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The classic  
course in  
discovering and  
recovering your  
creative self

# THE ARTIST'S WAY

A Spiritual Path  
to Higher Creativity

JULIA CAMERON

SOUVENIR  
PRESS

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This sourcebook is dedicated to Mark Bryan.  
Mark urged me to write it, helped shape it,  
and co-taught it. Without him it would not exist.



## FOREWORD

How deeply *The Artist's Way* has affected so many people. Back in the early '90s Julia dared to claim that each and every person has within them a source of creativity, that it can be watered and it can bloom. How democratic! How American! That art is not just for the elite, the special few struck by lightning. What she says is liberating and true. There is a hunger out there—it continues to sell at a fast pace and be absorbed into our conscience. I've seen it on display in the obvious places—bookstores, art museums—but I've also seen it for sale on the shelf of a hardware store, a grocery counter, in a pharmacy, and at a map store. This secret of creativity has seeped over into odd nooks and crannies, out of closets, into bare sight.

Julia Cameron is my friend. We share the love of place—one of a writer's primary tools. We knew each other in Taos, New Mexico, where a deep source of our creativity sprung. I know her now also in Santa Fe, walking her dog through the chamisa.

One day when we were together and I was complaining about my life's trajectory, she turned to me with her blue eyes and soft smile and said, "I want to never stop opening up people's lives." And she practices what she preaches, writing plays, musicals, novels—and little known to many, bakes a terrific peach pie. She is also a deep and dedicated listener to a friend's woes.

Julia continues to grow her inner life. People feel this in the book's integrity. May *The Artist's Way* continue to enlighten, march on through the transience of politics, the zigzag shifts in our human life. May it continue to be available for a long, long time.

Natalie Goldberg





## PREFACE

I am seated alone in a cafe, dining solo.

A woman approaches my table.

“Pardon me,” she says, “has anyone ever told you you resemble Julia Cameron?”

Startled, I reply, “I *am* Julia Cameron.”

Now it is the woman’s turn to be surprised.

“Oh my God,” she exclaims, “your book changed my life. It made me a novelist.”

“That’s wonderful,” I tell her, genuinely pleased.

“I bet you hear stories like mine all the time,” the woman says.

“In fact, I do, but it doesn’t take away the thrill.”

In 1992, I published *The Artist’s Way*, a book that I think of as a support kit for artists. Its popularity caught me by surprise. I thought I was writing a book for myself and a handful of friends. Instead, I wrote a book that spoke to millions. It had a central premise—we are all creative—and with the use of a few simple tools, we can all become more creative.

Creativity, I believed, was a spiritual practice. We had only to open ourselves up to the Great Creator working through us. We became channels for spiritual energy to enter the world. Writing, painting, dancing, acting—no matter what form our creativity took, the Great Creator caused us to flourish. And so, encounters like mine in the cafe became commonplace.

The sentence is always the same: “Your book changed my life.”

“No,” I often reply. “You changed your life. You used the tools I laid out for you.”

I think it is important for people to own their own spiritual practice. My toolkit is simple, and it invites practitioners to embrace simplicity. A recent review of my latest book noted that the tools were “simple and repetitive.” I think of this as a good thing. The tools do not change book to book. The same simple tools that worked in *The Artist’s Way* work still, a dozen books later.

In my travels, I encounter practitioners who have used the tools for years. “I’ve done Morning Pages for fifteen years,” a man recently told me. His Morning Pages—three pages of longhand, morning writing, have filled journal after journal. He doesn’t give them up, because they “work.”

A woman tells me the second primary tool, Artist Dates, a once a week, festive, solo expedition, have given her a life of adventure.

Used together, Morning Pages and Artist Dates do transform lives.

“I’ve given your book to my mother and my sister,” a woman tells me at a book signing. “It worked for all of us,” she says. “Now I want you to sign a book for my boyfriend.”

I ask his name, and write the simple phrase, “May our words be friends.”

I trust that the book will “work” for him, too. I have come to rely on the book. I trust that it is indeed life-changing.

“Julia, don’t you get tired of hearing our stories?” I am asked. The answer is no. Creativity is never tiresome. It is always an adventure, one I have been privileged to share.

“I was a very unhappy lawyer,” a Broadway actor tells me. “Then I used your tools. Now I am an actor—and a happy one.”

“I was what you called a ‘shadow artist,’” a thriving director tells me. “I was a producer until I used your toolkit, and emerged as a director. I’ve worked with your book three times, and each time has led to a breakthrough. Thank you.”

“Your tools felt natural to me,” a fine arts photographer tells me. “I used to create in spurts, but your tools have given me consistent productivity.”

“Before using *The Artist’s Way*, my life was very dramatic,” a poet tells me. “I was always waiting for inspiration to strike like lightning. Now I know that my creativity is a steady flow. I write poems regularly, and without high drama. The poems I write are just as good as any I wrote before.”

Sentiments like these make my years of teaching worthwhile. I am delighted to have been of service. I receive heartfelt letters thanking me for my work and telling me of the changes it has wrought.

Occasionally, the thank-yous are more public. Novelist Patricia Cornwell thanked me in the dedication of her thriller *Trace*. Musician Pete Townsend cited *The Artist’s Way* in his autobiography *Who Am I*. While it is thrilling to have celebrity endorsements, the book is perhaps at its best helping the lesser-knowns—and the help isn’t restricted to creativity issues.

“Julia, I was drunk in the outback. Now I’m sober, and a Hollywood screenwriter,” one practitioner wrote me. It is not uncommon for users of the pages to face down difficult issues such as sobriety, childhood trauma, and obesity. The pages urge honesty in facing down demons.

Last fall I taught in Sedona a class of ninety people. On the second night, a meeting was convened for all who felt the impact of *The Artist's Way* on their well-being. Person after person cited breakthroughs to clarity and health. When it was my turn to share, I told the group that their recovery gave me great pride. I was grateful for their acknowledgement; grateful, too, for the many and varied strides they had taken toward mental, physical, and spiritual health.

“Julia,” I am sometimes asked, “aren’t you afraid you are unblocking a lot of bad art?”

“No,” I reply. The opposite seems to be the case. The unblocked art is often very fine, and I find myself thinking, “how could they have not known they were an artist?” And yet, many people do not know until they encounter my book.

Many artists have never received critical early encouragement. As a result, they may not know they are artists at all. Artists love other artists. Shadow artists are gravitating to their rightful tribe, but cannot yet claim their birthright. I urge them to step forward out of the shadows and into the sunlight of creativity.

Most of the time, when we are blocked in an area of our life, it is because we feel safer that way. The toolkit lends practitioners a sense of safety. As they learn to take small risks in their Morning Pages, they are led to larger risks. A step at a time, they emerge as artists. It has been a quarter of a century since the tools were first published. It gives me great satisfaction that the book continues to sell, and sell well. It reinforces my belief that we are all creative and have a hunger for further creativity.

# INTRODUCTION

When people ask me what I do, I usually answer, “I’m a writer-director and I teach these creativity workshops.”

The last one interests them.

“How can you teach creativity?” they want to know. Defiance fights with curiosity on their faces.

“I can’t,” I tell them. “I teach people to *let* themselves be creative.”

“Oh. You mean we’re all creative?” Now disbelief and hope battle it out.

“Yes.”

“You *really* believe that?”

“Yes.”

“So what do you do?”

This book is what I do. For a decade now, I have taught a spiritual workshop aimed at freeing people’s creativity. I have taught artists and nonartists, painters and filmmakers and homemakers and lawyers—anyone interested in living more creatively through practicing an art; even more broadly, anyone interested in practicing the art of creative living. While using, teaching, and sharing tools I have found, devised, divined, and been handed, I have seen blocks dissolved and lives transformed by the simple process of engaging the Great Creator in discovering and recovering our creative powers.

“The Great Creator? That sounds like some Native American god. That sounds too Christian, too New Age, too ...” Stupid? Simple-minded? Threatening? ... I know. Think of it as an exercise in open-mindedness. Just think, “Okay, Great Creator, *whatever that is*,” and keep reading. Allow yourself to experiment with the idea there might be a Great Creator and you might get some kind of use from it in freeing your own creativity.

Because *The Artist’s Way* is, in essence, a spiritual path, initiated and practiced through creativity, this book uses the word *God*. This may be volatile for some of you—conjuring old, unworkable, unpleasant, or simply unbelievable ideas about God as you were raised to understand “him.” Please be open-minded.

Remind yourself that to succeed in this course, no god concept is necessary. In fact, many of our commonly held god concepts get in the way. Do not allow semantics to become one more block for you.

When the word *God* is used in these pages, you may substitute the thought *good orderly direction* or *flow*. What we are talking about is a creative energy. *God* is useful shorthand for many of us, but so is *Goddess, Mind, Universe, Source, and Higher Power* ... The

The primary imagination  
I hold to be the Living Power.

SAMUEL TAYLOR  
COLERIDGE

—

point is not what you name it. The point is that you try using it. For many of us, thinking of it as a form of spiritual electricity has been a very useful jumping-off place.

By the simple, scientific approach of experimentation and observation, a workable connection with the flow of good orderly direction can easily be established. It is not the intent of these pages to engage in explaining, debating, or defining that flow. You do not need to understand electricity to use it.

Do not call it God unless that is comfortable for you. There seems to be no need to name it unless that name is a useful shorthand for what you experience. Do not pretend to believe when you do not. If you remain forever an atheist, agnostic—so be it. You will still be able to experience an altered life through working with these principles.

I have worked artist-to-artist with potters, photographers, poets, screenwriters, dancers, novelists, actors, directors—and with those who knew only what they dreamed to be or who only dreamed of being somehow more creative. I have seen blocked painters paint, broken poets speak in tongues, halt and lame and maimed writers racing through final drafts. I have come to not only believe but know:

No matter what your age or your life path, whether making art is your career or your hobby or your dream, it is not too late or too egotistical or too selfish or too silly to work on your creativity. One fifty-year-old student who “always wanted to write” used these tools and emerged as a prize-winning playwright. A judge used these tools to fulfill his lifelong dreams of sculpting. Not all students become full-time artists as a result of the course. In fact, many full-time artists report that they have become more creatively rounded into full-time people.

Through my own experience—and that of countless others that I have shared—I have come to believe that creativity is our true nature, that blocks are an unnatural thwarting of a process at once as normal and as miraculous as the blossoming of a flower at the end of a slender green stem. I have found this process of making spiritual contact to be both simple and straightforward.

If you are creatively blocked—and I believe all of us are to some

Man is asked to make of himself what he is supposed to become to fulfill his destiny.

PAUL TILLICH

—

I myself do nothing. The Holy Spirit accomplishes all through me.

WILLIAM BLAKE

—

extent—it is possible, even probable, that you can learn to create more freely through your willing use of the tools this book provides. Just as doing Hatha Yoga stretches alters consciousness when all you are doing is stretching, doing the exercises in this book alters consciousness when “all” you are doing is writing and playing. Do these things and a breakthrough will follow—whether you believe in it or not. Whether you call *it* a spiritual awakening or not.

In short, the theory doesn’t matter as much as the practice itself does. What you are doing is creating pathways in your consciousness through which the creative forces can operate. Once you agree to clearing these pathways, your creativity emerges. In a sense, your creativity is like your blood. Just as blood is a fact of your physical body and nothing you invented, creativity is a fact of your spiritual body and nothing that you must invent.

## MY OWN JOURNEY

I began teaching the creativity workshops in New York. I taught them because I was *told* to teach them. One minute I was walking in the West Village on a cobblestone street with beautiful afternoon light. The next minute I suddenly knew that I should begin teaching people, groups of people, how to unblock. Maybe it was a wish exhaled on somebody else’s walk. Certainly Greenwich Village must contain a greater density of artists—blocked and otherwise—than nearly anyplace else in America.

“I need to unblock,” someone may have breathed out.

“I know how to do it,” I may have responded, picking up the cue. My life has always included strong internal directives. *Marching orders*, I call them.

In any case, I suddenly knew that I did know how to unblock people and that I was meant to do so, starting then and there with the lessons I myself had learned.

Where did the lessons come from?

In 1978, in January, I stopped drinking. I had never thought drinking made me a writer, but now I suddenly thought not

Why indeed must “God” be a noun? Why not a verb ... the most active and dynamic of all?

MARY DALY  
THEOLOGIAN

—

In the brush doing what it’s doing, it will stumble on what one couldn’t do by oneself.

ROBERT MOTHERWELL

—



drinking might make me stop. In my mind, drinking and writing went together like, well, scotch and soda. For me, the trick was always getting past the fear and onto the page. I was playing beat the clock—trying to write before the booze closed in like fog and my window of creativity was blocked again.

By the time I was thirty and abruptly sober, I had an office on the Paramount lot and had made a whole career out of that kind of creativity. Creative in spasms. Creative as an act of will and ego. Creative on behalf of others. Creative, yes, but in spurts, like blood from a severed carotid artery. A decade of writing and all I knew was how to make these headlong dashes and hurl myself, against all odds, at the wall of whatever I was writing. If creativity was spiritual in any sense, it was only in its resemblance to a crucifixion. I fell upon the thorns of prose. I bled.

If I could have continued writing the old, painful way, I would certainly still be doing it. The week I got sober, I had two national magazine pieces out, a newly minted feature script, and an alcohol problem I could not handle any longer.

I told myself that if sobriety meant no creativity I did not want to be sober. Yet I recognized that drinking would kill me *and* the creativity. I needed to learn to write sober—or else give up writing entirely. Necessity, not virtue, was the beginning of my spirituality. I was forced to find a new creative path. And that is where my lessons began.

I learned to turn my creativity over to the only god I could believe in, the god of creativity, the life force Dylan Thomas called “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” I learned to get out of the way and let that creative force work through me. I learned to just show up at the page and write down what I heard. Writing became more like eavesdropping and less like inventing a nuclear bomb. It wasn’t so tricky, and it didn’t blow up on me anymore. I didn’t have to be in the mood. I didn’t have to take my emotional temperature to see if inspiration was pending. I simply wrote. No negotiations. Good, bad? None of my business. I wasn’t doing it. By resigning as the self-conscious author, I wrote freely.

In retrospect, I am astounded I could let go of the drama of being a suffering artist. Nothing dies harder than a bad idea. And few ideas

The position of the artist is humble. He is essentially a channel.

PIET MONDRIAN

—

are worse than the ones we have about art. We can charge so many things off to our suffering-artist identity: drunkenness, promiscuity, fiscal problems, a certain ruthlessness or self-destructiveness in matters of the heart. We all know how broke-crazy-promiscuous-unreliable artists are. And if they don't have to be, then what's my excuse?

The idea that I could be sane, sober, and creative terrified me, implying, as it did, the possibility of personal accountability. "You mean if I have these gifts, I'm supposed to use them?" Yes.

Providentially, I was sent another blocked writer to work with—and on—at this time. I began to teach him what I was learning. (Get out of the way. Let *it* work through you. Accumulate pages, not judgments.) He, too, began to unblock. Now there were two of us. Soon I had another "victim," this one a painter. The tools worked for visual artists, too.

This was very exciting to me. In my grander moments, I imagined I was turning into a creative cartographer, mapping a way out of confusion for myself and for whoever wanted to follow. I *never* planned to become a teacher. I was only angry I'd never had a teacher myself. Why did I have to learn what I learned the way I learned it: all by trial and error, all by walking into walls? We artists should be more teachable, I thought. Shortcuts and hazards of the trail could be flagged.

These were the thoughts that eddied with me as I took my afternoon walks—enjoying the light off the Hudson, plotting what I would write next. Enter the marching orders: I was to teach.

Within a week, I was offered a teaching position and space at the New York Feminist Art Institute—which I had never heard of. My first class—blocked painters, novelists, poets, and filmmakers—assembled itself. I began teaching them the lessons that are now in this book. Since that class there have been many others, and many more lessons as well.

*The Artist's Way* began as informal class notes mandated by my partner, Mark Bryan. As word of mouth spread, I began mailing out packets of materials. A peripatetic Jungian, John Giannini, spread word of the techniques wherever he lectured—seemingly everywhere. Requests for materials always followed. Next, the creation spirituality network got word of the work, and people wrote

God must become an activity  
in our consciousness.

JOEL S. GOLDSMITH

—

in from Dubuque, British Columbia, Indiana. Students materialized all over the globe. “I am in Switzerland with the State Department. Please send me . . .” So I did.

The packets expanded and the number of students expanded. Finally, as the result of some *very* pointed urging from Mark—“Write it *all* down. You can help a lot of people. It should be a *book*”—I began formally to assemble my thoughts. I wrote and Mark, who was by this time my co-teacher and taskmaster, told me what I had left out. I wrote more and Mark told me what I had *still* left out. He reminded me that I had seen plenty of miracles to support my theories and urged me to include those, too. I put on the page what I had been putting into practice for a decade.

The resulting pages emerged as a blueprint for do-it-yourself recovery. Like mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or the Heimlich maneuver, the tools in this book are intended as lifesavers. Please use them and pass them on.

Many times, I’ve heard words to this effect: “Before I took your class, I was completely separate from my creativity. The years of bitterness and loss had taken their toll. Then, gradually, the miracle started to happen. I have gone back to school to get my degree in theater, I’m auditioning for the first time in years, I’m writing on a steady basis—and, most important of all, I finally feel comfortable calling myself an artist.”

I doubt I can convey to you the feeling of the miraculous that I experience as a teacher, witnessing the before and after in the lives of students. Over the duration of the course, the sheer physical transformation can be startling, making me realize that the term *enlightenment* is a literal one. Students’ faces often take on a glow as they contact their creative energies. The same charged spiritual atmosphere that fills a great work of art can fill a creativity class. In a sense, as we are creative beings, our lives become our work of art.

