



Deep Creativity

Seven Ways to Spark Your Creative Spirit

By Deborah Anne Quibell, Jennifer Leigh Selig, PhD and Dennis Patrick Slattery, PhD

13-minute read

Synopsis

Deep Creativity (2019) encourages you to celebrate your inner creative impulses as a means of self-expression. The three authors tell personal stories about their creative practice and offer sage advice for how to live a creatively satisfying life.

Who is it for?

- Creative souls
- Dabblers in depth psychology
- Searchers for inner peace and fulfillment

About the author

Deborah Anne Quibell, Jennifer Leigh Selig, and Dennis Patrick Slattery are all writers and depth psychologists. All doctors of philosophy, they either studied or have taught at Pacifica Graduate Institute, California. Deborah is a published poet and healing and meditation teacher; Jennifer worked in education for over 30 years and has written or worked on over 16 books; and Dennis is faculty emeritus at Pacifica Graduate Institute and has worked on 24 books, including a novel.

What's in it for me? Learn to celebrate your deep creativity.

Are you creative? Yes – we all are. Whether we're drawn toward words, music, painting, or photography, there's a creative spark living deep inside us all.

However, we don't always embrace our deep creativity as we should. When a creative impulse appears, it's all too easy to push it away – and just try to get on with our lives. That's a big mistake. The more you push the creative impulse away, the less it will visit you in the future.

That's where these blinks come in. Through stories drawn from the authors' own creative lives, as well as questions designed to spur you on to creativity, you'll learn how to honor your very own creative spark.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- why a spider's web is like a poem;
- how to turn suffering into something positive; and
- why *sacred* doesn't just mean religious.

We are all creative at a deep level, and can embrace this in various ways – the first of which is through love.

Have you ever wondered what's going on deep below the surface of your consciousness?

Well, if you'd ask a depth psychologist, they'll tell you: a lot. Underneath the conscious level, our psyche is constantly active, influencing us in mysterious ways.

And it's constantly creative, too. What are dreams and fantasies, ideas and moods, but the imaginative creations of our subconscious?

Our inherent creativity is something we should all celebrate. The authors call it *deep creativity* – the creativity that stems from the depths of our subconscious. At this deep level, we are all creative, and we should cultivate this creativity.

So let's dive in.

The key message here is: We're all creative at a deep level, and can embrace this in various ways – the first of which is through love.

The three authors identify seven ways to tap into our deep creativity, and we'll explore each in turn, starting with the first: love.

Romantic love is a well-established engine of creativity. Just think of the great Italian poet Dante, who was inspired to write reams of poetry after just a fleeting encounter with his muse, Beatrice.

But other sorts of love can also inspire creative work – even the love of creating itself. Recently, Dennis – one

of the authors – took up painting for the first time in decades. Back when he was in high school, a teacher had chastised him for painting unrealistically colorful trees. But he now realizes that, for him, realism is beside the point. What's important is the love of creation.

Having said that, Deborah – one of the other authors – notes that reality can be inspirational, too. She describes reality as the *particularity* of the world, and encourages everyone to look at, and love, the precise way that things are. Look at the leaves on a tree in fall. What story are they telling, as they curl and brown and fall to the earth? Love the world around you, and it will reward you with inspiration.

When Jennifer – the third author – thinks of love, she thinks of life. When she was 12 years old, she almost died when a friend shot her at point-blank range. Luckily, the gun was only loaded with blanks. However, this near-death experience opened her up to the simple joy of existence, and loving the wonders of the world around her.

How does love inspire you? Whether it's love for a person, the world, or even creation itself, it can help you unlock your innate creativity.

Nature can spur all of us on to creativity.

Jennifer is primarily a writer, but she also indulges her creativity through photography. And when she does so, nothing inspires her more than the natural world.

Simply bringing a camera with her transforms her experience of the world around her. She starts to notice colors, shapes, light, and all the wonders of nature.

Nature also reminds her that she is a part of nature herself, and not just a mere observer. Engaging with nature creatively reminds her of her connectedness to the world around her.

The key message here is: Nature can inspire creativity.

Dennis has had similar experiences. He remembers once sitting on a log in a forest and noticing a spider's web on a bush nearby. He paused to contemplate its beauty – but a moment later, when he shifted his viewpoint, it vanished.

Of course, the web's disappearance was nothing more than a trick of the light, but it reminded Dennis that we don't always see what's in front of us. Seeing the web, he thought, was like poetry. In other words, it revealed something right in front of us we hadn't known was there. Sometimes it takes creativity to make the invisible visible.

Some of nature's wonders are even more elusive than a spider's web. When Deborah went diving in the Virgin Islands, she spent the whole trip longing for a moment alone with some sea turtles. She had all but given up

when she finally chanced across one. She felt deeply privileged to swim alongside the turtle for a while, observing the minimal and purposeful movements with which it swam.

Deborah realized how much she could learn from her marine companion. When feeling pressured or rushed, we should all be as calm and wise as the sea turtle, swimming through the ocean with a serene stillness.

She also felt there was something reciprocal about her relationship with the sea turtle. Deborah realized she had to use her creative gift in the service of nature, to celebrate its beauty.

How do you connect with the natural world, and how does this link to your creativity? Do you think about the fact that you, too, are an animal – are part of this wonderful network of nature that surrounds us? And how do you celebrate nature in your creative practice?

Whatever form the muse takes, she is crucial for deep creativity.

Dennis gets up every day at 4:00 a.m. He lights a candle and a stick of incense, and proceeds to read, write, and think.

In the small hours, he feels a deep sense of clarity and inspiration. Simply put, the muse comes to him.

You may well have a different relationship with your muse – it may come to you later in the day; it may even be elusive. But you must engage with it, and fit your creative practice around when it appears.

The key message here is: Whatever form the muse takes, it is crucial for deep creativity.

Sometimes, but not always, muses are real people from our lives. Jennifer recalls the summers she spent at camp as a young girl. It was there that she met a wise and kind woman called Fish who she would spend all summer talking to. These interactions helped her gradually open up and get to know herself.

Years later, Jennifer found herself also teaching at a summer camp. She spent the summer with Kim, a shy 11-year-old girl, and helped her develop photographs in the darkroom. Jennifer passed on to Kim the flame she had inherited from Fish. And she honors these two women, her muses, through her writing and photography.

Muses can also be more abstract. Despite her passion for nature, one of Deborah's muses is the city of Amsterdam. It's like a love affair – the spirit of the city has come to permeate her soul.

One day, walking through the city, she noticed a few things she'd never spotted before – the weeds in the pavement and the aging paint on several doorways. Suddenly she felt like the whole city was a complex,

beautiful, and vast body. What's more is that it was all linked together like the organs and bones inside us all.

Muses can be anywhere and everywhere, both inside us and around us. They might come to us early in the morning each day – or one summer at camp. And as with nature, the relationship between you and your muse is reciprocal – your muse inspires you, but your creation, whatever form it takes, gives back to your muse as well.

Who or what is your muse? Do you give your muse the time and attention she deserves? Do you give her the space she needs to inspire you? And do you pass the creative spirit on, to become a muse to others?

Suffering can strike a deep chord with our creative selves.

Deborah once had a client with terminal brain cancer. Eventually, it became too difficult for him to come to her office, so she visited him at home.

As she approached his house for the first time, Deborah saw something astonishing. He had transformed the wheelchair ramp outside his home into a vibrant artwork, covered with painted images. And he had done the same on the walls inside the house, too.

Her client looked tired and pale – he was nearing the end of his life. Yet there was a look of peace in his eyes. He had turned his suffering into something meaningful – something creative.

The key message here is: Suffering can strike a deep chord with our creative selves.

Although she is not gravely ill, Deborah too has suffered – we all have. And she has felt that strange creative pull that suffering can cause. As a child, her father fell ill. For some reason, she decided to write a poem and, by doing so, it reminded her that she wasn't alone in her suffering. In fact, we are never truly alone when we're inspired by creativity.

Suffering can take many forms. One day in his dentist's waiting room, Dennis was deeply affected to read the story of some children who had died in a plane crash. Days after, he found that the only way he could come to terms with what he had read was to write a poem about it, which he duly did.

Jennifer has been inspired by suffering, too. A story came to her one day on the New York subway, when she saw a mother and her young daughter yelling fiercely at each other. What would happen, she wondered, if the little girl ran off onto a train and into an old man's lap?

Before she knew it, she had written a screenplay about the girl and her new father figure. But it was a while before she realized why this story resonated with her so deeply. Her father had left her and her mother when she was young. This story, then, was her curious,

subconscious way of healing the wound that abandonment had opened up so long ago.

Suffering affects us in different ways, from the conscious to the unconscious. How have your own experiences with suffering informed your creative work? Engaging with dark thoughts can sometimes lead to astonishing creative acts, just like that painted wheelchair ramp.

It's vital to foster a relationship with the creative impulse.

We may find ourselves inspired by anything – from suffering, to nature, or to love. But what is that creative urge that we feel? What is it that compels us to pick up a pen, a paintbrush, or a camera? Where does that force come from?

Deborah calls it the *creative impulse*, and she believes fostering a relationship with it is key to our artistic practice.

You can't always control when the creative impulse visits you. But one thing is certain – if it comes and you ignore it, it'll start showing up less and less. If you listen to it, though, the relationship will blossom – just like with any relationship. So find a way to open yourself up to its influence.

The key message here is: It's vital to foster a relationship with the creative impulse.

What about when the creative impulse doesn't show up, though? That's normally called writer's block, but Dennis has another name for it: *creative resistance*. And for him, it's not a wholly negative thing.

Occasions when the creative impulse deserts or resists you are opportunities to reflect. When Dennis isn't feeling inspired, he dips into a book from his vast library, perhaps to read a volume about how other writers worked. He sometimes ends up thinking about his own creative work in a different way, thanks to the fresh perspectives he's encountered.

On the other hand, sometimes the creative impulse overtakes us completely – Jennifer uses the term *creative flooding*. This can be just as problematic as creative resistance, as it may prove overwhelming. You might end up like Jennifer, with a folder on your computer called *Ideas* that's many times fuller than your *Done* folder.

But ultimately, even if your creative impulse feels out of control or chaotic, it's all part of the broader creative process. And at the end of the day, it all feeds into the work that we end up creating. After all, everyone has their own method. Jennifer, for example, tried out Dennis's practice of waking up at 4 a.m. each morning – but it didn't work for her. However, she has her own ways.

How about you? What method best allows you to answer your creative impulse when it comes calling? Are you familiar with that uncomfortable feeling that arises when you don't listen to it? And do you stay as calm as Dennis when it deserts you?

Sacred doesn't just mean religious – all forms of sacredness can be creative.

Not every creative person earns much money from what they do – the authors included. Although they are all published writers, they have other work too. Sometimes, creative work isn't enough to pay the bills. However, the need to create shouldn't be a financial one. It's spiritual. One might even call it sacred.

"Sacred" is a broad term, Jennifer argues. It's not about a specific religion, although it can be. Everyone has access to a realm of sacred understanding, and it's all around us. Even an everyday task can be sacred, and can be what Jennifer calls *everyday reverence*. This can encompass everything from cooking to sleeping, or even sex and silence.

The key message here is: Sacred doesn't just mean religious – all forms of sacredness can be creative.

Religious experiences certainly can make a powerful impression, though. Deborah was brought up Catholic, and every Sunday, as part of the Eucharist, she would have to say that she was unworthy to receive God's healing.

But it was only when she later started reading mystic poetry that she realized she *was* worthy after all. In fact, maybe God even *desired* her, and considered her perfect just the way she was. This realization set her life on a path of meditation and creativity, all deeply influenced by her own brand of spirituality.

Dennis once studied with a Benedictine monk, an especially rewarding experience for his spiritual practice. It was through the monk's life of contemplation and service that Dennis realized we are all on our own paths through life. In other words, he learned that each of us are living out our own myth. And by honoring our own myth, we acknowledge the sacred nature of our lives.

But of course, each of our myths is different. What is it that you're seeking from your life, and your creative life in particular? It might be public recognition, like getting your work published, or recognition from people who matter to you. Or it could simply be the transcendent experience of the creative process itself.

Here's another question – where is your creative temple? Some people may attend an actual temple or church, but for others, their temple might be a home office, or even a garage or backyard. Wherever yours is, do you treat it like the sacred place it is?

Art itself can unleash our deep creativity.

Deep creativity isn't just for professional poets and painters. There's an artist in everyone, and you don't have to be Dante or Picasso to create art that matters. It might be the process of making art, rather than the end product, that is truly important for you.

Then again, it's also possible for art to resonate so deeply with other people that it inspires yet more creativity. When Jennifer learned the term *ekphrasis*, it resonated deeply with her – put simply, it means a work of art inspired by another work of art. And such works of art are all around us.

The key message here is: Art itself can unleash our deep creativity.

Jennifer was driving through California one day, and decided to listen to a song by Johnathan Rice on repeat. After a while, she suddenly found that an intense and dramatic story had come to her. As it became more or less fully formed, she felt the urge to write it down. It was almost as if she had been possessed. So she pulled over, and proceeded to create.

What Jennifer wrote down wasn't exactly the same as the story of Rice's song, but they were intimately and mysteriously connected. It was as if Jennifer's story was her creative response to the song.

Dennis has also been inspired to create by other people's creative work. In fact, he has written whole books about it – one about Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and another about Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

After all, as one of Deborah's favorite sayings goes, the Earth without art is just Eh. Can you imagine such a place? Could life even live there at all, given that life itself is creation?

Whatever it is that inspires you – be it art, suffering, or the vibrant colors of nature – it's vital to give yourself over to the powerful, deep wonders of creativity. Not only is creativity itself a glorious and important way to express yourself, but the work you create may in turn inspire others to their own ekphrastic responses.

Deep creativity is contagious. Our own creations inspire the creations of others, and the amount of art in the world grows and grows. Which is better for everyone.

So, then – you owe it to yourself to be creative, but perhaps you owe it to the world, too. As if you needed another reason to embrace the mysterious magic of deep creativity.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that:

We are all creative at a deep level, and it's vital to embrace and celebrate this deep creativity. Your muse might be a person, nature, suffering,

love, or even art itself – but whatever form it takes, treat the creative impulse as something sacred, and it will richly repay you.

And here's some more actionable advice:

Embrace your creative impulse.

We all know that feeling, when we're overcome with the urge to create, yet not quite sure how to channel that energy. But ignoring it altogether is dangerous, because it means that the creative impulse will be less likely to visit you again in the future. So, the next time it appears to you, honor it – find the time to express yourself, whether it's through words, or images, or whatever else you do.

Got feedback?

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