

Create or Die



The five-line invocation that summons the muses,
inspires creativity and ignites a bigger reality

By Pam Grout

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About the author:

Pam Grout is the author of 16 books and a nationally-known freelance writer who has sold her work to the *Washington Post*, *CNN Travel*, *Men's Journal*, *Scientific American Explorations*, *Outside*, *Travel & Leisure* and many other magazines. She is a regular stringer for *People* magazine and a weekly blogger for the *Huffington Post*.

But most importantly, she believes that every human being is creative and that this innate creativity is the answer to every problem from depression to codependence to world hunger. This abridged eBook is a sampling of the bigger book that will appear on bookshelves soon.

Grout also has a website (www.pamgrout.com), two blogs and an email list that stretches from Perth, Australia to Reykjavik, Iceland.

Chapter One

Just do it!

*"This little light of mine. I'm going to let it shine."
--Christian spiritual*

If you're under 35, you may not remember the physical fitness revolution. Or rather you may not remember life before the pump-it, dance-it, just-do-it days. Back then, it was not only acceptable to be a couch potato, it was really the only option.

Professional athletes were the only ones to "work out." The rest of us laughed at the idea that we, too, needed physical exercise. But then Dr. Kenneth Cooper coined the term "aerobics" and proposed the radical notion that everyone should exercise. Today,

of course, there's not an American alive who doesn't either engage in some sort of physical activity or feel guilty because he doesn't.

The same kind of revolution is happening with our brains--our creative muscle, if you will. We've finally figured out that it's not just artists who need creativity. If we are to survive as a species, every one of us must dip into the well of our imaginations. In fact, creativity is the only thing truly capable of solving both personal problems and the world's problems. When a bird loses his nest in the disappearing rainforest, he doesn't mope or call his therapist. He finds a branch somewhere and sings.

Using a simple five-line invocation and an hour of daily discipline, I have managed to write 16 books, three screenplays, a live soap opera, a television series and enough magazine articles that I haven't starved in 20 years without a 9-5 job. In fact, it was this belief in something higher that enabled me to pry myself away

from limited, habitual thinking. Using three simple practices has opened many doors from me, it has introduced me to a higher realm, an inner need as important as food and shelter.

While most books tell you how to get something--a sizzling sex life, thinner thighs, a higher return on your investment dollars, this book will tell you how to give, how to reach deep inside yourself and pull out the artistic blessing that is yours to give. The blessing that no one else can give.

Maybe it's a poem tapping on your heart. Maybe there's a song that keeps you awake at night, a screenplay that won't leave you alone. A dream you keep pushing aside with some comment like "nah! I could never sing or dance like that. I could never make a film."

Now is the time to quit pushing that dream aside.

Every dream that has ever tiptoed across your mind is a

summons from the Higher Realm. Your song may not be sung on David Letterman. It may never make the top-40 list. But somebody out there needs to hear it. Maybe it's the 92-year-old shut-in who lives next door, who giggles every time she overhears you sing, "I wish I was an Oscar Meyer Weiner" outside her bedroom window. Isn't that enough?

At times, it seems like a daunting task, adding your voice to the chorus. You wonder:

"What do I have to add to the world's great body of art?"

"Who am I to join the likes of Bette Midler, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Peter Ustinov?"

Perhaps the better question is:

"Who are you not to? What right do you have to refuse the voice that whispers to you every morning, every afternoon and every evening as you retire spent and exhausted from denying

again and again the hand of the Great Collaborator.

“But hasn’t everything already been said?”

Until we hear your version of this fierce and joyful world, there is more to be said. Each man looks upon the sunset with a slightly different eye.

All of us long for a rich, participatory life. We all have the same recurrent longing to break down our defenses, to be able to give and receive our gifts. When we compose a piece of music or shape a lump of clay, we wriggle out of the straitjacket and come out shouting, shouting “yes, yes, yes” to the possibilities of Spirit.

Alexander Papaderos, who started a monastery and Peace Center in Crete, Greece, carries a piece of a broken mirror in his wallet. When he was a small boy, he found the broken mirror next to a motorcycle that someone had wrecked and then abandoned along a road near his small village. He spent hours trying to put the

mirror back together. Unfortunately, some of the pieces were missing so he had little choice but to give up, but not before plucking out the biggest piece which he rubbed against a rock until it was smooth and round. Papaderos spent much of his childhood playing with that piece of mirror. He discovered that when he held it just right, he could shine the sun's light into the dark, lighting up unknown cracks and crevices.

Your piece of the mirror is just a fragment. Nobody knows for sure how big and vast "the whole" really is. But if you take your small piece and hold it just right, you can shine light into the world's dark places.

The choice is yours. You can use your mirror to shine light. Or you can keep it in your wallet. But the mirror will never be whole without you.

Chapter Two

The Three Practices

"If your heart is pulling you in a direction that has mystery and wonder, trust it and follow it."

--David Wilcox

In the next 60 minutes, 40 people in this country will try to kill themselves. Four of them will be successful. By the time you finish reading this chapter, one of your fellow Americans will be dead--not from cancer, not from a worn-out heart, but from the unbearable burden of his own pain, the weight of which finally convinced him to place a gun to his precious temple or a razor blade to the wrist that his own mother held as she taught him to walk.

Slowly, over time, we have given up our inheritance. We

have turned over our power to think for ourselves, to make things up, to imagine, to plan, and to dream. What do we do instead? Call Pizza Hut and grab the remote control.

Inside each and every one of us is a master chef, an inventor, a writer, a statesman. All these heroes, these immense giants that exist within our souls, are literally dying from boredom. They're sick to death of watching "Days of our Lives."

The age of convenience food, I-phones and ready-made everything is holding hostage the gods within us. It's no wonder we're all depressed. We, the greatest of all creators, with capabilities to build cities and inspire nations are squandering our time watching reruns of *Seinfeld*.

The author considered calling this book, *Facebook with the Muses*, because it encourages readers, instead of communicating with all the mortals in their life, to communicate with the higher

forces that are available to anyone who takes the time to listen.

Here are the three steps:

Practice One: Commit. The trick for luring the muses is pretty simple. *Show up.* That's it. That's the only requirement. Like anything with any value, creativity requires seat time. I suggest one hour of daily practice.

Talent is irrelevant. The real juice is equally available to everyone. It's like a water table under the earth that you tap into through discipline. All it takes to tap this unlimited pool of talent is (a) desire and the (b) willingness to show up and dig. It's truly that simple.

Look at it from the muses' point of view. If you have an important project to give the world, would you pick some two-timing, tap-dancing Willy, someone too scared to make a

commitment? Or would you nominate the person who shows up every day, the person who is loyal, like the backyard dog, always ready with his tongue hanging out?

Practice Two: Ask. This is where the invocation comes in.

Now, that you've got the muses' attention, you simply ask them to use your skills, whatever they might be, in their service. You ask to be their channel. You agree to take dictation. You come at it humbly admitting that you could use some assistance. Every day, as you begin your hour, you repeat the following five-line invocation:

*Oh great muses, I open myself now to be your channel.
I put aside all my preconceived notions about myself,
about the world and about what I am meant to write. I
surrender to your wisdom. Thank you for giving me
this opportunity to receive and pass on your gifts.
I set them free to go out and bless the universe. Amen*

Practice Three: Share. Once you're tapped in (and I guarantee you'll get juice if you follow the other two practices), you're going to want to cross-pollinate with other artists. And I don't mean on Facebook, although that is certainly a noble goal. I'm thinking Salon, as in the French Salons of the 17th and 18th centuries. Get a group together with the sole purpose of sharing your muses' offerings.

Just as the salons of earlier ages brought about what we now call the "Age of Enlightenment," I'm counting on the salons generated by this book to uplift this sad and stormy world, to jar us out of our annoying ruts. FYI: This is not some small thing I'm asking you to do.

Salons, from ancient Greek symposia to Gertrude Stein's famous Paris get-togethers, have always been the incubators of

provocative – dare I say dangerous – ideas. Passionate conversation leads to passionate action. I expect nothing less than greatness.

Tools from the Muses

Battling your Inner Salieri: Or why discipline is non-negotiable. If you saw the 1984 film, *Amadeus*, you know all about Antonio Salieri, a Venetian composer, conductor and director of the Hapsburg Opera. In the film, made from the 1979 play of the same name, Salieri was intensely jealous of Mozart. He recognized the young composer's artistic gift and did everything he could to sabotage him. That's why I call the voice that continually tries to defile every noble attempt at creating art "the inner Salieri." It's the voice that puts a roadblock between you and everything the higher forces are asking you to do. In my opinion, it's the root cause of most depression and unhappiness. It's a tricky bastard.

That's why arming yourself against your Inner Salieri is a day-by-day process, one that can only succeed with discipline. In these chapters, I outline all the many guises this enemy will take. You can bet your Inner Salieri will try every last one of them. It's important to know them going in. Using Chinese general Sun Tzu's famous motto, "Know thy enemy," you'll be able to stare him down as you keep right on giving your hour, invoking your muses and sharing with your Salon.

Generating Creative Capital. Unless you've got a trust fund, you probably work for a living. And you probably spend a lot of time thinking about your economic plight. Money seems to be top of the worry list for most people. And while I can't do much about that (we create not to make money, but to make a life), I can help you generate creative capital which, in my opinion, is much more valuable than stacks of green paper. Creative capital consists of

ideas and projects (books, songs, movies, etc.) that become your stock in trade. As Brian Grazer, co-founder with Ron Howard of Imagine Entertainment and winner of numerous Academy Awards, says, “I didn’t have any money so, if I wanted to work in Hollywood, I had no choice but to provide creative capital.”

All of us are capable of generating creative capital. We already have lots of ideas. We simply need to become disciplined enough to carry our ideas forth. And to get the aid and assistance of the muses who are desperate for willing channels. I like to think of them as the Bill Gates and Warren Buffets of the spiritual world. This infinite, other-worldly cheerleading squad is equally available to everyone. The muses do not play favorites.

Tapping the divine. Practicing an art is so much more than painting a picture or writing a poem. It’s about learning to pay attention, about tapping into a vaster realm of consciousness.

Whether you're seeking "The Power of Now," the ability to meditate or a potent tool to achieve all you're capable of becoming, hanging with the muses is the best way I know to find true enlightenment. As astrologist Rob Brezsney says, "We all need a daily dose of vastness."

Excavating the unknown. Society is stuck, lodged in an endless loop of "what we think we know." So much more is possible, but until we contact the higher realm, the bigger possibility, we will continue to drive around the same old racetrack. The connection with the muses (AKA the spiritual realm) is the single most important tool in your daily campaign to be free. It's the engine of your destiny, the fuel for every act of liberation.

Uplifting the world. As Albert Einstein famously said, "we cannot solve problems at the same level at which created them." In order to move through the mire and muck in which our society

seems willing to wallow, we must look for bigger solutions.

Lasting, practical answers are available to individuals willing to “Facebook with the muses,” to open to the creative realm. In fact, very few people know this about Einstein, but towards the end of his life, he regularly admitted that his only regret is that he didn’t learn more about the mystics. That is, people who are in touch with the bigger, spiritual reality. And as for problems on the material realm, their only cause is our lack of imagination.

Scraping out time. I’m not denying that most of us are overcommitted, overstretched, overburdened. But I do have to ask this question: Why? Do you really need to have your nails done every week? Do you really need to gossip with your sister for an hour every night? Are those reruns of *Friends* really that important to your well-being? Gandhi once said that he didn’t have time *not*

to be true to his spiritual practice. It was much too important to his cause.

Chapter Three

Closet Bohemians Unite

“I want you to foam at the mouth and wander into unknown fields.”
--Natalie Goldberg

All my life, I’ve been a closet Bohemian. Even though I grew up in a small Kansas town, was a minister’s daughter, a straight-A student and a “goody-goody-two-shoes,” I always longed to live big, be outrageous.

Outside, I was Pam Grout, junior achiever. But inside, I have always been Isadora Duncan.

Glimpses of this alter ego snuck out whenever possible. In junior high, I wore Roy Rogers pajamas to a church bake sale, telling customers that our youth group was raising money to send

me to a “special home.” This was done, I might add, without the approval of my minister father.

I roller-skated through my high school wearing a clown suit and a mask of Richard Nixon. Again in college, I donned a mask and roller skates, only this time I wore a bikini and a signboard that read, “Follow me to Hoove’s-A-Go-Go.”

After college, I tried the corporate world, but quickly discovered that bosses tend to frown on thongs and high-top tennis shoes. I took to writing travel articles and personality profiles about people who make houses out of rolled-up newspapers, people who collect nuts and make films about guinea pigs.

As much as I like St. Francis of Assisi, I have come to the conclusion that I like wild people better. People who hug trees, ride Harleys, pierce their noses. People who live outside the bell curve. Either side of the bell curve.

Despite these glaring aberrations, I still feel like unflavored gelatin much of the time. Yes, I want to suck the marrow out of life, be Zorba the Greek. But at the same time, I want people to like me.

So I follow the rules. Mow my lawn. Watch my feet to make sure I'm doing it right.

I woke up one day to discover that my bold Isadora Duncan self had given way to a rote, lonely life. Instead of running with the wolves, I found I was crawling with the lemmings. My zany ideas, my outrageous dreams had been left to languish in the crisp green lawns of suburbia.

I don't really know how it happened. I don't know who this "they say" really is. It's like the frog and the water. You can't toss him in when the water's boiling. He'd jump out faster than you could say "french-fried frog legs." But if you turn the heat up slowly, degree by tiny degree, he doesn't even notice he's being

boiled alive.

Likewise, if “they” --whoever “they” is--tried to boil our originality out of us in one fell swoop, we’d put up our dukes immediately. But degree by tiny degree, we agree to conform, abandoning everything that’s fun and original and “authentically us.”

This book is about how I broke free and about how you, too, can jump out of the boiling water. It’s about a five-line invocation that I began using nearly 20 years ago when I first started writing books.

Until I discovered this secret, I’d start book after book, but could never seem to finish. I came up with lots of brilliant ideas, but never could seem to keep the momentum going. Over and over again, I’d set another lofty goal. I was going to write “Hay Ninos,” a book about the U.S. involvement in the Nicaraguan revolution. I

was going to write a TV series about my time in a Missouri commune. I was going to....

....start Monday. Start after my grandpa's funeral. Start when the job quieted down again.

I'm pretty sure you know what I'm talking about. That you, too, have heard the voice, the one that beckons to a higher calling. And I'm even more certain that you've also experienced the many disguises of what I like to call the the Inner Salieri: the procrastination, the perfectionism, the "I'm not good enough's" that are 100 percent guaranteed to start throwing rocks the minute you set out on your path.

I'd like to tell you that I finally knocked that sucker flat. But I would be lying. I still struggle each and every day with my damned Inner Salieri. Yet, I have managed to write 16 books. I have written three plays, all of which have been produced. And, yes, I

finally created that TV series about my time in the Missouri commune.

“How?” I hope you’re asking?

With the three simple tools that I shared earlier.

To this day, I still go head-to-head with my Inner Salieri, nearly every day. But with the help of a higher force, a chorus of muses that provide assistance whenever I show up long enough to listen, I’m able to overcome their constant harangue.

My only job, as I see it, is to sit at the computer and type. The muses’ job is to provide everything else. I’ve learned to rely on them for every single piece: the ideas, the words, even the editors to whom I send my projects. Lucky for me, they’re able to see things from a much wider perspective than I can. With my tiny, human viewfinder, I see only limitations. I see all the reasons I can’t write a book. With their help (and my discipline and faith), I’m able

to leap over that Inner Salieri that continually tells me what a useless, piece of dog doo-doo I am.

Life is not a spectator sport

I've heard that we teach what we want to know. In this case, I'm teaching what I want to do. I want to meet friends in cafes to write. I want to spend Saturday nights painting on walls, hosting Show and Tells and playing charades. I want to hang with other Bohemians, people who value big ideas over big homes. I want to share my dancing, daring, audacious side.

For years, as I said, I denied this side. I focused on this other person, this impostor who wasn't really me. In fact, I was so busy doing affirmations, reading books and trying to heal this broken-down impostor that I sorta forgot that the "real me," the crazy, quirky lightning bug me was the very thing I'd been searching for.

I hope *Create or Die* is the very thing you've been searching

for. It's about making art, yes. But it's also about becoming more, about recapturing that authentic self that many of us abandoned along with the Crayola crayons. Maybe yours isn't as Bohemian or as "far out" as mine (after all, creativity comes in all sorts of packages), but all of us have an authentic self that, over the years, has been broke into thousands of pieces just like our once-favorite blue-green crayon.

In a nutshell, *Create or Die* is an apprenticeship, an actual year-long journey into your creative soul. You may have already decided that you're a writer or a painter or dancer, but I say, "Don't choose. Don't limit. Just do."

Each of the 52 weeks has an inspirational message, a creative project and three or four more suggested "fun stuff."

Yes, it's Richard Simmons for the brain, but, more importantly *Create or Die* is the call to a spiritual path. Not only do

we actively summon the muses, but we trust that those muses will shake us alive, provide the signposts to enlightenment.

Unlike some books that encourage you to uncover all the negative gunk that stops you from creating, this book moves right to the heart: Just do it! Not only are there all kinds of offbeat, original activities like “chalking poems on park sidewalks” and “staging poetry readings around campfires,” but each week you’ll create one major project like a short story, a self-portrait or a song.

One of the main threads running through this book is “you already know how.” You’ve been to enough workshops. You’ve read enough books. Doing art is in your bones, it’s in your make-up. You simply need to show up, listen and take action. The muses will take care of the rest.

Author Bernie Siegel once went through a guided meditation to make contact with his “inner guide.” Being as he was

a medical doctor and a prominent author, he figured he'd get somebody famous, somebody like Moses or Abraham. Instead, he got some guide named Frank.

Well, this time you get a guide named Pam, but I reckon between the two of us, God and our prancing, creative spirits, we can do most anything.

Chapter Four

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

"We must accept that this creative impulse within us is God's creative pulse itself."

– Joseph Chilton Pearce

Before the Renaissance and the age of rationalism, it was common knowledge that great artistry came from outside the artist. The ancient Greeks even had a name for these disembodied entities that body snatched an artist. They called these outside forces "daimons" as in "That Theophylaktos has been writing an awful lot of poetry lately. He must be bewitched by a daimon, lucky dog."

The going term in ancient Rome for this magical force that inhabited an artist was "a genius," but it had a different meaning than the one we use today. A genius, to someone like Julius Caesar,

was an attendant spirit, an unseen companion that delivered messages from the gods. Artists themselves weren't considered geniuses, but merely vessels being put to use by this outside "thing."

Socrates, for example, believed he was tutored by a personal daimon. He considered it a "divine gift" and professed to blindly obey its every indication. In fact, he rarely did anything without consulting it, eventually even offering its guidance to all his friends.

Talk about a comfort. If the piece you're working on sucks, you can always blame it on the "daimon" or "the inner genius." "Hey, I'm just the one taking dictation."

But then the Renaissance came along and the going construct became one in which the individual was placed at the center of everything. Artists, like everybody else, were required to

be rational, grown-up adults. Forget things like magic and angels and disembodied beings delivering divine guidance. That's for children and fools.

Needless to say, the new construct hasn't worked all that well, killing off hundreds of artists who just couldn't live up to the pressure, stymying hundreds more who just can't get started.

In this book, we're going to take a U-turn back to the old construct, to the radical notion that invisible psychic forces are dying to help you with your creative projects. Some people call them muses. Some people call them angels or even God. The name doesn't matter. Asking for their help does.

Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat Pray Love*, says this application to an outside force saved her during the writing of her now-famous memoir. She started invoking the "thing," as she calls

it, on a particularly trying day. The work she was commissioned to write just wasn't flowing.

"I was in the pits of despair," she said. "I was have thoughts like 'This is going to be the worst book ever written.'"

She was even considering dumping the project, trying to figure out how she could repay the advance.

Suddenly, she remembered something Tom Waits once told her. He said that one day while driving on the L.A. freeway, a melody came to him. It was one he liked, one he wanted to copy down as soon as possible. Unfortunately, with both hands on the steering wheel, he wasn't exactly predisposed for dictation. He yelled up at the "thing" and said, "Hey can't you see, I'm busy here. Go bother somebody else."

In remembering that interview with Waits, Gilbert decided she'd appeal to the outside voice, whatever it was. She looked up

from the manuscript and hollered at the corner in her office: “Look, *thing*, you need to show up and do your part. I would like the record to reflect that I’m here for my part of the job. Where are you?”

That simple shift, moving from *her* doing the writing to letting the “thing” produce the manuscript gave us a memoir that has inspired millions.

As she says, “This shift in writing saved me.”

The “thing” will also save you.

I know what most of you think. That the higher forces or God, if you happen to like that word, live millions of miles away and are too busy working on world hunger to help you throw a pot or design a centerpiece. You just can’t buy that the higher forces might actually support you in your wildest dreams.

But here's my response to that: Who do you think it was that planted that dream in your heart anyway? Where do you think that big idea came from? The muses and angels have your back and if you commit to an hour a day and ask for their help, they'll be right behind you with a host of heavenly cheerleaders, fist-bumping all the way. They are as generous as you will let them be.

Madeleine L'Engle once said that every piece of art, whether it is a work of great genius or something very small, came to the artist and whispered, "here I am. Give birth to me."

Weekly project: Come up with the title of your autobiography

The world according to Pam

Rick Bragg called his *All Over But the Shoutin.'* Roy Blount, Jr. called his hilarious memoir of growing up, *Be Sweet: A*

Conditional Love Story. Katharine Hepburn, who happens to be famous enough to get away with it, called hers simply, *Me*. Tina Turner's is *I, Tina*. What are you going to call yours?

More Fun Stuff

Invent a new type of soup.

Name a rock band

Paint your fingernails ten different colors.

You're in good company

Donald Sutherland has made more than 100 films, but he still gets so nervous he throw up before each film begins.

Chapter Five

Ya' gotta believe

"Shiver awake now at the doing of your dreams."

--Bob Savino

In January 1959, a 30-year-old eighth grade dropout from Detroit borrowed \$800 from a family savings plan to buy a house, not an unusual goal for a man of his age. Only this enterprising 30-year-old had his sights set a little higher. He was going to use that unassuming two-story house to start a record company.

The man, of course, is Berry Gordy, the record company is Motown and the plan, well, let's just say that it worked. Between 1959 and 1972, Gordy's Motown released 535 singles, 75 percent of

which made the pop charts. From a recording studio that's barely larger than a king-sized bed, Gordy produced 60 number one hits before he moved to Hollywood and sold Motown to MCA Records for \$61 million.

I tell you this story because it demonstrates the power of opening to a bigger possibility. Berry Gordy could have easily settled for less. He was black at a time when black wasn't yet beautiful. He dropped out of school in eighth grade, had already failed at an upstart boxing career and could neither play an instrument nor read music.

But he had a dream. He wanted to write songs. And if nobody else would produce them, well, he'd just do it himself.

Catching a dream is the point at which all of us must start. We see a vision. We hear a tapping on our heart. We start to wonder if "maybe, just maybe, we might be able to"write a song,

dance a poem, leap into a new way of being. We become willing to say “it IS possible.”

But not even Gordy could have known that when he recruited a 19-year-old Smokey Robinson and his high school quartet, the Matadors (later to become the Miracles), he was launching one of the biggest musical phenomenon of our times.

When we first begin to listen to our dreams, we don't always know where they're leading us. This is good news. If we could see the final outcome, we might get scared off, put on the brakes, think “whoa nelly, that's way too big for me.” So luckily all we have to do for now is take that first step, put that first toe out the door.

The other thing that the Motown phenomenon demonstrates is the wealth of talent that so often goes undiscovered. Had Berry Gordy been content to plug lugnuts at a Detroit auto plant, one of many jobs he tried before starting Motown, he would have never

plucked Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder and hundreds of other poor black kids out of the ghetto. It seems impossible that superstars of their stature might have taken another path. But had Diana Ross not caught a vision, she could very well be just another bag lady on 9th Street; Stevie Wonder, another blind kid on welfare. Thank God, they had the opportunity to tap the creative spirit that was within them.

If Gordy hadn't turned 2648 West Grand Boulevard into a "happening" place to be, "Heard it Through the Grapevine," "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," "I'll Be There" and thousands of other songs would never have been written.

I, for one, would have had a completely different upbringing. If it wasn't for the Four Tops hit, "Reach Out I'll Be There," I'd have never danced with Andy Gilmore at Jim Rinklemeyer's party. I'd have never known he wore Brut cologne,

never known he smelled like mothballs, a discovery that can undoubtedly be traced to the tweed jacket he'd stolen from his older brother's closet, and never known how it felt to be 13 and helplessly smitten. Unfortunately, I lacked the nerve to ever speak to him again.

How many of us lack the nerve to investigate the creative spirit within us? How many of us are on spiritual "welfare" because we haven't caught the vision? The same kind of talent that Gordy found in his ghetto protégés is hidden in the people we walk by every day. It lays hidden because nobody bothered to look, nobody bothered to say, "hey, look what we can do." It lays hidden behind thoughts of unworthiness, behind "masks" that we put on for a good show.

Each and every one of us have that same creative spirit. But, no, you're probably thinking Detroit was different. The list of

superstars goes on and on--the Temps, the Tops, the Vandellas, the Supremes. But you know what? Gordy could have just as easily opened that record company and been just as successful in Cleveland or Chicago or Omaha, Nebraska, for that matter. There are Temps, Tops, Vandellas, Supremes everywhere. There are people that are just as talented, just as musical. The only thing they don't have is Gordy's vision.

This is not to deny the huge talent that existed in Detroit at that time. What they did on that little three-track recording system in Studio A can only be described as the musical equivalent of sitting in the front of the bus.

But it only happened because one man was willing to step up to the plate, was willing to say, "I believe."

Weekly project: Make a self-portrait.

Smile, you're on candid camera

When I made mine, I went to a photo booth, you know those places you find at the mall where you put in a buck and get three poses of yourself. I went in with hats and different costumes (not that I had time to really change them between poses) and made faces.

I blew them up on a copy machine, added graphics and photos and came up with, what I believe was, a unique self-portrait.

And remember Frida Kahlo made a whole career out of painting nothing but her own self-portrait.

MORE FUN STUFF

Create a new kind of pie.

Design a tree house.

You're in Good Company

The Beatles were turned down by producers at Decca Records because "guitar groups were on their way out."

Chapter Six

You already know how

“ Art would be my shield and honesty my spear and to hell with Jack and his close-set eyes.”
--Maya Angelou

The first thing most of us do when we want to pursue a new art is find a class, buy a book, seek out the advice of an “expert.” While there’s certainly a time and place for outside help, that’s not the first place to turn.

When we go outside seeking direction, we create at least two hurdles. The obvious one is the time we waste. Instead of leaping in when the idea is fresh, when its voice demands to be heard, we put

it off, insist that it be patient and wait until we learn how to punctuate our sentences or mix our paint. We ask this burning, passionate idea that wants nothing but to dance and scream to sit quietly outside the door and wait.

But it can't wait. It needs to be heard now. How can you put an exploding volcano on hold? How can you tell a raging river to wait patiently while you learn what a preposition is?

Think of the idea that's knocking on your door as small child. It can't understand that grownups have other things to do.

"But," you insist, "I really don't know how. I have never written an article, let alone a book. I have never created a character, let alone a whole play. I've got to get help."

This may sound like a rational plea. But I assure you, it's only a stall tactic. Sure, your reason for waiting may seem reasonable and mature, but you're dealing with an idea that is

anything but reasonable and mature. In fact, if you do wait, it will become reasonable and mature, but then it's too late. Who wants to see a reasonable and mature sculpture? A reasonable and mature stage play?

The juice, the gas has turned into an adult.

You can polish your skills later--after the idea that's pounding in your skull is aired. Get it down now. Consult with the muses now.

Waiting until you "know how" can take a week if you read a book, a semester if you take a class, a lifetime if you perfect a skill. By then, the idea is stiff, lifeless, nothing but a scab. It has faded like the old gingham curtains hanging in the kitchen window.

Once the fire is gone, we have a great excuse not to write it at all or if we do persist, we get discouraged by the stiffness and wonder where we missed the boat. Guess we should take another

class.

It's imperative that we answer the questions when they're first asked. Otherwise, the question has no choice but to look elsewhere. It must find someone who has the time and the confidence to carry the torch.

Go ahead. Jump in. Get your feet wet. Place your faith in the idea itself. Trust in the story, the dance, the painting. They have the ability to teach you anything you need to know. Within their fiery beat are the questions AND the answers. If you surrender to them, they will take you home.

Sam Shephard, who has written more than 40 plays, even won a Pulitzer prize in 1979 for his play "Buried Child," was 21 when he wrote his first two plays, "Cowboys" and "Rock Garden." As a young artist living in New York, he had no formal theater training and no exposure to dramatic literature. Luckily for him, he

was too young and inexperienced to question whether or not he knew how to write a play. Nobody had told him yet that people don't write a new play every two weeks. So he did. He listened to the fierce male characters playing hopscotch in his head. If he'd have said, "Hey, guys, I hear you, but I'm kinda busy right now with this class I need to take. I'll go to the library tomorrow and see if I can find a book," the American theater scene would be missing 40 controversial and poignant plays. He let the characters and the plays speak. He let them teach him how.

Passion, love, that burning fire that will create your art--not the skills you learn in a book.

Pablo Neruda, the Spanish poet, always said that poetry found him. He didn't read a how-to book. He didn't go to college to study meter and rhyme. The poetry, he says, arrived. His only job was to walk through the portal, shake hands and invite it in.

The art form and the muses that are calling to you have all the answers you will ever need. Don't head off to the bookstore. Don't call the college to see when the next gouache class is. Start now.

Weekly project: Invent a new board game

The Games Gang

Don't laugh. Rob Angel was a waiter until he came up with the board game Pictionary, which in the first six months of national distribution, sold five million copies.

More fun stuff

Make a paper doll of your first boyfriend/girlfriend.

Practice a new walk.

Tape paper to your TV and write down ideas for your own TV show.

You're in good company

Winning the Nobel Prize at age forty-four gave Albert Camus severe writer's block.

Creativity Test

There's the S.A.T. test to see if you're bright enough to get into college, the L.S.A.T. to see if you can make it in law school, the M.C.A.T. that opens doors to med school.

But here, being offered for absolutely no charge, is the very best test I know for measuring creativity in human beings.

Get out your pencil.

Pam Grout's Test of Creativity

1. Are you breathing? Yes_____ No_____

Check your score here.

If you answered "yes" to the above question, you're highly creative.

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