

Creative Monday

How to turn off
your critic and
turn on your
creativity

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Contents

Introduction	1
What Is Creative Monday?	2
What was my problem?	5
My near death experience	6
My Leap of Faith	7

Introduction



There's a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in. *Leonard Cohen*

You may think that creativity is for others but not for you. **What if all that is required is your desire to be creative, your time and some practice?** Do you have the desire? If you do then Creative Monday is for you (we'll work on the time and the practice later).

Do you need help believing you are creative? Do you start a creative endeavour only to give it up because it's not good enough? Do you buy books full of beautiful projects that you never make? Do you have a cupboard (or box, or drawer) full of art supplies that you never use? Do you walk into art shops wishing you knew what to buy? If you answered Yes to any of those questions then Creative Monday is for you!

Do you love to make stuff? Are you making stuff? Do you love to write? Are you writing? Would you like to be making more? Writing

more? **Do you need an injection of courage to help you move forward in your creative journey?** If you do, keep reading.

I wanted so badly to believe I was creative and I wanted so badly to practice some kind of making and writing but I had a problem, actually I had a few problems. Little by little the problems fell away as I started Creative Monday. I realised I had always been creative and I could easily practice every Monday, maybe even every day...

If you're still reading I'm going to assume you might like to do the same thing? All that will start in Chapter 1 but first...

What Is Creative Monday?

Creative Monday started life on a bright Monday morning in November 2013 around my kitchen table. I have been in love with making/creating/writing since childhood. But in all that time I didn't think I was creative. If someone had asked, I would have said, *no I'm not creative, I can't draw or paint, I can't even spell and nothing I make looks good!* But in the previous year I had a chance encounter which led me to begin taking my creativity seriously. After that I believed I was creative and more than that I believed that creativity was and is, an essential part of who I am.

For a while I had been noticing friends who also said they weren't creative and it was patiently obvious, to me and others, that they were creative but they just didn't know it. I was inspired by one of these friends, Molly.

One day I was visiting Molly and noticed in the corner of the room with it's back to us, there was a large art canvas. I'm naturally inquisitive and it struck me as interesting to see the back of a canvas. I asked Molly about it. She said, *oh that, I'm going to a painting class but I'm the worst there, I don't know how the teacher puts up with me.* I asked if I could see her work and she very reluctantly agreed saying, *it's no good.* But then she turned it around and I was blown

away. Ok, it wasn't finished, but the colours were amazing and it definitely didn't deserve to be facing a wall!

I thought about Molly's painting for weeks after. I didn't know why but I wanted to convince her that she was creative.... Was it even possible to convince someone that they were creative? It seemed to be possible to convince someone that they were **not** creative! Anyway, these questions bothered me for a long time and eventually I wrote an email (more on that later) to everyone I knew calling out to anyone who might like to encourage their creativity. A number of brave people answered. And so it began... Creative Monday has continued almost every Monday morning since then. This is what happens at a typical Creative Monday...

10am

The kettle is on, there are biscuits on a plate. The front door bell rings. I answer it and there's usually hugging and loud greetings. We walk back into the kitchen. There are paints, papers, brushes, pens, pencils on the table. There's a stack of different size canvases, a box of different fabrics, there's the book of wallpaper samples someone brought and a stack of fancy papers. The wall is covered in work, some mine, some from the people around the table. The sun is shining and the next door neighbour's cat is meowing to be let in. (An artist in a previous life?)

More people arrive, more hugging and loud greetings and those who want tea, have it. Someone, with a huge smile on their face, will say, *I know what I want to work on today!* Everyone is excited when they hear that, sometimes you just don't know what to do before you start. If someone else knows then it takes the pressure off you... Around the table there is no pressure... but it takes time to believe that.

The one who knows what they're going to work on will tell everyone about their project. They might ask for advice or ideas

or encouragement and most people will chip in. Someone else will say, *I don't know what to do today*. And I will force myself to be silent... (sometimes I succeed and sometimes I don't) because despite those words and the person's belief that they don't know, in a quiet place deep inside they do know but fear or old beliefs will prevent them from connecting with that knowing. Sometimes frustration will make it difficult for them and I will offer a project - the project I offer is unimportant the important thing is that they start.... that's why I came up with The Directions. More about them in the Appendix.

10.30am

Eventually everyone has settled... this is when I introduce the Curious Question (Chapters 3 and 4). Some people like to stop what they're doing and close their eyes, as I read. Others continue with their work. Because this is a group and because everyone is different I read out a number of curious questions, hoping there will be one that resonates with each person. The energy is quieter after the curious questions. The kettle goes back on and those who want to, have more tea. The chat and the work continue.

11.30am

Someone who was working out in the garden comes in to show their work. A new participant finishes their collage and I ask if I can hold it up for them. To see it at a distance. The work always looks different from a distance. Sometimes I will put a mount or frame around it and hang it on the wall. Sometimes that causes tears... good tears. For the first time in a long time they remember they are creative.

12.15pm

Someone remembers a story, someone else has found a drawing course (or a painting course or a writing course or...) and wonders which of the people around the table might be interested... The work continues. Someone notices the time, *is that the time?* One by one we reluctantly stop and tidy up and leave this space until next week.

After a number of sessions something happens to the people who attend - they find it easier to believe that they are creative. In the end I didn't have to convince anyone that they were creative, little step by little step each person began to *convince* themselves.

What was my problem?

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up. *Pablo Picasso*

My problem was that I couldn't start because I thought I had to be **good enough**... Jonah Lehrer in his book *Imagine How Creativity Works* talks about the Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex (DLPFC)...

“While the DLPFC has many talents, it's most closely associated with impulse control. This is the bit of neural matter that keeps each of us from making embarrassing confessions, or grabbing food, or stealing from a store.”

Sounds good, right? This DLPFC is like a big brother watching you. He keeps you on the straight and narrow... within the boundaries of the law and of society. Great for giving you the space to consider the correct thing to do. Most of the time it's smart not to be too impulsive, but what about when you have a **great** idea? If you are learning to draw or paint or you want to make a special get well

card, having your big brother watching over your shoulder is not very helpful. What if you want to write something interesting but he doesn't find it interesting? What if you design something that pleases you but it doesn't please him?

At times like this impulse control is your biggest critic and your biggest enemy. In all fairness it's trying to protect you from embarrassing yourself. This silly drawing, that naive aspiration to write, those childish paintings – could be very, very embarrassing... We definitely need protecting from them, we might be embarrassed to death... Well, I think you can die from embarrassment, can't you?

My near death experience

I nearly died from embarrassment. Back in October 2013 I shared in a blog post that I was afraid to tell anyone about my new idea. I wanted to start Creative Monday and bring a group of people (with their critics turned off) around the kitchen table to make stuff, like they were seven-year-olds... But I was too scared to do it!

For weeks I had been *trying* to bring it up in conversation, but I couldn't. Sitting at home thinking about it was fine, in fact it was great! I could imagine the table filled with people enjoying themselves. I could imagine people who were reticent at the beginning going on to produce work they were proud of. I was really excited, sitting by myself at the kitchen table.... but this was never going to happen if I didn't tell someone. In fact I needed to tell lots of someones. It all came to a head when a very kind friend asked me what I was doing these days. In my head I was saying,

I have this great idea to share my love of creating with others who think they aren't good enough to create. I think if I can gather them around my kitchen table and introduce them to a non-judgemental way of creating in baby steps that it will almost be like kickstarting a

rundown battery. I'm really excited about this because I can imagine whole worlds of creative ventures opening up for these people who thought they weren't "good enough".

Instead of telling her, I mumbled, *oh, nothing much, you?* All the passion I had for the idea was gone. If I couldn't talk about it to a friend how was I going to do this? How was I going to gather a group of people, if I couldn't even tell one?

As usually happens I turned to writing to clear my thinking and I wrote and wrote. When it became a tiny bit clearer... I took a leap of faith. Normally, if I'm stuck on something I write. Then a solution (or at least a compromise) appears on the page and I can share that writing. If I write and there's no solution and no compromise, I can't share that writing. I only share happy ending stories...

My Leap of Faith

My leap of faith was to share my unhappy ending story. Writing in the blog that day when I had no solution and no compromise was difficult. At the time I didn't realise, this was what Creative Monday was all about. Here I was wanting people to dive into a creative space where they didn't know if they could be creative. They didn't know if they would be the one person who's not creative or the one person who fails.

They didn't know that everyone is creative, that no one can fail at Creative Monday.

What I didn't know was that the perfect people to have around the kitchen table were people like me, people who had great ideas or great yearning, but their mind (their DLPFC) was telling them *no*,

don't do that! you can't possibly do that! By leaping off my cliff they could consider leaping off theirs...

After that blog I wrote to everyone I knew asking if they, or their friends, might like to encourage their creativity. I have met amazing people since starting Creative Monday. People I would never have met, people who have enriched my creativity and my life. Joseph Campbell said, *"What is it that makes you happy? Stay with it, no matter what people tell you. This is what is called following your bliss... Follow your bliss and the universe will open doors for you where there were only walls."* Doors have opened again and again for me since then and they continue to open. My dream is to encourage others to follow their bliss and see the doors open for them.

It turns out the DLPFC is the last area in our brain to fully develop, that explains why small children have no problem throwing a tantrum in a crowded shop. It also explains why they love their art! No impulse control... no critic. Imagine... NO CRITIC!