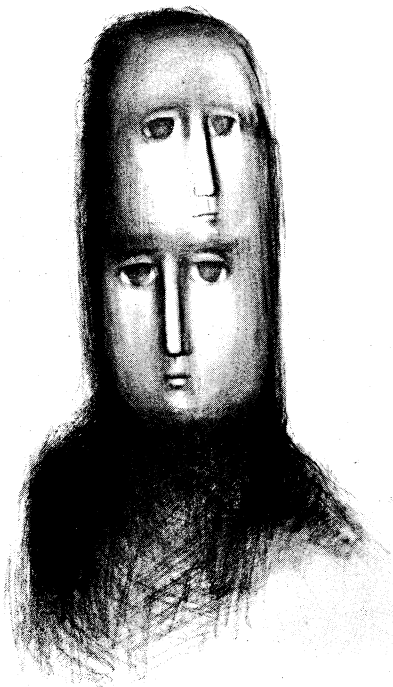


A Creative Life

Helen Lucas



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We are told that half the brain — the right half — does not think analytically. This is the intuitive side, which involves no conscious thought. The activity of being creative is largely right brain. When one absentmindedly doodles while talking on the telephone, those doodles, done without thinking, come from the right brain. Actually, they are not done 'absent the mind,' but rather absent the thinking mind.

To be truly creative, one must develop the facility of turning off the thinking and simply letting out whatever wishes to emerge. Without the thinking there is no term of reference to limit the imagination, and also, without the thinking, there is no accompanying dialogue which says, 'I cannot do it, I am not good enough.' Freely, out flow the ideas.

Small children instinctively use the right brain. Does a child pick up a crayon and then ask, 'How should I draw?' Such attitudes usually begin once a structured schooling is introduced. Reading and writing skills require left brain intelligence and logic. In this situation the child realizes 'I have much to learn, I am not as clever as my teacher.'

Consequently comparison and inadequacies begin to develop, and since the child has no way of separating the instinctive actions from the intellectual, it seems to her/him that anything she/he can do is not yet good enough. The joy of doing — without thought of trying to do better — is put aside. A life of consciously thinking out each act begins. We end up with a society of self-conscious, unfulfilled people, crippled by their inability to be spontaneous.

Of course we need to think and learn and experience, we need to know more and think better; but must it be at the expense of the intuitive and the spontaneous? If the two brains could only develop together — thinking and non-thinking, sense and non-sense.

People are crippled who function primarily with their left brain. Because of our tendency to emphasize the intellectual, some medical doctors now feel many of our illnesses are a result of our crippled right side. There is a doctor in Toronto who specializes in treating his patients by having them draw their illnesses on paper. This they can do once they visualize the disease in their minds. They then imagine how they would attack the disease and begin to do so through their drawings. It is a treatment involving right and left brain activity. If a patient has difficulty working this way, the doctor encourages that person to practise fantasizing, or to listen to music, to do anything which would counterbalance the conscious thinking. As I understand it, if I know that I am ill, the intensity of that thought can be fought with non thought activity.

It is imperative that we lead creative lives. To say that only the artist needs to be creative is a misconception. In order for our minds and bodies to be healthy, we all need a good percentage of our activities to involve our total being, which is what being creative is all about.

'To create,' the dictionary explains, is 'to cause to come into being . . . to evolve from one's own thoughts or imagination . . . to cause to happen.'

As a painter I worked from a model for years. Always, before the actual painting began, I knew that the final image would be close to the object posed in front of me. Once painting skills were developed, there was no challenge.

How do I create a new image? How do I form faces, arms, bodies, flowers, or whatever, in a way that is unique — totally my vision? Or to put it another way, how do I erase what I see in order to come to something I can't yet see?

A friend of mine who is a sculptor found a solution. He placed himself in an isolated room. The desk in front of him contained a pile of inexpensive paper. At his feet was a waste basket. He began to do quick, few-second drawings on each sheet. Each drawing happened too quickly to permit him to think about what he was doing. As soon as each sheet was used, it was crumpled up and thrown into the waste basket. This procedure went on for a number of days. At the end he pressed open all the drawings and examined them carefully. Soon he discovered some forms repeating themselves. Even when the drawings evolved over the days, these forms retained their identities. He said they triggered a response in him that made him feel they were strongly personal.

Why the waste basket? The only way he could convince himself that what he drew *did not matter*, was to show himself he was throwing away whatever he drew. So he relaxed and stopped caring, which then enabled him to open up and permit something to happen.

Some years later, remembering his words and plagued with the problem of uniqueness which refused to go away, I threw into the fireplace all my reference drawings. The courage was impulsive — not sensible. There was no turning back, the familiar was destroyed. I needed new images.

I sat with a piece of charcoal, moving it about, erasing and building, until an image formed. It was a two-headed form which I did not understand until much later. But it was mine! During those four hours I was convinced a firing squad was waiting in the next room. Now looking back, I regard those hours, along with the birth of my children, as the most memorable time in my life.

I had experienced something of the true, creative process I had tapped into myself. Now, eight years later, I understand it more clearly and can describe it in four steps:

THE INITIAL STEP: to rely on no one but me. Even if working with others, the exchange of ideas still depends on my self reliance.

THE SECOND STEP: to believe that I have the ability to create and that what I want to create is worth doing.

THE THIRD STEP: Often the biggest surprise – to accept that what I do effortlessly, therefore a natural extension of my body/mind, is what I do best. To try to force something to happen, only forces it not to happen.

This seemingly effortless act, is by nature of its effortlessness, often profound, for it comes from my very core. It is its uniqueness which makes it profound. No one else could have given it life, and no one can take it away. This realization is also profound.

Margaret Laurence describes a good writing period as 'being in a State of Grace.' In total harmony with herself, God and her surroundings. Nothing out of step. Of her writing she says, 'I don't reach for the words, they come to me.' Of course, there is frequently some sort of struggle before an artist has the final results. Everything in nature has its order, its harmony, its ability to hold together so as to interact with the world. The creative ideas emerge at random. To turn them into some kind

of order and to end up with a successful finished product requires, at this stage, the left brain skills and knowledge.

THE FOURTH STEP: to have the confidence to live in chaos as the creative flow emerges and to believe that I have the ability to eventually turn that chaos into order.

Some not only welcome the chaos but actually accentuate it. Joni Mitchell, in order to write a new song, first tunes her guitar strings in a totally unfamiliar relationship; out of the chaos of the resulting sounds, she creates a harmony.

Each of the four steps requires courage and confidence, without which one could never draw on the unknown and the unstructured. Women have not generally been encouraged to extend their boundaries and venture into unknown territory. The confidence and courage to do so may take years to develop, but once they sponsor a full creative life, they both continue to grow. The more a woman creates, the more she trusts the ability to create. The more she experiences the joy – and the agony – of creating, the more she seeks it out.

The results nourish the self; the self with confidence accepts new challenges. Before long, her personal accomplishments are a powerful affirmation of her validity. There is a belief in the contribution that I am making, a belief that cannot be shaken. There is no longer any desperation to prove anything. I just am . . . and I do . . . and I live

This is to be in a 'State of Grace'.

