perfectly fine energy. In other words, even if you're writing realistic fiction or non-fiction, you're not trying to copy the experience of the world or the exact conversation from childhood or the precise nuances of the colors of a sunset. You can't do that because writing is *not* a sunset, a tense family dinner, or a hike in the Grand Canyon. Writing is your tool of choice to share impressions with the world, and if you want the reader to believe you when you use language to express a hike in the Grand Canyon, you have to let your experience and observations of the hike merge with the language to create something entirely *new*, different and alive. If you try to reproduce the experience literally, you will fail. The piece will fall flat on the reader's inner ear – that part of the reader who is listening for the unique rhythm of a phrase – even if every detail is accurate.

This attempt to recreate the exact experience of a scene or emotion is a very profound misstep writers make when they write. “I want to make it real!” they exclaim. No. Don't try to make it real. Make it *live*, and to do that, you've got to step aside and let the Grand Canyon experience itself help you use your tools of language to create a believable scene on the page. The words the reader reads are *not* that hike to Indian Gardens. The scene is a different creation – sticky and shifting and breathing – with its own heart.

You don't take the Grand Canyon with you when you drive away from the El Tovar. You take the experiences you've filtered through your own lenses into your body. If you try to write about it so others will have *your experience*, you'll choke the reader with the "you-ness" of it all. There will be no room for the reader to have his own experience of the Canyon if you string it up in a noose.

The reader *can't* have your experience. What a relief! Instead, let the writing breathe. Select the strongest sensory impressions. The most compelling lines of dialogue. Save the meaning-making and the interpretations of the event for the reader. In order to do that, you have to shed the tightest suit of clothes a writer wears: that of Writer. You're not here to force-feed the one-and-only meaning of an experience. You're sharing your journey the best way you can. A writer writes. A wise writer steps away from the writing and lets it stand alone. You've done your job. Let it move out into the world without your parental warnings, disclaimers and restrictions.

The writing is *not* the experience. The writing and the experience create a new living organism. This requires the writer to trust the writing itself and recognize when the ego of the writer starts to step into the product. When you understand (and think of the word understand as to "stand under" rather than comprehend), when you are bowing to the part of writing that is larger than you are, there is harmony.

Remember these things when you approach the cave:

- 1) Shed your skins.

- 2) Write what your inner ear hears, not what your mind interprets.
- 3) Set it aside for a short time (at least a day) before you read it over and begin to revise.

Just like you function best when you hear and respond to your own unique heartbeat, a piece of writing must have its own (and only its own) heartbeat when it goes out into the world. You may loan it yours to help get it growing, but you have to back yourself out of the work and let it find its own sound, not yours. When your own heartbeat is strong and you have a well-developed and consistent relationship with your innate rhythm, the letting go is easier to do. If you don't trust that your heart will continue to beat, you will have difficulty separating from the writing when it's out of your hands. When the writer is unable to let go of her perception of the "truth" of a moment—when she holds too tightly to its preciousness, its perfection, its ultimate "rightness"—the piece can *only* speak to her. There is no room for another reader. When you leave no room for another reader, you not only alienate your potential audience, but you also leave no room for more writing to move through you. It simply cannot fit.

It's as impossible to stop the flow of writing as it is to stop the waves from lapping against the shore. It's only when our perceptions shift toward an over-identification with a piece of writing that we chase one single wave obsessively and lose sight of the larger landscape of the ever-churning sea. The secret is not to run faster or chase more fiercely, but rather to surrender and soften. As one wave washes over you, there's a pause before another one rises. This is the natural world and the natural way of things. You can't alter the rhythms of the ocean. You show up and observe them. Likewise, you can't alter the

natural ebb and flow of your creativity. You only *think* you can, and that thought is an unchallenged assumption that will cause you needless fretting. You only think the ocean is blocked or stuck or frozen. Release that thought and you'll notice that even when the ocean appears still, there are micro-movements on the surface, and down below still more ripples and churning and twirling and more life than even our marine biologists know exists. You don't have to understand the ocean, control it, or predict its next move to stick your toe into it and let the waves dance over you.

Be still. Listen to your heart. Notice when you're mimicking and mirroring the sounds and expectations of other people and let those go. Listen to your soundtrack and write what only you can. This act of humility shows a deep respect for your writing. Begin here and the possibilities are endless. Begin with the ego's arrogance, agendas, and restrictions, and your writing will reflect those things back to you with jagged edges, and sadly, you may begin believe that is all there is.

IF A TREE FALLS

*There is only one way to
escape the alienation of
present day society:
to retreat ahead of it.*

- Roland Barthes

When I was in third grade, our class had to do a cemetery project. We went to one of the local church cemeteries with tracing paper and pencils and made

etchings of the stones. Then, back in the classroom, we wrote stories about the person whose grave we found. I still wander the cemeteries, stepping carefully over stones, looking for families, wondering about fires, influenza outbreaks, and gunfights. In third grade, the graves of the babies haunted me, likely because they were closest to my own age. Most markers had little lambs sleeping on top of them, and many of the children only lived a day or two. I also worried about the people in the cemeteries for whom there never seemed to be an offering, a flower, or a note. The ones where the birth and death dates had dissolved into the stone itself, and I could not be sure if they were nineteenth century dates or twentieth century dates. Did no one love them anymore? Was no one left alive who remembered?

In a cemetery, everyone is together, wing of rib over arch of foot. There's no hierarchy, except perhaps of the living over the dead. We who still live may ask questions: And what of her? What made her laugh? What birdsong did she find exquisite? And him? Who did he respect? What did he write in a note to his mother? Did she write him back? But we'll get no direct answers. In a cemetery, nature is the artist, transforming one

substance to another. The living flesh becomes the food. The soil feeds the flowers. The flowers feed the insects. Those of us who can still walk out of a cemetery cannot escape bearing witness to this most powerful expression of alchemy.

The creative forces that shape our world are constantly shifting. The writer does more than make meaning of the past or reflect back the current world he inhabits. The writer is a visionary, leaping in front of the world and pulling the world with her. The artist stands on a mountaintop that many cannot see and shouts, “Come! Look at what it can be!” Sometimes the vision is hopeful. Sometimes apocalyptic. But always the artist is a filter for the possibility of experience. In order for this envisioning to occur, the artist often walks the edges of society, pushing at boundaries, testing the limits not only of the art, but also of life.

In 3rd century Chinese writer and critic Lu Ji’s book on writing, *Poets’ Jade Splinters*, he offers up this advice from his colleague, Song Zijing. “If you always use a compass to draw a circle and a ruler to draw a square, you will always remain a slave...the first taboo in writing is to walk behind others.” Zijing was speaking of writing poetry, but the same is true of any art. Don’t follow. Lead.

Too often, a reaction to those who step outside the norms of their society is a rejection by that society. The artist is labeled an “other”, a threat perhaps, and a direct challenge to the status quo. As far back as the 3rd century B.C., Plato, in the *Republic*, argued for removing the artists and poets from society because they did not produce anything of

value. But what often happens to the people who walk the front lines? They get blown up. In the west, the blowing up usually occurs more metaphorically in the form of bad reviews, poor sales, or ridicule. But in some places, the threat of physical harm is still very real.

On March 5, 2007, a suicide bomber attacked Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad, the heart of the Iraqi book district. Named for the 10th century Iraqi poet, Al-Mutanabbi, this street had been the center of Iraqi literary and intellectual life for centuries. When the car bomb exploded, twenty-six people were killed and over 100 people were wounded, including booksellers, writers, and children. This attack on the written word, on the power of ideas and intellectual discourse, shut down the street for over a year. The free expression of ideas can evoke change, and that change or threat of change is frequently met with violence and wars. We fight over our stories, over the ways we choose to see and experience the world, and the fighting inevitably further divides us.

The artist herself is divided. She straddles at least two worlds – the physical world she is a part of, and the world of the imagination, where she must visit faithfully to create. The creation itself – the song, the poem, the dance – is the artist’s bridge. It is challenging to navigate both worlds safely, and for many artists, it’s during the navigation where things go awry.

This may happen with less severity if we address an internal split that has manifested itself externally. Early in our education, we often learn that some people are artists and

some are not. We learn that there are specific ways of creating art, and if we don't match those things, we are not artists. This early-life culling of artists from the rest of society starts reinforcing the alienation that can follow the artist throughout his life. Anyone can take pleasure in creating and experiencing the arts. Everyone may not be able to write a novel, create a world-class sculpture, or become a famous architect, but the *involvement* with art need not be taken from those without a great talent or a burning desire to create.

Before art can be understood, it must be felt. It must be experienced in the body. We can't fully appreciate the beauty of a watercolor painting until we've tried to press the brush onto the paper ourselves. If we learn too early *about* what art is and what it is not (or what someone else believes art is and is not), we bypass that first, primal level of experiential understanding, which will help us solidify a life-long relationship *to* art, even if we are not actively engaged in creating art for a living. If we don't engage deeply in a relationship with art in childhood, it is very unlikely we'll patronize or create art in our adult lives. In an either/or system, one is either an artist or one is not. If one is not, then one walks away from art to pursue more "worthwhile" endeavors. After all, who wants to hang out in a place where they are "failing"?

The artist's cry of alienation has its roots in the individual's separation from his own artistic expression. Expression is a gift of being alive. A human being is not a single thing – a particular type or quality or skill set. A human being is an amalgam of many ways of engaging in the world.

In China, the imperial system of civil servant examinations, which existed into the twentieth century, required proficiency in poetry, painting, calligraphy, and music in addition to other arts. The awareness of the interconnectedness of the art forms and the ways in which the arts can enhance one another and the individual were once common knowledge. We have lost sight of this unity and intimacy among the arts in favor of specialization and mastery. And so the artist, who is building bridges between her soul's visions and the outward world, may find few places to share her work because many of those who are her potential audience, no longer hold a place in their hearts for breathing art.

Look inward first. Notice the places you have labeled yourself into categories. Parent? Employee? Athlete? Musician? Notice which ones you give the most weight to. Notice which parts are starved, or left unlabeled. Ask yourself: What are you shouting at? Where do you feel disconnected? The first healing occurs within you. A person who is whole within herself is not subject to the whims of the world. Challenges come and go, but she remains, her nature intact.

One day, someone will walk through the cemetery in which we are buried. If we're lucky, he might stop a minute and wonder who we were. Did she sing? Who did he love? What was a typical day like?

There will come a day when someone will walk across the bridge you've built. Build it from the ground up, and build it to a place that right now, only you can see.

TOOLS

Questions for Internal Cultivation



These questions and thoughts are only suggestions. Feel free to modify them to suit your needs.

- How many different roles are you aware of that you play in your life? What are the accessories for each role? What roles and trappings do you often bring to your writing experience? Which roles help you do your work in the world? Which roles sabotage your efforts?
- Create a metaphor for your mythic writing place that is authentic to you. Describe it in detailed sensory language. Don't forget reverence for both the light and dark parts of it.
- In what ways do you attach to your writing? Be specific. You might like to draw a picture of that entanglement. What can you do to unravel them? You might begin a journal with: First I must...
- In silent contemplation for approximately 15 minutes for at least seven days, listen to your thoughts as they surface. Observe them. Don't attach to or avoid any of them. Are there patterns emerging in energy, content, reactions? Write them down without judgment.
- How do you feel about applying the word 'wild' to your writing? What thoughts and feelings surface for you? Can you identify a place (or places) in the body where that wildness lives? Write a poem or short prose piece showing the

- wildness of your writing. Be sensory. Be specific. You might like to find an image for this as well. Google Images is a great place to begin searching.
- How are you enslaved by expectations for your writing? How are they serving you today? Can you let any of them go? What might happen if one fell away? Then another? Write a parable or fairy tale in which the expectations drop away from the writing.
 - When you feel contraction and fear around your writing, how does that manifest in the body? Attune yourself to this area. Where is it? What might that area want to tell you? Ask it in a letter or a poem.

Contemplative and Art-Based Activities

- Find a comfortable place to sit and settle into silence. Let your breath fill your body, belly to clavicle, and soften your body. Place your right palm over your heart and focus on its beat. Remaining still and silent, let your fingers hear the beating. As your attention keys in on this rhythm, stretch it out into your entire body. See if you can feel the pulsing in your wrists, ankles, behind your knees. Surrender your whole body to the beat. You may wish to journal after this experience.
- Put on some drumming music. I like Gabrielle Roth's 5 Rhythms (<http://www.gabrielleroth.com>) for dancing, but any music with a strong drumbeat will work. Try Babatunde Olatunji for Nigerian percussion, or Hamdi El-Khayyat for Arabian percussion or Movses Panossian's "Drum Circle" CD. Whatever you

choose, turn it up loud and dance. Stomp the earth with the drum. Let the focus be on the rhythm of the music, not any specific dance move. It doesn't matter how you look. It only matters what you feel. Let the drumming move you. You may wish to journal after this experience.

- Create a play list for your creative journeying. Remember: this is a flexible play list. The same songs aren't representative every day. Let this change and grow as you do.



This photo is courtesy of Patricia J. O'Brien, and you can see much more of her amazing photography at her [blog](http://triciajobrien.blogspot.com). (<http://triciajobrien.blogspot.com>) I liked the photo so much I screen-captured it and looked at it on my desktop for months. How many shadows does a creature have? Could I be walking with a ghost shadow? What would that sound like? What would that look like? Write into this picture. Start by using all five senses to bring us into the world of the photo. Follow the anchoring details. Let yourself be surprised. You might like to write a dialogue between the two egrets, or the two shadows. To bring this out of the realm of the written word, try making a drawing of your own secret shadow. Who is she or he? What does this secret shadow have to say?

- Check out Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic'. Here's a short (2 minutes 10 seconds) [YouTube video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASS7xMOM1EE) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASS7xMOM1EE>) of her 736 hour and 30 minute static, silent piece "The Artist is Present" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in March 2010. In this piece, the artist sat unmoving in the museum's atrium while guests of the museum were invited to enter into the space and sit opposite her. Notice how she remains still, no matter what distractions surround her. Notice how the power of her stillness affects the patrons of the museum. Notice how her stillness affects you. Do you feel any resistance in your body? In your mind? After you've finished watching the clip, settle into a few moments of silent reflection. When you're ready, write a monologue from the point of view of the artist. Then, write a monologue from the point of view of one of the patrons who observed the artist. Then, write a third monologue from the point of view of one of the patrons who sat opposite the performer. What do you notice about the three pieces? Similarities? Differences? How did the voice change from character to character? Now, incorporating the omniscient point of view, write a short scene or poem about the video clip.

You can find more about the artist at the MoMa website:

<http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/965>.

Your Turn



What are at least three questions that are surfacing for you? Write down the questions.

You do not need an answer. Questions themselves provide deep clues. Writing the questions down gives them an anchor. Once a question has a place to take root, many different ways of addressing the question can come forth.



NEXT?



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I hope you've enjoyed this free e-book. Thank you for your time. Please feel free to forward this to anyone you think might benefit.

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I look forward to connecting with you, and until then, I wish you ease and grace as you bring your good work into the world.

We need you.

