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Into the Frightening Light: Emotional Healing Through the Creative Process

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*Into the Frightening Light:
Emotional Healing Through the Creative Process*
by

Bethany Dunfee Pierce

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Science

April 2014

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

Abstract of Project*Into the Frightening Light:
Emotional Healing Through the Creative Process*

This project explores the role the creative process and art making can have in emotional healing and briefly describes connections among the affective skills of Creative Problem Solving and art making. Essentially a self-study taking place over five months, this project focuses on how the author, by developing mindful practice and behavior, used visual journaling, blogging, drawing and painting as methods of discovering her own creative process and how that process aided in emotional transformation leading toward greater self-actualization and artistic identity. This work provides key learnings that can help others in overcoming creative blocks, exploring creative process or in investigating affective skills needed in Creative Problem Solving.

Keywords: creative process, emotional healing, art making, mindfulness, creative problem solving, affective skills, creative blocks.

April 27, 2014

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Department of Creative Studies

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Project Advisor

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Candidate

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provided the space and an expectation for me to do this job well and always has the uncanny ability to ask the right questions at the right time. My coworker Lisa Evans put up with innumerable days of unpredictable moods from me and provided a constant mirror for me to see my true self in her questions and reflections of what I was feeling and processing. Those who dared read all my blogs and view my art online and responded with constructive feedback and motivating comments, especially Katie LaGassie, Alison Murphy, Nina Wason, and Ray Welch, require deep thanks. These adults along with my young students at the before and after care program at Mast Landing School gave honest responses to my artwork. They helped me to feel less alone in the creative process, became my audience and allowed me to feel the work I was doing was meaningful. Finally, to the members of the 2013-1014 Confirmation Class at South Freeport Congregational Church, who allowed me to take them to the edge of what was comfortable and, with me, risked doing more than they thought possible during a short two hour time of creating and sharing: thank you for trusting me.

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Into the Frightening Light: Emotional Healing through the Creative Process

Introduction

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. (Williamson, 1992, p. 190)

Erroneously attributed to Nelson Mandela, the above quote was actually written by Marianne Williamson in, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"*, Ch. 7, Section 3. I found this quote shortly after graduating college twenty years ago, at a time when my path was full of exciting possibilities and vast opportunities. This quote has held special meaning for many. It was included in the movie *Invictus*, about Nelson Mandela and the South African Rugby team. A secularized version was included in the film *Coach Carter*. Now, I come back to this quote as an old friend, as a reminder because it is into that frightening light I sought to propel myself by doing this project.

The purpose of my Master's project was to further develop my painting and drawing skills and specific affective skills related to creativity (mindfulness and being aware of

emotions) in exploration of the creative process and the necessary discipline involved in becoming “an artist.” In addition, using my own art making skills and affective skills as a base, I wanted to discover how the creative process of art making combined with Creative Problem Solving could bring about emotional healing. A far reaching goal or perhaps a wishful byproduct was to experience the empowering nature of creativity to build confidence and pave a way toward a personal sense of greater self-actualization. It is from that place of greater self-actualization that I will become a more effective, more positive, and more experienced agent of creative change for others.

Background and Rationale

For the majority of my adult life I have been an art teacher. Although I understand the methods and materials of being an artist, never have I had the courage or the conviction to abandon full time teaching and embark in any part of the practice of being the artist. For me, being the artist was a dream, something that was not compatible with being the art teacher because I devoted every waking minute of energies to my students for 11 months out of the year. I would teach my high school students skills and techniques, but I was absolutely amazed at the imaginative work some of them would produce. The ideas! The dreams they would capture in their drawings and paintings! I questioned how I could call myself their teacher when so often their ideas and flow of discoveries taught me more than I could imagine. Still, I would go into an art gallery or a museum, and get frustrated at some of the art on display, knowing I could do something like (or even in some cases, better than) the paintings on the wall, or the drawings in the sketchbooks, but I never would find myself actually doing them. Through this project I wished to clarify my identity as an artist and come to a greater understanding of the value of the creative process and develop my own

personal creative process abilities. In the past, something had been blocking me in doing this, and part of this journey has been to figure out what those blocks might have been.

Perhaps due to the performance pressures of being a teacher and getting students to produce artwork of *show* quality, or maybe because of my goal oriented upbringing, my focus in almost any arena has historically been on product. Whatever means of arrival - the end product had to be done well. It had to be *good*. Having a well made, good product is an inspiring and valuable goal. But, focusing on the product almost exclusively, as I was doing, created more blocks and hindrances to my personal creative confidence. It put much pressure on my students, the creators, and young artists I was trying to build, and on me in whatever role I played within the learning framework. It also left a great deal of room for paralyzing fear, unproductive, unresolved failure and self-doubt.

When beginning to learn about the Creative Problem Solving and practice its stages, I discovered how empowering the process could be, not only in educational realms, but in my personal life as well. The importance of going through *process* I found instructive and rewarding. I gained great confidence and strength in understanding the role and value of creative thinking and the deliberate implementation of dreams and ideas. The mindfulness required in process was refreshing to me – an affective skill I had not embraced for many years.

Since that beginning three years ago, I have made a few major life changes, which have fostered a greater confidence in me than ever present before. I have come back to a greater sense of who I am and the path on which I am traveling. Today I am at a crossroads. I gained the courage and faith to resign from my full time high school teaching position, a strongly healthy decision at the time, trusting that the tools I have learned will help me into

the next chapter. Now, I am discovering the positive opportunities that await me in the future. One of my goals is to help others reach their full creative potential: “to help others achieve more than they think is possible,” I say on my website. But something had been blocking me in reaching my own creative potential. I needed to find out what those blocks were. In order to help others find their way, it was important that I experienced finding my own way first. There are things I needed to work through, emotional scars that needed healing in order for me to shine. Being an avid, marathon thinker I hadn’t always recognized or processed my emotions about events that occur in my daily life. I would often think down my feelings such as anger or sadness until they built so strongly and burst through in a flood of explosive expression, from which it was hard to recover. I have been battered a bit in life recently and wanted to use my art skills, creativity and CPS to take me into the light of the next stage and heal that part of me that was wounded and empty, and face the fears that limit me from living up to my own potential. I needed the experience of this Master’s Project to draw from in the future, so that later I can consciously and unconsciously guide others into the frightening light of their lives.

And so, this Master’s Project was not designed to change the world, but to change me, so that I may be better equipped to help others better themselves. Put another way, in a long, drawn out, trickle down effect manner, I will instill change in others, by first acting on the change emerging within myself. I am at the edge of the cliff and want to fly.

Section Two: Pertinent Literature and Resources

As can be imagined, there's a plethora of resources and references that I've read that have lead me to this point in the journey. I've researched the importance of environment on the creative process, creativity in learning and in schools, brain research and neurological basis for creativity, creativity and spirituality among other topics. Still, there are a few key resources that influence my work specifically for this project. Below is an annotated list of those resources, followed by a list of even more references that I plan to explore deeper in the future.

1. Archibald, L. (2012) *Dancing, singing, painting and speaking the healing story: Healing through creative arts*. Ottawa, Ontario: The Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

This is a study conducted by the now closed, due to lack of funding after lasting longer than their 11 year governmentally funded mandate, Aboriginal Healing Foundation of Canada. In this study an overview of Canadian Indigenous and Western approaches to art and healing was discussed and a three-phase study conducted to determine what happens when art, music, dance, storytelling, and other creative arts become a part of community based healing programs. The results of the study, finding that using creative arts in healing programs are viewed as effective aids to healing, gave me further justification for my project, re-informs and validates creativity as a truly *human* element that is required for optimal health, and has made me consider the role that culture may play in my own creative process.

2. Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you're supposed to be and embrace who you are*. Center City, Minn: Hazelden.

Dr. Brene Brown is a self-proclaimed 'shame researcher' and has made a career studying difficult emotions such as guilt, shame, worthiness, and fear. Providing 10

guideposts such as cultivating self-compassion, joy, stillness, humor into living what she calls a wholehearted life, this book expands on many of the affective skills required for also living a creative life. Her words have provided me grace, understanding and insight into the emotions I deal with in this project. This is one of the most powerful books I have read during this study and is highly recommended.

3. Cameron, J. (1992). *The artist's way: A spiritual path to higher creativity*. Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee.

More than a decade ago I read this classic volume on the creative process. It was the first book on creativity I ever explored. Re-reading it more recently reminded me to acknowledge myself as a creative being and to challenge the critical voices in my head. I recognize the practice of writing as door opening in my creative process, which may have been influenced by the suggestion and (for me) sporadic practice of doing Morning Pages.

4. Carriker, P. (2010). *Art at the speed of life: Motivation + inspiration for making mixed media art every day*. Loveland, CO: Interweave Press.

This very colorful book is a true collage! A collection of articles by artists, surrounded by artwork, visuals, 'how to' steps, and advice, this book is a fantastic source for inspiration and encouragement. The challenges of making art while working three jobs and being a mom would have been daunting without this book. Simple suggestions like how to work on more than one art piece at a time, and setting time limits and length limits for blogging have been invaluable.

5. Gilbert, E., (2009, February). *Your elusive creative genius*. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius.html.

This wonderful TedTalk by Elizabeth Gilbert on her response to her best-selling work *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006) gives insight on how to keep doing creative work in the face of fear.

Thinking of the creative process as external to us, harkening back to the age of ancient Greek muses, provides a release of ownership and helped reframe my thinking more than once when stuck in process. Her words give courage for me to ‘show up’ for my part of the job!

6. Gregory, D. (2006). *The creative license: Giving yourself permission to be the artist you truly are*. New York: Hyperion Books.

Whimsically illustrated, this book is a fantastic guide to jumping in and engaging oneself in the practice and discipline of daily drawing and thinking creatively. I found it helpful to fall back on some of the exercises within it as old friends to help me keep working. Gregory’s journal like style and conversational tone became a voice of encouragement during the process.

7. May, R. (1990). *The courage to create*. New York: Bantam Books. (Original work published 1975.)

This classic work on creativity discusses types of courage and the relationships between creativity and humanistic behavior. Creativity is not the symptom of mental illness, (and I will bear to add ‘emotional distress’) but rather the greatest expression of mental health (and emotional health.) This work taught me that until I found some sense of “centeredness within my own being” (p. 3), I would not be able to have the courage to be the creative soul I strive to be. This was a profound discovery and led to much self-study and improvement leading up to this project. Without some of the realizations I came to after reading this book, I may not have risked doing this project.

8. Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*, 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Van

Norstrand.

This seminal work on Maslow's hierarchy of needs transformed my thinking to embrace self-acceptance and understanding of my situations and emotions in the present, a beginning step to living the life of being, rather than becoming, a first step in the mindfulness practice needed to fulfill my personal potential.

9. MacLeod, H. (2009). *Ignore everybody: and 39 other keys to creativity*. New York: Portfolio.

Hugh MacLeod gives us sayings and anecdotes such as "The idea doesn't have to be big, it just has to be yours," (p. 5) as insights and benchmarks to his own creative experiences. I learned from him that being an artist does not mean one has to create grand large-scale paintings as your masterpieces. One's most influential creative act may be as simple as doodling on the back of business cards.

10. McNiff, S. (2004). *Art heals: How creativity cures the soul*. Boston: Shambhala.

A seminal work in art therapy circles, this was my first encounter that the idea that art can be 'medicine for the soul' is not a touchy-feely, fluffy, fleeting concept, but is one based on research and academic study. McNiff's work gave me permission to use art making as a salve, or a tonic, or an agent for emotional healing. Drawing out the spiraling emotions on paper or on canvas, gave a pathway to releasing them where they no longer were trapped in my conscious or subconscious, thus allowing my soul to truly heal, allowing me to then partake in true, minute-by-minute mindfulness.

11. McNiff, S. (1998). *Trust the process: An artist's guide to letting go*. Boston: Shambhala.

As the title suggests, this book, also by McNiff, empowered me to recognize that after starting the images, the words, the concepts and communication would really flow from me.

Over and over I would repeat ‘trust the process’ to disperse the growing fear within me as I created. This work helps with understanding blocks, and embracing the idea of not knowing and tolerating ambiguity are actually part of the process. I also found many connections and parallels with McNiff’s discussions of the art making process and the CPS process, which I applied in this project.

12. Puccio, G. J., Mance, M., & Murdock, M. C. (2011). *Creative leadership: Skills that drive change* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

This, as my Creative Problem Solving-go-to reference reminds me of the stages of the CPS process and affective skills needed in the process.

13. Weiss, A. (2004). *Beginning mindfulness: Learning the way of awareness: a ten-week course*. Novato, Calif.: New World Library.

Written from the Buddhist perspective, this book offers a 10-week course on meditation. I have not completed the course, or the book to date, but I find many of its principles, valuable to guide my mindfulness required for this project, particularly in developing awareness of emotions and personal responses to life situations.

Literature to Explore

I cannot stop learning, exploring and discovering. (I have tried, but I end up being less of me; and, now that is an unacceptable state in which to be.) My anticipation of further development in this creative adventure is great. And so, below are more resources on my bookshelf and in my inbox, waiting.

Bayles, D., & Orland, T. (1993). *Art & fear: Observations on the perils (and rewards) of artmaking*. Santa Barbara, CA: Capra.

Lawrence, R. L. (2008). Powerful feelings: Exploring the affective domain of informal and art based learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2008* (120), 65-77.

Norton, R., & Norton, N. (2013). *The power of starting something stupid: How to crush fear, make dreams happen, and live without regret*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Shadow Mountain.

Pressfield, S. (2002). *The war of art: Break through the blocks and win your inner creative battles*. New York: Warner Books.

Stanier, M. (2010). *Do more great work: Stop the busywork, and start the work that matters*. New York: Workman Pub..

Tharp, T., & Reiter, M. (2003). *The creative habit: Learn it and use it for life: a practical guide*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Section Three: Process Plan

In order to begin to consider myself an artist I needed to develop the practices and discipline of being an artist. I needed to engage in the thought process of visualization and do the work to create the art. In order to facilitate my personal growth and emotional healing through this process, I needed to practice mindfulness techniques to become more aware of emotions as they arose. Then I embarked on the main risk of the project: using the act of creating to manage those feelings and process them. Finally self-reflection and gaining feedback from others helped to ascertain the degree of effectiveness of my work.

For this project I planned to engage in some sort of creative act each day. Setting aside at minimum of an hour each day to work in my sketchbook/journal to process whatever

emotions or feelings were within me at the time was a challenging and necessary goal. Larger blocks of time were used to create larger more complete artworks synthesizing my progress at various times throughout the semester. During this entire process, mindfulness practices were deeply explored and much reflective writing was done. In addition, I studied CPS techniques and strategies to clarify emotions, directions and process. Below is my timeline.

Table 1: Timeline for the Project

Week	Dates and hours	Tasks
0-2	Dec 20 - Feb 10 25 hours	Conducted preliminary exploratory art making in response to experienced emotions. Researched and synthesized ideas. Drafted Concept Paper.
3	Feb 10-15 20 hours	1. Synthesized feedback, made revisions on Final Concept Paper. 2. Completed environmental adjustments to studio workspace, set up work area. 3. Scanned through all pertinent literature. Identified key chapters, resources and sequence of study. 4. Finalized blog set up and posted most recent artwork and reflections on blog. 5. Solicited participants (my audience) to view and review artwork/reflections on blog. 6. Completed journal entries/artworks connected to emotions that occur in everyday life.
4	Feb 16-22 20 hours	1. Prepared six canvases for possible later painting. 2. Explored in depth at least three literature resources. 3. Completed new journal entries/artworks connected to emotions that occur in everyday life. 4. Completed Adopt a Project Assignment 5. Posted most recent artwork and reflections on blog.
5	Feb 23 - Mar 1 16 hours	1. Reviewed CPS strategies and begin to incorporate into art making process. 2. Explored in depth at least two literature resources. 3. Completed new journal entries/artworks connected to emotions that occur in everyday life. 4. Posted most recent artwork and reflections on blog.
6	Mar 2 - 8 10 hours	1. Diverged: reviewed and brainstormed concepts explored to date. Explored using CPS strategies, documented their use with art making process. 2. Explored in depth at least two literature resources.

		<p>3. Completed new journal entries/artworks connected to emotions that occur in everyday life.</p> <p>4. Self-Assessed progress. Reviewed audience blog posts.</p> <p>5. Converged: Tried to complete larger painting/artwork demonstrating synthesis of key learnings to date.</p>
7	<p>Mar 9 – 15</p> <p>10 hours</p>	<p>1. Explored in depth at least two literature resources.</p> <p>2. Completed journal entries/artworks.</p> <p>3. Posted to blog.</p> <p>4. Completed drafts of sections 1-3</p>
8	<p>Mar 16 – 22</p> <p>15 hours</p>	<p>1. Completed journal entries/artworks.</p> <p>2. Posted to blog.</p>
9	<p>Mar 23 – 29</p> <p>20 hours</p>	<p>1. Completed journal entries/artworks.</p> <p>2. Diverged: reviewed and brainstormed concepts explored to date. Studied CPS strategies; documented their use with art making process.</p> <p>3. Converged: Completed larger painting/artwork demonstrating synthesis of key learnings to date.</p> <p>4. Self-Assessed progress. Wrote single page self-reflection.</p>
10	<p>Mar 30 – Apr 5</p> <p>15 hours</p>	<p>1. Completed journal entries/artworks.</p> <p>2. Posted to blog.</p> <p>3. Taught class on creativity, spirituality and creative process to pairs of adults and 13 year olds.</p>
11	<p>Apr 6 – 12</p> <p>20 hours</p>	<p>1. Completed journal entries/artworks</p> <p>2. Diverged: review and brainstorm concepts explored to date.</p> <p>3. Converged: Completed larger painting/artwork demonstrating synthesis of key learnings to date.</p> <p>4. Self-Assessed progress.</p> <p>5. Completed sections 4, 5, 6.</p>
12	<p>Apr 13 -19</p> <p>20 hours</p>	<p>Completed final drawings and paintings and writings/reflections on project.</p>
13	<p>Apr 22- 26</p> <p>10 hours</p>	<p>Made Revisions on Final Project write up.</p>
14	<p>APRIL 28</p> <p>10 hours</p>	<p>Submitted Final Project</p> <p>Created 15-minute presentation of Project/ICSC Blog entry.</p>
	<p>WEEK OF MAY 5</p>	<p>Presentation/ICSC Blog Entry DUE</p>

Total hours: approximately 210

Section Four: Tangible Products/Outcomes

Introduction

The artwork produced in the process of exploring emotions such as anger, sadness, loss, grief, fear, joy, happiness or shame cannot be prescribed. Personal growth is hard to quantify. Expression is the end result of many emotive and cognitive processes that rarely have a roadmap giving them direction. As a result, the products of this project, in truth, could not be pre-determined. As Mark Runco (2004) wrote:

The product approach to creativity focuses on outcomes and those things that result from the creative process. The assumption here is that studies of products (e.g., publications, paintings, poems, designs) are highly objective, and therefore amenable to the scientific method. Products can be counted, for example, and sometimes it is just the quantity of one's efforts that is measured. The value of this approach is supported by the amazing productivity of Piaget, Picasso, and other luminaries (Simonton 1984). The problem with this approach is that it often informs us only about productivity and not about creativity. Also, it can be quite misleading because what it takes to be productive may differ from what it takes to be creative. An individual can be productive without being original; and originality is the most widely acknowledged requisite for creativity. In methodological terms, productivity and creativity are correlated but not synonymous. (p. 658)

Productivity is important (without it, no work would happen.) But my goal of this project was to focus on process. Thus, the actual tangible products that resulted became monitors of the process or indicators, you might say, of how I employed my creative process

to gain insight into personal emotional healing, visualization of ideas, and Creative Problem Solving. Creation of the products for this project was intentionally designed to leave room for creativity to bloom within the process. Section Five will explore how each of the resulting products achieved this, as well as my key learnings as a result of their completion. Here, I simply list and describe these products that resulted from my deep exploration into my personal creative process. I created a journal/sketchbook, an online blog, a small series of acrylic paintings and an experience for adults and young teenagers to collaboratively explore creative process and visual expression.

Journal/Sketchbook

First, I was able to begin, and currently maintain a journal/sketchbook to record images, words and reflections on my process of expressing emotions and visualizing ideas. This is an actual spiral bound, ten-inch by ten-inch square, 35-page book with heavy weight pages (The actual pound weight of which I am unsure, as I got it, and three others just like it, unwrapped and unlabeled at a discount store for a dollar each.) I took this sketchbook most everywhere with me. During the three-month duration of this project I did not fill this sketchbook; the number of products was not the goal. More importantly, it became my grounding base of operations for process exploration. It was my process companion. Below are six representative sketches from this book. These are not inclusive of the sketchbook; there are many others. Still, these six represent significant indicators of creative process development for me.

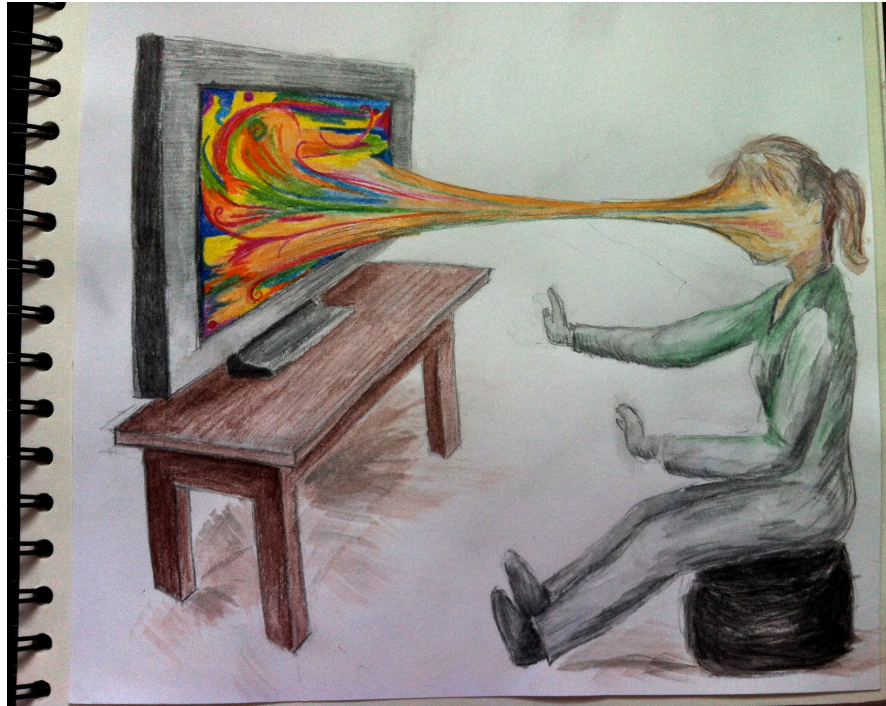


Figure 1: *Treat an Addiction*, watercolor pencil, eight inches tall by nine inches wide.

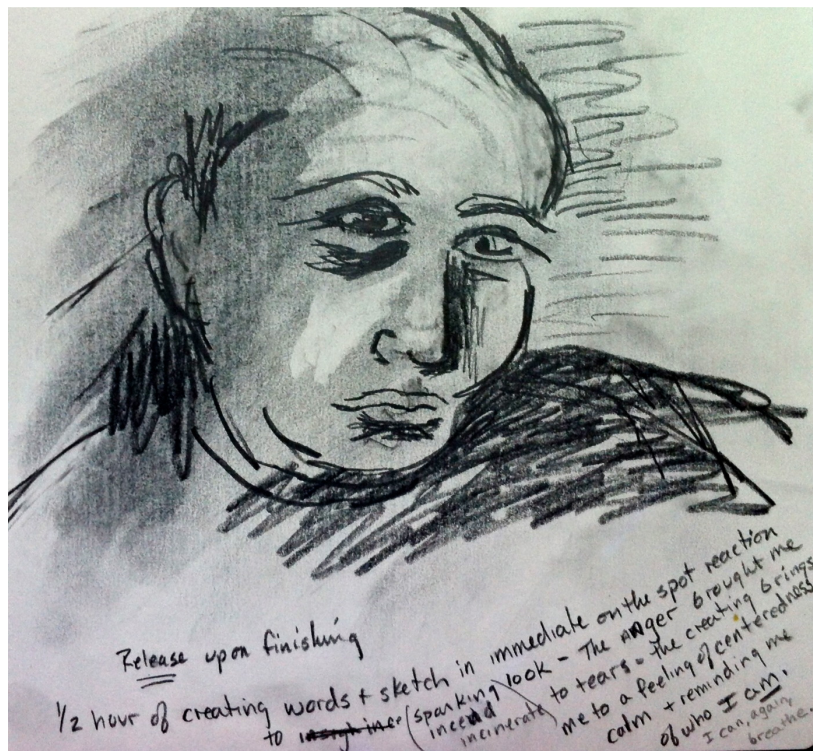


Figure 2: *Do Something With The Pain*, pencil, 10 inches by 10 inches.



Figure 3: *Hardened Heart*, watercolor pencil and ball point black pen, 10 inches by 10 inches.

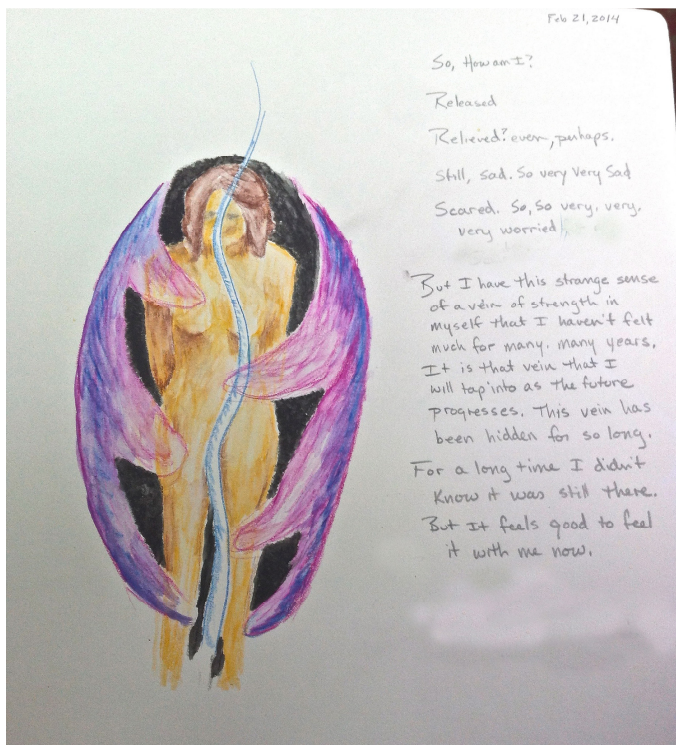


Figure 4: *Vein of Strength*, watercolor pencil image, pencil reflection writing. Image is approximately four inches by eight inches.



Figure 5: *Joyous Personal Experience*, watercolor pencil, 10 inches by 10 inches.

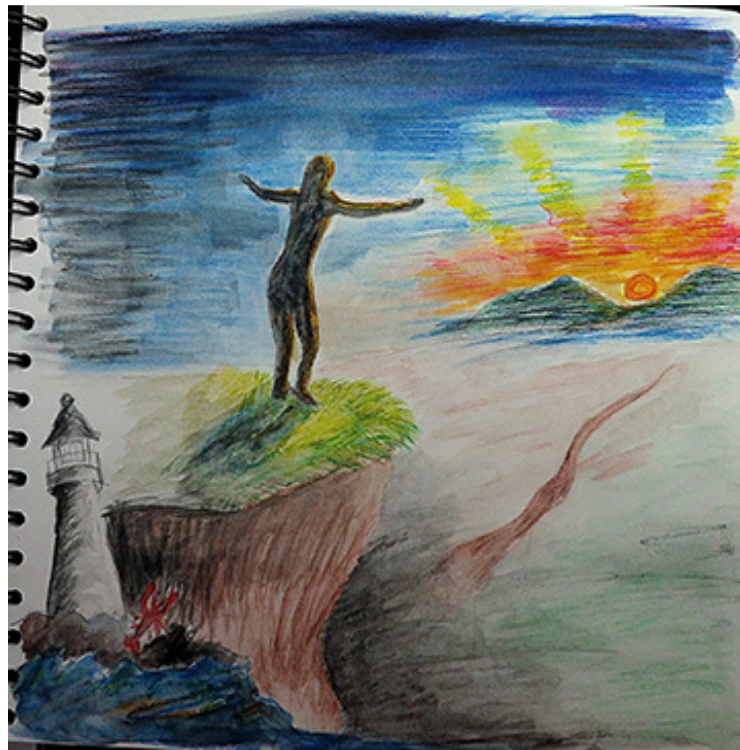


Figure 6: *Fly*, watercolor pencil, 10 inches by 10 inches.

These sketches were all drawn on the right hand side pages of the sketchbook. The left side of the sketchbook pages (the back of the sketches) is where I did a lot of reflective writing, either scribbling with my pencil, or actually pasting typewritten pages that I composed on the computer into the book. Establishing and continuing a practice of drawing and writing in this sketchbook has been a remarkably rewarding outcome of this project.

An Online Blog

Another outcome I began at the start of this project, and now continually maintain, is an online blog of the experiences surrounding my creative process. This blog shows photos of artwork and written reflections of my thoughts surrounding the artwork, and the processes, both physical and mental, that were involved in creating the artwork. On average I posted my progress weekly on this blog, currently totaling thirteen entries, which provide snapshots of my learnings, fears, accomplishments and setbacks. This blog can be found at <http://intothefrighteninglight.blogspot.com>.

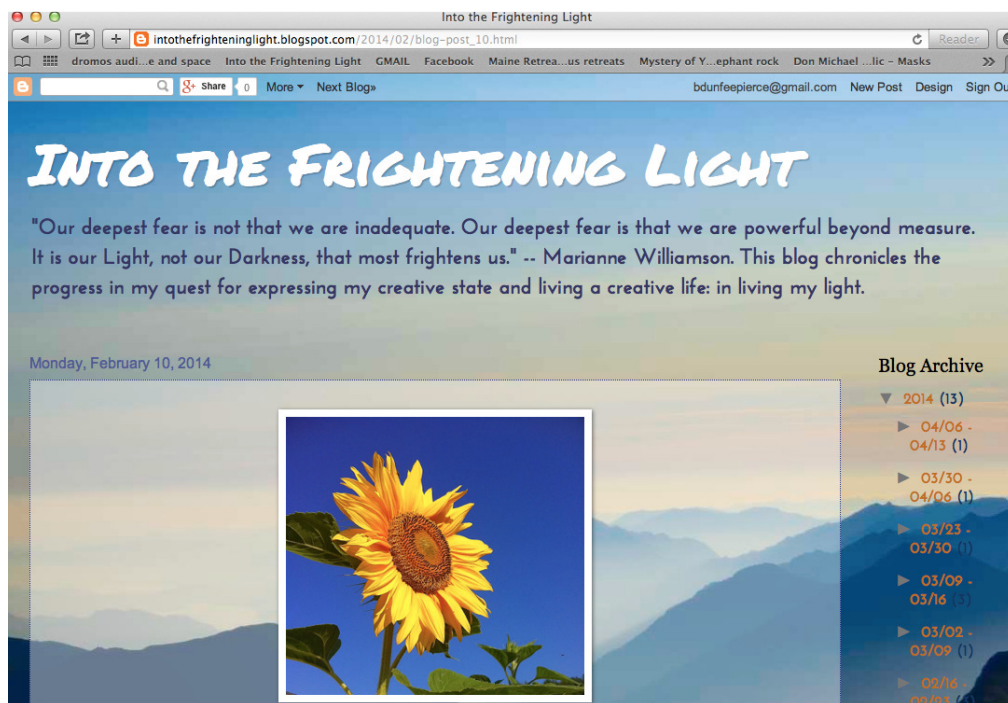


Figure 7: Screen shot of my blog: *Into the Frightening Light*.

Acrylic Paintings

I was also able to complete three, acrylic on canvas paintings as a result of the work for this project:



Figure 8: *Start...Now*, acrylic on canvas, 16 inches by 20 inches.



Figure 9: *Start...Now, Two*, acrylic on canvas, 16 inches by 20 inches.



Figure 10: *Ray's Painting*, acrylic on canvas, 11 inches by 14 inches.

A Creative Experience for Others

Another less tangible but no less real outcome was how I used my learning as a benchmark activity for this project, to **guide others in a group creative endeavor**. I gathered together twelve people and subtly shared my learnings on creative process during a class I taught on the visual representation of spiritual events and ideas. The participants were Mentors and Mentees (adults and eighth grade students) of my local church's Confirmation program. We met for two hours one Sunday afternoon at the start of the tenth week of the project. During this meeting, I shared some of my discoveries so that I could coach six pairs of adults and young adult students in painting banners for the church. All participants knew their task was to create banners, but most did not know that the process would be through painting and not manipulating fabric. The eighth graders, of course, had been exposed to creating projects in school and painting specifically in art classes. But some

of the adults had not touched a paintbrush since elementary school and were very nervous at the start of the class. I carefully planned a sequence of activities, which eased them into the creative process, discussed creativity, creative blocks, provided all materials and paint shirts, read a passage of out Danny Gregory's *The Creative License* book, described Elizabeth Gilberts' view that creativity stems, in part possibly from external muses, and thanked each person for having the courage to "show up" and risk making something with me that afternoon. The resulting outcome was that twelve people were able to brainstorm ideas, overcome some fears, incorporate feeling and emotion through use of art elements, elaborate upon original ideas and create inventive quality banners for public display. When leaving, one woman who was probably in her late sixties said to me: "Beth, I'll draw with you any day; and I *don't* draw!"



Figure 11: Banner-making Class.

Finally, through the work and intense mindfulness that developed during the process, a lasting outcome was the greatest understanding of my own personal creative process I have ever known, the inward generation of the discipline and the understanding of what being an artist truly means for me, and a strong inner drive to continue creating. These intangibles are truly gifts for me, for which I value considerably, and have lasting benefits long after the timeframe for this project is over. Exploring these more internal outcomes is best accomplished by examining some of my key learnings.

Section Five: Key Learnings

Introduction

Ultimately, the path of mindfulness will lead you to a place within yourself where you may encounter the world without ideas or preconceptions, where you can disengage from your habitual narrative and free yourself from mental constructs. Here you will see yourself and the world as we all really are, in our great, infinite radiance and tenderness, and in our most awful delusions. Mindfulness allows us to experience the delight of touching life deeply and authentically. It gives us a way through suffering to joy. It encourages us to do all of this every moment in our daily lives.

-- Andrew Weiss (2004) in *Beginning Mindfulness: Learning the Way of Awareness* (p. xvii)

In order for this project to be successful, I needed to engage in deep, almost constant mindfulness. The work could only have happened by being deliberately and consciously aware of the all-encompassing emotions and feelings I was experiencing, such as joy, pain,

confusion, anger stress and loss as well as the more subtly-framed emotions which include fear, shame, uneasiness, sensing gaps, and hope. This took energy and concentration but by doing so, I was able to be lead to this place Weiss described above, where I became able to ‘disengage’ from my usual practices and began to explore new mental constructs. Not only did this enable me to *create* in response to daily life, it caused me to experience life more deeply and authentically. Truthfully, this is my greatest experiential learning. By requiring myself to put into imagery what I was feeling every couple of days I developed a stronger sense of mindfulness than I have ever employed before. Mindfulness has happily, permeated most aspects of my work, play and life. In turn, this experience allowed me to discover some other aspects of the creative process, which I can use to help others along the way.

Some of those discoveries include:

- Begin where you are.
- Use what is happening around you as catalysts for creative work.
- Art heals.
- Acknowledge the strengths of both the left and right sides of your brain and incorporate them into your creative process.
- Symbolism and composition can be used as tools for gaining clarity.
- Be kind to yourself and develop simple action oriented mantras for getting through creative blocks.
- Encouragement and removing judgment really does allow for creativity to flow.
- Trust the process. Develop faith that something valuable WILL emerge as you venture into the unknown.
- The art making process has parallels to the Creative Problem Solving Process.

Each of these key learnings can be elaborated upon in reference to the artwork I created or the process I engaged myself in during this project.

Begin Where You Are

As a teacher, I often tell my students: “Start with what you know to get to what you don’t know.” It is a reminder to begin where you are, acknowledge where you are in a process and build off what you know -- to learn and grow and discover that you *can* arrive at the place that you didn't know you could get to. I was reminded of this concept when I started doing work for this project.

A friend agreed to pose for me in my quest to get back into painting and art making. After bringing all my materials and easel to her house and getting set up, her husband asked if he could stay and watch the process. Normally I feel uncomfortable when being watched while sketching or painting but I found myself using his presence as part of the process. I know how to be a *teacher*, having done that for so many years. I’ve also read and studied enough of artists' process to know what a "real artist" would do to start the painting; and, I remembered how to start from years ago when I did this more often. Yet I still was very nervous and fearful of beginning. So, while he was in the room, I started scribbling on the newsprint with charcoal. As I smudged and smeared, I started to describe to my friend's husband what I was seeing in the marks...teaching him what I was doing in the process and why. A few minutes of laying on the charcoal, erasing and smudging revealed a man's back, muscled shoulders and a down turned head. This came out of the scribbles I was doing on the page, not from observation or anything that I was *trying* to do... As I allowed myself to teach the process, I was able to experience the process as well. By starting with what I know how to do (teaching) I was able to create, and through creating, calm my fears about starting.

The next hour was spent working on the pose of his wife where I was actually able to get to the brink of the Zone, known as the state of *flow*, as discovered and researched by Hungarian American psychologist and creativity explorer Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997), -- that place where all time and consciousness stops. Starting didn't seem quite as scary after that.

Use what is Happening Around You as Catalysts for Creative Work

Near the start of the project I realized that I have this problem. I find it incredibly easy to treat the challenges in my life with avoidance- and medicate them with the escapist technique of immersing myself in the stories of other peoples' lives portrayed by actors in movies and in TV shows. Netflix would be my downfall.

So, I tried incorporating this awareness into art making. I drew what it feels like to watch as much TV as I sometimes do. What resulted was an image of my brain being sucked from me into the screen. (Figure1: *Treat an Addiction*.) Recognizing a simple activity such as watching television, gave me fodder for meaningful, communicative art making.

Furthermore, in all succeeding artworks for this project I relied on the developing mindful awareness of what was happening to me and around me, emotionally, spiritually and physically and used that awareness as subjects for the art. I have learned that if one listens very carefully to what is happening in our souls, and chooses to respond to it, we can have endless supply of topics for visual communication.

Art Heals

Now, Shaun McNiff (2004) has already eloquently written the book on this concept that art heals; from which I gained great knowledge and even greater understanding of the transformative power art making can have on people. Still, one of the main purposes of this project was to explore *how* this might be possible. Here I provide a few examples as proof.

Do Something With the Pain (Fig. 2) was a fast sketch, which marked a significant revelation and starting point for me in how creating can lead to emotional transformation. A few hours after discussing this project with my advisor, something happened in my personal life to make me feel incredibly angry and considerably rejected. Inspired, instead of processing in my head, as I am usually one who traditionally thinks and processes and thinks and processes emotions and reactions over and over to the point of nausea – instead of doing that - I took to the page. First I wrote. I spelled out everything I was feeling in a poem and gave myself a written statement of affirmation. Then, I decided to trust. --Trust the words of Shaun McNiff in his book *Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul* (2004), which said: "Art heals by accepting the pain and doing something with it" (introductory page before the table of contents). In this situation, the only thing in my visual cortex was the memory of the look a person gave me that was the catalyst for the severely intense anger and rejection I was feeling. After writing the poem and the affirmation, I began to draw that look. This sketch emerged, (Fig. 2) taking maybe 20 minutes to angrily carve into the paper. But most importantly, upon finishing, I felt a true honest release of the negative emotions I was carrying concerning the situation. The anger and hurt I was feeling, which had brought me to tears, had dissipated. I wrote under the sketch right after I made it: "the creating brings me to a feeling of centeredness, calm and reminding me of who I am. I can, again, breathe."

The art making had become a tonic, a salve to the gashes in my heart from the situation. That wasn't the end of it though. Interestingly, in the past, as I have said, I would persevere on those things that annoy me or make me frustrated. The memory of a look, or some words would be replayed over and over in my mind, often for a long time and even

days. In this case, doing something with those words and looks, namely creating written poetry and a fast sketch caused me to release those emotions. So that an hour later, I consciously paused what I was doing (a completely unrelated activity) and realized the memory of the situation that caused the raw emotions was almost gone in my brain. I recorded in my journal: "It's as if the action of drawing it erased it from my emotional consciousness - erased it from my emotional presence. Calm and peace remain."

I never really understood art therapy before. This was a completely new way to experience art making for me. Being aware of the emotion (a creative affective skill) and accepting whatever pain that came along with that emotion is one thing, a very important thing. But, when I actually created something with it -- doing something with it-- is when I truthfully experienced healing power. Four months later I am still awed by it and feel the benefits from this one exercise/experience. I haven't felt this level of anger in response to this type of situation since. Creating released it and transformed my thinking so that I process this type of anger differently now. In fact, this type of scenario was replayed again in my personal life recently. In that recent situation I found my self healthfully disengaged from the triggers that would have previously emotionally entangled me. I have become transformed, and feel I am on a somewhat different developmental level, closer to the serene balanced person I envision myself to be.

I experienced this power over and over again during this project. Creating *Treat an Addiction* (Fig. 1.) enabled me to stop getting sucked into the trappings of TV watching for a time. *Hardened Heart* (Fig. 3) was a representative of how I was feeling toward a person and our relationship. Since doing that artwork, those feelings of distance, cold, hardened resistance in me have allayed somewhat. I find even just being around this person to be more

tolerable now and some of my barriers to our building a positive connection are being softened. Creating artwork that captures the memory of a positive experience as I did in *Joyous Positive Experience* (Fig. 5.) carried me through a time of unrest and despondency during the middle of this project, when I really just wanted to give up, throw it all away, sell all my possessions put my dog and kid in the car and move out to some random horse ranch in the rocky mountains (--I've never done anything like that before, and now, since starting this quest into the creative realm, I am open to, and almost always craving, new experiences. So it really wouldn't have been all that irrational a prospect). But the artwork kept me here. It grounded me and taught me how to deal with the present moment. Honoring and acknowledging emotions (mindfulness) and creating imagery that reflects those emotions does, without a doubt, have deep, remarkable, transformative healing power.

**Acknowledge the Strengths of Both the Left and Right Sides of Your Brain and
Incorporate Them Into Your Creative Process**

We are not just creative beings. We are analytical ones too, who love to classify, arrange and quantify the phenomena in which we live. Two months before starting this project I found my self immersed in a deep organizational flurry of activity. I reorganized and repurposed rooms in my house, categorized, boxed and labeled my art supplies, sorted my bookshelves. It was as if I was trying to quiet or satisfy the left side of my brain before embarking on what I thought was going to be a strongly, completely right-brained experience of doing this project. I read an article that mentioned the story of the neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor who suffered a stroke that damaged the left side of her brain. In the article it described her calling her experience “Nirvana. ‘I felt enormous and expansive.’ ‘...My spirit soared free...’” (Beck, 2008, p.50.)

I wanted my spirit to soar free for this project also, but I wasn't about to cut out the left side of my brain. Instead, what I discovered through doing the drawings and the paintings was that in almost all cases, my personal creative process began with some sort of writing, classifying, analyzing and/or sorting. For instance, the sketch *Vein of Strength* (Fig. 4.) emerged out of a friend asking me "So, how are you?" after I experienced a very meaningful yet difficult conversation with someone. I wanted to respond pictorially, but found that I couldn't do any visual work until I recounted the details of the conversation in writing. Only after writing it all out did the imagery come to me. The thinking, with all of its labeling, classifying, analyzing and naming had been taken care of with the words and then the feelings could be expressed with the picture. The writing got me to the visual. Sometimes this same phenomenon happened through reading. In *Hardened Heart*, I had read a passage that a friend sent me intending to help me in dealing with a challenging personal decision. Only after careful analysis as a result of reading the words did I arrive at the idea of the image I created. I often link words with classifying and analysis, and typical for functions of my left side of my brain. Over and over I found that if I acknowledged the needs and tendencies of activities usually associated with left-brain processes during the development of my visual creative expression, that visual creative expression came so much more clearly and easily.

Symbolism and Composition Can be used as Tools for Gaining Clarity

The sketch entitled "*Fly*" was created in response to the phrase I had written earlier in this paper: "I'm on the edge of the cliff and want to fly." Although that is another example of my fourth key learning listed above, the real discovery that happened during this piece was that by developing symbols for the challenges, issues, and dreams involved in a

personal state, and developing the arrangement on the page (composition) among those symbols, I found I can gain greater clarity and insight into those issues, challenges, dreams or goals linked to that personal situation. This process is akin to using storyboarding to draw desired outcomes in the initial stages of the Creative Problem Solving process.

Here, I knew I wanted the basic pose of the figure in the picture; but, I had to make conscious choices as to the direction the figure was going to face, how much of the figure the viewer would see, the perspective, the colors and so on. Then other elements had to be added to complete the scene. As I was thinking and working, it became clear that creating symbols for the challenges, issues and dreams involved in my life, which I wanted to depict in this picture helped to identify them and categorize them. Then, as true with any building or creating exercise, choices had to be made as to where to place these symbols in different areas on the page. I had to think about the size of the symbol where it was going to go in relation to the other symbols and images. I had to think about direction, position, dominance, subordination, and connections between or among the symbols. An interesting task emerged. I realized that my feelings and emotions connected with the symbols played an important role into its placement, size and position. I had to be mindful to my feelings about each symbol in order to place it on the page in the appropriate place to communicate a desired meaning. Did it generate a feeling of happiness, rejection or disdain, hope or anticipation? Was the symbol representing something present but insignificant in light of other symbols/factors? Did it overshadow something else? Were my feelings about a symbol complicated or clear?

Based on my feelings about what the symbol represented, I had to make decisions as to where it made 'sense' to place the symbol in relation to the figure; in front of it or behind

it? How big or small should it be? How bright or dark in color? and so on. Asking these questions and being incredibly mindful of the emotions connected with the symbols, forced me to think about how one piece relates to another and helped to clarify the level of importance of what issue, challenge or idea that symbol represented to me. It also brought to light fears, joys, and expectations of the situation represented by the picture. By paying close attention to the emotions and feelings connected with the issues represented by the symbols the relationships among them can be determined through exploring composition.

Mindfulness was vital here. This process can only be used to gain clarity if a person creates these symbols and compositions with direct and honest connection to what is being felt at that moment - so whatever is in the present can be released to be seen. Since doing this drawing I have used this principle in diagrams or visual maps of other emotional challenges and found that using symbolism and composition are excellent tools for bringing clarity to issues and situations.

Be Kind to Yourself and Develop Simple Action-oriented Mantras for Getting Through Creative Blocks

Drawing and painting these images, posting them on a blog and talking about my process has not come simply or easily. At various times, often when a deadline was eminent, I would experience freezes of focus and energy where all I found I could do was to prep another canvas, either for me or for other people. Uninspired, it became a chore to start painting. At a certain point during the project I expected to begin working on canvas after spending weeks working in a sketchbook. I did not expect this to be any sort of difficult shift, as I have done many paintings years ago. But I was surprised at the difficulty this presented. I wrestled for days. I beat myself up over and over. I couldn't release any of the

tension or stress I was feeling on the canvas like I was able to do through the drawings in the sketchbook. After almost two weeks of considerable angst over this, I finally paused and deeply considered what was happening. I looked carefully at what had been working and decided to be kind to myself and go back to doing what works. Even though I was disheartened and feeling defeated, I resolved to continue by focusing on the positive. I literally made the conscious choice to remember a very positive experience and mindfully went back to the sketchbook and began to draw an abstract image representing what that positive experience felt like to me. *Joyous Personal Experience* (Fig. 5) is what resulted. Abstraction became freeing, as it didn't have to look like anything in particular except for whatever was in my heart to express. I allowed myself to feel and expressed that feeling in a way that could not be judged by anyone else (abstraction) and kindly allowed myself to recover from being blocked.

One afternoon during the time I was creating *Joyous Personal Experience*, after many days of being challenged with the block of beginning painting on canvas, I grabbed a blue-green canvas from the corner of the room and simply painted START NOW on it. Immediately after painting those words, strangely, interestingly, I began to see a future in what could appear amongst that blue green surface. I realized that by painting the words on a primed canvas I had essentially completed a painting. I had started on canvas at last. I pulled out the next canvas and again painted START NOW on this one. After painting these words, adding more to the canvas became easier. Start...Now became my mantra. I was able to develop the second painting into a complete, balanced composed painting, with other images intertwined with the Start Now words. The third painting I did for this project also began with Start...Now. However, this time I didn't actually paint the words on the surface,

though I did imagine them there. I figured I would add them in later after I did some of the work of the painting. I repeated the mantra over and over in my head as I was painting and it became the secret to get over the fear of starting. After a while I realized that the painting was coming along nicely and I didn't really need to put in the words Start Now. The finished painting, *Ray's Painting*, was at last, the level of work and type of work I had been trying to do, that I wanted to do, and the type of work I know I was capable of. By literally using a mantra, I rapidly found inspiration and a pathway to overcoming a block in creative focus.

Encouragement and Removing Judgment Really Does Allow for Creativity to Flow

Teaching the class on banner making, I witnessed most clearly how focusing on encouraging others and being mindful to remove any sort of judgment as it infiltrates is imperative to other people's success. Yet, I was even more convinced when I recognized this in myself. As mentioned, a considerable block for me during this project was transitioning from sketchbook to canvas. After spending much time fretting, I came to realize that I could work easier in my sketchbook because I could control the risk and the degree to which I was being judged. I would only show the sketchbook to the people I wanted, those I trusted would give me useful, yet oftentimes only positive feedback. Painting on canvas was more public. Anyone could look at it and judge it. Therefore it was too scary to produce. The anticipated judgment of my future potential viewers caused me to resist creating. I learned to control my exposure to judgment – I worked in the sketchbook, I only posted works on my blog until the emotions connected with the work had dissipated. I only publicized my blog to my friends. I did these things (being kind to myself) until I felt confident enough in the work to risk stepping into the next stage.

**Trust the process. Develop Faith That Something Valuable WILL Emerge as You
Venture Into the Unknown**

At one point during one of my blocks, I found myself sitting next to my easel outfitted with a prepared blank canvas that I had decided to use for a painting a friend wanted me to do for her. I sat there waiting for my brush to grace its surface. Quite serendipitously, Ackoff and Vergara's (1988) definition of creativity as "the ability to overcome self-imposed constraints" came into my consciousness. I realized that by setting aside canvases especially for certain purposes ("This one is for Donna's painting, this one is for Ray's painting, etc.") I was focusing on product, not process. I had built in the constraint that each canvas could only be used for the particular purpose for which I named it. I was limiting my potential creative outcome to only be that particular end product for which I gave its purpose. Instead I needed to allow for many more options. I needed to buy more canvases and just be concerned with creating, not necessarily creating specifically for a particular person. Previously, I thought I had needed an assignment. For that is how I had always done art in the past, as an answer to a problem someone – usually a teacher or a professor, or in this case Donna and Ray- set out for me to solve. The assignment approach has merits at times, but to continue this project I needed to overcome that constraint and focus on the process of making paintings, not what the paintings will be after I had made it. I believe this is one example of what Shaun McNiff (1998) called "giving up 'ego' control." I needed to "relax in periods of uncertainty and to trust that the creative intelligence will find its way" (p. 3). By putting a name or a purpose to a particular painting, I was forcing creativity to only be involved within that one outcome, and that outcome had to be the desired one that fit the purpose already prescribed. In response, this is when I grabbed the blue-green canvas and painted START

NOW on it. (Fig 8.)

Almost immediately after painting those words, I could see what could emerge amongst the blue green surface. I wrote: “I can feel my hand with a paint loaded brush stroke a thin wavy line across that space on that canvas, even now before I have done anything on it. From that line, I feel and ‘see’ what will happen next, and next, and next.... A strange, almost instant phenomenon is happening within me... It is almost as if the gate is opened with those START NOW words and I can feel the creative juice welling up being ready to pour out through my fingers on to that canvas.” I decided to leave the blue green surface untouched, as a bit of a reminder of what was happening. To fulfill what I could ‘see’ on the canvas I feared would put closure to the phenomena – and I wanted to explore it further. So instead I grabbed another canvas and painted another START NOW across it. On this second one, I was able to invoke playfulness and deep honest mindfulness centered on the real time process of creating.

Everything on the second Start Now painting (Fig 9.) came out of my imagination and is all about process. I began again, with the words. Then the only thing I knew I wanted to paint was the foggy coast scene. That was inspired by the sage green color I had mixed and used to prime the background. The rest of the painting emerged as I was working, without plan or agenda. Every stroke, line, and shape on this painting evolved from the one before, out of a need to continue the process of painting. Seeking visual balance and harmony I worked until it was finished. Of course that’s what anyone does when creating something, but in this case, in the middle of working on it, I could not have told a viewer what would happen next, or when the piece would be finished. Having faith that my skills were strong and my path was set ahead of me, I learned that I could trust that the path would

emerge just as, and when I needed it. After finishing the rocky coast, I felt I needed a long swooping form the left to the right, splitting in the middle. Thus the pink line resembling a curtain emerged. Then a color needed to be here, or a line needed to be there... Trusting the process of creating I was able to paint not what I saw, but what was in my mind. I just kept working, adding things until it *felt* done. This was the first time I created a painting entirely out of my imagination, without looking at any real object or photo to replicate. It was a remarkable accomplishment.

Completing this painting had remarkable effect. Painting with the faith that the needed shapes, lines colors and forms would emerge from me when needed presented a confidence, which had been untapped in me for years. Almost immediately upon finishing the second Start Now painting, I picked up the canvas I had earlier decided to paint for my friend Ray. This was a painting I had promised to do nine months before and had become one of those things on the 'to do' list hanging over my head, that I just couldn't get to. Finally, now knowing the process would unfold as I worked, I trusted and began. This was a bit different than the Start Now painting, as I had a photo to work from of some pottery. But this was more of the type of work I have envisioned myself doing for years, but couldn't get to. Remarkably this too flowed from me, with more of a plan and an agenda than the others, because of the nature of it. But finally, I was doing the work I set out to do. Focusing on the process allowed me to be tolerant of myself and trust the work will emerge from me rather than me trying to force it.

The Art Making Process has Parallels to the Creative Problem Solving Process

This is a very recent discovery for me of which only bits and pieces are beginning to formulate in my mind, the ideas for which may be completely out in left field, or may

warrant further study. During this project I reviewed the steps of the Osborn-Parnes Creative Problem Solving Process (Puccio, et al., 2011) of which I have been trained, as any ICSC graduate would be. For this project, I intended to use CPS in the process of art making somehow to facilitate the ideation, implementation and development of creating art. But as I continued studying and through mindful contemplation of my progress, I discovered that the art making process was providing examples for me of the affective skills of the CPS process. I realized how varied the purposes of art making can be and that the art I had created represented different affective skills I was employing in this grand problem of gaining emotional healing and greater self-actualization. The Grand Problem for this past semester might have been worded something like: How might Beth develop a higher sense of emotional awareness and a greater confidence and experience a new level of self-actualization? The creative answer might have been: “make art according to the CPS Stages” (Of course that would have been an *assignment* causing me to focus on *product* and would have defeated the entire purpose of my plan to focus on process... But for the sake of hindsight and possible future development and relevance for others, I continue). For instance, below I have put together a table of the CPS stage, the affective skill connected with that stage and the resultant artwork that I used those affective skills most to accomplish the art.

Table 2: CPS, Affective Skills and Art Making.

CPS Stage	Affective Skill	Artwork I Created	Rationale
1. Exploring the Vision	Dreaming	<i>Fly</i> (Fig. 6)	Dreaming of future states brought about this image. I was creating symbols to represent present past and future, and so was

			exploring the vision of what it may take to get to the future state (the sunset over mountains.)
2. Formulating Challenges	Sensing Gaps	<i>Hardened Heart</i> (Fig. 3.)	I needed to closely analyze my feelings when engaged in an emotional challenge to figure out symbols of those emotions. That required sensing gaps between what I currently felt and what I wanted to feel. Pictorially representing what I currently felt was the challenge to help to process the 'gap' and resolve the issue.
3. Formulating Ideas	Playfulness	<i>Start...Now, Two</i> (Fig. 9.)	I allowed myself to truly play with the materials and composition. By doing so, ideas came to me in the midst of process. The rocky shore lead to the pink 'curtain' which lead to the blue lines, which lead to the dots, which lead to the bubbles...etc.
4. Formulating Solutions	Avoiding Premature Closure	The <i>Start...Now</i> series (Figs. 8, 9 and 10)	Making a conscious decision to not finish the first blue-green Start Now painting allowed more options to be available to me. The solutions to the creative block became keeping the 'Start Now' mantra open and engaged to complete two more paintings.

5. Exploring Acceptance	Sensitivity to Environment	<i>Posting Work on the Blog</i>	Allowing people to see my sketches and paintings on line in a limited capacity helped me explore and risk the reaction of viewers, something critical to consider as I evolve into becoming a practicing artist.
6. Formulating a Plan	Tolerance for Risks	<i>Ray's Painting (Fig 10)</i>	This is the cumulating work. I risked judgment as this is a painting designed as a gift for someone else. I risked losing creative advancements by depending upon old patterns of painting objects I see rather than objects I imagine, right after completing an entirely imaginative piece. Doing this work involved very step-by-step process of painting one part then the next part, then the final part, very much akin to how one would execute a plan.

So, what I am seeing here in my key learnings is that this project as a whole has become the creative solution to a very real problem in my life. The problem was my quest to become an artist, to live mindfully, to develop an avenue for emotional healing, to overcome blocks to my creativity and to develop a greater sense of self-actualization from which I can then help others engage in their creativity and achieve more than they think is possible. Interestingly, I feel as though much of that I have done. For instance, here is a note from one of my former high school students who, now in college, saw my blog and responded:

Funny enough, I saw a lot of myself reflected back in what you wrote. I'm always "priming the canvas" for other people, encouraging them, leading them towards success, but when it comes to myself.... /well/. I have a dozen art ideas, a pile of scrapbooks (undone), and 12 novels roaming around in my head that have been just sitting there. I never really considered it a "fear of starting" but having thought about it, and about those lovely Brene Brown books... I totally agree (like, loads and loads of agreement)! ☺

I especially love the idea of focusing on the starting and the process to get past that creativity paralysis. I'm going to remember that! ☺ (LaGassie, 2014.)

And then from another friend:

I am also thrilled to hear that your vision and your skill are merging to create such beautiful work...I love so many of the pieces, especially the one with the vines as curtain. So lovely. I think I may take up a challenge of my own [soon]--maybe a photo a day challenge...to inspire you and to inspire myself. (Welch, 2014)

Even my mother told me that after reading some of my blog entries, she wanted to put the computer down and go *make* something. So, can I rest and say my project is done and go back to my life as it was before having to spend endless hours on the computer and in the studio? Do I conclude that the project was successful and now that I have met all the requirements for getting the degree, do I say "Thank you, and have a nice day?" No, not at all...

Section Six: Conclusion

*The most important questions don't seem to have ready answers, but the questions themselves have healing power when they are shared. An answer is an invitation to stop thinking about something, to stop wondering. Life has no such stopping places. Life is a process whose every event is connected to the moment that just went by. An unanswered question is a fine traveling companion. It sharpens your eye for the road. -- Rachel Naomi Remen (2006), *Kitchen Table Wisdom**

Discovering that I have achieved much of what I set out to do *cannot* be the ending point in my journey. As a result of this process, I have:

- Improved my awareness of emotions as I experience them.
- Used art making (primarily drawing/sketching and painting) as means for facilitating personal emotional growth and healing.
- Used CPS strategies during the creative process to enhance idea generation and personal emotional growth and healing.
- Arrived at a place where I can say that “I am an artist” without reservation, and with clarity and conviction. (I now have the experience to back up that claim. I also have gained clarity to what that part of my identity means to me.)
- Put trust in my abilities at drawing and painting, so the fear of creating something isn't as paralyzing as it once was.
- Developed mindfulness practice as becoming much more of a standard for how I live my life.

- Facilitated the act of creating something to be consciously part of my every day living experience.
- Inspired others to create through my example.

This list came from my Personal Learning Goals that I set out to achieve at the start of the semester. I am thrilled that I am able to answer all of them positively at this time. Yes, I have done all those things, but the conclusion is that those things are simply the *beginning*. I cannot declare this a success until I use all that I've learned daily for, honestly, the rest of my life. I am stronger, freer, more confident, more able, and more excited to embark on this task for the next phase in my growth and development. In creativity training we are taught to phrase most things in terms of questions. "How might I...?" "What might be all the ways..." "How to...?" and so on. This opens up our minds to the possibilities of varied and creative solutions. So, the real question at this time is: *How might I maintain momentum, enthusiasm and drive to continue? ... to continue art making? ...to continue mindfulness practice? ...to continue creativity exploration? ...to continue seeking and providing inspiration?...to continue academic study and reflection?* My next steps are not simple or easy. My next steps are to keep the questions coming --to keep seemingly unanswerable questions in the forefront of my newly developed mindful practice and behavior. If "an answer is an invitation to stop thinking about something, to stop wondering," as the above quote suggests, then I must not accept this project as answered. Wondering and thinking and feeling and creating *is* who I am. Describing myself in terms of actions is prophetic for this moment, because, this is not a "stopping place," in my life. (Despite the punctuation at the end of this sentence, and the placement of this sentence at the end of my paper.) Devising the next propelling questions, I move onward...

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