



# COFFEEHOUSE FOR WRITERS

WE'RE BREWING SOMETHING GOOD DAILY!



15.9.12

## Bloom Where You're Writing\* By: Noelle Sterne



### YOUR INEXHAUSTIBLE CREATIVITY

Are you worried you'll run out of ideas to write about? Do you feel you have to mine old newspaper articles for great ideas? That as you get older, your inspiration will wane? I have good news: whatever your age, however much or little you've written, your creativity is unlimited.

The astoundingly prolific writer, painter, sculptor, architect, metaphysician, and businessman Walter Russell declared (The Man Who Tapped the Secrets of the Universe), "Great men's [and women's] lives begin at forty, where the mediocre man's life ends. The genius remains an ever-flowing fountain of creative achievement until the very last breath he draws."

Way before our last breath, ideas bombard us constantly. We have only to recognize them. Author, executive, and spiritual leader Tom Zender points out that our marvelous brain recognizes an idea "at the speed of thought, or about 500 milliseconds—a literal split second, the aha moment, the creative nudge."

That "creative nudge" is always with us, boundless, ceaseless, ever-renewing. You can discover and encourage it in many ways. Here are some.

#### A Few Creative Nudging Exercises

1. Pick a guy in the park. You may know this feeling well. Prolific freelance writer I. J. Schecter observes (in *Writers' Journal*, May/June 2004): "You see an average man sitting on a normal bench on a regular day and you suddenly feel compelled to write a story about it."



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#### CONTACT US:

Coffeehouse For Writers  
P.O. Box 436967  
Chicago, IL 60643-6967

Email: [Coffeejens@gmail.com](mailto:Coffeejens@gmail.com)

#### GOOD EARTH TEA



...It soothes the savage muse.

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Maybe on a bus you can't help but notice a shy Oriental girl with eyes down. Is she a recent immigrant? Or on a bank line you admire a dapper older chap with an old-fashioned moustache. Is he a British ex-pat? What can you imagine about their lives, now and before? Start scribbling.

2. Do a voice journal. James Scott Bell in *The Art of War for Writers* describes this invention: "The voice journal is simply a character speaking in stream-of-consciousness mode. . . . just let your fingers record the words on the page."

You may or may not yet know where to place your voice journal character. If you do, fine. Maybe the shy Oriental girl fits into your latest cozy mystery, or you see the dashing man in an essay about gender differences in fashion. If you don't, no need to panic. The story may come to you as you're listening to and recording the words of this character, or you'll file him/her away for later use. (And trust your unconscious to dangle it in front of you at the exact right later moment.) In any case, the voice journal is great practice for loosening your creativity and listening to the dictates of your creative depths.

3. Plumb your life. Look at the stages and milestones of your life (you have permission to take a drink). Childhood, adolescence (oy!), young adulthood, responsible adulthood, marriage, failed marriage, glorious marriage, older adulthood . . .

I recall the devastating embarrassment in fourth grade when I couldn't see the blackboard and had to come to school wearing glasses. What about the clash you had with your loving parents over colleges to go to, or to go to college at all? What about your first real job in the world of work? A weekend away with your sweetie at the most romantic B&B in the Western hemisphere? An excruciating Thanksgiving dinner with cheek-pinching, relationship-prying, denture-smelling relatives?

Now make a chart—head the columns with every life stage. List the experiences you immediately recall in each. (Leave room because more will occur to you.) Choose one experience or event that excites or enrages you. You have the makings of a short story, novella, or, especially as related incidents surface, a full-blown novel. Get going.

One writer developed a rather ingenious and elaborate "scoring" system for the ideas that come to him. He devised a 5-point scale for the emotional charge of every idea:

1 = So what?

2 = Mildly interesting

3 = Hey, not bad

4 = Pretty exciting

5 = YES! Can't wait to dive in!

He knows that the 4s and 5s will sustain him, even through terrible drafts. When he feels the need to start a new project, he looks at his self-evaluations and, if they're still in the 4 and 5 range, he attacks the keyboard.

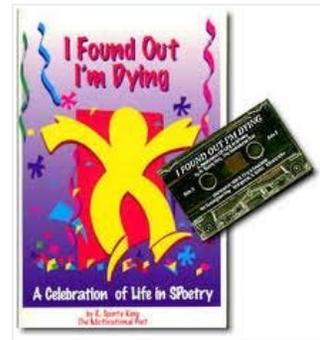
Never Too Late

Do you feel it's too late to write? Or that your ideas will dry up? Reread Walter Russell (yes, you too are a genius) and enlarge your creative assumptions and boundaries. Michelangelo was 74 when he began painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (and on his back!) and in his eighties when he designed the dome of St. Peter's. Picasso, less than two months before he died at 91, drew an erotic sketch of a bearded man and woman. Even then, as an art critic commented, "his hand was quick and sure." Writer Phyllis A. Whitney published her last book at 93. Writer Jessie Foveaux published her first book at 98—incidentally, it was of childhood memoirs.

One of my favorite and most heartening books is called *Late Bloomers*. In it, writer

and Creative tips...

- Article of The Week
- Bloom Where You're Writing! By Noelle Sterne



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Brendan Gill draws portraits of many now-famous people who achieved their accomplishments and fame late in life, and you'd be surprised at many. Gill comments on their "lateness":

They are people who at whatever cost and under whatever circumstances have succeeded in finding themselves. . . . If the hour happens to be later than we may have wished, take heart! So much more to be cherished is the bloom.

So, the next time you fear loss or shriveling of your creativity, remember these examples. Experiment with one of the exercises, or devise your own. Trust your inner richness. Your brilliance blooms as you get older and increases as you write. Your creativity is indeed inexhaustible.

**BIO:**

Author, editor, ghostwriter, writing coach, and spiritual counselor, Noelle scribbles constantly in her voice journal. From her inexhaustible note-making, she has published over 250 fiction and nonfiction pieces in print and online venues. With a Ph.D. from Columbia University, for over 28 years Noelle has guided doctoral candidates to completion of their dissertations. Based on this work, her latest project-in-progress is a practical-psychological-spiritual handbook, Grad U: Complete Your Dissertation—Finally—and Ease the Trip for Yourself and Everyone Who Has to Live With You. In her current book, Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams (Unity Books), Noelle draws examples from her practice and other aspects of life to help writers and others release regrets, relabel their past, and reach their lifelong yearnings. Visit Noelle at <http://www.trustyourlifenow.com/>

Image Credit: SPFF

Posted by COFFEEHOUSE FOR WRITERS at 2:54 PM

**3 comments:**



**Karen Lange** September 18, 2012 5:56 PM

I love these ideas, Noelle! When I am out, I often wonder about people and their stories, what their life is/was like, etc. I'll have to give some of these a try soon. Thanks a bunch!

[Reply](#)



**Noelle Sterne** September 19, 2012 9:28 AM

Thank you, Karen. Have your notebook or dictation or "notes" phone app ready! So glad you find these ideas helpful.

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**Jennifer Brown Banks** September 20, 2012 8:11 PM

Great ideas, Noelle. Thanks for the inspiration.

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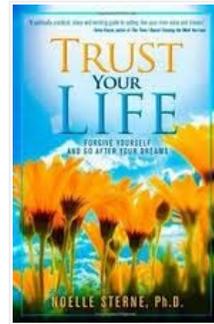
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**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

"Whatever sentence will bear to be read twice, we may be sure that it was thought twice."

---HENRY DAVID THOREAU



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