

Big Magic

Creative Living Beyond Fear

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Creative Living, Defined

So this, I believe, is the central question upon which all creative living hinges: *Do you have the courage to bring forth the treasures that are hidden within you?*

Look, I don't know what's hidden within you. I have no way of knowing such a thing. You yourself may barely know, although I suspect you've caught glimpses. I don't know your capacities, your aspirations, your longings, your secret talents. But surely something wonderful is sheltered inside you. I say this with all confidence, because I happen to believe we are all walking repositories of buried treasure. I believe this is one of the oldest and most generous tricks the universe plays on us human beings, both for its own amusement and for ours: The universe buries strange jewels deep within us all, and then stands back to see if we can find them.

The hunt to uncover those jewels—that's creative living.

The courage to go on that hunt in the first place—that's what separates a mundane existence from a more enchanted one.

The often surprising results of that hunt—that's what I call Big Magic.

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An Amplified Existence

When I talk about “creative living” here, please understand that I am not necessarily talking about pursuing a life that is professionally or exclusively devoted to the arts. I’m not saying that you must become a poet who lives on a mountaintop in Greece, or that you must perform at Carnegie Hall, or that you must win the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. (Though if you want to attempt any of these feats, by all means, *have at it*. I love watching people swing for the bleachers.) No, when I refer to “creative living,” I am speaking more broadly. I’m talking about living a life that is driven more strongly by curiosity than by fear.

One of the coolest examples of creative living that I’ve seen in recent years, for instance, came from my friend Susan, who took up figure skating when she was forty years old. To be more precise, she actually already knew how to skate. She had competed in figure skating as a child and had always loved it, but she’d quit the sport during adolescence when it became clear she didn’t have quite enough talent to be a champion. (Ah, lovely adolescence—when the “talented” are officially shunted off from the herd, thus

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putting the total burden of society's creative dreams on the thin shoulders of a few select souls, while condemning everyone else to live a more commonplace, inspiration-free existence! What a system . . .)

For the next quarter of a century, my friend Susan did not skate. Why bother, if you can't be the best? Then she turned forty. She was listless. She was restless. She felt drab and heavy. She did a little soul-searching, the way one does on the big birthdays. She asked herself when was the last time she'd felt truly light, joyous, and—yes—*creative* in her own skin. To her shock, she realized that it had been decades since she'd felt that way. In fact, the last time she'd experienced such feelings had been as a teenager, back when she was still figure skating. She was appalled to discover that she had denied herself this life-affirming pursuit for so long, and she was curious to see if she still loved it.

So she followed her curiosity. She bought a pair of skates, found a rink, hired a coach. She ignored the voice within her that told her she was being self-indulgent and preposterous to do this crazy thing. She tamped down her feelings of extreme self-consciousness at being the only middle-aged woman on the ice, with all those tiny, feathery nine-year-old girls.

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Three mornings a week, Susan awoke before dawn and, in that groggy hour before her demanding day job began, she skated. And she skated and skated and skated. And yes, she loved it, as much as ever. She loved it even more than ever, perhaps, because now, as an adult, she finally had the perspective to appreciate the value of her own joy. Skating made her feel alive and ageless. She stopped feeling like she was nothing more than a consumer, nothing more than the sum of her daily obligations and duties. She was making something of herself, making something *with* herself.

It was a revolution. A literal revolution, as she spun to life again on the ice—revolution upon revolution upon revolution . . .

Please note that my friend did not quit her job, did not sell her home, did not sever all her relationships and move to Toronto to study seventy hours a week with an exacting Olympic-level skating coach. And no, this story does not end with her winning any championship medals. It doesn't have to. In fact, this story does not end at all, because Susan is *still* figure skating several mornings a week—simply because skating is still the best way for her to unfold a certain beauty and transcendence within her life that she cannot seem to access in any other manner. And she would like to

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spend as much time as possible in such a state of transcendence while she is still here on earth.

That's all.

That's what I call creative living.

And while the paths and outcomes of creative living will vary wildly from person to person, I can guarantee you this: A creative life is an amplified life. It's a bigger life, a happier life, an expanded life, and a hell of a lot more interesting life. Living in this manner—continually and stubbornly bringing forth the jewels that are hidden within you—is a fine art, in and of itself.

Because creative living is where Big Magic will always abide.

Scary, Scary, Scary

Let's talk about courage now.

If you already have the courage to bring forth the jewels that are hidden within you, terrific. You're probably already doing really interesting things with your life, and you don't need this book. Rock on.

But if you don't have the courage, let's try to get you