

Living Creatively: Trust

Where do you place your trust when you are working on a creative endeavor?

It turns out that question is much more complex than it appears at first glance. In my exploration of Elizabeth Gilbert's, *Big Magic*, I found this chapter to be by far the most challenging to grasp and in the end the most eye opening. It took me several reads before I could grasp Gilbert's message and then one more before I could see that I actually do a version of the misplacement of trust she portrays.

Gilbert begins the Trust chapter explaining that most creatives, famous and struggling, get it all wrong when it comes to trust. It seems common practice to buy into the myth that suffering and making go hand and hand. This idea is so prominent that we have generations of artists who only trusted their agony and suffering and were skilled at perpetuating it in their own lives. This by no means is a historical phenomena, it is rampant today. As examples, she shares stories of the heroin addicts who emulated Charlie Parker and the alcoholism among the writers of the Lost Generation. This misplacement has been passed down and today there are countless painters, writers, musicians, and even tech start-up geniuses who believe they must place their trust in misery over joy to bring about great work.

Boldly debunking this myth, Gilbert proclaims that when we accept an idea, and form an agreement to bring it to life, our trust belongs to the joy of our work. The love of what we do should be our guide not our suffering. By lightening up and embodying the pure and simple pleasure and trusting in it enough to invite it to stay we can deliver masterful work without the agony.

I especially appreciate a section of this chapter in which

Gilbert reflects on the process of her friend and colleague Brene Brown. Brown comes to the creative process from the world of academia known for its long suffering stance and she admittedly suffered greatly through the writing process of her bestselling books. It wasn't until Gilbert offered another approach that she could see through her own martyrdom.

What brought Brown joy was storytelling and if she could find a way to capture that voice her process would take on a whole new light. This was in direct opposition to the dark and heavy place she typically drew from. So, with Gilbert's help, she came up with a way to trick this process, and I so love what she did! When she was hard pressed against a final deadline, she gathered two trusted colleagues to join her at a Galveston beach house. There, she told them the stories she wanted to share in the compassionate storytelling voice she is known for. They in turn recorded her words on paper so that her own natural tone could be captured. Not only was this brilliant and successful, but it was even a bit playful and the three girlfriends together brought a joy to writing in which Brown had never before experienced to the completion of her book. She reported writing faster, better and with more trust than ever. In this process, Brown was able to tap into her own deep well of Big Magic, the very subject of Gilbert's book.

The first time or two I read Gilbert's reflections on the suffering in this chapter on Trust I would wince and think how fortunate I was not to take on that habit. I never drank my way through a project or abused my partner or family but then I had to ask myself this, was I allowing myself to feel joy and did I place my trust in it? Not so much. I feel joy when the idea first arrives and in the process of making the commitment to bring it forth. In fact, I am experiencing that right now as I work out the outline for my next book project. This part absolutely has a light almost playful presence. I also feel joy when I clear the space physically and mentally in my schedule for the work ahead.

But, the story changes completely when I get down to the business of writing. Even that term, business, is important to pay attention to as I shift from a lighthearted state, experiencing the deep connection to my writing, to the business of getting it done. Once in this “production mode” I become a task master and lost is the earlier sense of playfulness and pleasure. And to be sure, there are no breaks in sight for the task master once deadlines are set because I am absolutely fearful that the work might not get done. What a profound realization and one I am so grateful I have brought to light before this next project is fully underway.

Join me next week for Trust: Part II as I commit to a new way of being at the start of my third book project.

Persistence II

Last week I began sharing a personal story on persistence that began with the visioning of a natural health clinic in Austin. If you missed Part I you can catch it right here.

At the close of the meeting I stumbled out into the thick August air in complete shock. What had I just witnessed? What had swept into the room and co-opted our meeting? There was that same shock one feels when witnessing a traffic accident. The biggest question however was whether this was new or had it been there all along? Had I been blinded by my ego in its desire to bring about this vision? That is still a question I wonder about today.

By the end of that long day the practitioner who led the meeting emailed to say that she was no longer interested in a group venture and then one by one, each practitioner stepped away for a variety of reasons. By the end of the week I had

spoken to all involved and each individual was prepared to let go of this idea for one reason or another. While I tried desperately not to take their change of heart personally, the pain however was very personal. Let me share right now, it hurt like hell. It was the worst breakup ever as I had not just lost one partner but five!

Just what did this all mean for me? Where did it leave this plan, that had seemed so divinely guided, that now was discarded? So many questions led me into a period of deep soul searching but not before a few weeks of pure undeniable grief. It seemed as if an entire season had passed before I felt secure enough to venture out into the light of day. I was more than certain that I wore my failed vision like a cloak that could be spotted miles away. I believe we call that shame. This shame came from not seeing this coming and not being able to stop it. Wow.

Sounds like I took on quite a bit of responsibility for how this would all play out, right?

Since in my exuberance I had shared my work on the creating of this amazing clinic with everyone I knew, of course they all would be asking what had happened. Urghh. How could I face anyone? This feeling hit a very familiar chord. I was transported back thirty years; as often strong emotions will do to a very old wound. At nineteen, in a very similar fashion, I had experienced a shame of being caught off guard. Just weeks after the publishing a big splashy announcement of my pending engagement in our small town paper, my fiancé had a sudden change of heart and ended the relationship. I could not have been more shocked or hurt. On top of the personal pain, the fact that I was living in the quintessential small town America, completely exposed, did not help. There I was dealing with all of the shame stuff Brene Brown so eloquently describes. Yet Brene at that time, was busy growing up just like me, and not quite prepared to dish out her quotes of wisdom, such as this classic, she shares today,

"Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen."

Had someone, anyone, been available to share this concept with me, the next year might have not been so excruciating and this recent loss might have not hit so deep. Fortunately, I was now thirty years wiser and much more resourceful and found my way out with some divinely guided support and teachings.

And this time I finally learned the greatest lesson in regards to my "cloak of shame". It happened when I let myself be seen. I discovered that the, "failed plan," that had been so personally devastating to me, was really no big deal to anyone else. I mean really, no. big. deal. Now that was news! They were all busy working their stuff and were not attached to what I achieved or not. What a revelation, an incredibly freeing! Once I got that, some incredibly beautiful things began to unfold. Because I allowed myself to show up, even in my wounded vulnerable state, the guidance I needed came.

So what remained when this big plan crumbled? My desire to serve, my passion for natural health care rooted in my own personal healing experience, and the steady whisper of desire to be a practitioner that I had quieted for years. All of that remained, and it turns out that was enough, even more than enough.

The answer to every question I asked was to go within. Everything would be provided, I just needed to get clear and create a path I wanted to travel. Teachers would be provided and those that needed the help I could offer would follow. The very core of what I had attempted to do with the group was to build something to fill the gap in healthcare. While I had conjured up a grandiose plan, maybe there was an approach that was not so complex. Maybe there was an answer that I could provide on my own.

So what did I do? I became a student of everything I needed to

know in regards to the body healing both spiritually and physically. I found my own unique path, not one that had been traversed before and my period of isolation, of solitude, provided me with the strength I needed whenever doubt arose. I read voraciously and traveled to be with practitioners who modeled what I believed, in the practice and personal lives, because it all must be in sync. And when the answer I needed required me to get on a plane and fly across the ocean, I did, multiple times. One of these trips is when I met Dr. Heiner Frei, a story I tell about in this blog post.

Before long my persistence paid off. I rallied the courage to open a small practice and my work has continued to evolve ever since.

As I shared in the beginning of the post,

Persistence comes from the heart of that deep love of what we do, it is our core, our willingness to move all obstacles just so that the work we are called to do can continue.

It is truly a love for what I do that gets me up each morning and helps me to work through the obstacles of the day. I do this because never before in my life have I felt so sure I was doing the work that was connected to a greater plan.

In this story, persistence paid off, big time. But your story doesn't have to be so dramatic. Persistence can take many forms. It is exactly what is required to be able to return to your work after a bad night of sleep, or family demands that beckon, or repeated unsuccessful attempts. Giving yourself permission for a pause is always warranted but it's about the coming back, remembering the joy it brings, and the deep love you feel for what you do.

Living Persistence

Creatively:

Elizabeth Gilbert chooses to dedicate an entire chapter to the topic of persistence in her book, *Big Magic*. Gilbert defines the persistence necessary in the creative process as what keeps you hammering away at your idea even when the enchantment starts to fade. At the point, when what seemed clear starts to blur, is exactly when the effort must be made to,

“seduce the Big Magic and it will always seem to come back to you the same way a raven is captivated by a shining spinning thing.”

Persistence comes from the heart of that deep love of what we do, it is our core, our willingness to move all obstacles just so that the work we are called to do can continue. Persistence is honoring the time you set aside to write, draw, build, or make whatever is your heart's desire, despite all odds. It's about finding a place and time you call your own and honoring it with a reciprocal agreement.

Most of the time this works... and then there's going to be the morning in which every possible obstacle seems to get in your way. Persistence is when in spite of all obstacles you still pick up your tools and put them to work right then and there for however many seconds you are granted. That my friend is real persistence. It is essential ingredients to lead a creative life because guess what, it isn't always going to be pretty and clean and served up to us so we can partake. Sometimes, and actually many times, we need to plow through it all to get to the good stuff.

Six years ago I had to do just that as I was led by an idea

that stalked me day and night. It would not grant me a moment's peace and before long I could not see straight through my obsession. I was, at this point in time, in the midst of passing along to new owners the bootstrapped gluten free baking company that I had lovingly nurtured all the way to the shelves of Whole Foods and was ready for a new challenge. I knew what would be required next for this homegrown business to profit was more than I was willing to invest on many levels and above all the call to work in natural health care was beckoning.

This beckoning became rather loud and annoying when I learned of the imminent closing of a boutique practitioner cooperative. Soon to be stranded were some of Austin's finest practitioners from a rich variety of backgrounds. While the cooperative model they had followed for years was not financially viable I had an idea for another model, one I had come across in California. On paper it was beyond brilliant and would provide a new home for those practitioners who still sought a community along with a few others that could be handpicked to allow for a range of therapies. The intensity of this idea was such that I was compelled to take action and so began to meet with each individual one on one and to hear out their personal goals and began to form a collective vision.

While I had years of personal experience with Homeopathy and Gemmotherapy along with mentoring by my German homeopath while living in Europe, I only dreamed that in another lifetime I would indeed practice. Surely the thought of it would rise up often enough but only to be quieted by my logical mind. The idea of it seemed too far out of reach, and I accepted that the best I could possibly do was to support those who did practice become more visible and accessible to the public. Besides, in this planned clinic there already were plenty of practitioners but what was missing in the equation was someone who held the big picture and kept the vision moving forward. So in the formulating of this natural health clinic,

interestingly enough, I envisioned myself stepping into an administrative role.

Once the group of practitioners was finalized we began regular meetings to create our mission statement, objectives and value propositions. Let me just reiterate here how my obsession with this idea grew with each step we took as a growing team. I could so clearly see the huge gap in health care that this creative endeavor would fill. In my exuberance I shared this vision with literally everyone I met in the months of our planning process and created an enthusiastic following along the way. All progressed beautifully from winter into the months of summer. We even took the steps to assemble an advisory board of key leaders in business and health and seek their input.

While looking at properties had been saved as a final step, now in August, the time had come and to no surprise one came available instantly right in the neighborhood of our choice. How perfect could it get? After viewing it and sketching out a possible layout we gathered as a team to take these next important financial steps together. However, once we were all assembled in the same room we had harmoniously gathered for months, something was tangibly different. The gentle buzz and hum of creativity was gone and instead there was a distinct metallic feel of tension that was so strong you could taste it on your tongue. There was a brittleness that had never before been present. Not until much later did it become clear that what showed up that day was FEAR.

One of the key practitioners took the lead for that meeting and from the start everything began colliding, like the start of bumper cars, all it takes is one to begin a continuous chain reaction. Suddenly this compatible group, who had gathered to form a shared vision for six months, began to push up against each other's edges and egos. The bumps experienced turned into roadblocks by the end of the meeting and no action could be taken on the pending lease. Everything was

stalled.

Check back in a week when I share what transpired next and how my persistence was truly put to the test.

Living Creatively: Permission II

“Make absolutely whatever you want to make. It’s nobody’s business but your own.”

~ Elizabeth Gilbert

In living creative lives even with every good intention, the act of granting permission can be paralyzing. Even with a healthy dose of courage summoned and the magical spell of enchantment you can find yourself engaged with an old continuous soundtrack. This tape may claim any of the following: you are not skilled, prepared, perfect, credentialed, as good as, or even deserving of taking the next creative step. Due to this you will wait, as if there is an official office of creativity that must issue a clearance stamp to proceed. This sadly is exactly what too frequently halts the creative process. As if your own will or desire is not enough you will begin to search outside for confirmation and more important an authority to approve your taking action.

Do you know what is so heartbreaking about this barrier to creative living? Not only are so many prevented from the beautiful experience of bringing forth their idea but the world as a whole misses out on the unique way in which you were destined to deliver that idea.

In discussing the theme of permission in her book *Big Magic*, Elizabeth Gilbert states,

“Never delude yourself into believing that you require someone else’s blessing in order to make your own creative work.”

That line my friends, needs to be written on your bathroom mirror and across your computer screen. Give yourself permission and do so without trepidation. We don’t create with the expectation of bringing forth a masterpiece, we create for the joy of the making. Whether that making is arranging words into a poem or short story, ingredients into a meal, or color into a painting- we do it for the love of the process.

Gilbert also offers sound advice to those who struggle with originality.

Most things, she says, have already been done- but they have not yet been done by you. Did you hear that? Your personal spin on whatever you create makes it original because no one, trust me, no one sees it and can produce it just like you. Here’s a simple illustration of this. In the region of Germany that my husband comes from, potato salad is made from a precise handful of basic ingredients to include broth, vinegar, salt, onions, potatoes. Yet, absolutely dependent on the ratio of each ingredient and the type of potatoes used, the dish will take on it’s own unique characteristics. Each Taunte or Oma, makes the recipe her own and serves it up with the love of a maker to the delight of her family who can no doubt can pick her salad out of a lineup of identical looking salads. Just imagine their disappointment should she decide hers was lacking originality and not worthy to share. So take note here, as it is not about originality but rather it is about making your mark by contributing what you can make no matter how big, small, complex or simple.

Perhaps you grew up being told you were not enough or that

creativity is only for those who can achieve perfection. While that is tragic for sure, you can choose to live out a different storyline. You are the permission granter. You control the gas pedal and are the force for the brakes behind your own creativity.

Looking for a way to find or get back your groove? Start small. Possibly begin in the kitchen with trying your hand at some new recipes or maybe attempt to capture an image each day of natural beauty that touches you. Whether you revive an old skill or learn one you've always longed to try is your choice, but the pleasure won't begin until you give yourself permission to act. And please, whatever you choose to do, let yourself be messy and fail miserably at times, it's all part of the process and pleasure.

It really is a lot like meditation practice. As my teacher Susan Piver says,

"We don't do it because we are good, we do it because when you are relaxed amazing things happen. When we choose to live creatively, accepting the invitation that is presented, and grant ourselves permission, something pretty magical happens.

Doesn't that sound lovely? Let that be your personal invitation. Choose to grant yourself permission and begin down your own path of creative living.