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### Creating a Life of Art: A Personal Journey towards Creative Freedom

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CREATING A LIFE OF ART: A PERSONAL JOURNEY  
TOWARDS CREATIVE FREEDOM

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

KRISTEN HANKS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF THE ARTS

May 2004

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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## ABSTRACT

### CREATING A LIFE OF ART: A PERSONAL JOURNEY TOWARDS CREATIVE FREEDOM

May 2004

Kristen Hanks, B.A., Miami University  
M.A., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Visiting Professor Nina Greenwald

This paper is a journey through my life as a Creator, from early childhood to the present. As I have moved through the process of writing my creative history, I have been able, for the first time, to take an introspective, reflective look at who I am as a person and an artist/creator. Using skills introduced to me in the Critical And Creative Thinking Program, it has been possible for me to undertake the task of confronting my past, my present and my future.

My journey towards creative freedom begins in early childhood as I struggle with being a creative person in a world that only seems to value certain forms of expression. From there I move on to high school and college, astonishingly creative yet confusing times. I begin questioning my future and wonder why I cannot conceive of defining a career for myself. When you feel creative and are passionate about all kinds of Art, what do you DO? Struggling with this question and internalizing negative messages about artists and creators seems to define this period in my life. Taking a look back I am able to see for the first time some of the blocks to my own creativity and its progression.

After college I eagerly venture into the “real world” and all my deepest fears about being a creative person begin to surface. Will I ever “make it” or actually find a career in a creative field? Maybe I need to see what else is out there in the way of a “real” job. The moment I head down this path, I abandon my creative passions of writing poetry and connecting with my inner artist. For a time, this vital part of who I am falls by the wayside and I am not sure what steps to take to reclaim it – I know that I need help. By some providence I find the CCT graduate program and I begin another amazing journey: the reclaiming of my creative self.

Utilizing skills introduced to me in my CCT courses, I am able to begin excavating my past, present and future as a person who desires to be an artist and a creative person for life. Free-writing, strategic personal planning, and risk-taking are some of the tools that aid in my creative re-birth. Through the meta-cognitive process of critical and creative thinking, I am able to envision my life in a way that I never have before. I delve into my past to unlock blocks to my creativity, I recognize first-hand the importance of community in my life, and I allow myself to voice hidden dreams and to see them as possibilities. Finally I am able to reach a point where I can say, with conviction: I AM AN ARTIST and whatever I end up doing in my life, creating will be central and vital to whatever I choose.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: CHOOSING A LIFE OF ART

I am a woman who is figuring out how to create her own life. There is no set rubric for me to follow here, no handbook for how to undertake this kind of task. If it seems daunting, perhaps it is. Or maybe it's both scary and extremely exciting at the same time. How does one take all they have learned, all that they are, and form it into a plan for the future? What is the process behind how someone realizes their dreams? This paper is about the journey I have taken in order to identify myself as a creative person, one who is looking towards her future.

The need for me to document and reflect on my process is very strong, perhaps because I have been a storyteller of sorts all of my life. Since childhood I have been a creator and an artist -- I simply did not know it until now. It has taken many years for me to see myself as a creative person and much of that time was spent trying to deny the creative part of myself. Why did I do that? I hope to explore that question and many others as I lead you through my own story of discovery.

Throughout the years I have struggled with being a person who loves many, many things. Art, dance, poetry, film, nature, fashion and people have been so focal to who I am, that when faced with the questions: What are you going to DO? What career are you going to have? I have been completely unsure how to respond. Inside my mind I've thought: Why can't I find some kind of job, some kind of "calling" that encompasses all of these things? Why is it necessary for me to choose? It was as if subliminally I was being sent messages telling me that if I enjoy the arts and creative pursuits, I'd better

think again because these things would never bring me success or stability.

Unfortunately, I internalized this sentiment and it was not until beginning the CCT program that I could truly start to deconstruct this and some of my other fears about creating.

My journey begins as a young person in love with the Arts, moves through the turbulent time in between college and “the real world”, and leads up to graduate school, my turning point, the place where I face my future and my creative dreams head on. I will lead you in my own personal voice through my experiences as a creative person, one who could not even identify herself as creative until recently. Entering into my graduate studies I realized that what I was lacking was not only confidence in myself, but the tools to be able to look closely at my life, my desires, and my dreams. After beginning the process Julia Cameron calls The Artists Way, a whole new world opened up for me, one where I was forced to look at every aspect of who I was. Moving through my courses, I began piecing the puzzle together, slowly seeing that I was a creator and an artist who had been denying that focal part of myself for too long. The reason I had been unable to see my future was because I was leaving out a very big part of who I was: my love of Art and beauty.

So here I stand at a crossroads. I see behind me all of the things that I have learned in my life and the things that make me who I am: My love of art, the desire to feel part of community, my need to be creative, my passion for life and beauty, and my drive to keep learning. In front of me I see my future and it is just beginning to take shape, to take on the colors and forms of a wonderful creation. Please come with me as I take you on a journey, one where I will try to discover (and uncover) my own powers as a

creative person. This is a process of evolution wherein I see a vision of my future taking shape. The journey is also a documentary of sorts, my own creative journal of personal discovery. Perhaps you will find yourself in my words; that is my hope.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXPLORING THE WORLD AND MY PLACE IN IT WITHOUT FIRST HAVING A DEFINED CAREER

I came to the Critical and Creative Thinking program because I was searching for something. I wasn't quite sure what I was looking for but my mind and heart were open. In truth, I wanted and felt I needed to learn more. My undergraduate studies had given me the puzzle-pieces, yet I was very unsure how to begin putting the puzzle of my life and my future together. What I can tell you is that I knew who I was when I embarked on this journey. I had a strong sense of myself and I felt confident that I knew what I loved, what I was good at, and what was important to me. Beyond this I felt lost.

Being in school and learning has always been something I have loved. In my undergraduate years I studied Women's Studies, Literature and Art within a small interdisciplinary studies program. I felt like a jack-of-all trades, interested in many things and always at a bit of a loss to explain an answer to the question: "So what are you going to do with *that* degree?" I wasn't sure, but I felt like I could do a plethora of things and succeed at them. What I was grappling with was where to begin looking. The idea of being out of school was exciting, however I had no idea where to turn first and that was a bit disconcerting. What was I going to DO? It felt like this was a bigger question than I had an answer for.

In order to complete my BA, I undertook a final project/thesis-like paper entitled: "The Art (S) of Fashion". The focus of the paper was my own personal perspective on the concept of "fashion as Art". I had chosen the topic because of my passion for it, and I utilized literature, cultural studies, film, photography and fashion design, to make the

case that fashion was (is) a vital and important art form. This paper was so much fun to do and to present to an audience. I had been extremely interested in the topic of fashion all of my life, but I had always seen it as a hobby or obsession rather than something I could pursue as a career. First of all, I wasn't an artist, and secondly, I had studied literature and women's studies – my final degree was in philosophy! So what was I going to do with that kind of degree? At times I felt I had to explain or defend my choice of study, and yes, I was confused about where it would lead me. In my heart I was confident that things would work out; I *had* to be confident. By this time I knew that whatever I did, even if I had many jobs or careers in my lifetime, I would be ok. I knew that I would find a job somewhere.

What was difficult for me was trying to find guidance for my dreams. Above all else my dream was to be happy and to feel empowered and excited by whatever I did. I know that that's a pretty loose definition of a dream, but at the time, that was my starting off point. I was interested in so many things that I felt at a complete loss as to where to begin. I wanted to venture out into the "real world" and be an instant success, to find my calling on the first try! Traveling over to the "career office" on campus, I met with a counselor about possible careers and in light of my senior paper, jobs in fashion. I think I had had the false assumption that I'd go to the career center and someone would say: Hey, this job would be perfect for you, here's a contact person! Of course, it didn't happen like that. Because I had come from a good program, one whose students seemed to do well, I was told I wouldn't have a problem finding a job and that things would work out great for me. I left feeling more lost than ever. Also, it was becoming clear to me that

I had many dreams, yet I was unable to define them, to *really* figure out what they might be.

At this point I was getting ready to graduate and the possibilities for the future seemed endless. The overwhelming feeling I had was: I know that I have the answers inside of me, but I don't feel like I have the tools (experience, language, insight) to unlock them. My college experience had taught me an invaluable amount but it hadn't given me the tools to begin thinking about my life or my future. I remember looking at many self-help books, most of which were created to help one find their "true calling". What I discovered was that none of these books could help me. There were some major in-between steps I was missing. Although I may have wanted to graduate, snap my fingers and say: THIS IS IT! I HAVE FOUND MY TRUE CALLING! That wasn't my reality. Perhaps some lucky people step seamlessly into great careers that they love; they are blessed and lucky. However, I knew that wasn't going to be me. For some reason that I had yet to figure out, things were going to happen differently in my life. I guess it was assumed that as smart young graduates we would figure it all out on our own, and no doubt many of us did, but I felt like the black sheep standing on the other side of the fence while everyone else walked off into the sunset. I wanted to learn more, to figure out what I wanted and how to achieve it. I also wanted to see if there was some place I belonged.

After completing a stressful last semester of school, I felt I needed a job that was as far removed from the academic world as possible. I yearned to be around different kinds of people, exposed to a totally new environment. So, I began working in a bank. First I was an assistant and then I moved on to being the sole collections person. It was a

small bank where I thrived because I learned new things every day. Instead of looking on collections as a bad thing, which it was in many instances, I tried to see it as an opportunity to help people. I worked hard to help set up payment plans for customers before their property was foreclosed on. My own interest surprised me and I realized that I had the ability to talk to people in trouble, to show them I cared enough to try to help them. That's what I enjoyed most, trying to help folks who had just gotten laid off or had a major illness in the family. I always thought: That could be me, and if it was, I would want some compassion. Looking back, this job was a stepping stone; yet another way for me to figure out a piece of the puzzle. I truly enjoyed working with people and trying to help them. The bank job didn't fulfill me creatively, but because it was new, I enjoyed it. Of course I knew that I wanted more. In my mind graduate school was the place to learn more about myself, and the world.

During the two years that I worked in the bank, the two years between when I finished undergrad and came to the CCT program, my dreams changed little from what they had been my entire life. In addition to being happy and challenged, I had always wanted to move to the "big city", to be in a new place where I was surrounded by culture and endless opportunities. Of course I had romanticized it because I was a dreamer at heart. I wanted to move to the big city and write a column about fashion, especially "street-fashion" (clothes worn by normal people) for some fabulous magazine like Vogue. That was the hidden dream that most people didn't know about. I believe that I kept it from people because I didn't feel I could achieve it. That dream felt so far away, so far removed from the life I was currently living, that it just didn't seem possible. Yet I felt like my destiny was someplace else, doing something amazing. Also, I had lived in

Cincinnati all of my life and wanted to see what other opportunities might be out there. I'm sure that many people say the same thing and perhaps it's a trite sentiment, but not in my eyes. If you are going to dream, dream big.

At the same time that I was having these secret dreams I was paradoxically doing a lot of self-doubting. I could see this bright future and I had no idea how to get there. I often psyched myself out thinking things like: You'll never be able to get a job in fashion because you don't have a degree in design or art; your grades weren't good enough; you are a little hometown girl with no money – how are *you* ever even going to get hired? The bridge between where I was and what I wanted seemed huge. This is not to say that I wasn't a confident person or that I sat around doubting myself all the time, because that would be untrue. I felt I was human and I was scared about the future. Many times I could see that I really did not know what I wanted; but what I didn't know then was that that was OK. It was OK to not know, to ask for help, to admit you need to learn a heck of a lot more about yourself. And the thing is, I wanted to learn more. I wanted to be able to explore my inner thoughts and dreams, to be around a group of supportive people who felt like I did. I felt like my motto at the time was: I'M STILL TRYING TO FIGURE IT ALL OUT! At the time I didn't really feel like it was all right for me to keep saying this. Now I know better. I know that for the rest of my life I will proudly own this as my own personal motto. If I'm not trying to figure it all out, then what *am* I doing? I can now embrace the uncertainty, but at that time, I didn't know how.

It is also important to tell you that during my time at the bank, I began to have a deep artistic drought. I simply felt like I was completely removed from my creative self. Growing up I had been a ballet dancer, dancing nearly every evening of the week in a

serious dance program. It was difficult giving up so much of my time, but I loved to dance and the freedom of spirit that came with it. I felt like a real artist being surrounded by all that beauty – the music, the movements, what it felt like to dance. In high school I reached a point where I had to say: Either I pursue dance and go into a company, or I choose school and pursue all of the other things I love, namely literature. So I abandoned dance completely because in order to keep up with my schoolwork, I felt that was what I needed to do. I wish I would have at least enrolled in a modern dance class, just for fun, to keep myself close to dance. I never did, and I felt the loss quite keenly at different times in my life, especially working at the bank.

In high school I was lucky enough to discover another creative outlet: poetry, and like dance, truly felt a calling to do it. I loved to write creatively and found that it was the perfect venue for me to express myself. Writing and reading poetry was something I could just do, without thinking too much effort, so it seemed natural that in college I would in some way pursue the study of literature. Poetry also seemed to me *pure* freedom, unlike ballet, which is (in addition to being freeing and wonderful) very structured. I suppose that it was the imposed structure and being unable to dance the way *I* wanted that had made it easier for me to leave dance. Reflecting on it, ballet seems to be a metaphor for my life. I am always looking for creative freedom and the feeling that comes with having your own voice be heard. Yet like my ballet experience, I rebel when a creative structure is forced on me. I want freedom, but I want it to be on my own terms. I want creative control as opposed to someone telling me what I can and cannot do. It is hard to strike a balance and that is challenging for creative people. Often you feel as if you must work inside of a set structure, like ballet dancers who must orchestrate every

move perfectly, moves that are most often choreographed by someone else, in order to be taken seriously as an “artist”. If one doesn’t go to an art school, learn specific ways of creating and then play “by the rules” it is hard to be considered important. This certainly isn’t always the case, but it often is. I know that I struggled with the fact that I felt creative, like at my core I knew I was a creative person with a drive to feel the freedom of creation, but I had to do it on my terms. So more often than not, the poetry I created was something I couldn’t show to people – I just didn’t know what they would think and I was afraid they would say: Well, she doesn’t rhyme anything, she takes on feminist themes, most of the time we can’t tell what she’s talking about, and *that* is not playing by the rules -- therefore its not really art. Most of all I think I feared that people would read my personal work and think I was some kind of freak. Laying out all of your emotions in a poem is amazingly cathartic, but what if someone else were to read that powerful and emotional work? Would that not open one up to judgment? I think that is what I feared the most.

After graduating from college, I stopped writing. I even stopped reading as much as had, something I had always done. It was as if my work at the bank, being out in the “real world”, made things like writing poetry and reading seem inconsequential and unimportant. Here I was working with people trying to make ends meet (and struggling to pay the bills myself) and then I coming home and trying to tap into my own creativity? I didn’t even begin to know how to do this. There seemed to be no balance, in my own mind, of the real world and the creative world that made me feel like me. I began believing that maybe I had to choose, that maybe I had to give up some of my creative self, if I wanted to make a living. And since I was working in a job that felt very removed

from the creative world, I felt a notable lack of inspiration. I would sit and think: “I need to write poetry, I need to get back into it” – then I would sit there and nothing would come to me. And since nothing came, I assumed I just couldn’t write well anymore. For two years I wrote almost nothing. That is not to say that I cut myself off completely from art, because that would not be possible. I began cooking for the first time and I was discovering gardening, which I loved, so I was still in some way connected. However, I just felt like I had lost some part of myself. Some creative spirit that was once alive now seemed to be gone.

I know that instead of truly confronting this loss, I ran away from it. Because of fear, namely the fear of failing, I quit. Within the book Art and Fear (Bayles and Orland) the idea of quitting is put into a context that truly resonates with me. It is said that an artist quits when they feel like their art doesn’t belong, when they feel there is no place for it, that it has no “destination” (p. 10). That is how I felt. I was out of school for the first time in years, trying to work and feeling like there was no place for my poetry in the life I was living. Somehow I believed that I needed to be truly inspired again in order to write, yet I didn’t know how to attain that vital inspiration that I so needed.

It is easy to look back in retrospect and see what some of my problems might have been, but at that time nothing was clear. I had no perspective and I was not sure how to get it. This is the first time I have taken a look back, to gain perspective on where I was then. Every thing that happened to me during that time was something that I needed to learn; something vital to getting me to the next step. If I had been able to leap into the work- world with flying colors and my sense of creativity intact, perhaps I would not be

where I am today. Surely, I would not have ended up at UMASS in the Critical and Creative Thinking program.

Although I was moderately happy at my job, I mentioned that there came a time when I began to palpably feel disconnected from the creative side of myself. I had been viewing my job at the bank as way to try out something new. Having always thought I would dislike working in a structured business setting, how could I really judge that without ever being exposed to it? I had placed myself in this job because my academic life had lacked interaction with the real world that I felt I needed. Although I learned quite a bit at the bank, after a time it was as if I could not see my future at all. Was my future at the bank? Was it in graduate school? I felt generally confused, but at the same time I still knew who I was and what I loved, even if I was feeling non-creative at the moment. It is difficult to keep up with creative pursuits when you are working hard each day and coming home feeling tired and un-energized -- that is how I was feeling many days.

Among other things, I felt I was lacking inspiration. For me, the concept of inspiration is at the core of creating. I knew that in the past I had had moments of creative power where I felt inspired to write or dance like a madwoman. It was in these moments that creative forces would somehow align and I would feel some unseen hand on my shoulder, guiding me towards my own form of brilliance. I can recall vividly one such moment which occurred during a family trip to Alpena, Michigan when I was sixteen. Each summer my family would travel to the upper peninsula of Michigan to stay on a lake, in a small cottage, for two weeks. We were virtually in the middle of nowhere, with untouched natural beauty in amazing abundance. Our days would be spent hiking around,

swimming, reading and hanging out. One evening before dinner, I ventured out onto our little dock and sat down at the end of it, overlooking Grand Lake. No one was around and the solitude made me feel as if I was alone with Mother-Nature -- just the two of us existed. In this moment I looked out at the water and the wind began to kick up. The air smelled of pine and lake-water and wood and there I sat, feeling totally and completely overwhelmed by the sense of myself within that space in the universe. I truly felt like I was part of that dock, like the wood of the planks had fused with my limbs and there was no distinction between the wind, the lake and my body. It sounds so surreal, but it was the moment in my life where I gained clarity. I cannot say that I gained some grand clarity about my creativity per se; rather, the clearness was an ability to see myself as part of the earth. Some people speak of finding god in moments like this – *I found (and felt, very deeply) a connection with the universe. It was as if I actually understood, for the first time, that I was just as vital as the lake and the trees and that they in turn were just as vital as I. I felt connected to nature in a way that made me feel like: This makes sense, and even if everything else in my life feels confusing, I know *THIS* and this knows me.*

It is difficult to put into words a moment like this but it was incredibly profound for me, in that instant. I did not go back to the cabin and write poetry feverishly, which is to say that no outward creation was tangible. However, the creativity that happened *inside* of me, the feeling of true inspiration, was like I had found what I was seeking. I had been wanting someone to tell me: You are really going to be ok, you are going to find a career/purpose that moves you, you are going to make a difference, your creative spirit is going to keep growing. I had no guarantees, but after this experience what I did have was a response to all the fears and confusions in my mind, about my future.

Something, some force, had heard what was in my mind and my heart and answered back: It is going to be ok. It was as simple as that: It's going to be ok. I don't think I really believed it until that moment and that was the inspiration I needed to move on.

While reading Clark Moustakas' book Creative Life, I was struck to read a similar account of an all-encompassing moment of clarity. As Moustaks recounts, "...Everything was charged with life and beauty. The meeting with the wind revived me and restored me to my own resourcefulness. I felt an expansive and limitless energy" (Moustakas, 27). I wonder if every person has a story like this, a turning point where in some particular moment, you get what you need for you spirit. As if that thing you were seeking, whatever it was, even if you weren't sure how to pinpoint it, comes to you and inspires you. Without these kinds of moments, it is very difficult to continue on. It is easy for me to get in a place where my mind is just going haywire with self-doubt and confusion: What am I doing? Where am I going? What will I do with my life? Will things ever come together for me? When this happens, as it did most strongly in the time between college and graduate school, I am unable to clear my head. I feel blank, like the questions my brain is asking are allowing no room for answers. However, the turning point for me was that moment at the lake when I was a teenager. I had to revisit this memory in order to remind myself of what I was capable of; also to tell myself that things would work out for me. After reflecting on that time in my life, I began thinking: I will start my search for graduate programs that offer me an alternative; that would suit a person like myself who wants to learn how to reflect, in a more productive way, on my life and the world around me. My dreams and desires cannot be put into a box and looked at through only one lens. I must find a place, a *space*, wherein I can look at the world and my own life in a new

way. In a most serendipitous turn of events, I found some information about a program called Critical and Creative Thinking. I had opened myself up to the belief that I would find the right place for me and that is exactly what happened.

## CHAPTER 3:

### MAKING A SPACE FOR CREATIVITY AS I ACKNOWLEDGE FEARS AND INTERNALIZED EXPECTATIONS

Continuing on my journey, a year has now passed and I am preparing to move to Boston to begin my studies in the Critical and Creative Thinking program at UMASS. I am simultaneously anxious, excited, and terrified. What I know is that this particular program *sounds* like the place for me, other than that, I am not at all sure what awaits -- this is a big adventure. What if I've made a horrific mistake? What if this program is not what I'm looking for? Am I going to be able to afford to live in Boston? What will it be like leaving my family and friends? I realize that this just might be the biggest risk I have ever taken in my life. If nothing else, I have learned that if I want to be myself, if I want to be a creative person, I am going to have to take risk by the hand and say: Let's goooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!

People would ask me why I was moving or why I'd come to Boston and I would say: To go to grad school AND because I wanted to. If I hadn't have moved, I would have woken up every day and wondered what would have happened if I'd have made the leap and not been afraid. Even if I got to Boston and everything was a disaster, how would I have known if I didn't try? People reading this might wonder why I am making such a big deal of the fact that I moved. Well, I am the first person in a large family to ever move away from my hometown. My parents still live in the house I grew up in and I have nothing but good memories of Cincinnati – everything that happened to me, all the milestones of growing up, happened in that place. I have always been a person who

became attached to places and houses and experiences in a big way. Even if I drove down my street a million times, I would always be filled with a strong sense of how much I loved where I was from. So, needless to say, it was hard for me to leave. At the same time, the desire to “go out into the world” was something that, along with my attachment to my hometown, was very strong and very apparent – it always had been. As a little girl I would devour the James Herriot books like All Creatures Great and Small. I was so intrigued by the stories. Here was this guy, a city bloke, who gets a job in the middle of the English countryside and all of a sudden finds himself in a world that is drastically different from the one he came from. In spite of this new adjustment, Herriot thrives and must learn a totally new way of living and interacting with the world. Ever since reading about James Herriot and his adventures in a “foreign” place, I wanted to go to a new place too, just to experience it. The need was strong and not because I didn’t like Cincinnati, quite the contrary, I simply *wanted* to because I *could*.

So I began life in Boston and soon my first day as a CCT student arrived. My introductory course was Creative Thinking with Nina Greenwald. I remember vividly our first in class assignment: Get in groups, take this box of junk, and assemble it into some kind of invention that you will later explain to the class. At first I was tentative: Was this graduate school? If it was, then I was on board! Right away my imagination ran wild (as it is usually does) and I started thinking of a million ways to piece these random objects together. It was so much fun being free to do what you wanted, without someone imposing strict rules like: You must construct an airplane OR concoct an automobile out of these things. Instead, we envisioned whatever it was that we wanted to make. Whatever took shape was encouraged, even if it was far- fetched or totally bizarre. I

found that my classmates were enjoying it as much as I was, and what was even cooler was the fact that each one of us had contributed some small thing to make the piece what it was. Certainly it was the first university class I had taken part in where I felt that above all, creativity was paramount, and perhaps even more importantly, valued.

One of the project options for the creativity course was something called The Artist's Way by Julia Margaret Cameron, an interactive book that would supposedly help any of us who wanted to re-connect to our own creativity. If we chose to do the book, we would be doing daily morning writings and weekly outings with ourselves called "artist dates". The process sounded interesting and I knew immediately that I wanted to do it. Within that first class, we were also informed that we would be required to do a presentation/performance later in the course. In this presentation, we would be asked to take on the persona of someone other than ourselves, to bring this person (whoever we chose) to life in a creative way. Hopefully The Artist's Way would help me prepare for this presentation because already, I was uneasy about it.

My next CCT course that week was Creativity in Literature and The Arts and upon entering the class, I was met with yet another unorthodox request: Complete your own biography (similar to what one would find on a book jacket) for your first assignment. I knew, even from my limited experience, that CCT was about "thinking outside of the box" but with these two assignments, the bio and upcoming presentation, I felt like there was some rubric for completing the task that I simply didn't know. I went home and struggled with my bio, trying in vain to write something like I'd seen on book covers, something to the effect of: "Kris Hanks has worked as a ... for ten years and written five published articles..." The prevailing thoughts going through my mind were: I

have not done anything important enough, I don't have a career, I am not accomplished. It was also very hard for me to write in the first person, it felt really strange and uncomfortable. If I was going to write a brief bio, I had to do it my own way and I didn't care if it was correct or not. It sounds silly now, but this first assignment was very difficult for me, not because I had nothing to write, but because I thought there was some expectation for how I was supposed to complete the assignment. What I saw while writing the bio was that all of my years in a structured academic environment had done little (if anything) to give me confidence in my own creativity. It almost felt like I had a voice in my head telling me: You can't do it *that* way, that's not "by the book", what if its completely wrong? My internal censors were so apparent, forcing my own creative voice to be silent.

The more I thought about it, I realized that I was making a big adjustment. Here I had been working in a bank, and before that, doing pretty rigorous university work, each a situation that had required me to fit into a kind of mold. I simply was not used to someone telling me to: Write a bio, plain and simple, no explanation. I was also very frightened that I would get to class and my bio would be too personal, too different. Not that I have ever minded being different, I simply wanted to start out on the right foot, to have my classmates think I actually belonged in the program. Sometimes when you are trying to be accepted, you don't want to feel that you are different (and that is something that I have felt at many times in my life). I should not have worried about any of these things, all of them being quite inconsequential when it came to me writing my biography. However, these were my fears and I felt that I needed to be honest about them and to validate them, as opposed to brushing them off and not acknowledging that they existed.

After giving voice to these fears and being crippled by them (I had written the bio at least twice and thrown it away both times) I finally decided that if I was going to do this bio at all, I had to do it my way. Instead of trying to write it like I'd seen other people do it, I simply began to write.

I want to note here that one of the reasons I had so much trouble with this initial assignment was because I have always had a difficult time talking about myself and sharing it with others in a frank manner. In the same token, if you asked me to write a poem about me feelings, or about my life, I could do it for you and it would make sense to me. When I began this program, I started it with an open mind and heart, yet I brought to the table all of my insecurities and fears (things I usually have dealt with through writing poetry, dance, cooking, etc.). Almost instantly I was being forced to confront these things head on and it was difficult for me, to say the least. With the bio assignment and my upcoming creative presentation, I was almost crippled by fear. I knew that if I was going to succeed, if I was really going to get something out of my time in CCT, that I was going to have to confront all of my fears about being a creative person. Honestly, at this time, as I was entering into the CCT program, I didn't really believe that the things I created in my life were of value (I had written volumes of poetry in my life, but almost none of it had been shared with people AND I had quit dance a few years back). I believed in myself, but when I looked at other people who had written books, or drew paintings every day, or designed gardens, I simply did not see myself as being equal. I knew I could create, but I did not consider myself a creator. I would soon be forced to confront this discrepancy head-on.

At this point, you may be asking yourself: But *why* didn't she consider herself a creative person? What *caused* that? I will be delving into these issues soon. At this early stage in my CCT experience, I was aware of these particular issues, I just wasn't sure how to begin dealing with them. Very soon, I would begin to disassemble and reconstruct the idea of myself as a creator, however the process was just beginning.

After my failed attempts at writing the bio I said to myself: You have to do this bio in a way that resonates with you. If it's going to be real, it must reflect who you are and what is important to you. I had the keen sense that I was doing the assignment incorrectly, but I didn't care. Here is the bio that I wrote, the bio *I* wanted to write:

“When I was growing up I was completely in love with books, cooking, fashion, writing, my hometown, movies and my family – I still am. I guess you could say that I've always been on a quest to discover/uncover beauty and to somehow bring it to others (or just myself). I have done a lot of school work and written many long papers, some of which I am really proud of, but I get as much joy out of tending to my garden or having an amazing dinner with friends. Right now I am continuing to explore the world and my place in it; I am not prepared to define myself by what I do for an occupation, I'd rather define myself and my life by the people and things that I love. My dreams/goals for the future are to marry my boyfriend in Italy, to open my own store in downtown Cincinnati (where I will sell clothes and books and beauty), to restore an old house, to write lots and lots of poetry, to plant a field of peonies, and to have children.”

Each class member was asked to read our bio and when my turn came I said: “I had quite a bit of trouble with this assignment. I felt like I had to do something like I always see on book jackets and I didn’t feel comfortable doing that – it didn’t feel like me.” In reply, my professor, Ben Schwendener commented: “All that I told you was to do a bio; I didn’t tell you *how* to do it.” I had been so afraid of the assignment that I didn’t even stop to recall what Ben had actually said. *I* was the one who had tried to put myself in to some kind of box, to try to live up to some kind of standard. In the end, the only way I could really complete the task was to listen to my own heart, to say what *I* wanted to say. So, I read my bio and people seemed to really like it. After class, a woman named Mary came up to me and made a point of telling me how much she had enjoyed what I said. She went on to tell me that what I conveyed really showed who I was as a person, and she liked that. I can’t tell you how much it meant to have my classmates (all new acquaintances) accept what I had written. Just the act of reading my thoughts (however simple) to a supportive audience made me feel like: I can do this, it is ok to be who I am, no-one is going to look at you and say you’re too romantic, too boring, too \_\_\_\_\_. I didn’t feel judged. In the past, I had had people tell me that I was too emotional, that my writing was too romantic. I felt that with these first initial CCT classes, I was slowly beginning to chip away at that part of myself that was deathly afraid of people seeing the real me, for fear that they wouldn’t like it.

I see an issue arising as I recount this experience, one that merits looking at. In my academic career, I have been acutely aware of a tendency within curriculum and instruction to be very narrow-minded. In college, where I studied quite a bit of literature, we were always reminded of what texts were “good” and which ones were “bad”.

Because I was in such a strongly academic setting, I knew that if I said: I really like Oprah, or, sometimes I actually *enjoy* reading romance novels, people would have looked at me like: WHAT??!! I rarely fessed up to these (and other) secret loves for fear that I would be looked down upon by a barrage of professors and peers who read nothing but great literature and felt it was their place to judge good from bad. Now I am able to see that it just doesn't matter, but at the time, I wanted to fit in, to be smart, because I admired so many of the people I was around. Of course I wish I had been able to say, at that time: I don't care what you think, I am who I am and I am growing and changing. But I had to learn, and I am still learning, to be able to do that without thinking. I can look back at reading my bio to Ben's class and say that I was afraid, but I must also acknowledge where some of those fears might have come from (and to see how deeply they were ingrained). As it turns out, I was just beginning to disassemble my fears and to look critically at my own life. Without doing that, I would never be able to envision myself as a creative person with specific creative aspirations.

During this time, I began working through The Artist's Way, a book/course/process designed to lead me towards "discovering and recovering" my creative self (Cameron,41). Each day I would get up early and journal for an hour (as the book asked of us), freely writing anything that came into my mind. If I was going to begin my "creative recovery", these pages were essential in that they were my chance to get out all of the fear and petty, everyday thoughts that were always with me -- all of the things standing between me and my creativity (p.11). I wondered though how the morning pages would really work for me. What I began to see, in writing for myself every day, was that this process wasn't about whether or not the Artist's Way *worked*, it

was about whether or not I felt I was learning from the process. I think that AW began working for me because I was open to it; I had no expectations. I knew I was creatively blocked in a major way, but beyond this, I didn't know why, what had caused it, what my role in my own creativity really was. I didn't know any of these things, so I was able to enter into the Artist's Way without the expectation that it would "work", that it would "fix my problems".

As a newcomer to Cameron's book, I was intrigued by the authors' promises of how this process would change my life. Initially, it was easy to read about how the morning pages were my "...primary tool for creative recovery" and how they would "...get us to the other side of our fears and our internal Censor", but until I really got into the process, these words meant little to me (p.11). I surely hoped that I would be able to "free my inner creative self", as Cameron promised, but in the beginning stages, I wasn't totally sure what this meant – I had to move through the process myself.

Initially, I used the morning pages primarily to vent all of my frustrations and fears about being in this new program and adjusting to a new city, a new life, in a sense. I was amazingly charged and excited by what I was learning but I had the overwhelming feeling: I don't know what is going on. I was struggling for a way to locate myself within all the things I was learning about creative people, taking chances, living a creative life and feeling creatively alive. I wanted to hurry up and "get" it all, but at this time my thoughts were swimming around in a sea of all sorts of new, amazing information and I was trying to figure out how to process it. Looking back in my life, I was used to instructors telling me what I should be gleaning from class. I was used to things being very cut and dry, as in: This is what we are learning; here is what you should write about,

etc. Now I was in an environment where I was acutely aware that there were few definitives, no specific answers that we were all supposed to “get”. *I* was the one in charge of my own learning now and I have to tell you, this was an adjustment for me. Some might say: Well, weren’t you always in charge of your own learning? I had been under the false assumption that that’s what I had been doing all of my academic life and now that assumption was proving to be false.

I think that in the beginning, I was using my old logic to move through the Artist’s Way as well. I was approaching it thinking: I will do as I am told here, I will follow directions and I will come away from it all a changed person, one who had found her creative voice. However, it wasn’t a math formula with an answer at the end. As I did my morning pages I realized that I could be brutally honest about everything – my feelings, my fears, etc. I was able to vent all of my frustrations and to document what was going on in my life. And what’s more, I was *allowed* to do this, it was OK, this was a space where I could be honest with myself. I enjoyed being able to open myself up, but initially, I wasn’t sure if the process was helping me but I kept it up. Again, that voice in my head was saying: This is all great, you are getting your feelings out, but what is the point? Where is this getting you? Sure enough, within a few weeks I had begun to identify some of my major issues, themes that kept coming up in my writing. Feeling like an outsider, needing to just ‘let go’ in class and not be afraid, wanting to connect with people, being confused about what I was learning – all of these were recurring themes early on in my writing. Its funny, but I think I probably wrote about my fear of opening up to others fifty times before it hit me: This is a real, valid problem for me. What am I going to do about it? Maybe even more importantly, where did this issue come from?

In my morning pages I wrote: “ I truly feel like if people really got to know the real me, they would find someone who they don’t understand, or who they think is weird, or that’s too opinionated, passionate, and emotional”. Just a year before, while working at the bank, I had had an upper-level person tell me (while I was struggling to understand the bank merger that was taking place): “You are too emotional, you can’t work in the business world and be emotional”. I hadn’t gone around crying, I was simply voicing my opinion that the merger was causing layoffs that were unjust to people, friends of mine, who worked at the bank. If I got worried about the bank foreclosing on someone, I would make a case for them. Often times, I was told to stop getting my feelings involved because this was “about money, not people”. I thought that way of looking at things was disgraceful, but in my own mind, I had internalized: I guess I *am* too emotional, certainly I get too invested in trying to help people and I guess that ends up hurting me (and them?) in the end. Yes, I had learned an enormous amount working at the bank, but I had also come to believe that maybe I was too emotional and that I cared too much. Of course, I knew in my heart that being an emotional and caring person was a positive thing, it was who I was, yet I couldn’t help but feel that me being this way was somehow off putting to a lot of people.

I brought this struggle with me to the CCT program because I hadn’t dealt with it. However, the morning pages brought it straight back to my attention. I had been deathly afraid to read my bio to Ben’s class because it shared so much of who I was, yet when I did read it, it was like a small victory. Immediately it was ok, people had looked at me with smiles as opposed to smirks. But even though I had won my first small battle, opening myself up in my bio, I had a long way to go.

As I continued to move through The Artist's Way, Cameron asked daily questions of us such as: If you had five other lives to lead, what would you do in each of them? List twenty things you enjoy doing? What do you do with your time? What were some issues you identified this week? Each day I was reflecting on these things and seeing clearer and clearer some of my hidden creative desires surfacing. Because no one was seeing my reflections, I could say, point blank: "If I had a past life to lead, I would want to be Edith Piaf because she was groundbreaking, artistic, an amazing singer, dressed in beautiful clothes, was not afraid of who she was, loved to perform, and she was *different*." I didn't have to be afraid that someone would see what I had written, and this was amazingly freeing. It also allowed me to see things that I dreamed of for my own self: to be a poet, to be able to get up in front of people and not be afraid of bearing my soul, to dress wonderfully (even if my clothes were from the Salvation Army), to feel free. I suppose its no wonder that for my upcoming Creative Biography presentation, I chose to take on the persona of the famous French singer from the 1930's, Edith Piaf.

The assignment was to give a fifteen minute presentation *as* another person, to inhabit that person and give the class insight into who they were/are. I was terrified to do the presentation, literally terrified. It had occurred to me to try to write my own poems, in the voice of Edith Piaf, to give the class a true idea of who this woman was. She had lived on the streets, sung for coins, and ended up becoming one of the most famous singers in the world. In addition, she was passionate, wild, carefree, half-mad, and always terrified that people would not accept her. I think I saw a bit of myself in Edith and so her life and her persona resonated with me in a big way. Yet sitting down to write my poems, nothing came, I was completely blocked. I must have started a hundred times and erased

every word I'd written. All the while, thoughts rang through my head: "You can't do this, no-one is going to like or understand the poems, your presentation isn't going to be funny and people like to laugh, YOU CAN'T DO IT!" My internal censors were on overdrive and because of this, I could not write. Finally, I took my pad and paper, went to a coffee shop (for a change of scenery) and I wrote. The words just kept coming and before I knew it, I had written all of the poems. I had simply told myself: You can do this, what are you afraid of? What really mattered was that I was proud of what I wrote, I had struggled and confronted my inner censors and had worked over them to write what I wanted to write.

Just writing the poems was a huge step for me, personally. I had felt like they were in me and I just had to give myself the space and the confidence to write them, without fear. When it came time to do my presentation, I was again very scared, because I wanted people to understand what I had written. I wanted them to know that I was doing this presentation for myself and not because I wanted them to like me. I knew that getting up there and reading these poems was like saying: This is who I am, the passion in these words, the lust for life that Edith Piaf had, that is also within me, that is me, *this* is me. I was afraid that people would think I was being too intense (I had been told by people before that I was "intense", something I think I perceived as a negative thing as opposed to a positive thing) Since I was young, I have felt as if being passionate and intense were somehow not quite accepted by the mainstream. As a teenager I kept my intense side to myself as much as possible, afraid that it would be perceived as not normal, or not "middle of the road" enough to be accepted by my peers. What that had taught me was that no matter how hard I tried to be someone else, I was full of passion, I had strong

opinions and it was hard *not* to let people see this. If I didn't open up, I became very aware that I wasn't being myself, my true self.

Here are the poems that I wrote and read to the class:

1.

If you saw me on the street you'd probably  
mistake me for a child, a vagabond, a little  
slip of a woman with violet eyes.  
Alone I am nothing but a small  
skipping stone, thrown across the Seine,  
a thing that sinks rather than  
soars.  
Little do you know that I am a bird,  
the sparrow you cannot help but  
pity,  
the one whose song awakens you  
from your deepest sleep and holds  
a mirror up to your soul.  
I am just a tiny thing, with feathers  
brown and matted, an underling,  
one who has begged for scraps and been  
ignored.  
I am you and you are me.  
I open my beak to sing, to cry,  
the song of city children,  
dwellers of gay Paree'.  
My song is of love, lonely nights,  
a man I once knew, a  
bench I once perched on.  
This body is nothing to look at,  
but my voice, my call,  
brings the city to my feet;  
It sits down, slowly,  
and listens to itself.

2.

Do not leave me alone.

I need you tonight like I need  
oxygen to breathe.

You make me live,

You are my heart.

I have never forgotten the days  
when I stood on a street corner and  
you threw coins at my feet.

You were my food, my drink,  
the force that brought me here; you thought  
me a diamond when I was merely fools gold.

When I open my eyes to the stage-lights

I see you, a million strong,  
or so it seems.

I imagine you on the battlefields  
of the Front; I am with you  
there.

I will be your lover, your mother,  
every woman who ever comforted  
you.

I will take this voice and wrap  
you up in it.

Both of us are not alone.

We will always need one another.

You will be the glass of whiskey which  
warms my bones,

I shall be

The first person you ever kissed:

Always in your memory,

aching,

warm

& bittersweet.

3.

I have no regrets.  
I am no saint in robes of blue.  
Money always came, but it never stayed.  
    I drank it away  
or gave it to a boy with sadness  
    in his eyes, like a lake that doesn't move.  
There was a time when  
    I knew sadness like this;  
        It is this that  
makes us all the same, the tie  
    that binds, the song that  
    fuses a lost woman with a lonely  
old man. We are all the same.  
    I do not regret this.  
    I loved too many men and  
    drank myself to death.  
Is that what they said of me?  
    So what? So what?  
        An apology for a life lived,  
        a life of sounds and tastes,  
        music and madness, broken hearts.  
I never thought much about  
    anything but music. I am not sorry.  
    I am lost love,  
        lonely nights,  
        fits of joy and rage,  
        drinks at dawn,  
        sad goodbyes and  
        tearful reunions,  
        lovers meeting in the dead of night.  
    I loved and was loved.  
        I have no regrets, anymore.

4.

They told me:  
“You will die if you do not stop performing.”  
The words hold no relevance to me.  
Singing is breath and without breath  
you die.  
I refuse to die without a song on my  
lips, ready to escape, to sail  
me into unknown seas of  
light and dark, to be my  
albatross, a guiding salvation.  
I am not afraid  
if I can take these with  
me; I have created them.  
They contain everything  
that is me.  
I shall walk  
towards God with Saint Theresa  
on one arm and my song-book  
in the other.  
I bring these offerings to  
you, the work of my  
life, my purpose.  
My explanation to you of  
all I have done, right  
and wrong.  
Please accept me in, for who  
I am.  
I never tried to fool you.

## CHAPTER 4

### GOING WITH THE PROCESS, YET TENTATIVENESS REMAINS

After I read my poems, I wasn't sure what kinds of reactions were registered on the faces of my classmates; it was difficult to tell. After sitting back down I had a few people ask: "Did you write that?" This made me feel so good. When I got home that night and read the comments from my classmates, I discovered that my presentation had been really well received and that was a triumph, a validation. Having taken some time to digest what had happened that night, I came to see that for the first time my happiness and sense of achievement didn't hinge on what other people thought, it came from my own feeling that I had overcome something big – my own fear. My classmates enjoyed my work, but even if they had disliked it, I realized that that would have been OK. What I felt about the process was important, and sharing your work with others means that everyone will receive it differently. Many folks just don't like poetry, but it is not about them, it's about *you*. I just felt free, like a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. It may sound strange, but before I began my presentation, I had said a silent prayer to Edith Piaf. I asked her to be with me, to help me make it through what I was about to do. If nothing else, I was imploring whatever spirit is out there, that helps each one of us to create, to help me believe in myself as a creator, as a person who makes something from their heart and sends that creation out into the world.

As I recount this experience, a chapter in the book *Your Life As Art*, by Robert Fritz, comes to mind. Fritz believes that in order for us to create, we must not be looking for our purpose in life, seeking out solutions to all of our problems, or searching for some kind of salvation. Instead of looking for an answer, he instructs us to look in order to

“...See what there is to see” (Fritz, 62.) Fritz goes on to talk about finding an energy or spirit within ourselves that we are open to. For some, this might be god, but the essence of this “spirit” is finding a space where we forget about our goals and our beliefs. We forget about having some kind of agenda, and we just LOOK, to “see what we can see”. I am reminded of this idea because it hits at the essence of what I experienced when I wrote my poems and shared them. It is hard to explain, but it was as if some force was working within me, along with me, to help me bring that part of myself to light. After opening myself up to this force, I felt like a light had gone off. I told myself: Even if you get up there and garble your words, or if someone snickers, it will be Ok; this is not about failure or success -- it’s about *you being able to show the world what’s inside of you; it is being able to expose your inner creator without fear.*

In moving through my daily morning pages, I began to expose more new dreams, ideas and fears. I felt as if a flood of ideas were coming to me. Maybe this was because suddenly it seemed like they might all be possible. As I worked through Cameron’s exercises, which challenged me to keep identifying my dreams and desires (even if they seemed totally far-fetched and unattainable), another new idea immerged.

My final assignment for Ben Schwendener’s Creativity course would be choosing some kind of creative project (again, no restrictions were placed on us here) and working to bring it to fruition. While writing one morning I had the idea: Why don’t I design a shop, a store? The idea came to me, quite out of the blue (or so it would seem). Many of my interests in life centered on fashion, art, beauty, having creative control, and culture, therefore when the idea of designing my own shop manifested itself, I decided to run with it. As a person who loves to visit small boutique stores, museums and

restaurants, I find that I am always constructing in my head my own version of the store I would like to open one day – I have always seen it as a mix of all the amazing stores I have been in, combining all sorts of different elements to make something unique. The thing is, until this moment in time, I had never thought to myself: Yes, it would be possible to open your own store; you could actually do this! Here I had been all of my life shopping around and admiring what other people had created, yet never believing it was something that I could do. Didn't you have to have a business degree, financial backing, or some kind of knowledge that I simply didn't have? I had inadvertently closed myself off from the possibility and I didn't even know why.

I believe that it was vital for me to see in writing my fears and desires before I was able to step back and look at what they really meant. In an exercise called “Ten Changes You Would Like To Make”, I had written:

- 1.) I would like to: Not care what other people think of me
- 2.) I would like to: Write some great poetry
- 3.) I would like to: Open my own store
- 4.) I would like to: Discount the opinions of people who don't know me

The recognition that comes with seeing these things written down is very powerful. It is as if in writing them you are able to give them validity and if nothing else they become even more real. When I looked at my Ten Changes, what I saw and heard was: I would open my own store if I wasn't afraid of how I would be perceived. I would open my own store *if I weren't afraid to fail*. This was not the first time I had acknowledged these fears. This time however, I was aware that these were big issues for me, and my subconscious wasn't going to let me forget it. What I can tell you is that through seeing these fears in print over and over again, it made it easier for me to say:

Ok, so now what are you going to do about it? You can't let it stop you and you know you are capable of overcoming it. You are capable of moving through this.

In voicing my love of fashion and creating different personas (through clothing, dance, performance) I was able to validate these things. Observing myself writing things like: "I wish I could work in fashion", or "I wish that I could have creative control over designing something" seemed to give weight to these thoughts. I was able to acknowledge that yes, not only do I love these things but they are *part of who I am* – how can I keep denying that?

So I set out to design my store. I had tried to relay to the class the ideas that were in my head about my ideal store (a place that not only sold clothes and gifts, but had a coffeehouse and a place to just gather, to hang out) One of my classmates queried: "But what is it going to look like?" From this very good question I decided to construct a model, almost like a dollhouse, that would literally *show* people my store idea. I saw this project as an opportunity to do an amazing art project, something I hadn't done since grade school. My brother had been endowed with an innate ability to draw and paint, but I had always been unable to do any of these things well, therefore I think I had always felt like: *I am not an artist*, at least not like he is. I stuck to writing and dance because whenever I did a school art project, I never seemed to get very high marks. Now I was at a point in my life where I *wanted* to do an artistic, hands on, materials-based "art" project – but this time, I was going to do it *my* way and I was going to have fun doing it. For the first time, I had few pre-conceived notions about what I was going to create, or how I was going to create it. I wanted to get to work and just see what evolved. I felt exhilarated by the thought of conceiving this model as I went along, without the fear that it would look

goofy, amateurish, or un-artistic. I really felt that I was doing this project for myself, simply because I wanted to do it.

Constructing the model made me feel like a kid again. I purchased art supplies and would spend entire weekends constructing mock-hardwood floors for the model, cutting out fashions from my old Vogue's, and figuring out how to rig the model with working lights. I let my imagination run wild, all the while envisioning my future, a time when this place actually existed. I could see where it would be located, I could see the storefront with fresh flowers in window-boxes, I could see Thursday evenings when kids from the neighborhood would come in to do creative arts projects. The place wasn't pretentious or expensive, but inviting and interesting – my ideal boutique. The amazing thing about this process was letting myself explore everything that was in my imagination, without telling myself: No, that won't work! Instead of feeling scared and anxious about how my model would turn out (and be received), I focused instead on just doing it, being in the moment of creation. Having that freedom, allowing yourself to be free with your ideas, is an incredible feeling. Each day I worked on the model and my ideas for it, I wrote in my journal, and I felt good about what I was doing -- not unsure, tentative or afraid, but *good*.

Throughout the semester I came in contact with three books (that had been assigned in my classes) that opened my eyes in amazing ways. Uncommon Genius, by Denise Shekerjian, took me through the experiences of people who had been lucky enough to win the coveted MacArthur Fellowship. I remember one man who had worked in the business world and began feeling as if his job was slowly draining him of who he was. Because he had always loved woodworking, he quit his job to work in a studio

making furniture. For a time, he and his wife could barely afford to eat, but he kept learning how to create furniture because he loved it and felt a strong need to do it. Now this man is a very successful woodworking artisan and has been working at his craft for thirty years.

This particular story stuck with me because of the risk this guy was willing to take for his art. I imagine that he (and his wife) were very frightened to leave a life that was secure in order to take on a new life that might never yield much money or security. The message I came away with was: If there is something you want to do badly enough, you need to go for it, without being afraid to fail. Also, whether you want to work with wood, or become a circus performer, or build skyscrapers for a living, it doesn't matter as long as you love it.

One evening in class we had creative and innovative individuals come in to speak with us. One woman whose story really resonated with me was an artist, who decided one day to begin knitting a sweater. She didn't even know how to knit, so she just went with the flow and ended up creating this wild, interesting, sweater-like garment. Because she liked the way it turned out, she took the sweater to a Newbury Street shop and they ended up purchasing it. As the months went by, she made more and more sweaters and each one of them sold. She was so surprised because they had been a kind of happy-accident that she had just invented. Again, I marveled at the guts it must have taken to walk into a store and say: "Here is my creation, would you be interested in buying it?" The sweater was so unconventional-looking that many people would have turned up their noses, but this woman said: No, this is beautiful and I think other people will think so as well.

As I read about creativity and heard first-hand accounts from risk-taking, creative people, I felt a bit like I was on the outside looking in. I felt such a desire to be like them, to be fearless and confident, to go out there and achieve all that I wanted to, but I still felt like: *that couldn't be me*. I mean, could I actually be that brave? Was the only thing stopping me my own fear, or was it that I still was not sure who I was as a creator? I felt keenly aware that I wanted to be like those creative individuals who inspired me every day, but I had quite a bit of work to do yet in re-covering my inner-artist. I was certainly working on it, and each day I gained more and more confidence, but I felt that I still had a ways to go.

I can explain this further by telling you that even after completing my model, being proud of and happy with my creation, I still felt removed from the idea of actually bringing the store to life. Throughout the months of working on this project, I had filled an entire notebook with ideas, store names, what I would sell, how I wanted the place to be part of the community, but I felt like what I had been doing was simply letting myself explore. I had given myself permission to be really free in creating, to let things evolve and grow, which they had. Yet as I was nearing the end of the project, I had the realization of: Oh no, what do I do *after* this? It was as if I wasn't sure how to proceed. How would I keep this creative momentum going? I think I was deathly afraid that after my creativity classes were over, I wouldn't know how to keep going by myself. After quite a long time I had broken through some creative blocks that were very difficult for me to knock down. I felt I was gaining the confidence I needed to keep going, but because I was unsure of my final destination, I wasn't sure how to confront that fear.

As I write that last sentence, something becomes clear to me. After going through that semester and re-connecting to my creativity, being a kid again in the creative sense, it was like going back and re-learning things that I had lost. I needed to re-learn the vital idea that if I want to create, I need to free my mind, I have to stop being scared, and maybe most importantly, I need to stop focusing on the end product. When I stopped worrying over my presentation and what would happen after the project was done, I was *free to create in the moment*. Yet now that my project was finished and I had given a well-received presentation, I was free to focus solely on what was going to happen to me now. Instead of continuing on and living in that spirit of creative and personal discovery, I stopped and said: What about my future? Quit playing around and think about THAT! Where is all of this creating going to GET you? Immediately I was freaking out again, worried, fearful about my future, wanting to put my arms around something that was concrete instead of elusive. As I look back, I can see what was a significant problem for me: My inability at that time to focus on the process. I couldn't step back and see all that I was accomplishing, to just be ok with where I was. I just *had* to know what my future held – How was all of this creating going to benefit me? What was I going to DO with it? Somehow it still wasn't ok for me to just be myself, to be unafraid, to be open and free to the things that were flowing through me. At times I would be totally open to these forces, and at other times I would want to say: I should just forget all of this because what is it doing for me? What job am I going to get? What does all of this mean for my future? All of my past fears were still there, as powerful as ever.

I knew that I was capable of creating. I had not lost that part of myself and that was a big realization (and recovery) for me. Yet if I wanted to keep moving through the

CCT program, I needed to keep my mind open, to know that I would figure things out, regardless of what the outcome was. Instead of focusing on the ever-present fear of my future, it was possible (and ok) for me to live in the moment – I had learned how to do that again and look what I had created. Before leaving for the summer (a time I somewhat dreaded because I knew I would be forced to keep going with my work on my own, without class to help guide me) I re-read a letter from my morning pages where I was supposed to be an old woman writing a letter to my younger self. I would come back to this letter time and time again for inspiration:

“Dear Kris,

Do not ever be frightened of your dreams; never think them impossible or foolish. When you say that want your life to be a constant search for knowledge and true happiness, you are right – this is your destiny. Do not pay heed to those who try to box you in, those who do not understand that this is all one big process. You never were a butterfly who stayed put long! This is what I love about you, your ability to love, to believe, to open your eyes and greet life with a sense of yourself and empathy for others. Although you may feel a bit lost, you are not, you will soon be found. Maybe you have found yourself right at this very moment but it will just take a little while until the final unveiling. Please do not ever apologize for who you are or the choices you make, even the small ones, because if people do not understand, they will simply have to try harder. You must stay focused on your creativity, your vision, your quest for BEcoming. If you have always dreamed of opening up your own store, do it! If you want to publish a book of poems about *becoming*, do it! If you want to live in Italy for a year, do it! You will never forgive yourself if you don't at least try to live out these dreams. Continue to

surround yourself with beauty, you will always be a designer. Love hard and with all your heart. Learn to listen, to let yourself stand for yourself without all the pomp and circumstance. Do not always try to impress everyone with how different and smart you are, they will see it for themselves. Find an outlet for your fear, loss, uncertainty and stress; creatively make a space in which to work through these things. Live in the NOW, not in the tomorrow or yesterday. Do not worry so much, open your heart and have faith. Say thank you for all that you have. Do not take anything for granted. LIVE, LIVE, LIVE, LIVE with Gusto!”

## CHAPTER 5

### CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD AND EXPANDING MY VIEW OF CREATIVITY

Over the summer I kept up my morning pages and wrote as much poetry as I could. I was also able to pursue two other passions of mine: gardening and cooking. Throwing myself into these creative activities and being able to give myself permission to do it was vital to my journey. It is easy to focus on working and making money while at the same time abandoning your creative pursuits for lack of time or motivation. I knew that if this wasn't going to happen to me, I really had to work on it. If I wanted to do the creative things that I loved, I simply had to make time for them, to re-arrange my schedule if necessary. You have to feed your creative spirit if you ever want it to grow. It is also perfectly ok to be creative without some apparent end. For so long I had viewed my own creativity as some 'all or nothing' thing. Either I danced, or wrote, or gave 100% of my time to creative pursuits, or it was pointless for me to invest the time. I was beginning to see that being a creative person didn't always work that way. If I could give only half an hour a day to cooking or writing poetry, then that was ok. Just because I didn't sit at the computer all day writing did not mean that I wasn't dedicated to my artistic self. I saw that being outside and planting some pansies fed my creativity in the same way that producing a good poem did, even if it only took a short time.

As I returned to school in September, I felt like a person who had finally taken real steps to regain the creative part of her self. However, the question remained: If you want to create a future for yourself where you can continue feeding this creative spirit, how are you going to do that? What steps are you going to take to bring this experience to

the next level? I tried not to get too bogged down with these questions, but I kept them in my mind because I knew they would somehow factor into all of the work I would complete in my last year of grad school.

The Evaluation course challenged me to begin thinking about the idea of educational change. For the past year I had been focusing on myself, but now I could begin to expand on what I had learned personally. During the summer I had had a chance to really step back and observe the rhythms of my neighborhood, a place where so many folks seemed too busy to even say hello to one another, let alone plant flowers or hang out on the porch. Everyone seemed so fragmented and unconnected, always coming and going but never staying put long enough to connect to anyone else. In my own writings I had explored my need to feel part of my new community, to know people and be friends with them, to feel as if I was really connected to the neighborhood (something that I was definitely struggling with). Slowly, the idea for starting a community garden began to take root.

There is a chapter in the book Creative Life, by Clark Moustakas, where the author talks about getting out of one's own head and connecting with other people. It is necessary for creative people to explore their own internal worlds, but there comes a time when this might not be helping the creative process. We create as a response to the world, to being alive in this world, and we need to really open our eyes to what's going on around us. If we really want to engage with life in the here and now, it is crucial to let the world in. I think that I had been viewing the world (and my future in it) with a kind of dread and inevitability brought on by my own fear. Inside my own mind I was terrified I would never be able to succeed in life as a creative person. I had been believing that I

would have to give up and take a job I didn't like, simply because I did not know how to be myself (the creative self that is at the core of who I am) and have that be all right.

But things were beginning to change. I knew that I wanted to get out there in the world and make a creative contribution, no matter what that was. So I began "planting the seeds" for a community garden, talking to my neighbors and starting a dialogue about gardening. I found out that other people on my block were interested in beautifying their yards and finding ways to get involved with neighbors, they just didn't know how. Slowly, more and more people seemed to be turning what little green spaces they had into tiny gardens. It was so cool to see people out planting and transplanting and to wave over to them as I did the same. In class I explored different ways for expanding on my community garden ideas and I looked to other successful programs for help.

The feeling I had "getting out of my head" and taking a risk was amazing. I knew now more than ever, that it was extremely important to me to be involved in the community. Sometimes we need to retreat into our own worlds, it is often really important that we do this, but when we are ready, we must step out into the world and say: I am a creative person, I have something to offer; I think I'll just get out there and see what happens. Even if I had done something as simple as baking something for a community function and attending, it would have been a step towards connecting with people. By opening up my creative self a little farther, I was beginning to expand my possibilities. As I write this I hear Clark Moustakas in my mind, so eloquently capturing my feelings, "The individual is not a fixed entity, but a center of experience involving the creative synthesis of relations. The central force for this becoming nature of the person is

a basic striving to assert and expand one's self-determination, to create one's own fate" (Moustakas, p.111).

During this time I was also taking the Critical Thinking course, which gave me yet another chance to continue thinking about my life, what was important to me, and what I needed to do to create a future for myself. I began to look at the different facets of my life and what I really needed to keep going in the direction I was heading. I wanted to continue being creative and productive, I did not want to relive the time in my life where I had lost these vital parts of myself.

Throughout the creativity course, I became interested in ways of seeing and how different people perceive the world around them. When it comes to Art, what do people *see*? How do they react to Art that might be shocking, or childlike, or hard to understand? In turn, I began looking into how I perceived certain music, or paintings, or graffiti that I saw on the street. For our final paper, I traveled to the Museum of Fine Arts and challenged myself to truly consider Art that I was not usually interested or passionate about. I wandered through the portrait hall, a place I had always disliked because I didn't feel challenged by the paintings there. I saw them as boring, unimaginative, and dull, a sweeping and close-minded opinion for someone who called herself a lover of Art. So, I confronted these paintings. I sat down and just looked, without judgment or preconceived feelings. I sat there for quite a while looking at a painting of a young girl with a mandolin. As time went on, I began trying to construct a story for this girl. I wanted to know all about her, so I made up her history. I found that for the first time, I didn't want to look at who the artist was and what the piece was called – I just wanted to have my own secret story about the girl, one that would remain unchanged by outside information.

I left the museum feeling as if I had found a new favorite painting, one I knew I would go back to visit again and again.

I had challenged myself to think differently, to open myself up to the possibility of seeing in a new way. I knew that the next time I visited the painting, I might have a completely different experience, and that was ok. The key was that I had suspended my judgments. I had walked into the museum without saying: I am going to go see this, or I do not like this; I am going to dictate my experience. I didn't do any of those things and I came away with a newfound sense of myself. Being so judgmental, especially when it came to my own creative pursuits, had so often kept me from creating (or seeing) anything. It is one thing to strive for greatness, and to keep creating things that you believe are good, but it is vital that you listen to your own creative spirit and not the voice that tells you: It's not good enough, no-one will understand, this is not art! Who am I to say that the garden a family grows together is not art? Who am I to tell someone that their love of graffiti is not going to get them anywhere because that medium is not "accepted" as "real" art? When you create, you are taking a risk, you are putting yourself out there for the world to say: "You are dead wrong, you aren't an artist at all, no-one cares about what you've done." I knew that I had to have the guts to say: This is my creation, take it or leave it, but *I* know and *I* feel that it is Art (whether it is a poem, or a flower bed, or a crème brulee).

Critical Thinking helped me to see, and to believe for myself, that all things are Art if we believe them to be. If we create something, that creation is some reflection of our spirit and if we believe that it is art, then it is. I realize that many people would argue with me on this point. I felt as if I was reclaiming the word Art and appropriating it for all

those people who create but never believed that what they created was anything special. Of course you cannot get anyone to believe that they are an artist or a creative person, that is something we all must come to on our own. But surely there is merit in recognizing that Art is more than what “important” people *say* is art. Of course, these are simply my own opinions, ones that helped me move onto the next phase in my learning: envisioning my future. What do I really want for myself? What do I believe in? I attempted to answer this last question in the personal manifesto I wrote in Critical Thinking. Our last assignment was to come up with a “manifesto”, a vision of what we had come to believe about the world from taking the Critical Thinking course. I decided to turn in a poem:

This is what I know:

I cannot tell you how to BE. Critical, creative, uncensored, free, not free.

all I know is that I am me. I take definitions and warp them to fit my space, my womanhood, my mood, my groove, my future, my present.

I could say that I know, that my world is made up of definitions, worlds I am

trying to fit IN TO , putting myself in boxes, telling the world I have found the

best way to be. But that would be a lie.

I ain't playin the game anymore --- I want to explode the box and eat the definitions. Instead I tell stories so that I can relate,

so people out on the streets can maybe relate, to the debate, the stop the hate, to fill the plate that has been empty for a long time now:

I once knew a girl named Kai who drew a mural on  
a public building of trees and flowers growing  
in an abandoned lot where there was once glass and  
trash.

If you want a definitive, a definition, a reason, an answer, I would tell you that Kai

Is critical, creative, visionary, one who uses her intellect and talent  
To envision something ELSE, something better, different,  
GLORIOUS!

I reach into my past, throw it into the pot of my present, and marinate it for my future.

My thoughts and dreams have built, step ON step, ever rising towards

KNOWLEDGE, HAPPINESS, GOODNESS, FREEDOM.

Critical thinking is what i do to stay alive, to achieve the dream,  
what ever that means, to keep my hands on the pulse of the world, the tendon that  
connects me to you and you to me ----- us to us.

What matters is that we try to know each other. All that matters is

putting myself in your shoes because if I can't do that  
then who am I? What do I know? I know nothing. I am nothing without you

and the kid on the corner, or the woman on the subway, or the man in the  
nice suit. I am everyone and everyone is me, we are free, or we could be

if only we could try to SEE.

My manifesto, womanfesto, criticalfesto, creatiefesto is: OPEN YOUR EYES.

My eyes *were* open and what I saw was a future where I might be able to own my own store. Who was there to tell me I couldn't be my own boss, or live out a creative dream, or succeed in business? Nobody. If I was going to step out into the world and create my future, one that was filled with art and beauty and creativity, nothing was stopping me except myself.

## CHAPTER 6

### STRATEGIC PERSONAL PLANNING HELPS TO MAKE DREAMS A REALITY

Entering into the Practicum course, I knew that I wanted to further explore the idea of opening my own store. I was slowly beginning to believe that this might be something I could do, that I would be really good at. This idea had been born out of my daily free-writing, and I continued to build on the store concept by utilizing a CCT tool called “Off The Wall Ideas.” The concept is simple: When you are brainstorming and trying to come up with more ideas, just voice all crazy things you can think of; get those ideas out there no matter how wild or crazy they seem. I used this tool to say: Ok, let’s say I want to open a store, what else goes along with that? I want this place to be like a shop/museum/learning-center/gathering place. That idea seemed crazy to me because I had no idea how I could ever achieve it – I hadn’t seen a store that looked quite like the one I had been envisioning in my dreams; was it even possible? I continued to throw off the wall ideas out there, like wanting my store to be the best place to come and hang out, it would be the Starbucks of whatever neighborhood it opened in! It was both helpful and fun to be able to just voice whatever it was I wanted to voice. When you first look at an OTW idea you’ve written, it seems just that, kind of crazy. But when you keep looking you realize: I wrote that for a reason. Obviously I really *do* want this place I am designing to be many things, not just a store. Before, that is how I had been thinking of it, as just a store that people would come into to buy things and relax. The Off The Wall exercise had brought to my attention the fact that I had a much bigger “vision” in mind. I became

aware that this store I was envisioning was much more than I had once believed – it had many more components than I had thought.

I continued doing brainstorming in order to flesh out my ideas about opening a store. It was so exciting to think about because just last semester I had come up with the idea (it had manifested itself in my morning pages) and now here I was actually starting to build concrete ideas. I could see a notable change in my thinking. I had gone from writing in my morning pages: “I want to open my own boutique some day, just like the ones I love going to”; to deciding in Ben’s course to build a model of this store, to being in place where I was starting to see the evolution of my own ideas. The store was becoming real and just a year ago it had been a far-fetched dream, an off-the-wall idea.

The next brainstorming tool that helped me immensely was Strategic Personal Planning, a tool formed by professor Peter Taylor. At the time it was introduced to me in Practicum, I really had no idea if it would be effective or not. The only way to see was to try, and I was game. Doing an extensive “map” of your ideas was a really effective SPP tool for many of my classmates, but the personal planning tool that really worked for me was “Post-Its”. I was challenged to take my idea of opening a creative store and to write down all of the aspects of this store I could think of. I sat on my kitchen floor with a huge stack of post-it notes and I wrote without worrying or censoring myself. Here are some of the things I wrote:

- I want to be involved with my community
- I want to have creative control over what I do
- I want to feel connected to people
- I want to be surrounded by Art
- I want to be a successful businesswoman

I wrote about thirty messages on my post it notes but these were just a few that really jumped out at me. I had allowed myself to just get all of my thoughts out there, even if they didn't seem to fit anywhere. The SPP guide then asked us to try to take each post-it and to see if could fit in a grouping. By doing this I saw that a big aspect of my wanting to open a store was my desire to feel part of the community, to contribute to where I lived, to connect with people, and to share my deep love of art and creating with others. In another group it became clear that I have a desire to be my own boss, to have creative control, to grow as a creative person, to be a "successful business woman."

When I saw that I had written that, I was so taken aback. I just wrote *what???* It was a big moment for me. It was like a bell had gone off in my brain. Yes, I do want to own my own business someday, I think I would be good at it and it is a dream of mine. Never in a million years would I have thought I would have written that! I was the girl who had wanted nothing to do with the business world. I had always lumped all business in with something I considered bad, establishment, all about money and not about valuing creativity. As I moved through the Practicum course, I began delving into books about small-business owners, some women like me who had a passion for something and had decided to turn it into a business. It was becoming clear that starting a business did not have to be all about money or being a trained business-person. Many people had achieved dreams that were similar to mine and I looked to these people for advice and inspiration. Some books that were helpful to me in my research were: The Great Good Place by Ray Oldenburg; The Cultural Creatives by Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson; Creating Community Anywhere by Carolyn Shaffer and Kristin Anundsen; Turn Your Passion Into Profits by Janet Allon; and A Shop Of One's Own also by Janet Allon. The first

three books focus on the idea that creative people who care about the communities where they live can have a positive cultural and artistic influence. I loved Ray Oldenburg's discussion of neighborhood small businesses such as bookstores, coffee-shops, pubs and barbershops as being at the heart of any community. These gathering places are focal to our own sense of being part of community AND they keep us connected with other people. This idea began to factor itself into my own store ideas quite strongly. If I did in fact open a store, I wanted it to center around community and to be a place that all kinds of folks would want to come to, just to hang out and BE. In researching opening a unique, artsy, community-based store, I also always kept in mind a message that Ben Schwendener told our class many times: "You can live an artistic, creative life AND be successful. You are allowed to make a good living while also doing what you love. Don't ever think that because you are an artist that you have to be poor and unheard, it doesn't have to be that way." What Ben was trying to hammer home was the idea that if you had a unique idea, try whatever you can to make it a wide success. In doing this, you may be able to touch a lot more people than you once believed. I keep this message in my mind always and it helps to give me the confidence to pursue my dreams, even if it sometimes seems like they'll never become a reality.

When it came time in the semester for each Practicum student to present their work, I got up and talked about not only my store ideas, but the evolution I had taken to get to this point. To me, the personal process of how my ideas had changed since beginning the CCT program was behind all of the work I had done up to that point. I had come into the program feeling lost, unsure of myself, confused, certainly I was not able to call myself an artist or a creator. Now I was standing in front of my amazingly supportive

peers, my friends, wanting to share with them that I felt like a different person. Whether or not I opened my store in two years or ten; even if I took a different creative path, I knew that I wanted to live a life of Art, filled with creativity and community, a life where I wasn't afraid to be myself and to let people see that. The process and its transformative nature had changed me.

## CONCLUSION

As I look back on this journey, I see that it has been going on all of my life and that it certainly does not end here. I notice that this is the first time I have really written about my life, my fears, my struggles and my hopes, all in plain view. It has never been easy for me to do this, I have always used poetry and creative writing to express my thoughts and emotions in more interesting ways (ways that were more interesting to me, at least). Instead of saying: “I am afraid of not being accepted by other people,” I am better able to tell a story or bury my true message in language that must be deciphered by the reader. And because I rarely share my poetry, it would be difficult for people to see how I really feel, to be privy to my deepest fears and desires. As an artist, one wants to challenge people, to have them dig deeper than merely what they think they see.

This paper was a difficult one for me to write. When you put yourself out there, you are more aware than ever of how you are going to be received. As I wrote about my fear of failure, of not believing in myself as an artist, of feeling lost and confused, I wondered: Why do I feel the need to write this? People don't usually share this kind of thing, so why am I doing it? What provoked me to do it this way, of all the ways I could have done it? The answer is that I had to write this, in this manner. When I began writing, the words just began to flow. I felt that if I didn't say these things out loud, on paper, that they wouldn't ever be truly valid. By saying: “I am terrified that I will never live a creative life” I have in some small way let that demon free. For me as an individual, I need to express my emotions or else I suppress them; then they're never really gone, never really dealt with. Writing a creative journey of this kind is being able to say: I AM

Creative, I AM Emotional, this is what is inside of me and it's OK that I voice it – even if no-one else understands that.

I wonder often how it was that I came to be part of the CCT program, because this was so obviously the place that I needed to be. If I had not come here, would I be facing my fears and trying to re-define myself as a creative individual? I am not sure. What I do know is that CCT created an environment, a space, and a community, wherein this kind of personal journey was supported and fostered. So many of my personal fears were allowed to exist because I didn't know how to confront them. In addition, here I was carrying around all of these self-doubts yet everyone seemed to be saying: "You'll be ok; suck it up and you'll figure it out; stop being so emotional; you're smart and your future will figure itself out." HOW? That was my question. Here I had all of this knowledge but I didn't know how to use it to think about my own life, my deep down hidden dreams and fears. Of course I went around worried about being myself, no-one seemed to value the things that were important to me.

But then I found the place that helped me to bridge the gap. I will never forget one class period where Peter Taylor told us: "I prefer to think of myself as a person who guides you and is here to help you while you are figuring out how to take your life seriously." I will never forget that because I had never heard anyone, especially an instructor who is so gifted (as a person and a teacher), say anything like that. In that moment everything made sense to me. Being a critical and creative thinker was not only about learning new ways to look at the world and to understand the world, it was also essentially about how *I* (without anyone telling me how to do it) was going to take my life seriously. And that is what I am learning to do. There is no formula, only I know

what I need to do to make my life what I want it to be. I also know that if I want to continue creating my life, that I must involve other people. This is what I mean by community, whether it's CCT, or my neighborhood, or a community of artists. I need other people to help me make my dreams (whatever they are) a reality. I could go on for days about my dreams and desires, but when it comes down to it, what really matters is how I think about my life and how I engage with the world. I may open that store one day, but I might not. Maybe I will publish a book of my poetry, or go to Africa to teach literacy, or design my own line of clothing. What I have now is the confidence and a way of looking at my life that I believe will help me to achieve whatever I put my mind to. It is possible for me to live a life where I don't have to give up the things that matter to me. I believe that is true for the first time. The Critical and Creative Thinking program has changed my life.

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## EPILOGUE

Each day I see new things and recognize new dimensions of who I am as a creative individual. Just recently I went to an exhilarating rock concert and came away from it thinking how wonderful it would be to work in the music industry in some capacity. This added yet another layer to my thinking: if I open my own store one day, I will make it a goal to help promote music that might not be available to the mainstream. Then I get out my notebook and write that down as a goal for the future, as an element of what's important to me as an artist. I can actually say that now I have the faith in myself as a creative contributor to envision things I never would have thought possible. I know that this feeling will continue to strengthen and evolve.

I thought it might be helpful to share with you some of the texts that have helped me through my journey, pivotal ways of thinking that were introduced to me (or that I stumbled upon myself) and that I have found invaluable. Some of these I mention in my paper, others are ones that informed my thinking as I moved through the CCT program.

For rediscovering your own creativity AND thinking about your life:

- 1.) The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1992). A hands-on daily process of reading, writing, and reflecting on who you are as a person and a creative force.
- 2.) Your Life As Art (Vermont: Newfane Press, 2003), The Path of Least Resistance (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984), & Creating (New York: Fawcett Columbine: 1991) by Robert Fritz. Practical guides to the creative process, which will help you to create anything, from a painting to a career change.
- 3.) Art and Fear: Observations On The Perils of Artmaking by Bayles and Orland (Santa Cruz: The Image Continuum, 1993). Focuses on the idea that fear propels many of the decisions that we make NOT to step out there and be fearless as artists. What holds us back and what can we do to overcome it?

- 4.) Art Objects by Jeanette Winterson (New York: Knoff, 1995). A writer talks about learning to look at and appreciate art.
- 5.) Creative Life by Clark E. Moustakas (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1977). Gives insight into the struggles that creative people strive to overcome and explores what it means to be creative.
- 6.) The Continuum Concept by Jean Liedloff (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1977). A writer goes to live in an indigenous South American culture and comes to see that their way of life might be able to teach us about what's missing in ours.
- 7.) The Art of Innovation by Tom Kelley (New York: Doubleday, 1995). The story of a design firm which values creativity and collaboration at its core. A revolutionary way to look at business and invention.
- 8.) Effortless Mastery by Kenny Werner (New Albany, IN: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, 1996). A musician and instructor looks at the technical and spiritual aspects of creativity.

Sources for opening your own business AND getting involved in your community:

- 1.) A Shop of One's Own (New York: Hearst Books, 2002), Turn Your Passion Into Profits (New York: Hearst Books, 2001), and This Business of Bliss (New York: Hearst Books, 1999) by Janet Allon. These books are written by a woman and geared towards women who want to open their own creative businesses. The personal stories and resource pages are very helpful.
- 2.) The Great Good Place by Ray Oldenburg (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1999). This author has written a few books about the necessity for community gathering places, whether they be pubs or coffee-houses. The "third place" he focuses on is that place other than our work or home that connects us to other people, to the pulse of the community.
- 3.) Creating Community Anywhere by Shaffer and Anundsen (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1993). For those people, like me, who struggle with wanting to be a creative person, make a contribution to the world, AND find the support to do it. No matter where you live, you can help to build a community of support and creativity.
- 4.) The Cultural Creatives by Ray and Anderson (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000). I was drawn to this book because of its belief that there are many people out there who desire creative, engaged, challenging and passionate communities to be part of.

- 5.) Seedfolks by Ray Fleischman (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1993). An amazing little book about a community that works to build a public garden out of an abandoned lot. Diverse ages and backgrounds work together to find common ground.

These texts were all helpful to me in the process of thinking about my own creativity. Not only do I strive to be a creative person because I am compelled to, I also recognize a strong need to be part of my community (wherever that is) and to contribute to its well-being and collective spirit. Seeing that dimension is a tangible example of how I am growing as a person, a creator and an artist. I hope that these texts will be as helpful and inspiring to you as they have been to me.