
Catalyst News and Views from AnnA
Your Personal Development & Creativity Newsletter
20 February, 2009

I seem to be in a bit of a philosophical mood this week and I offer food for the heart and encouragement for all creative aspirations by saluting those who have not let age be a barrier. Best wishes for your continuing love of life, creativity, and all the gifts your life brings you - AnnA - your Creative Catalyst

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A MEDITATION ON LOVE

Last time I looked at relationships, but underneath all relationship is love of some kind. Romantic, passionate, platonic are all different ways of experiencing love and one of the questions that comes up can be 'is it real?' How do we know that those feelings are genuine and what distinguishes it from friendship, liking or basic attraction?

There was a Catholic priest, author, and academic called Romano Guardini who addressed this in a way that I think helps us sense what true love is. He was a spiritual guide who looked deep into the nature of love, and this is what he had to say about it:

"But there is such a thing as genuine love, which is always considerate. Its distinguishing characteristic is, in fact, regard for personal dignity. Its effect is to stimulate self-respect in the other person. Its concern is to help the loved one become their true self. In a mysterious way

such love finds its truest realization in its power to stimulate the other to attain their highest self-realization."

How often in our relationships is that concern to help our beloved to be their truest self the driving factor? Love is often the way we show the best of ourselves to another person, and part of that revelation is in finding that we place their happiness at least alongside, and often ahead, of our own. A concern to help them become the best of who they are in our presence, and beyond it, is a great gift and when we examine our own relationships how often do we achieve that?

THE NINE STAGES OF THE HEROIC JOURNEY

The Hero With A Thousand Faces was a hugely influential book by American author and mythologist Joseph Campbell. It has important lessons for all of us in how we approach the challenges in our lives, and is particularly relevant for creative people.

The premise of Campbell's book is that the myth of the Hero is found in virtually all cultures, and the journey is very similar in most cases. A hero ventures forth from the everyday world into a region of supernatural wonder where fabulous forces are encountered and overcome. The result is gift of knowledge or power for the individual, or for society at large.

The journey classically has nine stages that you will encounter along the way:

1. Call to adventure

A still small voice keeps nagging at you to change something - your work, your relationship, how you are living. Ignoring it only makes it stronger.

2. Refusal of the Call

The usual instinct is to ignore and reject the call. You may not feel ready to make this change, or you are afraid to and you need to ask yourself which it is.

3. The Challenge Appears

This is where you can distinguish fear from being unready as there will be an event that pushes you regarding the challenge you have put on hold. You may have rejected it because you haven't got time, and a major hole in your

schedule will appear, or you mention it to a friend who can either encourage or dissuade you and make you think again about whether you want to go on this journey.

4. A Guide Appears

This can come from a person, or an experience. You may 'accidentally' pick up a book that makes it clear to you, or meet someone who makes you realise that you can meet this challenge and take this journey. From wherever it comes, you get the knowledge you need to enable you to go ahead.

5. You Commit to the Journey

You take a decisive action that changes your life and puts you firmly on the journey. You may leave your job or embark on a period of spiritual development; what that action may be is less important than the fact you are moving into unknown territory, but go ahead and take the risk.

6. Support Flows In

The decision activates help and support in ways you could never have imagined and from sources you may be totally unfamiliar with. Being open to receiving all the help you need supports you for the next step on the journey.

7. Challenges

There are obstacles to your success and challenges come when you may least expect them. This is the point you have to hold fast, and not give up - trusting in that help and support that will appear when needed.

8. The Gift

By surviving the challenges you get a gift of great price; personal knowledge of your own inner strength and ability to survive. You bring this knowledge back with you to your new life and live it fully

9. The Ending is the Beginning

You are not the same person you were at the beginning of your journey - and it has opened you to the knowledge and realisation that there can be many more journeys as you deepen into a stronger sense of who you are, and how you truly want to be living your life.

Can you see how the challenges you face in working to increase your self-knowledge and expand your creativity have brought you on that Hero's journey? Is it time for

another one?

THE PAST IS A DANGEROUS COUNTRY

You probably know the quote "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there", which comes from L.P. Hartley's novel, *The Go-Between*. I was reminded of it this week when speaking to a client but the phrase that came to mind was that 'the past is a dangerous country, you cannot live there.' Both phrases are true, to my mind, the past is foreign in that we no longer inhabit it or know its rules and customs and however we try to return it is not, and cannot be the same. We have built a past that we return to in times of trouble usually, and our memory constructs it to give us what we need from it.

That is why I say it is dangerous and that we cannot live there - however tempting it may be. In times of extreme grief and loss it can be the only refuge that gives us comfort, but we are organic, growing, beings and to stay trapped in that time and place is literally a living death for us. We all have to move on, however little we may wish to do so, and the sweet seduction of a past where we were happier, the days were sunnier and longer and we faced no crisis or challenge is a fairy story.

Like the Hero's journey, myth has its place in our lives; to inspire us and challenge us but not to bury ourselves in. If we can use the past as a firm foundation for our future, and not as a barrier to our growth, then we have learned something valuable.

If the past is a dangerous country we cannot live in, and the future is a dream we have not yet realized, then we can only live in the present moment. Using all our memories and dreams and resources to create in the here and now the blueprint for the life we want.

YOUR MOTHER, AND YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

How do you, did you get on with your mother? It's not an idle question because new research jointly released from the Universities of Washington and Illinois shows that children with a strong bond to their mother are able to form closer

friendships when they start school than those who have not.

It's because such children have experienced a more emotionally open and secure relationship with their mothers and therefore seem to have a more open and less judgemental attitude towards others. They are capable of separating a hostile act from a hostile intent, for instance if a child is hit by a ball thrown by another child they don't assume that it was deliberate as a child with a less secure emotional background is more likely to. In other words, the child takes the behaviour they experience at home and applies it when they get to school. So if they experience open emotional communication for both positive and negative feelings then that's how they tend to relate, and this makes them much more socially comfortable and at ease with others - and able to form friendships more easily.

Mothers always get blamed for lots of things, so if you have no friends do feel free to blame her, but let's also hear a cheer for their potentially positive contribution to helping their child form lasting, secure, relationships. Mum, could I have a word with you?

CREATIVITY CLIPS



1 Too old to get published? If your reason/excuse for not getting that novel written is that you have left it too late and you are now too old, this story is meant to shame you! The Costa book awards have been going for 38 years, and for the first time in its history an award has been won by a 91 year old. Diana Athill won the biography category - and a nice £5000 - for her memoir 'Somewhere Towards The End'. Another reason to get started on that life story of yours?

Mark Frankel is 76 and has now had his first book published. He has been writing for over 60 years but not until he retired in 2000 did he start seriously trying to sell his work, first some short stories and then his novel. He first put it on the Arts Council free site www.Youwriteon.com which I have mentioned before as a place to showcase your work. His book 'Morgan' is a sci-fi thriller was picked up from there and is now being sold online through Amazon.

If you are a woman poet, aged over 60 or will reach 60 before the end of June 2009,- then you are eligible to enter a new

competition run by Grey Hen Press who are dedicated to publishing the work of older women and their wisdom. You have got until the 30th of April to share your genius with them and full details are on their website at www.greyhenpress.com and the maximum poem length is 40 lines. You can manage that can't you?

2 Writing in the sun. If you are looking to combine a writing holiday with an opportunity to soak up the sun then I can highly recommend the Skyros Writing Lab. Skyros is renowned for holistic holidays of all kinds, but their lab gives you first rate tuition on a beautiful Greek island and throws in other activities such as yoga to help you relax even further. This year they have courses on How to Write a Novel in a Week, so not much time for sunbathing there, or you might prefer to learn about the Fiction Writer's Toolkit. Full details on their website at www.greyhenpress.com and if Greek islands aren't your thing they also offer writing holidays in Havana.

3 Try this... One of the most neglected senses in writing is that of aroma and yet how evocative are certain smells? Estate agents encourage you to pop some bread to warm in the oven when showing round a prospect so it gives a feeling of comfort and ease and home. As a writer you can take people to places very fast by evoking a sense of memory - both pleasant and unpleasant. Your mother's perfume or the neglected drains in an old city can both immediately conjure up a feeling of place and atmosphere.

For you creative writing exercise try evoking a place or event primarily through your nose - let it lead you and see how rich the writing can become.



Any questions, comments or criticisms? I love to hear your views and your experience, or feedback on any items in the newsletter, so do please do contact me at <http://www.catalystonline.co.uk> or email anna@creativecatalyst.co.uk



Catalyst News and Views from Anna
Your Personal Development & Creativity Newsletter
6 February, 2009

I thought a little look ahead to Valentine's day might be in order, particularly if you are thinking of proposing - or accepting - on that day, with some thoughts on what makes a healthy relationship. February can be a gloomy month, but if you are feeling tearful read the article below first and think about tuning up your mind and spirit with an unusual conference. Oh, and if you want even more inspiration then why not take a look at the newsletter archives on my website? There are plenty of ideas and creative exercises there to help you through the dark days. Best wishes for your continuing love of life, creativity, and all the gifts your life brings you
- AnnA - your Creative Catalyst

IN THIS ISSUE:

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HOW TO HAVE A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

Woody Allen once described the perfect relationship as one of interlocking neuroses, and though not a very romantic concept it might be a guideline to how successful your relationship is going to be. A happy, though possibly dysfunctional, relationship could be built on one partner needing total control of every decision and the other wanting to be told what to do - or any other combination that works for you.

If you know someone who has had multiple relationships it is often a mystery why they keep picking the same disastrous types, but in the other they are seeking something they feel they lack, or are attempting to heal in their own psyche. It's a common belief that opposites attract, and they certainly do, but for long-term relationship we go for someone who is more like us than not. Choosing the wrong partner might mean getting your heart broken, literally as well as emotionally.

Our primary relationship usually has a big impact on our lifestyle, and our health. A vegan and a meat eater can get along, but it's unusual, and one or the other usually makes some compromises to make it work. We influence each other's habits and it common for someone to switch dietary preferences, and drinking habits, to be more compatible with their partner. Someone heavily into exercise and healthy eating might switch their partner's bacon and eggs for muesli and yoghurt, or the other way round, for instance. The partner of a heavy drinker or drug taker will often try to keep up with their habit in order to control it, and be more like them, but usually end up in the same situation as their spouse. Many men visit their doctor rarely and reluctantly when single, but when married their wife usually has a positive influence on more regular visits -though they may still be reluctant!

What is even more interesting is that we often say of long-term couples that they grow to look alike, and apparently that is not just on the outside. Research has shown a tendency for high blood pressure, for example, in one partner almost doubles the risk for the other and this can also hold true for other conditions such as strokes, depression and ulcers. It's guesswork at the moment, but if you are sharing the same meals and activities with the same stresses and strains you are bound to be affected. We know that if a partner is made redundant and as a consequence suffers from depression and anxiety then their partner - quite naturally - is highly affected. Also there is a three times greater risk of heart disease for men if their wives are unhappy about, or unsympathetic to, their work.

So how does this concern you as we approach the patron saint of lovers? St Valentine is an odd choice for this anniversary for me as I prefer not to equate love with martyrdom, but at its highest we could say he represents the willingness to die for love. I prefer to be alive and happy, so am suggesting you seek your soul mate from someone with similar attitudes and aspirations so you can reduce potential health risks and live longer. Much more romantic to live healthily ever after don't you think?

SCIENCE AND MAGIC CONFERENCE

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Not often you see those two words together is it, or even science and spirituality though that has seen some movement

in the last few years. If you are interested in such things then the 32nd annual Mystics and Scientists conference takes place in Winchester from 3-5 April this year. It's called The Science of Happiness and the Experience of Bliss and has some first rate speakers

The idea of such a conference came from the founding of the Scientific and Medical Network in 1973 by George Blaker, Dr. Patrick Shackleton, Dr. Peter Leggett and Sir Kelvin Spencer. They draw on a worldwide community of scientists, doctors, psychologists, engineers, philosophers and theologians to provide an alternative way of looking at the big questions about our existence and the cosmos, and that new ways of thinking were needed to explore the frontiers of science, consciousness and spirituality.

One highlight of the weekend is a talk by Dr. Carol Craig on A Common Sense Perspective on Happiness. She is Chief Executive of the Centre for Confidence and Well-being, and author of Creating Confidence: a handbook for professionals working with young people. If happiness is your thing - and if not, why not - then follow that with a talk on Can Happiness be Pursued by David Lorimer. I want it not only pursued, but caught, so that one would be for me and he is Director of the Wrekin Trust and the man who wrote the book on the Prince of Wales's philosophy and work called Radical Prince.

One of my own quiet heroes from the USA is also speaking and that is the Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox whose book on creativity and spirituality is a great inspiration for me. He talked rather too much about original blessing rather than original sin when he was a Dominican theologian and was excommunicated - a good move for him as he is free to talk worldwide on many subjects and I recommend his books - starting with Original Blessing would be good. In Winchester he will be addressing the issue of Happiness and Bliss and the Return of the Sacred Masculine. The theme is are men and women happy right now and could it be better if viewed from another perspective and he will also be running a workshop on the inner landscape of happiness.

All this happiness in one weekend sounds good to me, and there are plenty of others high profile and inspirational speakers to arouse your interest - or annoy you - depending on your perspective. If you would like to know more then visit the website at [www.scimednet.org](http://www.scimednet.org) or

email:info@scimednet.org

## WHY DO YOU CRY?

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Cry me a river may have been a big hit as a song, but despite popular belief they are not always the best solution. We are encouraged to 'cry it out' and it can be a wonderful emotional release, but it depends to some degree on why you are doing it, and who you are doing it with.

Some people of course cry more easily than others; I am a liability at the cinema as my feelings and my tear ducts seem to be a fast lane freeway and I never leave the house without tissues in case I see something that moves me. Previous research has shown that women cry more often, and more easily, than men do and once one of us starts, the other women are likely to follow. I have seen men stand amazed at women's' ability to cry when they are happy - just look at any wedding congregation which is full of bright shining eyes full of tears - although I find that the bride's father usually looks a little red around the iris as well, but it may be at the thought of the cost of the reception. A good cry can restore your emotional equilibrium, but I just saw an article in the journal Current Directions in Psychological Science that questions whether that is always the case. They say that if you expect to feel better after a good cry, and don't, then you are set up for disappointment in the aftermath. The physical act of crying increases our heart rate and breathing is usually rapid and congested - it is possible to cry without getting a stuffed nose and a chest heaving like a bodice ripper, but I haven't seen it too often - except in a Hollywood blockbuster.

Why do we cry? Because we are upset is the obvious answer, but the subtext is usually to elicit support or help from someone else. If we cry with a close friend we usually do feel better afterwards if we have been consoled and comforted, but crying in front of a group of people can leave feelings of embarrassment and shame, and sometimes even anger at our own loss of control. Sometimes crying can even be a way to block out emotions, in that in the midst of those tears there is no space to think about something that you cannot face. When dealing with death, divorce, or loss of any kind, there

can be questions about why it happened, what we could have done about it or fears of the future that we simply cannot face at that time. A period of intense grieving and tears can help keep us numb from that, but eventually those questions do have to be faced and the tears may have become an indulgence to prevent us from facing them.

Psychologists say that if you were comforted and cuddled when you cried as a child, then that's what you will expect to get in your adult grief. However if your parents saw crying as a sign of weakness and did not allow you to indulge it, or even punished you for it, then your adult tears become like the demanding cries of a baby - who doesn't expect to be heard or heeded. The baby is signaling that something is wrong and the tears are a signal that it wants someone to help. This form of crying is the most difficult for the outsider, or the partner, to help with as it's the initial lack of comfort that the person is always seeking, and often unable to accept when it's offered.

If you shed a tear at an old movie, that form of social crying is acceptable and can leave you feeling lighter. If your tears flow at the plight of an abandoned or abused child or animal then those tears are really from the heart for all of humanity and connect us all on an intimate level. If we cannot offer immediate help in the situation, we can show our unity and compassion - and those are qualities that are much needed by all of us.

## CREATIVITY CLIPS

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I John Updike died recently, and reading about it reminded me of how much I liked and respected his novels when I was at university. He didn't write a lot of poetry, but this one below has as its opening some lines that resonate with the creative being and I wanted to share them with you, and ask you to use them for your own journey into creativity.

A Rescue by John Updike

"Today I wrote some words that will see print.
Maybe they will last "forever," in that
someone will read them, their ink making
a light scratch on his mind, or hers."
My suggestion for you to ponder is what you are creating that

you want to scratch lightly on someone's mind now, or in the future? Or what has scratched itself into your mind from something you have read, seen or heard?

2 The qualities of wheat. No, you are not about to read an agricultural bulletin, but I came across a very beautiful poem that can be a real jumping off point for your own creativity. If you are a painter or potter, it cries out for some form as the images are so strong, and for writers the qualities described could you inspire you to create something that celebrates the feeling contained in the poem.

Wheat -- Ishihara Yoshiro

"Let a stalk of wheat be your witness to every difficult day.
Since it was a flame before it was a plant,
since it was courage before it was grain,
since it was determination before it was growth,
and, above all, since it was prayer before it was fruition,
it has nothing to point to but the sky.

Remember the incredibly gentle wheat stalk
which holds its countless arrows fixed
to shoot from the bowstring --
you, standing in the same position
where the wind holds it".

Ishihara Yoshiro

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Any questions, comments or criticisms? I love to hear your views and your experience, or feedback on any items in the newsletter, so do please do contact me at <http://www.catalystonline.co.uk> or email [anna@creativecatalyst.co.uk](mailto:anna@creativecatalyst.co.uk)