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Come in...and be captivated...

Writers' Craft Box

What this section is intended to do:
Give writers suggested hints, resources, and advice.

How to use: Pick and choose what you feel is most helpful and derive inspiration from it- most importantly, **HAVE FUN!**

What a Writers' Craft Box is: Say you're doing an art project and you want to spice it up a bit. You reach into a seemingly bottomless box full of colorful art/craft supplies and choose only the things that speak to you. You take only what you need to feel that you've fully expressed yourself. Then, you go about doing your individual project adding just the right amount of everything you've chosen until you reach a product that suits you completely. So, this is on that concept. Reach in, find the things that inspire you, use the tools



"Arts and Crafts" N.M.B Copyright 2008

that get your writing going and see it as fulfilling your self-expression as opposed to following rules.

Writing is art and art is supposed to be fun, relaxing, healing and nurturing. It's all work and it's all play at the same time. A Writers' Craft Box is whatever your imagination needs it to be- a lifeboat, the spark of an idea, a strike of metaphorical lightning, a reminder, or simply the recommendation of a good book. Feel free to sit back and break out the crayons. Coloring outside the lines is heartily encouraged.

Craft Box Contributor Bio:

Author, editor, dissertation and writing coach, and spiritual counselor, Noelle Sterne has published over 300 pieces in print and online venues, including *Author Magazine*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Funds for Writers*, *Children's Book Insider*, *Graduate Schools Magazine*, *Inspire Me Today*, *Pen & Prosper*, *Romance Writers Report*, *Transformation Magazine*, *Unity Magazine*, *Women in Higher Education*, *Women on Writing*, *Writer's Monthly Review Magazine*, *Writer's Digest*, and *The Writer*. She has also published pieces in various anthologies, including *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books; has contributed several columns to writing publications; and recently became a volunteer judge for *Rate Your Story*.

With a Ph.D. from Columbia University, Noelle has for 30 years helped doctoral candidates complete their dissertations (finally). Based on her practice, her handbook addressing dissertation writers' overlooked but very important nonacademic difficulties will be published in September 2015 by Rowman & Littlefield Education. The title: *Challenges in Writing Your*

Dissertation: Coping with the Emotional, Interpersonal, and Spiritual Struggles. In Noelle's previous book, *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams* (Unity Books, 2011), she draws examples from her academic consulting and other aspects of life to help readers release regrets, relabel their past, and reach their lifelong yearnings.

Her webinar about the book can be seen on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95EeqllONIQ&feature=youtu.be>.

Visit Noelle's website: www.trustyourlifenow.com

Too Late for Your Dream?

by Noelle Sterne

- Do you feel stuck in your job, your activities, your life?
- Do you condemn yourself about what you could have, should have done differently?
- Do you yearn for more, even if you don't know what it is?
- Do you suspect you've got something to give, even if you can't identify it?
- Or do you know what it is but haven't been able to let it out?
- Have you pushed your secret yearnings, your Dream, into the back of your life, like old photos in the sock drawer?

Like many people, maybe you live for the weekends or retirement. Maybe you promise yourself that then—finally—you'll do what you really want to. Too often, these envisioned golden times never materialize. Why? Partly because of that mindset of "later," of lifelong habits of feeling non-deserving, and because the first steps may seem overwhelming, bewildering, or unattainable. You spend years that go too fast in activities that don't satisfy, self-blame, frustration, illness, and a growing sense of failure.

Maybe you've recited your own "If Only" stories (if only I'd gone to college, married someone else, hadn't taken that job...) or believe other "If Onlies" you hear that supposedly prove inevitable victimitis. But you don't have to believe them. You can take charge. In Deepak Chopra's words, "You and I are essentially infinite choice-makers. In every moment of our existence, we are in that field of all possibilities where we have access to an infinity of choices" (*The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, p. 22).

That infinity includes your Dream.

Why It Isn't Too Late for Your Dream

Whatever your secret desires to do more and be more—to paint, write, sculpt, make pots, create your own business, or devote more time to anything else that's always fascinated you—it's not too late.

Whatever your age, circumstances, childhood background, or the state of your bank account or waistline, it's not too late.

Every life experience has perfectly prepared you—even though you may not see it—for where you are now. Any self-judged "wrong turns" you feel you've taken have been nothing less than perfect.

These convictions are based on my own life lessons and three principles in my book *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams*. Please stay open to these:

1. There are no mistakes.

Miles Davis, the great and enlightened jazz musician, said, "Do not fear mistakes. There are none." Your imagined failures stop you from reaching for your buried Dreams and living more fully.

2. We can reframe our pasts.

When we realize there are no mistakes, we can free ourselves from branding past experiences as negative or wasted. Instead, we can review, relabel, and understand our past differently—as the perfect foundation for reaching our long-cherished desires. We can reflect on what we learned and turn every perceived botching of our past into a greater bonus for our future. We can more easily forgive ourselves for our "mistakes" and see them as the inevitable steps toward the future we want to create.

3. The outer reflects the inner. “Out there” is “in here.”

As you perceive your life differently and become freer from the self-defeating thoughts and labels that have kept you down, you'll start to shed your old habits of negating yourself. You'll ease gently into the splendid clothes of deserving. In these new clothes, which are much more than zipper-deep, you'll begin to blossom and develop your talents and abilities, as you've always secretly known you could.

Today's spiritual teachings reiterate these principles: Napoleon Hill's Conceive-Believe-Achieve, Neale Donald Walsch's Thought-Word-Action, Eckhart Tolle's Power of Now, Louise Hay's affirmations, Abraham-Hicks' alignment with the Source and the ancient-new Law of Attraction.

When we apply these magnificent teachings, we learn to name, visualize, deserve, expect, and act on our God-planted greatest desires. We begin to feel a wonderful sense of rightness and know we're really on the way to our Dream.

My Dream

My Dream was always writing. Nevertheless, I pursued all the undergraduate and graduate degrees, supported myself with office jobs, and right after the last graduation, taught college English and literature. Two years later I retired (or got fired, depending on one's perspective and title), weary of too many committee meetings and too much letterhead.

A friend brilliantly suggested that I become self-employed so I could devote more time to writing. So, being also a good secretarial student and having weathered the rigors of the doctoral dissertation, I advertised dissertation typing in my university community. Clients appeared quickly.

As I typed, I often became engrossed in clients' materials, and when they next visited to pick up the work, I started asking questions about their drafts. They began to suspect I wasn't your average office drone. Encouraged by my questions and interest, they spilled their troubles about impossible deadlines and chapters from their professors endlessly thrown back dripping with blood-red pen critiques.

Feeling for the clients, I began bolstering them with advice and editorial suggestions. The clients' faces relaxed and their small smiles of hope showed me I'd reached them. I felt wonderful.

I graduated again—from typing to editing and advising. Continuously learning, I developed a business that became one of helping adults pursue their Dreams through their academic graduate degrees.

Looking back, I see now that each step helped prepare me for the next—from getting the degrees myself, to typing, to dissertation consulting. And I've gained immeasurably—in self-assurance, stamina, ability to master many subjects quickly, greater organizing skills and creativity, better interpersonal skills, and greater facility as editor and writer.

Did all these capabilities develop in a vacuum? Of course not. Each was absolutely essential for my own writing. Each enabled me to keep at it, stick to it, and ceaselessly refine it. At this writing I have published many writing craft articles, spiritual pieces, essays, and stories in print and online publications and a spiritual self-help book (from which this essay is adapted), with the next book, a handbook for dissertation writers on practical-psychological-interpersonal-spiritual issues, at the publisher's.

Still Skeptical?

Maybe you're shaking your head and saying, "Sure, sure. I've tried this, that, and those. I've spent money, time, and tears and gotten nowhere." Maybe you feel you'll never get out of your dark place. Or you've already dismissed the possibilities of wonderful things happening to you.

You may have a lot of reasons for your reactions. One major reason is that you probably don't credit yourself with what you've already done. Many of us don't even remember our accomplishments. Many of us dismiss them and say, "Big deal." How then can we give ourselves credit and build on our experiences? Or maybe we feel it's "too late" for us to start or resume a cherished activity, like Tom.

Tom's Story

Tom had been an important man with an impressive title. Director of the premier art museum in a large Eastern city for 38 years, he handled and acquired the most treasured works. Part of his job was to discover, develop, and showcase stellar new artists.

Tom had always secretly wanted to be a painter himself. He'd begun painting in his early twenties but abandoned it as family and responsibilities grew. His Dream receded and almost disappeared as he

became busier, kept up with the art world, and graciously accepted promotions, which of course meant more work and more time devoted to his profession.

At 64, with his wife's gently insistent urging, they retired to a quiet South Florida community. After Tom's decades of living with the best paintings in existence and encouraging and nurturing the next generation of artists, he longed to resume his own painting, which he'd put aside so long ago.

I met Tom at a local art exhibit, and we became acquainted, exchanging pithy critiques of the paintings and photographs. I told Tom a little about my work, and he asked if we could get together. At our first meeting, he pulled out his yellowed résumé and said he wanted it revised so he could teach art criticism part-time in an adult education program.

He admitted in that first meeting, almost with tears, that he knew teaching was a ploy to still avoid painting. In our next meeting, he shouted that it was "too late" and recriminated himself with an amazing burst of anger.

He felt "way behind," fearing he'd lost his early promise. He confessed that he daily condemned himself for not having plunged into painting earlier. Then he reeled off the names of successful artists his age who had "made it." He wished, he said, he'd had someone like himself to encourage and guide him, as he had done with so many young artists in the past.

Now, though, with his time his own, Tom was terrified of starting. He dabbled with teaching but mainly watched too much television, ate too much at trendy restaurants with friends, played cards in the afternoon with other retirees, and struggled with guilt, conflicting desires, and fears. Finally, the anxiety in his stomach propelled him to grapple with his desire to paint.

Slowly, I helped Tom see that no talent or time is wasted. His "interminable detour," as he called it, had helped him refine his aesthetic sense, critical skills, and discerning eye. With a great light in his face, he finally realized that he needed that long training to embark on his own. He accepted that his desire to paint was God-given and he deserved to pursue it.

Late Flourishers

I told Tom about many artists, writers, and world figures who came to their calling in their later years (I keep a list to shore myself up). Just a few of

these “late bloomers”: Anna Mary “Grandma” Moses, the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, Miguel Cervantes, Jonathan Swift, Charles Ives, Edith Wharton, Robinson Crusoe author Daniel Defoe, President Harry S. Truman, Pope John XXIII. These and many others are from the wonderful book *Late Bloomers* by Brendan Gill. As Gill says, “If the hour happens to be later than we may have wished, take heart! So much more to be cherished is the bloom” (p. 11).

And a few more, writers and others:

- In 1997, writer Jessie Foveaux published her first book at 98.
- Gerontologist Dr. Charles Oakes started his third career in his 70s as an exercise therapist for older adults. Then in 2000 he published *Working the Gray Zone*, a chronicle of his clients’ remarkable sense of purpose, expansion, and spirituality.
- Arlene Arneson won the Boston Marathon in her age class in 2009. She was 74.
- In 2010 Myrrha Stanford-Smith landed her first book deal—at 82. The publisher, admirably forward-thinking and age-unbound, signed her to a three-book deal—and the other two subsequently came out. Stanford-Smith never retired and continues to write and direct for a repertory theater.
- And a consummate role model: In 2015, at this writing, Tao Porchon-Lynch teaches yoga 20 hours a week at the center she founded outside New York City. She also pursues her other passion—competitive ballroom dancing with partners in their twenties. She’s 97 (look at her two years ago on her birthday: <http://www.rebellecommunity.com/2013/08/13/the-worlds-oldest-yoga-teacher-turns-95-today/>).

People seem astounded at others who are active and creative at “later” ages: “He’s _____ and still ____!” Well, why not? Who is to legislate the expanse or limits of creativity and energy? The usual incredulity shows stereotypical thinking about age, numbers, decades, and what supposedly one can/can’t/should/shouldn’t be doing. None of it has to be true.

More important, unlike hairlines, our creative desires don’t recede with age. Writing guru Julia Cameron says that if we want to write a novel at 20 we’ll still crave to write it at 80. Our talents don’t evaporate, as in the examples

above. Instead of ignoring our desires or pretending they don't matter, we can honor them and reinvigorate them.

When you feel inclined to dismiss, devalue, or give up your Dream, remind yourself:

- I can achieve my Dream because it is implanted in me.
- My Dream means I have the tools and talents I need to fulfill it.
- I know how and where to start to activate my Dream.
- I fully deserve my Dream.

And what about Tom? He acted on his Dream. I helped him set up his studio, and he's been painting daily, currently preparing for a show at one of the city universities.

The Lesson Is Listen and Trust

Listen to yourself and your deep-seated desires. Trust that inner urging. Muster your courage, and visualize yourself living your Dream.

As your Dream becomes clearer, you'll know the first steps to take: enroll in a pastry-making course, clear out the spare room for a workshop, call the interior designer who offered to show you the wholesale houses, start that novel with a space cleared on your desk or a modest little outline.

Kick out your guilt and the years you thought you wasted. Your wealth of life experience can only add to your Dream. You are the master of your choices.

Embrace your creative strength and power, embrace your knowing. Yield to your deserving.

Too late for your Dream? Never!

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"With Wings" by Patti Dietrick; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pattidietrick/>

About this image: "Every year I do a self portrait around my birthday. "With wings" is a transfer image on watercolor paper with added ink and pencil. It symbolizes opening my heart, mind and soul to what the future brings." —PD

Giving Yourself Wings

by Nicole M. Bouchard (*see About Us page for staff bio*)

This prompt is inspired by the above image which is a self-portrait done by Patti Dietrick. As she explains, she does a self-portrait each year around her birthday. It is our magazine's birthday, turning seven years old. Seven has a biblical significance of creation and completion of what was built. The number has a multitude of meanings associated with it across various cultures and faiths, including but not limited to individualism, introspection, knowledge, spirituality and—the written word.

Following these inspirations, we invite you to create a self-portrait of words. Where and who are you at this point, this year, this time in your life... Think outside the box with the form your self-portrait will take. Feel free to use tools such as Magnetic Poetry or even flip through the dictionary to see what random words you gravitate to. Experiment with mediums. Try collage. Get out art supplies or simply arrange the words the way you wish on the page. Get your hands dirty with paint or chalk if you feel like it. Cut out pictures and cover the floor with clippings of beautiful things. It can be

anything. Symbolic flash fiction, abstract poetry, mixed media and collage, paragraphs of non-fiction with crayon of a favorite color in the margins, anything.

What do you want out of life? What do you love? What do you need to survive? What are the traits you are most proud of? What makes you happy? What are you feeling? What are you learning at this stage?

The great thing about this is that it can be done time and again to take the pulse of where you are; when you're creating, growing, dreaming, exploring, you are ever-changing and expanding with certain aspects as your solid foundation.

As with the prompt in our Art & Soul issue, rather than featuring the image in Writers' Challenge, I decided to put it here as an invitation to delve deep and see what individual responses it elicits. There are no right or wrong answers. As you're writing, let the response come naturally with no other purpose than responding truthfully to whatever thoughts or emotions arise. We will have other opportunities in the coming months for challenges, giveaways and gift certificate prizes on our blog, yet it seemed important that this prompt was not perceived in the spirit of competition, but instead, as a private catalyst for inspiration. Let this exercise come to you as it will, in the way and form that you need it to.

Should you wish to, feel free to write in via the e-address below about your process in responding to this prompt and let us know what you thought of it. Happy discovering!

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