

CREATIVITY IN THE MIDST OF THINGS

A SHORT GUIDE TO EXPLORING WHATS BEYOND THE
HORIZON AND EXERCISING CREATIVE MUSCLES AGAIN.

BY

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This booklet has been put together at the end of a three month non creative stint, not being able to write, art journal or feel inspired has been hard. Ultimately the things I learnt from it got me from moment to moment to many moments where I've written at my desk and journaled in my sketchbook again.

MY STORY

I hadn't got here because something traumatic happened or all my supplies were burned in a fire, nothing bad had happened at all. I was however in my first trimester of pregnancy. Hooray congratulations you may think or feel I have been blessed. Yes, I definitely have.

I understand this may not be an entirely relatable experience and you don't have to be pregnant in order to read this guide, phew! The thing to relate to is that the huge changes that were happening in my body, showed up through my hormones this gave me depression like symptoms for three whole months - 120 days!

This book isn't 'What to do while in a creative rut', though I will begin by offering suggestions to what helped me through in the section Below Zero.

This book is about what to do next, when you've started to see something beyond the horizon. When you feel a pull to re-exercise creative muscles. It could be that you want to dip your toes into creative exercises in your busy lifestyle, that too will work.

BELOW ZERO

When I felt this way, sad though I had things I've always wanted in life, I was planning my wedding (with the help of my mum and his family, I really wasn't up to much) and was pregnant, up until then I was uncertain it was even possible. I worked flexible hours and had money to enjoy spending each month. This picture could have featured me smiling and laughing gayly through life, though it didn't, my hormones had plummeted and I was left feeling empty, depleted and down. I knew it wasn't my fault, I knew it wasn't lasting or a dangerous depression I just saw it as a process of something I would go through.

The first thing that helped me move along the grey clouds were exercise, an obvious to most it was movement that kept me moving fluidly in my day. I didn't get stuck or overwhelmed. I simply set out to do something e.g. Go swimming, do a yoga set at home or go for a walk and did it, then moved onto the next things such as making dinner, talking with family, listening to music.

There were days that turned into weeks that I knew my creative self had taken a holiday and I was a person getting by. I had been here pre-twenties, working a job I loathed to be in but was there for the money, to get by.

There were tell tale signs to confirm this was a hormonal issue, I no longer took interest in reading something simple like the back of the cereal packet or a blog post like I usually would. Instead I would have total engagement with chat shows and evening soaps on TV. Now I know this can be people's regular pattern, which is why I fitted in so well around others who's it was. However it wasn't mine, through watching them my body and mind relaxed a little and when I felt more myself again, thankfully the impulse to watch those shows went away. I accepted it was something I did at that time and had faith it would not last.

The same went for music, I couldn't stomach (literally) the music I usually listened to, devotional songs with a harmonium in the back ground. They made my head hurt, made my nausea flair up

and gave me unexpected mood swings. I found a solution in listening to devotional songs with a Western twist, I allowed myself to listen to older pop, R n B and anything that took my fancy. I didn't hold back with my music choice, if I felt uplifted for it, it was on.

The thing about depression is it comes with the side effect of numbness, like sensory deafness. Nothing comes in, nothing comes out. Like times when you feel down you say 'A giant cat with big round eyes singing The only way is up wouldn't even bring a smile to my face.' I got through this numbness by just breathing, breathing and being thankful. Breathing long and deep comes from yogic practices and that old saying 'The only thing we own is our next breath'.

I didn't wake up with a optimism and a happy feeling wash over me like before, I did develop something through out my day. I went on a happiness hunt. Here's an example for you, there were days I'd walk by, look up at the sky and the autumn leaves on a tree and see only GREY and TREE. This may seem pretty common, for me everything had been filtered differently, this was not my usual way of thinking. It wasn't till later in the day, it could be absolutely any time though in this example 5pm, that I'd look at the sky and the tree and think WOW THE CLEAR SKY AGAINST THE AUTMNM LEAVES ON THE TREE IS WONDERFUL TO LOOK AT, I smile to myself, I MAY EVEN DRAW IT LATER, IT'S BROUGHT ME JOY TODAY!

You see, I'm not sure if it's because I'm a creative person at heart that I see things differently or because I practice yoga but that is my thought pattern on an average to full blown inspired day, nature fascinates me.

That is where the happiness hunt comes in. No matter how down, depleted or numb I felt, I knew I could find a few moments of happiness I just had to be aware of it and accept it could come at anytime. It could come at 7.15 that morning and see me through my day or arrive at 6pm or 9pm.

The happiness came in tiny, minuscule, fleeting moments, the type people don't even pay attention to in there day. I never knew if or when they would come, so I surrendered and waited with faith they would.

The most rewarding moments were seeing happiness and joy on others faces and in small acts of kindness from strangers. If you were in a highly vulnerable state it's a good idea not to get attached to them or the people featured. I had a sesame seeds worth of optimism I would witness the kindness of strangers and each day, I did.

They came in the form of seeing old friends catch up in the supermarket, a store worker telling me the right way to go or finding me the right product, a smile from a sales assistant who smiled as she remembered serving me the other day. The last of the Summer sun warming my legs as I sat in the gardens before work, the breeze the wind blew and hearing genuine laughter. It all counted, everyday something new, no matter how similar it was never the same, would uplift my spirit a cm more than it was before or raise a smile to my face when a few minutes earlier that felt like an impossible ask.

I experienced human interaction from a completely new perspective, it made sure I got out more to witness it.

The final thing that helped at Below Zero, was routine. Each five out of seven days I would show up for work. Like I said before my job was flexible but over time it became frustrating. This wasn't entirely pregnancy related, I had come to a dead end at this type of job being fulfilling. There were as much pros as cons and working wasn't the issue, it was the getting ready and commute to it, where then I would spend half a day doing work I no longer looked forward to being at.

The great thing about work at this time was the overall picture, I got out of the house and chose to earn money. I spoke to people, had conversations and listened to others. The people I was working with made me smile at times and through working with them I kept focus mostly for the entire day of working.

Little by little, each day you will find proof that happiness is all around and attainable again. You are stronger than what is, what it seems like, be patience, breathe and see.

AT POINT ZERO

Nearing out from minus numbers, below zero, I came to Point Zero. This is a term by Painter and Author Michelle Cassou. My creativity was creeping in, not in fun short bursts of ecstatic inspiration but gradually, like a crawling injured animal through a thick jungle.

I started free style writing again, something I've done since a teenager, in my early twenties it was Julia Cameron's morning pages that got me going and now it's back to writing in journals. I bought a colourful A5 thick notebook with swirly patterns and glitter on the front, I covered it with hand cut out card writing 'Baby journal by Taran' on the front and added scan pictures when I got them. This wasn't an act of cuteness or excited mama to be, this was out of necessity of writing how I felt. Maybe one day I would look through it or our daughter would. Basically it was a place to write 'I feel sad. Bored. Annoyed. Irritated for no reason'. As much as I felt necessary. It was a space to write how I felt without holding back on anything.

Another medium I felt was do able was big freestyle painting or intuitive painting, the style I learnt from Michelle Cassou.

The only supplies required are a big sheet of paper, I cut off part of a big paper roll from the DIY store, some children's paints, brushes and an open mind, heart, the basic ability to listen to whatever comes and paint it on the paper, no matter what. Much like a 3 year old who hasn't had much of the experience of the world or been told what art is, you paint as freely as they. It's not rocket science but when someone walks by my paper stuck to a wooden board and tells me how 'imaginative' I am, I tell them it has nothing to do with imagination, it's all about showing up and painting what comes.

I have a painting I started before I realised I was pregnant, true to intuition it features a woman with eggs in her lower body, I've added to it as the months have gone by, I've covered the whole page in oranges, blues, reds and now add details to it, when it's finished I'll know.

I do it when I feel a pull of stillness or as a starting point for other projects in my day or as a closing ceremony, I like to paint in block of time, with little or no interruptions. Though it's all a process, no workings out of why, how, when, or analysing in anyway allowed. Not till I the end you look back on your BIG painting and personally understand what it's all about.

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A great piece of advice I was given at this time of hormonal and nausea upheaval was to carry out your tasks even if it was a 'bad day' to. I followed this and on days I didn't feel like swimming though it was the only thing on my to do list I did it and felt great after. I drove to the shops and did a food shop or art supply stock up when I didn't want to move from the house. I did art journal spreads even though I already knew I wouldn't feel a thrill of creative freedom like before.

The point is, much like swimming, painting, writing, I showed up and created something. I exercised some muscles and made movements to get me to the next and so on. Deeper than that I created discipline to do even on the hard days, doing on the easy days is just that, easy. I made better use of my time, this in turn had a positive effect on interactions, spending and attitude.

My point is - Do when you don't feel like doing. Don't over do it, just commit to it. Make it one thing. One thing at a time to tick off and celebrate in a small way.

THREE CREATIVE ACTS YOU CAN START RIGHT AWAY

1. Drawing swirls

I was waiting for a client one afternoon before work and had some time to fill, I read my book then left sometime after for creativity. This was an unofficial pattern I made through reading the inspiring *Coaching the artist within* by Eric Maisel as the chapter would end on an exercise or reflection.

I got out my A5 notebook and black pen, I started making swirls, small circles that curled in like a snail's shell. This was the first time in months I had done something like this. I drew them diagonally from the top of one corner to just past the middle of the page. I stopped and realised I had been drawing what looked like the wind if I was to make another drawing I could add more circles in swirly patterns and me to the right of the page in my yellow mack. I was drawing the day, journalling on the windiest day we'd had. I was also doing Zentangle, black and white shapes in patterns to form a whole picture. All of this done without any real effort.

When your feeling creatively low, get out a pen and like artist Paul Klee says - take a line for a walk! It doesn't have to be art, lead anywhere, it could be totally private.

I know my drawing didn't go from draft to drawing though it did allow me to do more drawing with my pen, I drew black and white shapes till I got back to my usual writing on a page and putting colours down.

With a black pen, my favourites are Ink Joy, Micron, Uni Pin, Uni ball or use any pen that is a step up from a biro. Take some paper or plain notebook and draw shapes; circles big and small joined and away from each other, ovals that transform into leaves, lines that make an interesting border.

Whatever you do just get out a pen, put something on paper and stop and smile.

2. Abstract with added nature

One day, on a flustered walk to work I sat at a bench near to the bridge I would walk under to get there. I had time, maybe 15 minutes, I got out my journal, determined to use the free time I had. I really felt this year I would do something with the natural inspiration of autumn leaves we had all around us, there were deep reds, purples, oranges and pale yellow. I didn't quite do what I envisioned but I did save a big leaf to replicate. First I drew out the shape and basic lines in pencil then added watercolour after, making the leaf permanent on my page.

Abstract is possibly the easiest starting point, it just takes a brush and watercolours or thinned acrylics to start. A yellow, a green, a purple and your page may be complete. Or you could get in a flow and add many more layers.

Don't be afraid it won't be 'enough' or match up to what you usually make, a few colours is where to start. Be kind, have compassion for yourself in this time.

3. Collage works

Another great way to re-start is collage, if your already used to tapping into creative me time often you'll know, or come to know all it takes is some magazine pictures and glue and you have a collage! Whether it be in neat squares, overlapping or making a scene of some kind. I started with pictures the stood out to me or were in my story that week, pictures on working women,

swimming and painting were stuck on the page. I came across words that uplifted 'There is a way' and 'In the swim'.

You can collage on a single sheet of paper and put it on your desk as inspiration or straight into your journal, I used my A5 for small collages and went on to my bigger one to explore The collage ideas book by Alannah Moore for more ways of how to use collage.

Collage is portable too, collect images in a plastic wallet and a glue stick and you can do it on the go when away from a desk full of supplies.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS AND FINAL NOTES

If all else fails, there's always model making. When I moved home and was creating from a tiny space, my creative energy all gone, I found solace in making a self portrait out of clay, it wasn't a perfect representation and I didn't enjoy it much, it was tricky and not forgiving at all. It was a process that seemed to slow my mind down, I sculpted the person I was then, hair up in a bun, purple dress on and a big smile. I kept it for a year then threw it away, it served its purpose and I wasn't attached to it.

The same is true about a model I found in the decoupage section, I really like decoupage but it's an expensive hobby. I bought the thin papers to cover a journal and decided to paint a mini giraffe. Though I didn't make the model, it's still fiddly and again I don't really enjoy the process. I think it comes down to starting something and finishing it.

Finally, when in the midst of things, take more moments to relax. Really RELAX. If a bubble bath doesn't suit you (I rarely have time for them but when I do, they're divine) then put on a movie and watch it in bed. I looked up 'top tear jerking movies' and cried through them, it gave me a different kind of release than anything else. I have a friend who watches Netflix while knitting and another who swears by Healing eye pillows. Whatever it is, do it, let be, breathe in and long sigh out.

I hope this short guide has been useful to you and has offered you inspiration to get your butt in the chair and create something.

If so, let me know! Share with me, the whole reason I haven't included pictures here is because this is a basic guide, I want it ALL to be about you, your expression, the ripple effect from here is yours.

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Love, light and happy making!

Taran