



THE CREATIVE SEED

LILIAN WISSINK BA GradDipCounselling

HOW TO ENRICH YOUR LIFE THROUGH CREATIVITY

'... the perfect guide for anyone who has an interest in exploring some form of creative expression [with] a host of strategies to keep you inspired and on track.'

— Clean Eating magazine

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Empower

practical self-help tools by leading experts

In loving memory of my inventive,
creative Pappie, Antonius

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Preface

IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

- Do you feel there is more to discover about yourself?
- Do you have an inkling that there is some form of creative expression you would like to try? Writing? Singing? Painting? Playing a musical instrument? Sculpture? Perhaps an avenue of craft, such as woodturning, leadlighting, ceramics or creative knitting and crocheting?
- Do you regret not having pursued an earlier creative interest?
- Do you remember the enjoyment of being creative and playful when you were younger and want to tap into that pleasure again?
- Do you already have an interest in or a fascination with some form of creative expression but are not sure how to go about developing it?
- Do you get discouraged when the challenges of life seem to get in the way of you moving forward in your creative expression?
- Are you active in a particular creative domain but experience self-doubt, frustration and other obstacles that thwart your progress?

If you said 'Yes' to any of these questions then it's time for you to let *The Creative SEED* guide you on your path. I will take you on

a journey to explore your creative-self and find ways to expand your current sense of what you believe you can do. This journey is lifelong and once embraced will enrich and inspire you. Each chapter has questions and exercises to help you move forward. These exercises are designed to increase your self-awareness — the key to unlocking your creative spark. What you discover will help you to deal with any obstacles that get in your way. All creative and performing artists experience obstacles, no matter the stage of their journey — the challenges of self-doubt, fear, anxiety, procrastination and frustration. What makes you successful is your determination to keep going, to keep learning and staying active in your creative expression. You'll learn helpful ways to handle challenges and will find that your creative skills will reach a new, exciting dimension you had not thought possible.

A BRIEF OUTLINE

Chapter One in Part One is written especially for readers who are not sure about the area of creativity they would like to explore. You'll have the opportunity to discover what is likely to be exciting and satisfying. Even if you are established in an avenue of creative expression, this chapter provides insight into other forms of creativity you might enjoy. Myths surrounding creativity are also discussed as a means to understanding how beliefs influence your approach to creative expression. The last chapter (Chapter Four) in Part One provides a clear overview of what the creative process is all about. Whether you write, sing, paint or sculpt; whether you knit, turn wood or make pots — in all creative pursuits, you will go through stages, face challenges and solve problems along the way.

Part Two helps you to explore and develop your creative expression. Presented in this section are ways to support and

guide you through the common ups and downs of the creative process so that you can reach realistic and exciting goals.

You will read stories of people who are just like you — discovering and nurturing their creative-self. These are people I have met over the years in my profession as a counselling psychologist and in workshops and classes that I have taken as a developing artist.

PROVEN STRATEGIES THAT MOVE YOU FORWARD

The strategies in this book are based on sound, well-researched theories of Cognitive Behaviour Theory (CBT), Transactional Analysis (TA) and mindfulness. A major premise of CBT is that the way we think influences how we feel and behave. This book provides straightforward strategies to help you deal with any unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that thwart your potential. TA also underpins my writing. This theory is particularly helpful in understanding the different aspects of our personality and how they interact. And thirdly, the philosophy of mindfulness helps you to become more present-centred rather than caught up in worries about the past or concerns for the future. At the core of mindfulness is self-acceptance and compassion, both crucial in any part of our lives, including our journey into creativity.

KEEPING A JOURNAL

Keeping a journal is a helpful tool. An unlined art diary is ideal for this purpose. I hope you will use it to do the exercises offered to you throughout this book. You can express the feelings that bubble away at various times and write down ideas, desires or frustrations. You can write poetry or prose, sketch or doodle. Your journal can be a history of your experience and a place to honour

your strengths. Keep it private, as this will encourage you to feel free to express yourself in whatever way you choose.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

There are several different ways you can read this book. You could dip into it at random, but I suggest you read it from start to finish and notice the chapters and exercises to which you particularly relate. Then come back and read more slowly, giving yourself time to do the exercises. Each exercise is valuable in helping you to understand yourself more clearly and find ways to move forward creatively. However, don't feel you have to do every exercise in the order it is presented. Go with your gut feeling. You will know, for example, if you need particular help with procrastination or perhaps in dealing with stress in your life. So go with what you believe will be most helpful to begin with. This is a guidebook and a workbook. Keep coming back to it. Use it time and time again to inspire you to keep going in your creative life.

So let's begin.

PART ONE

DISCOVERING YOUR CREATIVE-SELF

Chapter One

WHO IS MY CREATIVE-SELF?

*Imagination is the beginning of creation.
You imagine what you desire,
you will what you imagine
and at last you create what you will.*

— GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

You may already enjoy an avenue of creative expression or perhaps you have never seriously considered the idea but now feel tempted to explore the possibilities. Maybe secretly you would like to look into some form of creativity but you keep thinking it's not that important or you don't have the time. This chapter takes you through some exercises that will provide ideas to inspire you. You have the opportunity to discover something unique about yourself and see that creativity is already a part of your life. So set aside some quiet time to explore the answers in your journal. If you are not used to journalling in this way,

just start with a few words, ideas or symbols. As time goes on it's likely you will feel more comfortable and see that expressing your thoughts and feelings helps you to understand yourself better and clarify things you want to do.

YOUR SKILLS AND QUALITIES

We all have skills and personal qualities that we develop over time. Maybe you work in a supermarket and know how to chat to customers, check through groceries or manage the ordering of stock. Perhaps you have reared children, taught at tertiary level, driven a bus or taxi, or worked in a hospital or successful business and have fine-tuned a whole host of skills to carry out your work. Not just your skills, but also your unique qualities have helped you in many different roles. These qualities may include persistence, time management, compassion, efficiency, determination and many other attributes that you have developed over the years. It might surprise you to learn that you can draw on any or all of these qualities to expand into a new area of your life.

We create every day. For example, we cook a delicious dinner, write a business proposal or fix a leaking roof. How we go about these everyday tasks gives us insight into what is needed for other forms of creativity. You may be asking how fixing a leaking roof can be anything like learning to play the guitar or learning how to paint. Well, lots of things are common to both: you need to have the tools, set aside time, think about what to do, have a go, fix up your mistakes and maybe ask for help. For now, acknowledge that you already accomplish many things that require thought, imagination, experimentation and determination.

Let's read about Sarah and see how she acknowledged her skills and qualities. Then it will be your turn.

SARAH

Sarah is a part-time physiotherapist. She is happily married, with three children who have now all left home. Over the past couple of years she has noticed periods of feeling down and dissatisfied about her life. She wants to find something enjoyable that is different from her usual activities. She isn't really sure what she would like to do, but she is willing to give herself some time to think about the possibilities. When Sarah thinks about her skills and qualities, she remembers how she went about redecorating the lounge room on a modest budget. This is what she writes in her journal:

Skills:

- I researched what colours went well with my favourite colour yellow that I wanted to highlight in the room.
- I experimented with different shades by painting them on boards.
- I learnt how to make cushion covers and enlisted the help of my sister.
- I invested in some good quality brushes to help me do the job.
- I asked for feedback about my idea to do a feature wall.

It is a little harder for Sarah to think of her personal qualities because of her modesty. But after a while she realises that in order to redecorate the lounge room she drew on the following qualities:

Qualities:

- Imagination to play with different ideas.
- Ingenuity in deciding colour scheme.
- Courage to take risks and ask for help.
- Determination to keep going even when it all seemed too hard.
- Playfulness in making some funky looking cushions.

After Sarah finished this exercise she felt more confident that she could try something new, like drawing and painting. She realised that she had developed lots of skills over the years. Although not successful straightaway, with time and determination she accomplished what she set out to do — and she had fun and enjoyment along the way! You can do this too. Now it's your turn to think about the skills and qualities you already have.

YOUR SKILLS AND QUALITIES

Think about something you have accomplished recently. It can be big or small. Give yourself some time and in your journal write about the skills and qualities that helped you achieve what you set out to do. Don't be bashful! Some people find it difficult to acknowledge their positives. If this is true for you, begin with a few words such as: 'I made a start by ...'

How did you go? You can come back to this exercise at any time. You might find that things come to you as you get on with your day and you give yourself time to reflect. But keep coming back to it. Once you explore one accomplishment why not find another? This exercise is valuable in boosting your creative self-esteem.

The next two exercises are adapted from a book called *Live the Life You Love* by a careers counsellor, Barbara Sher. These exercises help you identify activities and experiences that uniquely give you pleasure, enjoyment and a buzz for life. Why is this important? Well, it can propel you to make choices about what you might like to explore creatively.

CREATIVITY IN CHILDHOOD

In your journal, write down the different activities you enjoyed when you were little. What did you love to do? These activities can be big or small, from reading books to putting on plays for family and friends, from making a billycart to riding your bike, from building things with wood to playing in autumn leaves. Don't censor yourself when you write your list. Be free and jot down everything you can think of. Write down the activities on one side of the page and on the other side write down what it was about each activity you liked. What senses were stimulated? For example, if you enjoyed making mud pies you might say something like: 'I liked the feeling of mud and moisture squelching through my fingers. I liked decorating the pies with leaves and berries.' Or if you enjoyed playing with puppets you might say something like: 'I liked how a story would unfold with the puppets talking to each other. I liked the excitement of seeing how it would end.' Get the idea? Have a play with your list and see what you come up with.

Sometimes it's difficult to remember our childhood. If this is the case for you, that's okay. The other exercises in this chapter will also provide opportunities to explore possible creative paths.

Here are just a few of the things that Sarah wrote:

As a child:

Activity	Why I liked it
Drawing and colouring in	Making things look pretty
Dress-ups	Fantasy, making up stories
Made-up plays	Liked pretending, fun
Dancing	Felt free and happy
Swinging on the swing and singing	Felt like I was in another world
Watching father develop photos	Felt magical, something appears out of nothing

After completing this exercise you may feel a sense of nostalgia or even a sense of loss. Or you may feel excited or inspired to feel the pleasure of these past activities once again. Gently accept whatever feelings emerge. It can be helpful to write about your feelings in your journal or to draw or doodle. Perhaps you discovered some interest or fascination that has been lost for some years. How about choosing a couple of activities on your list and trying them out again now, as an adult? Just for fun! See how you feel.

CREATIVITY IN ADULTHOOD

Write down the things you love to do now and that you have enjoyed over the years of being an adult, even if you haven't

had a lot of time to engage in these activities. Once again, don't censor yourself. They might be social activities such as dancing, or aspects of your work such as organising a function, or playing sport. Again, write down the activities on one side of the page and then on the other side write down what it is that you particularly like about doing this activity.

Here are some of Sarah's examples:

As an adult:

Activity	Why I liked it
Making bread	Sense of accomplishment
Running	Felt strong and independent
Singing	Liked being expressive, joyful
Acting	Fantasy, being someone else
Sewing and knitting	Making something useful out of material

When you have completed the last two exercises, take some time to look at *why* you enjoyed the activities in your childhood and as an adult. Do you notice any neglected pleasures or ones you have just forgotten about? Can you notice any themes? Sarah realised that when she was young and again later as an adult she enjoyed activities where she used her imagination and could be expressive.

Whatever you discovered by doing these two exercises I hope you are starting to gather a stronger picture of what you might like to explore. What we enjoy and value influences the life

choices we make. Sometimes we get sidetracked into activities and even careers because of expectations from others or society. Or perhaps we have a heightened sense of duty or need to conform. Now it's time to do something that reflects your inner drive.

Values

Values are the important principles that guide our life. They include personal qualities and strengths we respect within ourselves and other people, and also the qualities we wish to develop. Values echo how we want to function as a human being and they give meaning and purpose to our lives. Your values need to be in line with your creative interests, so it's important to think about your values as you explore and develop your creative expression.

Values are different to goals. Goals are specific things that we want to achieve, and we will focus on goals in later chapters. Values guide us in making decisions and achieving our goals. We often don't give much thought to our values but they run deep within us. If we live our life outside our value system we are likely to become unhappy and dissatisfied. This is what happened to Tan.

TAN

Tan immigrated to Australia with his family from Thailand when he was a teenager. He had always been encouraged by his parents to work hard and earn good money. He followed their advice and worked in a bank. Tan is a brilliant creative problem solver and inspires those around him. Management, however, didn't acknowledge his creative spark. Slowly his zest for his work diminished.

Besides valuing creativity in the workplace, Tan recently acknowledged other deeply held values: his musicality and love of composition. He had pushed these values aside but eventually he decided to take a risk and undertake a degree in music, despite his parents' concerns. He realised that working in the financial sector was gradually depressing him. It took courage to make such a change, particularly as it meant leaving a well-paid job. Although Tan is only halfway through his course, his enthusiasm for life has returned and he is excited about his future.

The following exercise helps you think about your values and encourages you to reflect on whether you are living your life according to these values. This exercise also helps you to link your values to any creative path that you've thought about. If you are already pursuing a creative life, hopefully you will see that these values are embedded in your creative expression and other parts of your life.

PERSONAL CREATIVE VALUES

There are many values and below is a list of a few. Read through the list and tick the ones that are the most important to you, especially in regard to your creativity. Feel free to add any other values you like to the list.

<i>contribution</i>	<i>expanding knowledge</i>	<i>wealth</i>
<i>accomplishment</i>	<i>contribution to society</i>	<i>fitness</i>
<i>adventure</i>	<i>fun</i>	<i>truth</i>
<i>beauty</i>	<i>authenticity</i>	<i>ideas</i>
<i>competition</i>	<i>freedom</i>	<i>history</i>
<i>courage</i>	<i>acknowledgment</i>	<i>challenge</i>