



Unleash Your Creativity

HOW TO RECLAIM YOUR CREATIVE SPARK
AND START MAKING THINGS YOU LOVE

by Pat Aitcheson

You need to create

You were born with creative gifts. We are born creative and we are happiest when we use and develop our creativity.

Are you successful? You have a job or profession, a family, a social life, some or all of the conventional trappings of society's approval. Yet, you have a nagging sense of discontent. You wonder if there's more to life. Making it in the world can leave you feeling hollow, because it only uses part of your talents and interests.

Maybe you've forgotten or lost that part of yourself. Maybe you tell yourself it doesn't matter, because you can point to your achievements and possessions. You made it.

Now what?

How would it feel to look back at your life, feeling regret where you could have had fulfilment? At the end of our lives we regret the things we didn't do more than the things we did. Failing to realise your potential is like leaving money on the table of life. You can't take it with you.

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.
Maya Angelou

The Biblical parable of the talents tells this exact story. Our gifts are meant to be used, to bring value to our lives and to the world at large. Stifling your talents, no matter how small or esoteric, eats away at your spirit. It is a kind of slow death, unseen and unacknowledged, that taints daily life and spoils the things you used to enjoy.

The Challenges

Yes but I can't do this, you say. I have commitments and limitations and reasons not to follow my creative heart. I'm not a flaky artist, I'm a serious adult with things to do. Maybe other people can, but I can't.

Or you're feeling angry that I could even suggest such a thing. The thing you want so badly is being dangled in front of you, but your nose is pressed against the outside of the shop front. You can never have a creative life.

You are sceptical, and I understand why. Let's look at some of your objections.

It's too late

There is no time limit on following a dream or growing as a human. A man graduated from medical school in Romania at the age of 66. The world's oldest college student Nola Ochs graduated aged 95. She lived another nine years with the satisfaction of having a degree, after decades wanting one.

Clearly you cannot become a prima ballerina if you start ballet aged 45. But you can become stronger and more graceful through barre work. You can improve your focus by training. **You can practise and improve, at any age.**

I don't have time

We all get 168 hours every week and 8760 hours each year. Some of us have more commitments and less energy than others. But you can find time to do what you want. That might mean giving up something else, like endless TV, or something you don't enjoy anyway. It certainly means setting priorities.

If you are a successful adult, you already have the skills of time management and goal setting. You can use those skills to make space for creativity.

Creativity is silly

Why do people write or paint without getting paid? Why do people spend weekends looking for the perfect antique lamp to complete their room? Why aren't they doing something worthwhile? The world forces us to leave the curiosity and free spirit of childhood behind. In the process we lose something essential; a spark of vitality that puts a spring in the step and gets us out of bed, eager for the day ahead.

The rise of observational TV has sapped our collective will to be active. We watch people decorate houses or bake cakes or sing in a choir, rather than participating. Life is more than transactions, buying and selling. Instead of consuming, try creating for a change. It is infinitely more satisfying.

You can't stop time, but you can make the most of it. Be childlike. Allow yourself to play.

We don't stop playing because we grow old: we grow old because we stop playing.

George Bernard Shaw

I'm not good enough

Here is the adult, judging, left brain talking. Often it's the voice of an authority figure from earlier in your life like a teacher or parent. It might be the voice of an envious peer or sibling, buried deep in your memories but resonating to this day. You were beaten down and turned onto what was considered a more suitable path.

Maybe like me, you were told that art did not mix with science. You were taught that clever people become lawyers and doctors, not musicians and painters.

Some people are more talented, more experienced, more advanced in your chosen field. That will always be true and it doesn't matter. You are good enough to start anything. Once you start, you are better than everyone who is passively consuming rather than doing.

Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.

Arthur Ashe

The only measure you should use is against where you were yesterday. Are you progressing, challenging yourself, refusing to settle for the easy route? Then you are living.

It's too hard to change

Change can be scary and painful. It's also exhilarating and necessary. Without the caterpillar trusting its chrysalis stage, there would be no butterfly. You have already survived change in your life. It is unavoidable and it helps us grow as people. Change does not have to be agonising. Taken in small, controlled steps, it can be enjoyable.

You don't have to abandon your entire life and starve in a garret either. That stereotype of the artistic life has little basis in reality. Reclaiming your creativity can and should integrate with the life you already have.

I'm not sure...

When you read this, do you feel a flicker of excitement that you immediately dismiss?

Is there something you always wanted to do?

Did you give up an interest after finishing school or college because it didn't fit with grown-up ambitions?

Then this is for you. If you hang out with people who follow your interest and support them from the sidelines, this is for you.

Rediscover your spark

You already know what you want to do. **You already know what you want to do.**

It's the thing that makes your heart sing.

You lose track of time doing it, so you avoid it.

You read articles and browse programmes or books about it.

You are very knowledgeable about it.

You started doing it and quickly gave up again

You watch other people do it with a faint sense of longing.

It came naturally to you without formal instruction.

Maybe your spark is buried somewhat deeper and none of this seems to apply.

Try these:

You encourage your children to do it and your fingers itch to have a go.

Someone told you not to waste time doing it.

You did it when you were younger.

You are irrationally angry when someone like you does it.

You are a patron giving regular financial support to an artist who is not a friend or relative.

Still not sure? Fill in the blanks.

When I was a kid I loved to.....

I really wish I could.....

When I retire, then I'll start.....

When I got married/had kids/started work, I put away all my.....

One last question. You won the lottery, woo-hoo! You paid off your loans, bought a nice house, got your family situated, took three holidays. Now your days stretch ahead. You don't have to work to survive.

What do you do with your time, now that finances are no barrier? That smile that came to your face just now, what sparked it? If your security doesn't depend on the result...

What would you do?

Listen to your body. The spontaneous half-smile, the skip in your pulse, the little sinking feeling are all instinctive responses that bypass your rational mind, if only for a moment. That's what a gut feeling is. You may have trained yourself to ignore it for many years. Now I ask you to pay attention.

Other people don't want you to follow your dream

Now that you have your spark, *guard it carefully*. A spark can start a forest fire, but it can be blown out by a harsh wind. Don't announce that you're going to learn the ukulele or restore a vintage motor just yet. You need to have a plan, and the confidence it gives you will stand between you and the inevitable criticism coming your way.

You might get scorn that sounds eerily like a parent or teacher. The speaker is ***trying to give you a reality check***.

What a waste of time

You can't make money doing that

But what is it for?

You can't neglect your family/work for that

What makes you think you're any good?

Or ***envy, sometimes veiled as concern***.

At our age? As long as you think you're up to it...

You don't want to make a fool of yourself

Must be nice to have so much time/money to spare

Isn't that a bit selfish?

I gave all that up because I had to be responsible

People don't want to be reminded of their own forgotten dreams. Your potential success feels like a rebuke to them for settling, so they pull you down. If you put crabs in a bucket, any crab that tries to get out is dragged back down by its fellows. They all stay and suffer together.

If you want to be different, you must leave the herd behind and take a different route. You are not better than them. But you could be happier, and that's what counts.

Be aware that these criticisms will get louder the further you move away from the norm. The voices of parental figures are often deeply ingrained in our psyches. Take a moment to think; who is speaking, do they have a fair point, and should you adjust course? You decide because you are in charge now.

Nurturing your spark

This baby spark needs love and care so it can grow. At this point you might be tempted to set goals and produce an action plan. But this is meant to be fun, not work. First find your thing, then find time to do the thing, then gather resources. Then you can start.

Time is the one non renewable and finite resource in the world. You cannot make new time. **But you can find time you're not using effectively, and re-deploy it.**

Start with a chart showing each hour over seven days, like this one. Fill in all your essential activities like sleep, work, travel, caring responsibilities, and self care. Add chores, exercise, and social commitments. Now look at the time that's left.

Are you watching three or more hours of TV every night, as many people do? What about weekends? Are there chunks of time that you don't know how you fill?

Look at them critically. You're searching for enough time to follow your passion, perhaps 30-60 minute blocks. Or you might prefer to have a three hour block once a week. It depends on the activity.

Writing can fit into tiny blocks of time and is better little and often than occasional. The same goes for anything demanding regular practice, whether a new language or a new musical instrument. A big project like rebuilding a vehicle is better in larger blocks, but even so some jobs might break into little chunks.

Some people need to get up earlier to find their time. Others need to step away from their smartphones and use lunch or commuting time. John Grisham wrote his first bestselling legal thriller in the gaps between cases, while working long hours as a lawyer.

Still others need to set their DVRs to record and watch programmes offline, thus taking back control of their schedule without missing their favourite shows.

You're not giving up the important things. You're allocating time to what is truly important.

Schedule your creative time

Now, schedule your creative time. Put a red box around it. Guard it. Act like it's important, and people around you will respond. If you feel guilty, remember it's a tiny bit of time each week. Two hours a week is just 1% of the total. You're worth that much, and more.

Get used to scheduling it, and get others used to your schedule.

Take one step right now

Take one small step towards your goal. Do not be sidetracked by peripheral acts like buying equipment or researching software. Use whatever you have to hand *right now*.

Want to write? Write a haiku on the back of an envelope, describe the weather outside, type it into the Notes function of your phone.

Want to draw? Doodle a bird or an elephant on the back of an envelope. Borrow your child's pencil and draw your hand.

Want to sing? Sing along to the car radio, sing nursery rhymes in the shower.

Want to cook? Bake a cake using whatever is in the kitchen.

You have to overcome the inertia that keeps you frozen, and get over the need to be good immediately. You must start, and then keep going. Yes, you might suck at it. Everybody sucks in the beginning.

Everything seems to be possible when you are a child. There is no ego. You only see a finish line and you want to cross it.

CamMi Phan

Claim your creative power now

- You are born creative
- Using your creative gifts makes you happier and serves your growth as a human
- The world needs you to share your gifts
- There is time
- You are good enough
- This is possible

So now you know what to do.

Take the first step today.

Open your calendar and write in capitals **TODAY I RECLAIM MY CREATIVITY**. Then pick up a pencil, open a document, play the video.

Find your spark, shelter it, feed it.

Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it.

William Hutchinson Murray

Set the world on fire.