

THE WHEEL OF CREATIVITY

THE Wheel OF
Creativity[®]

Taking Your Place in the Adventure of Life

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Art & Soul Productions LLC

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In memory of Shaka Taylor (1976–2008),
whose creative spirit lit up every room he entered.
May his short life remind us all not to wait for life's
creative adventure to begin, but to take our places
in it today.

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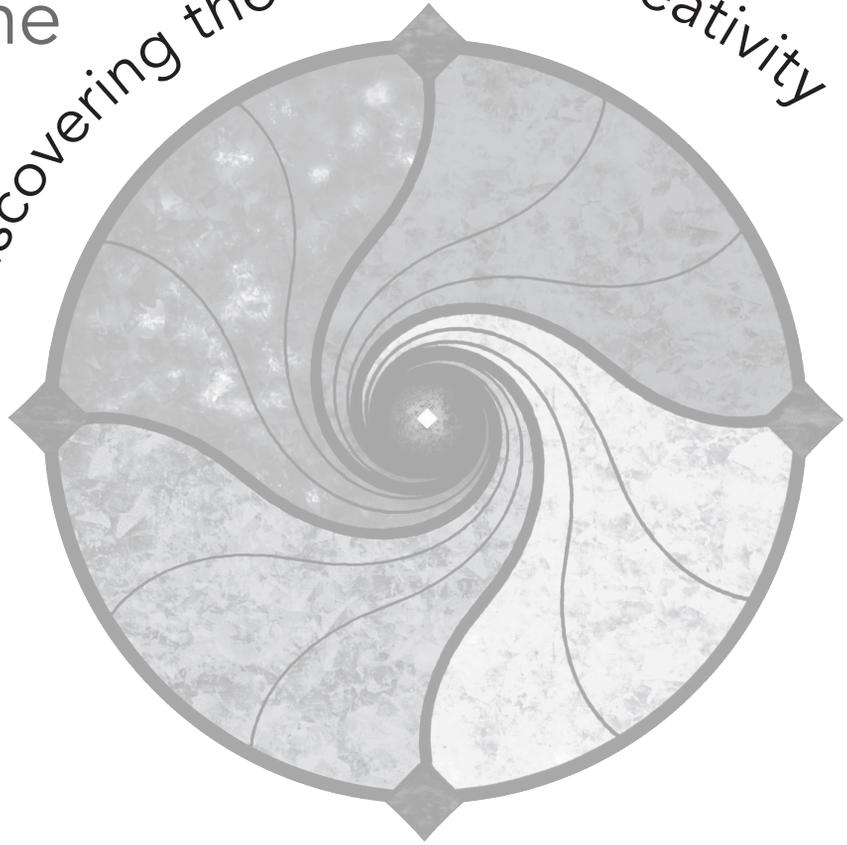
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Part One
Discovering the Wheel of Creativity



INTRODUCTION

Creativity, Source and Me

Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark. AGNES DE MILLE

My most important lessons in creativity have not come in the classroom, but on the street. I have always been curious. How does this thing work, and why? Why do you do the things you do? Why do I? There have always been gaps throughout my life between a relentless string of questions and the answers to those questions, between having ideas and implementing them. It is into these gaps that I love to go.

Half a lifetime ago, I decided that questions never have final answers, that life is meant to be explored, and there is always new territory to discover. Answers come in bite-sized pieces, revealed in the context of the language I understand at the time. Whatever knowledge I gain today will be replaced by something new tomorrow. My life rolls out before me in never-ending, unceasing cycles, one giving way to the next in a great wheel of evolution.

This book explores the territory between the questions and their answers—the mysteries of life and its manifestations, the unseen and the seen—the landscape where spirituality and creativity converge. This book is about how you can use the creative process to explore that territory yourself. I tell you my

story not because I believe I am unique, but because I believe, at the deepest level of our humanity, we are the same. Through seeing the process unfold in my life, you can learn to recognize it in yours. And that is the beginning of the adventure!

Splitting Life in a Second

So many of the great adventures of my life have arrived as the unannounced afterthought at the end of a road. At the time, most of these experiences felt like the end of the world. For all my talk of questions, living through them is not an easy path. It is not comfortable. But perhaps comfort is not all it's cracked up to be.

In one split second, on May 7, 2009, all my plans changed. I was in the prime of my life. I was newly married to an amazing man, living in three countries, working on a meaningful project with the ideal client, and beginning to go public with my heart's desire to sing. I had lots of plans.

On that sunny afternoon in Nice, France, having just returned from England, I left my apartment to walk to the store to buy food. I crossed the street and stepped up onto the sidewalk. The curb in that

spot was about four inches higher than normal. My foot did not clear it, and I fell. Arms full and unable to break my fall, I landed on my right hip. I tried to move, tried to stand; but my leg lay there beneath me like a tree trunk in the forest.

In that instant, though I pushed my mind to stay open to a better possibility, I knew what had happened. Two hours later, the young emergency room doctor at Saint-Roch Hospital confirmed it: I had broken my hip. It was a clean break, severing the head of the femur from the rest of the bone. My heart sank. Young Dr. Roux performed emergency surgery at 10 that night. And I began the long process of recovery. It would be four months before I would walk again, and a year before I would feel close to normal.

Resting there on the sidewalk, even as my body slipped into shock (paramedics measured my blood pressure at 80 over 50), my heart responded, "Okay, if this is what is next, let's go." That spirit of acceptance and willingness made the long months of recovery—which could have brought misery and angst with the pain and complications—rich with treasures, discoveries, blessings, friendship and love.

There on that sidewalk, Life took the lead, and I embarked on a new journey. Like countless others throughout my life, this process showed me my place in the adventure of life, required me to respond, and invited me to collaborate in creating the outcome. The cycle I went through, like all the others, had specific stages, which I identify now as The Wheel of Creativity.

The Wheel of Creativity is a map of the creative process, each point of which I have verified by going there myself many times. In addition to showing you that map, this book retraces my steps along the way so that in your own life journey, you can learn to recognize the stations I have visited. This book also presents others' stories to show the diverse applications of the process. And it offers you the tips I have learned at street level for how to get the most out of your trip.

This book is not just for artists, though artists certainly will find the material useful; it is also for

the rest of us. It is for the everyday people in all walks of life who are unceremoniously doing their best to make something of value with their time on the planet. This is a guidebook for the adventure of being alive.

The Place I Had to Leave

I can't say exactly when I first had the idea for this book, but its roots are there in my earliest memories of childhood. Not so much from what I was given, but from what I was given to work with. So many experiences, as I look back now, showed me whom I was by showing me what I was not. So I begin with my own personal story—the soil into which my roots reached out, where I was nourished, inspired, humbled and compelled.

I was born in Houston, Texas, in 1956, the daughter of a child psychiatrist and a self-made entrepreneur who left school at 15. I would have been an only child, but six months before I was born, my father's niece and nephew, who had spent 10 years in an orphanage, arrived to make their home with us.

Ours was a religious home. Sundays and Wednesdays found us at South Main Baptist Church. And I was proudly presented at Sunday School practically before I could form a thought. I learned to think and act in the context of Jesus's teachings and someone else's interpretations of them.

Ours was a fearful home, with right-wing political leanings and well-researched fears about the dangerous changes happening in the world. My mother—a pediatrician turned child psychiatrist in 1960—protected me as only a trained shrink can. My father, less educated in his anxiety, also believed the world a dangerous place for his daughter and tried his loving best to keep me safe. They protected me by instilling their fears in me. I say this with the deepest appreciation for their loving intentions and complete forgiveness for their human limitations. As I have taken responsibility for my own limitations along the way, I have come to understand the origins of theirs.

I was a sensitive child. According to my mother,

by the time I was able to sit up in my high chair, if I spilled my milk I would burst into tears. I was extremely fearful about doing anything wrong. At the same time, I was a big and colorful character, and was probably overindulged as the only child born to parents late in life.

I vividly recall one night, when I was three or four, being in the family room with my parents and cousins (19 and 14 by then), whom I idolized as sister and brother. I was doing my usual bouncing-singing-dancing thing around the room, when suddenly a dark cloud of worry came over me with a message: "These people are really uncomfortable with me. This is really bad, that they feel uncomfortable. It's obviously my fault. Therefore I am too big." It led to one of those decisions you never really make but changes your life all the same. I began to reel in my energy like a school of fish caught in a net, tighter and tighter, until I felt it was safe to be there, safe to be. I was born into a world of other people's agendas for me. So are we all.

Conformity Comes Home

At age six, because of my mother's desperate campaign to keep me safe from the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll in public schools, I was sent to a strict parochial school. My childhood fears took root in the school's narrow judgments about what was right and what was wrong. Seeing the harsh punishments inflicted there on those who ventured out of bounds—forced to stand outside the classroom facing the wall, sent to the principal's office, hit with a paddle—terrorized me. Order in the classroom was maintained. And I was conditioned for a life of conformity.

The education at St. Thomas was excellent in classical academics—math, science, English, Latin—and the arts had their tiny extracurricular place. In addition to chapel singing, competitive Scottish dancing and needlepoint, there were occasional Christmas concerts and plays. Once, when we performed Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, I played Portia. There was no structure to develop skill in or understanding of the arts; they were the

seasoning on our intellectual buffet. We were being groomed—with math, science and language—to get into good universities and to excel and compete in the world. I am grateful for the benefits of this training, and I regret its costs.

In this creative outback, there was one woman who saw me. Mrs. Homer T. Bouldin, my first-grade teacher, was writing a book on teaching children to read and write phonetically, which she called *An Acorn in My Hand*. To demonstrate how her method could work, she selected my story and published it exactly as I had written it, exactly as you see it here.

5

George Washington By Kathy Robertson

When George Washington was a boy his father had pigs, cows and horses. George had a pony of his own, Whitefoot. He rode Whitefoot around in the fields every day. When George was eleven years old his father died. One day when George was at his mother's house he found some old tools. "Those tools were your fathers tools," said George's mother. "Can I have them"? said George. "Yes", said his mother. "He meshered land with those tools", said his mother. "I want to learn how to mesher land," said George Washington. "You will have to go to a man in town", said his mother. So George went to town. He said, "Sir I want to learn to be a sirvaer", said George Washington. "To be a sirvaer is hard work", said the man. "I know sir", said George Washington, "But I want to be a sirvaer sir", said George Washington. "Okey", said the man. One night when George was out with the sirvaing party he saw an Indian war dance.

I was six years old, still innocent of the judgment and shame in words like mistakes, and right and wrong. I was so proud. I am proud to this day—of the sweet little girl who set out to write a little story in the best little way she could. Lesson one: I can do it and it's fun. But that changed the next year.

In second grade, we learned to write cursive, and Darcy Dunn knew how to make her ovals right. I can

remember looking at my page, looking at her page and feeling bad. No matter how hard I tried, I could not get my ovals to look like Darcy Dunn's; I could not get mine to come out right. Lesson two: You don't always get what you want.

One day, in third grade, I dared to play a little. It was Halloween time, and those little white-yellow-orange candy corn pieces were a favorite. Quite uncharacteristically on a dare, I broke off the white part, went to the teacher with "my tooth" in my hand, and asked to be excused to the bathroom. I shall never forget the terrible feeling of waiting in the principal's office, crying my eyes out. My inner shame was punishment enough. I never dared anything like that again. Lesson three: Don't you dare!

By fourth grade, I had learned it was not safe to not know. If I had a question in class, I would not ask it; I feared I would be reprimanded for not knowing the answer. So for me, learning came not from passionate curiosity but from the need to be right, to do it right, and above all to not be wrong. Lesson four: Take no chances!

I stayed at St. Thomas until my last year of high school. Though one year I tried another private school, I returned. I was fused to it. It was the cloth I was cut from. What drove me to excel, despite my innocent love for life, was fear. Year after year, the lessons taught without words took me farther away from myself.

Spirit Breaking Free

Outside school, my mother ensured that I was exposed to all the traditional art forms. There I dared to dream, to explore, to reach out for something more. My introduction to creativity was learning-how rather than listening-to.

There were lessons for everything, starting at age six. There was dance—ballet, tumbling and tap—which I adored but did not continue. There were piano lessons with Mrs. Clark—strict, academic and constricted—and the terrible stage fright at every recital, which I am finally mastering today. There were painting lessons, and private voice lessons as

well, as it seemed I was gifted in this area.

Outside school as well, what began as a delightful dream soon deteriorated into work and fear. I could only envy the pleasure of friends who played piano by ear at our parties. I stopped studying piano when I was 12, and I always regretted it. I avoided dance again until my 40s, when I discovered Gabrielle Roth's 5Rhythms. I never painted again. I learned to plant the seeds of work and pleasure in separate gardens.

The one place in my life where pleasure and work flowed together was on the back of a horse. With all my other pursuits, I could go through the motions in my head; but I had to be in my body to stay in the saddle. Those strong Arabian spirits settled me down, and I was passionate for them. Horses gave me my first physical experience of an unseen force that flowed through all living things, connecting us to each other. Deep within I knew that this force was truer, stronger and more important than anything I was learning in school.

God Gets a Box

One Sunday morning, when I was 11, I felt this force in a new way, like a knock at a door deep inside me that I hadn't known was there. I responded in the way it was done there at South Main Baptist Church: I left my pew and walked the long aisle to the front, where, met by the preacher, I was guided to ask Jesus to be my Lord and Savior.

In that moment, I stepped into the box where others would define that unseen force for me. What the filmmaking Wachowski brothers called the Matrix, I call the box.

I was a good learner, and all my questions found answers there, for a while. From the innocent awakening of my young heart, I was taught to have the answer for the rest of the world. I was taught to be right. In the context of what felt to me like loving and caring, I learned fundamentalism. But along the way I misplaced my direct connection with the unseen force that had called to me in the first place, the force that was flowing through me all the time.

For the next 10 years, Southern Baptist Christianity would be the only box I knew. Eventually, that box became my launching pad. Life's journey has led me far from the shores of that safe haven and back, beyond the box to the unseen force beyond definitions, back to myself.

God Is in the Guitar

At 14, I picked up the guitar. Three easy chords to that first song, House of the Rising Sun, moved me. Perhaps it was the vibration of the instrument in my arms. Like my Arabian horses, the guitar was another relationship, between a very limited human girl and the mysterious, uncontrollable force I longed for.

I started to write songs. They were desperate songs, angry songs; but the voices inside me that could not find expression anywhere else found expression there. The words and music flowed together through me, from somewhere beyond me. I was plugged in. I was free—from the opinions of others, the instruction of experts, and the right and wrong way to live my life. The energy flowed to me

directly from the source. I was alive.

The Wheels of Life

Some people will be very disappointed if there is not an ultimate theory, that can be formulated as a finite number of principles. I used to belong to that camp, but I have changed my mind.

STEPHEN HAWKING

The more I felt alive, the more I felt angry. It was there in my music. It was there in my attitude. After one particularly memorable blowup with my parents, I feebly tried to take my life. My mother's solution was a tranquilizer and a trip to see our church pastor. I rejected the first but consented to the second because I felt safe with this man. I walked the two blocks to his house that night in darkness, inside and out.

He listened to me compassionately and then told me a parable, which went something like this:

"Once upon a time, there was a young goat who lived in a beautiful green garden. He had everything he needed in this garden: plenty of grass to eat, a clear running creek to drink from, and full, mature trees to shade him from the hot sun.

"But the goat was obsessed with the fact that there was a wall around this garden. Every day, from dawn till dusk, he spent his hours trying to jump high enough to overcome the wall. Every day he would collapse in the green grass in exhaustion and frustration that he could not surmount this wall, see what lay outside and escape to his freedom.

"You are like this goat, Kathie. You can spend your life butting your head up against this wall and miss all that you have right here in the beautiful garden where you live. And it only makes you unhappy."

On the surface, in our days of present-moment spirituality, the moral of this story rings true. But it did not satisfy me very much. What if we were all contented like this? What worlds would lie undiscovered, what cures still dormant, what problems unsolved?

I went home that night feeling nothing. My heart was numb. I sat in a chair in my room, wrapped in a blanket, knees-to-chest, and didn't move for hours. I could not think. I could not feel. But in my heart, I knew I was not content to live within those walls and pretend that the world outside did not exist.

Something died in me then, and I spent the next 30 years trying to keep it buried, for the resurrection of it would surely destroy the world I called home. What I didn't know then was that ash is the most fertile of all soils, and that the ashes of that neat little world would nourish the seeds of a vast new world beyond the walls of my imagination.

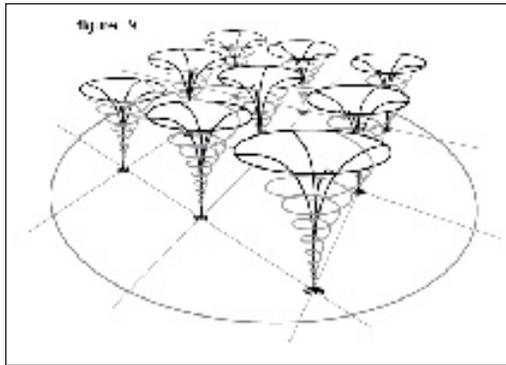


Figure 9. The Creativity Highway System

Through rituals like these, we celebrate Nature's creative process in four seasons. Each season gives a vital energy to the repetitive nature of Life. Spring is a time of rebirth and new beginnings. Summer is a season in full bloom. When summer has reached its peak, autumn brings the harvest. And when the harvest is done, winter offers rest and repose.

Drawing on the rhythm of Nature's cycles, The Wheel of Creativity uses four quarters to understand the cycles of the creative process. Just like the different energies of the seasons, the four quarters of the Wheel reflect distinct energetic states, which appear in human creativity as well as Nature.

- Quarter 1: Vision is where new things begin, in the form of ideas.
- Quarter 2: Exploration is where new things are sought and pursued.
- Quarter 3: Incubation is where new things are sown and protected.
- Quarter 4: Cultivation is where new things are developed and grown.

Each of these quarters corresponds to one of four elements, named by philosophers dating back to 5000 BC as the fundamental stuff of which life is made. The process through which we create is the same process through which we are created, the same stuff of which we and the stars are made.

The Vision Quarter expresses the energy of the element Air and is the realm of the mind and thought.

The Exploration Quarter expresses the energy of the element Fire and is the realm of the spirit and intuition.

The Incubation Quarter expresses the energy of the element Water and is the realm of the heart and the emotions.

The Cultivation Quarter expresses the energy of the element Earth and is the realm of the body and action.

The Four Elements

In the fifth century BC, the Greek philosopher Empedocles proposed that the universe is made up of four "roots" (Earth, Air, Fire and Water), which Plato later named elements. Similarly, Empedocles theorized, the human body was made of four humors, corresponding to these elements, which were later developed by Hippocrates.

Empedocles stated that the four elements were mixed and separated by two opposing forces—Love and Strife—to produce the nature of the universe at any given time. The same dualistic forces that keep us separate and distinct also bind us together. This sounds a lot like construction and destruction to me.

The Buddha, who lived on the other side of the world from Empedocles, taught that the same four elements form the basis for our observations of physical sensations. But he also taught that they are false, and that form is actually made up of much smaller particles, which are constantly changing.

These are the elements of which we are made, and with which we work in the process of creation. Empedocles's names made them personal. The Buddha's warning revealed the doorway to our personal participation in the process. The Wheel of Creativity helps us find the building blocks of the future in our present circumstances, as we play our part in bringing Life's ideas into form.

As The Wheel Turns

The primary defining characteristic of a wheel is that it turns on an axis. It can be still from time to time, of course, but its function and its usefulness is in its turning. The Wheel of Creativity is a model that describes the process that turns and moves you through your life. The Wheel of Creativity is equally a system and a set of tools that assists you in moving through life deliberately.

Two hundred years after the Buddha's death, Aristotle proposed a fifth element, based on his observations of heavenly bodies and his belief that they could not be understood according to earthly elements alone. Aristotle's fifth element was Aether, what we might call Space or Void. It is as integral a part of the beliefs of Hindus and Buddhists as of the ancient Greeks.

Taoism gives Aether the name Qi (Chi) and refers to it as a force or energy rather than an element. The Taoist universe consists of heaven (made of Qi) and earth (made of the five Chinese elements). These are the major themes of China's oldest written system of cosmology and philosophy, the I Ching, which describes the balance of Nature in the interactions of two cycles, a generating (creation) cycle and an overcoming (destruction) cycle. All that exists moves through these life cycles in this dance between heaven and earth.

On The Wheel of Creativity, Aether takes the name Essence, which is the Wheel's axis. From this still point at the center of the Wheel to its constantly spinning perimeter, the four elements interact together in a continually evolving dance of creation. Essence is made into Form at the perimeter, and Form is dissolved into Essence as it cycles back to the center.

Consciously or unconsciously, all human beings participate in this evolution. When we create anything—from a letter to a meal—we bring energy into form through the deconstruction and reconstruction of elements. The process begins even before we have the idea. With the realization that something is needed, we put ourselves in the gap

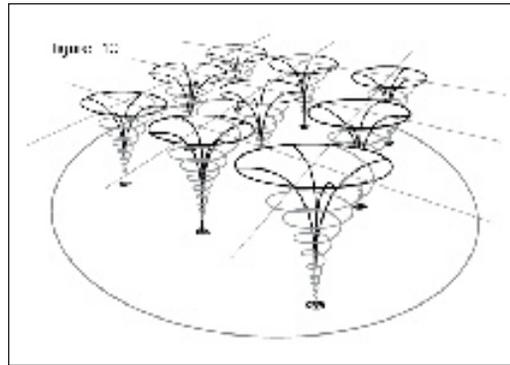


Figure 10. The Field With a Weaving Pattern Between Heaven and Earth

between what is and what is not yet, between what is not yet and what is to be. We engage in the transformation of form into energy into form by expressing our own essence in the world.

The Chakra of Creation

Both Buddhist and Hindu philosophies describe human energy in terms of seven primary centers, ascending from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. Each of these chakras (Sanskrit for wheel or disc) spins at a different frequency in the energy system of the human organism, each governs a different aspect of the human experience, and each is associated with a different element.

Like the chakras, and perhaps unifying them, The Wheel of Creativity spins on the axis of our innermost essence. Like the chakras, when it spins freely, creative energy flows; when it doesn't, it doesn't. Learning to align ourselves with the natural turning of The Wheel of Creativity brings us power, balance, harmony, energy and a sense of connectedness with all of life. When we try to force the movement it becomes blocked, and we fail to experience these most nurturing aspects of Life.

Writer's block is a familiar term that expresses the moments when "it" is not flowing. Each writer has techniques to unblock the blocks. One of the most effective of these is house cleaning; simple, repetitive tasks get us up out of our chairs and out of our heads. They free us from our illusion of control. And

The Wheel at a Glance

Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. HELEN KELLER

Helen Keller arrived at her assessment of life through her hands-on exploration of the world around her, and she expressed her experience in a language all her own. Keller might have spent her life institutionalized in sensory isolation, or medicated to control her emotional outbursts. Instead she made unprecedented contributions to the world as an educator and author, not despite her deafness and blindness but because of them. The limitations of Keller's physical body shaped her genius. She became a hero to our world because she accepted the role of hero in her own. For Keller, the ultimate creative adventure was being alive.

By our cultural standards, Keller was as creative a human being as ever lived. Not only did she take what she had been given and make a better life with it; she also grounded her personal achievements in tangible results that would change the world. A life is created stone by stone, particle by particle, and, as with Keller, the quality of our lives rests in our own hands.

Life itself is your greatest creative collaborator as you dance your way through the process. Sometimes the dance is a waltz, sometimes a tango, sometimes it's nothing more than wild, ecstatic abandon. Sometimes Life leads the dance, and sometimes you

do, but you are always participating in the process together. It is easier and more enjoyable when you know the steps.

I have discovered, synthesized and created a model to help you find and take your place in Life's creative process. No matter how wealthy, how beautiful, how intelligent, how popular or how far from these things you may feel, you are here on earth for a reason. You have a contribution to make, and making it will change your life, not only by the results you produce but also by the way you undertake the task.

Life does not come with a set of instructions; each of us must find our own way. But when someone comes along who has been on the same street, that person can guide us. If you can, with a little help, see your life from a higher viewpoint, you can relax and trust the process just that much more.

The Wheel of Creativity is a framework for a process as ancient and intimate as Life itself, and I have tested and refined that framework through the experiments of my own life. It is more a poem than an equation, waiting for you to enter the spaces in between and find yourself there. Enter the Wheel with me to discover what it has to say to you about your place in life, and how to jump in and participate in the greatest adventure of all.

The Landscape

In chapter 1, I established the basic structure of The Wheel of Creativity: a circle with four quarters, each of which contributes a different vital energy to the process of creation. I also presented the context in which the Wheel organizes the energy of cocreation in the physical world. Here we will take a closer look at what happens inside the Wheel as you live your daily life in that world.

The Wheel of Creativity is a map of the creative journey. The journey has 12 stations, which take you through all four quarters of the creative process: Vision, Exploration, Incubation and Cultivation. Your ticket, which every human being receives at birth, gives you access to all 12 stations, and they must all be visited. You need not visit every one on every cycle, and they do not necessarily appear in order. You can get stuck in a station or a quarter when the work you need to do there is particularly difficult for you. But the Wheel is always turning and will move you forward through your life if you will trust and commit yourself to the process.

Each station has a unique and recognizable feeling. It calls you with a distinctive voice. Each has its own task for you to achieve, and its own reward to win. Knowing where you are on the Wheel with regard to a single project will enable you to take the most from the experience and to transform yourself through it even as you create.

Station by Station

To help you understand what occurs through the Wheel as a framework for the creative process, I will outline the journey here station by station. This is the process in its most natural and organic state, as it is turns unobstructed by personal agendas or issues.

Think about yourself as you read this. Think about a project you're dreaming of, or one you're already in the midst of. And follow along on the Wheel as we go through, to see what fits for you here. Where do you find yourself in The Wheel of Creativity?

HOME. The starting point on the Wheel is always Home. This is the status quo, the world as you know it, normal everyday life. While this is not necessarily your literal home, it is an experience where everything is familiar, stable, orderly and known. Most of the time, it is lovely to be at home. Grounded in the community you know, it is comfortable and safe and secure. And then one day, suddenly or gradually, you begin to feel restless. You start to feel that you want something more, there's something missing. It is this restlessness that casts you into the Wheel and starts you on the journey.

STATION 1. That feeling of restlessness is the first station, which I call Hunger. It is a vague feeling that something's missing. You don't really know what it is; you just know that something is not right. It could be that something is worn out in your life—a relationship, a job or a hometown—but it is always evidence of an inner hunger, a desire not quite yet formed. Station 1 can lead you to the start of any new project. You can find yourself here at midlife, or at any transitional time. It is a clear indication that the-way-things-are needs to die in order for the-way-things-could-be to be born. As you sit with that and begin to tell the truth about what you hunger for what is missing starts to become clear; you become aware of what you're longing for.

Nalin Patel is an MIT-trained computer programmer who grew up in the Gujarat region of India. Encouraged by his family to become an electrical engineer, he was in college when he first felt his life didn't fit. "I liked Indian robotics, being a part-time gadgeteer," Nalin told me one day as we sat on a park bench in France. "So I got into the best engineering school I could and took electrical engineering as a route to making robots." Leaving his sheltered home for the first time at 16, Nalin felt out of place among India's future electrical engineers at college. "They would spend all their time reading and talking about it; and I couldn't wait just to be done with my assignments."

Nalin's restlessness with his choices pushed him to look outside his childhood box, and that led him to the point where he found something that did fit. "I started exploring other things just to keep me sane. I started taking philosophy classes and, eventually, a short-story writing class run by a very old Polish lady who had been a writer for years and had stories of cafés in Poland and Paris and the writer lifestyle, and I found that it just fit. Something clicked."

- Where in your life are you experiencing creative restlessness?
- What other doors do you feel drawn to knock on?

STATION 2. From the vague feeling of something is missing, you begin to notice something on the horizon. Soon you realize that it is calling to you. That calling makes the vague hunger into something specific. This is the second station of the wheel, which I call Appetite. It is the feeling of desire. It's the big "Yes" that leaps up in you: "That's what I want!" For some, it comes as a clear certainty of what to do next. Joan of Arc called her guidance "voices." For others, it could be simply the awareness that something like that might be better than this. It can lead you to a new town or job or out of a bad marriage, but it is the first stop on a process, and you cannot know now where you will actually end up. Whatever the form, it is the point of clarity when something comes into focus outside, and your heart spontaneously responds. Yes! Yes! Yes!

Marti Cate, a performing artist and teacher, enjoys spotting the creative process at work in everyday life. In an interview, Marti told me:

"I watch kids on the beach playing with stones. The stones may slip as they try to move them from one place to another; but they never get discouraged. They just do it and do it and do it; and then they get it, and then they get better at it, and then they get great at it. There's a lack of self-consciousness because they are just finding the depth of the well of unlimited possibilities.

"I find that these days in partner dancing. For example, I was in the countryside in Italy, and there was this moment. The waiter, the music, the floor, there we are. We were total strangers, listening with all our senses to this moment and cocreating it. And it's just brilliant and exciting and fulfilling. And that's what I would like to share with people in my work." Whether it's children on the beach or her own personal pleasure, Marti is always paying attention for signs of what she wants on the horizon.

- How do ideas on the horizon get your attention?
- What do you do to be available to them?

STATION 3. After the expansive "Yes" of Station 2, a natural contraction follows. It is the habitual "No" in your life, and it comes down like a crashing wall. I have named Station 3 Anorexia after the eating disorder, because essentially it is the avoidance of what nourishes you. In this station you must not only release control, you must also choose what you believe will nourish you. You may second-guess yourself, or the voice of doubt may come from your family, your friends or your culture. "You'll never have that. Don't you dare try." As inner and outer voices come up to test and build your resolve, the pressure of your longing builds. It is a time of resistance, whether from outside or within. Your inertia may look really cozy as you cling to the familiar past. Even though you long for change, you are paralyzed.

As he moved further from his sheltered upbringing into the world, Nalin Patel began to see the origins of his inner restraints. "Within my region of India, creativity is thought of as a luxury of the idle rich, not something that any sane person should focus on. Children who enjoy writing are told, 'Fine, you do that on the side, but get your career in pharmacy so you have a stable living.'"

By aligning his choices with what clicked for him, Nalin gradually overcame the internal prejudices against creativity he had learned in childhood. It was in Los Angeles, when he joined a writing group at a

club of Indians in the film industry, that he realized the extent of his internal resistance. “I was the only young person there. Everyone else was the age of my father. This class of people I had always thought of as disciplinarians, people who hated creative pursuits, were all sitting around drinking and smoking, talking about art and poetry. And suddenly I realized that Indians do have strong creative instincts.”

- What prevents you from going for it in your life?
- What kinds of new choices do you need to make?

Hunger, Appetite and Anorexia are the three stations in the Vision Quarter, where the work is primarily internal and receptive. As you move among them, these stations work together to build a kind of torque, the energy to push you from your internal idea out into the external world. When your desire to pursue the vision exceeds your reluctance, there is an energetic shift that allows you to break through your inertia and take action. If, however, you sit in the process too long, the energy can become extremely destructive. You must harness the power of your thought to be able to move on.

GO. Once you’ve moved past the paralysis of Anorexia, you move through the Go Gate into Station 4.

STATION 4. Launch is exhilarating, energizing and exciting. Finally leaving the familiar shore can be an act of faith or an act of desperation, depending on how you handle the risk. If you’ve been resisting the commitment out of your fear, you might let go and leap from sheer exhaustion. But inherent in this station is the natural enthusiasm and excitement of beginning something new. Whether you are beginning a new project or a new relationship, Station 4 is the high dive, and once that leap is taken there is no turning back.

Through 30 years of research into changes in the sun’s activity, solar physicist and computer scientist

Peter Fox has learned to “look for the unexplainable” in his intuition. “As a scientist, you have to have some element of confidence in yourself,” Peter told me on the phone, “because otherwise you don’t open yourself up to the creative thought. There’s the point where you have to trust that at some level your intuition is right.

“Early on, self-censorship doesn’t exist, because we’re just like children, experiencing everything. And then in the period of training—graduate work, postdoctoral work—and in your early career, there’s a lot of censorship. Because we haven’t matured, we haven’t established our sense of identity within a faculty, within a system or within a field of research. But the work I’ve done has let me accumulate enough experience that I can trust myself to think about any problem and to have a creative thought, even not in my field.” That point, where Peter has learned to take the leap and follow his first thought, is Launch.

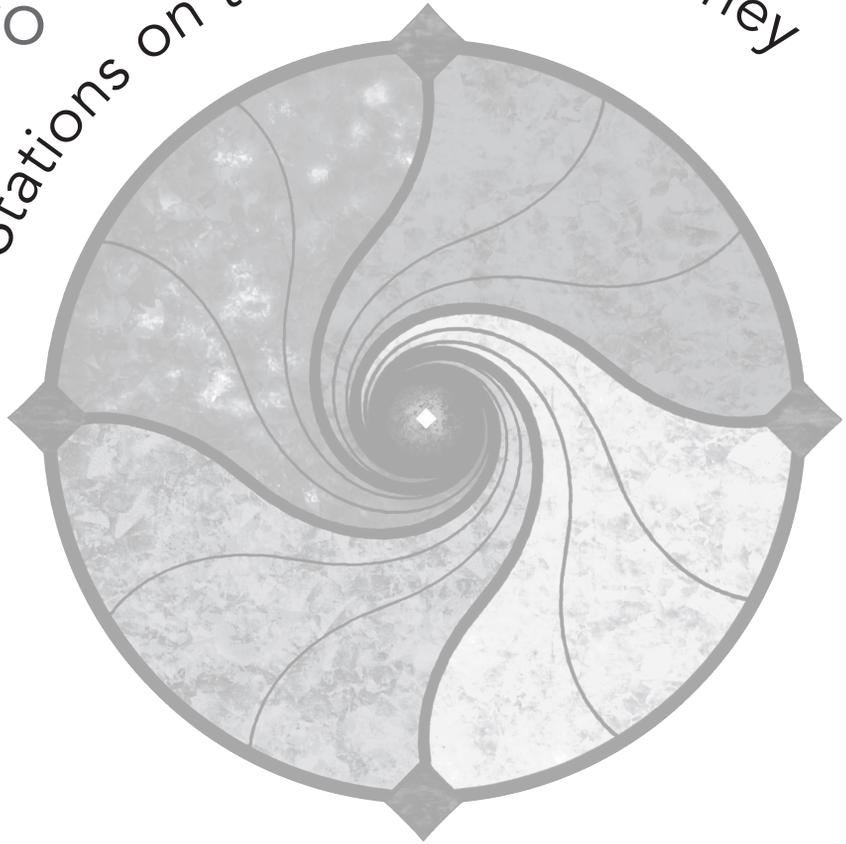
- What enables you to make the leap on a new project?
- Where do you find the confidence to trust your intuition?

STATION 5. It could be weeks or months after Launch, but eventually there comes a point when the shore you leave behind disappears. If the new shore ahead is not yet visible, then Station 5 appears on your path. It is the period I call Isolation, when you feel completely alone and lost, even despairing. For explorer Christopher Columbus, it was the time when he put away the charts. His men were running out of food, they were talking of mutiny, and there was still no sign of land. In Isolation, the voices of doubt (still inside you) start screaming: “What were you thinking? You should never have left home! This was a huge mistake!” And what are you to do with that? Keep going. Stay vigilant and navigate your way through, even with tiny moves, to keep moving in the direction of your dream.

Louise Rogers always wanted to be an artist but never thought she had what it took, and her

Part Two

12 Stations on the Creative Journey



Whatever you can do, or dream you can do,
begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic
in it. JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE



STATION 1 Hunger

Hunger comes to me on the road like a savage beast,
speaking the truth.
It calls to me from my innermost Self.
It calls me to eat Life, or be eaten by it, to ask
what would nourish me, and then
to go about creating that.

Hunger tempts me with the fruit of the tree
of the knowledge of good and evil.
It tempts me
to be human, to enter the Void
where Fire and Water and Earth and Air can dance
where Form is created
and I, in the creation of it, am nourished.

What are you hungry for? What do you long for?
What calls to you from the deepest darkness of your
own soul? What's wrong? What's missing? What
made you pick up this book, and why are you still
reading?

Hunger is the starting point of our connection
with Life. It is what brought us here. It is how we
survive. In relation to the creative process, I define
hunger as the soul's longing for nourishment.

On the Platform in Station 1

Hunger is the first stop on The Wheel of Creativity
and the official entry point to the creative process. It
is Station 1 in a closed loop of 12 stations that make
up the full circle of the creative journey. Inevitably,
the journey leads you away from Home and back

again. And once the journey's taken, life is never
the same again.

Hunger opens the gate to Vision, the first quarter
of The Wheel of Creativity, the landscape across
which you move away from the comfort of Home. As
in all four quarters, you will stop in three stations to
reach the other side. When all the tasks are done, you
pass through another gate into the next quarter.

You can arrive at your Hunger by choice or by
accident, through internal or external forces; but
the resulting experience is a deep, inconsolable
restlessness. The overall feeling in Station 1 might
be boredom, stagnation or a relentless dissatisfaction
with the status quo: "This isn't it." The voice of
Hunger—the announcer in Station 1—repeats at
increasingly regular intervals for anyone to hear,

“Something’s missing.” The graffiti on the wall says, “I want. I do not have.” In any case, this stop on the journey is uncomfortable.

If you ignore it, Hunger becomes increasingly painful and eventually all-consuming. When you are blinded by “This isn’t it,” the beauty of Life all around you—from a simple flower in a vase to the music of the wind or the constantly changing patterns of the sky—becomes invisible to you. When you lose your connection with Life, to a greater or lesser degree, you lose your strength, your confidence and your personal power. When ignored too long, this deep Hunger for Life itself can actually make you sick, as your need for spiritual food drains your personal resources to keep you alive. It is actually possible to starve to death.

Creative Hunger occurs in life transitions as well as creative projects. While Station 1 is commonly associated with midlife, usually called a crisis, it also occurs on most of life’s thresholds, at any transitional time when the secure shell of the present must crack open for a new future to emerge. It occurs in cultures around the globe as surely as in the privacy of your own heart.

It is the force that initiates new projects, new governments and new lives. It is markedly evident in world news today, as people rise up in one country after another to say, “This is not acceptable to us anymore.” But, as we begin to see, now that governments have fallen, the force of Hunger must unravel the status quo. What comes next depends on how well that force is grounded.

Hunger always points to the need for something new; and it often rides in on the wake of loss. It could be a job. It could be a relationship. It could be a government. You could lose your health, your home or your faith. But the loss itself is a gift from Life, to pull you off the security of the shore and cast you into the wild and unpredictable river of Life again.

Sometimes we choose the changes, and sometimes they choose us; but with any inarguable withdrawal from the status quo, The Wheel of Creativity begins to turn.

When we listen and respond to our hearts’ desires, Hunger leads us naturally into the creative cycle. But when we are not listening to Life, or fail to respond to its invitation, it gives us a hand, sometimes bringing to an end the very thing to which we cling so tightly.

This is not a recreational ride! More often than not, it can be scary, destabilizing and disconcerting. Most of us would never choose it willingly. But as external circumstances dissolve, they point you to your deeper longing for intimacy with your Self and your Source.

Responding to Hunger requires feeling rather than avoiding the pain. That’s why this step takes courage. To live in the gap between what you have and what you want, when you don’t have it yet and you don’t know where it’s coming from or how, is uncomfortable.

It is understandable that people often try to avoid or manage the discomfort of Station 1. Everywhere you look, there are plenty of distractions. And we use them as long as we can, acting out in escapism, obsessions or compulsive behaviors like working too much, eating or drinking too much, social media addiction or compulsive spending, reaching in desperation for anything but the here and now.

The longer Hunger remains unattended, the more urgent it becomes, until finally it screams: “I have to have this . . . now!” You can make huge changes in your life based on this urgency, only to find out down the road, when the honeymoon is over, that things (and you) are still the same. You must stop and feel the void before you act. The only way around this is through it.

The Sacred Voice of Hunger

We are a have-it-all generation. We have so many choices, so many inputs, so many things to fill our time, busy our minds and stuff our bellies that we have forgotten what real hunger feels like and have lost touch with its value. There are many people in the world, not as materially fortunate as we, who

never know what it feels like to not be hungry. Good fortune lies on the middle road.

The gift of Hunger lies in knowing and feeling what you don't want. The stronger the feeling becomes, the more you feel the emptiness. While the void may become very strong, however, it is still unclear, vague, dark, even confusing. And it appears in the very first words of the Bible, in Genesis 1:1–3:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light."

The emptiness, the vacuum, the void itself is the beginning of the creative cycle. It may not always feel like it, but it is good. Hunger's discomfort must be endured to get to authentic desire—Appetite. Before you can know what you do want, you must first know what you don't want. This awareness guides you like a machete through the jungle to the clearing of your own mind. If you never let yourself feel it, you'll never have clarity about what's important to you, and what really nourishes you. Appetite moves from inside out, reaching for that nourishment.

In this chapter we will explore what Hunger feels like to you and where it appears in your life today. We will examine your discomfort and what you do with it. We will look at what is required of you to move from Hunger to Appetite, which is Station 2 on the Wheel. And we will look at the reward of trusting the process, through which you come to know what you truly want.

A little reminder: creativity and art are two different things. When I speak of creativity, I speak of the bigger context of life in which we all live, not the professionalized practice of that force by a few elite talents, and certainly not the trivialization of creativity as a part-time pastime once more important things are done.

Creativity is a way of living by which you take your natural place in Life's creative process. This continual

process of creation is one in which we all participate. It is a process through which you connect with and are nourished by the Source of all that is, as you define and experience it.

Life in Station 1

Hunger is a gaping void and it speaks the truth. It acknowledges the Void in the process of creation—the fifth element, required for Earth, Air, Water and Fire to interact and create form. And, when felt, it puts you into the gap between what is now and what is not yet.

We are in this gap in many places in the world today. Japan is recovering from triple disasters in 2011, the outcome of which is still uncertain. The Middle East is rocking as violently, with a crescendo of discontent that crosses borders and defies authority. The so-called West is working frantically to try to repair broken economic systems built on unstable ethics, which are exploding in one industrialized country after another. Hunger's message of "Something's missing!" is going viral around the globe and leaving us spinning with instability.

These crises have shattered the status quo and sent people headlong into bottomless pits of want and need. Part of what has brought us here is that we have collectively ignored the world's Hunger pangs, until now they overwhelm us. Just as the human body can function beyond the initial feeling of hunger, when blood sugar drops too low, the body goes into crisis. Particularly for people with diabetes, this condition can be life-threatening.

The temptation, in vulnerable times, is to stop the hunger we feel, to stuff it down, block it, short-circuit it, make it go away. But the hunger itself is the key to reconstruction. It cannot be ignored and it cannot be appeased—for long. It requires attention, truth and nourishment. And the process cannot be rushed.

There is a growing trend in the New Age movement to suppress our longing. We are told to focus only on the way we want it to be. It is suggested that feeling negative feelings can be dangerous.

“We must not complain, keep ourselves positive and ignore the rest.”

The Experience of Hunger: Restlessness

Through much of my life, my experience of Hunger’s restlessness was fear—of the space, the emptiness, the uncertainty, the longing. But longing is the contrast against which true deep appreciation is revealed. Those who renounce the longing miss the point; the point is not to turn away from those feelings, but to accept them, to welcome them. The voice of Hunger is a sacred voice. To refuse it is to refuse Life itself.

When I was a child, my father always wore a short-sleeved shirt and a pocket protector. My father gave the best hugs—strong, tender, committed. The six or seven different pens he carried in those pocket protectors always poked me. But it was worth it.

Sometimes Life embraces us with strong experiences that are in fact softer and more comforting than you would ever imagine. Even the hard blows have amazing gifts in their pockets; but you have to get close enough to them and let them touch you in order to know the gifts are there.

For exactly six months in 2003, I took antidepressants. I had spent years righteously resisting the notion, in honor of my “schizophrenic” maternal grandmother whose life was lost in psychiatric treatments—from multiple types of shock therapy to a lobotomy in the end—that robbed her of her authentic Self. Eventually, exhausted by the mental and emotional storm I now identify as menopause, I listened to my doctor and tried them. I took half the usual dose, and I determined in advance the date when, at four months and two weeks in, I would start reducing the dose. I took them precisely. They helped. And I didn’t like them.

I didn’t like the way they cut off the highs and lows of my experience of life. I could not reach the high notes I once had; something was missing, and that something was important to me. In the words of the character Zorba the Greek, I want “the full

catastrophe” of life. Life may deal hard blows from time to time, but that is part of the experience of being fully alive. For with each experience lived and responded to, I create myself in the world.

I am not demonizing antidepressants, nor do I wish to alienate anyone who is benefiting from them. I value them as a temporary recalibration; I worry about them as a long-term solution. It is not the point of life to be comfortable in every moment, and our dependency on outside substances to take the edge off deprives us of the very thing that will make us whole—our true Selves.

Hunger is an uncomfortable feeling at times, to be sure. But that discomfort changes and diminishes with time. When accepted and received with gratitude, it opens up another world.

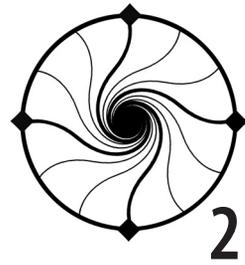
The death of a loved one can have this effect. At 5 a.m. on January 16, 1992, my phone rang. I had packed my car the night before to drive from Chicago to Texas for a long visit with my parents, but because of a blizzard on the route, I had delayed my departure. The call came to tell me that my father had died. I got up, dressed, added a black suit to my suitcase and went to the airport. I’ll never forget the feeling as I floated through O’Hare International Airport. The world seemed suddenly softer; nothing was all that important; it all seemed pale by comparison to the knowledge that my father was no longer there.

For a few days or weeks, that enormous absence put me in touch with the exquisite precariousness of life in the body.

The Beauty of Hunger

Mystics have known this for millennia, the power of this edge where we are keenly aware of our mortality. Thus, in many of the world’s religions, fasting plays a part in spiritual practice. For some, fasting is about denial; for others, purification. For me, it is about making nourishment authentic.

Hunger puts you in touch with the precariousness, and preciousness, of Life at its essence. It puts



STATION 2 Appetite

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.
I want to know what you ache for
And if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.
ORIAH

On the Platform in Station 2

Appetite is the second stop on The Wheel of Creativity. It is Station 2 in the 12-station loop that moves you around the creative journey and home again. Appetite is the place where your longing must be named, your vision clarified, your desire refined and your resolve reinforced in order to move what-could-be out of thought and into the physical world.

The work done in the Vision Quarter is to recognize and define what you hunger for. What are you attracted to? The work done there is the work of attraction, collecting your thoughts (and the feelings and sensations they bring with them) and forming them into ideas.

The experience of Appetite is desire. Its task is to pay attention. And its reward is direction.

While Hunger was a feeling of restlessness, Appetite takes that restlessness to the next level. "Something's missing" becomes "You're all I want." With Appetite, you move from the vague feeling

of Hunger into the specific awareness of what you desire.

What is the relationship of Appetite to Hunger? In the Hunger Station, by telling the truth about the emptiness in you, you begin to gain awareness of what you're hungry for, what you long for. That awareness—of what attracts you and what nourishes you—moves you to Appetite

As you become clearer, you feel what you desire more strongly. But knowing what you want is just the light going on. That strengthening of your desire makes the light grow brighter. What you do—or don't do—with the desire comes later. Appetite and the action of reaching for what you desire are two different things.

In the creative process, Appetite refines desire. It evolves Hunger from an internal emptiness into a particularly definitive vision. It makes it specific. It is beginning to reconnect with what you are attracted to, what you feel strongly about and what you feel called to, perhaps for the first time in your life.

Defining Appetite

The *Oxford Dictionaries* define appetite two ways: (1) “a natural desire to satisfy a bodily need, especially for food” and (2) “a strong desire or liking for something.” It originates with the Latin words *appetitus* (desire for) and *appetere* (to seek after).

Hunger is the physiological drive to find and eat food. Appetite is the psychological desire to eat specific foods. Appetite aids digestion by stimulating the secretion of saliva and other digestive juices. In fact, you need only see a food you like to begin the process. Giving your attention to foods leads to appreciation of them, and that starts the digestive juices flowing.

Appetite also stimulates the desire to eat enough food to nourish your body with the elements to rebuild it and supply it with enough energy to sustain itself continuously. When enough food has been eaten, the brain registers this and flips the off switch on appetite.

Mind and Body

When Aristotle talked about desire, he described it as the craving for pleasure. And he referred to two types: rational and irrational (or natural).

Rational desires are born in the mind. They are given to us, in a sense, because they have been described to us in positive terms, and we have believed in them. This could describe the cause of many of the uprisings occurring around the world today. The fight for democracy may be founded for many in what they have heard from others. And today, the media play a huge role in this. Advertising and marketing have their roots in rational desire, as advertisers lead us to believe their products and services are the solutions for our natural desires.

Natural desires, according to Aristotle, are not based in the mind, but are connected with our senses and originate in the body. Through our bodies, we experience the desire for nourishment; that

Part Three

Coming Home to the Adventure of Life



There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique.

And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.

MARTHA GRAHAM