

VEIN
OF GOLD

Also by Julia Cameron and available from Souvenir

The Artist's Way

The Artist's Way Workbook

Seeking Wisdom

The Listening Path

Floor Sample

Write for Life

VEIN OF GOLD

A Journey to Your Creative Heart

JULIA CAMERON



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This book is dedicated to
Domenica Cameron-Scorsese,
my artist-daughter,
and
to the creative spirits
of her beloved grandparents:
James William Cameron,
Dorothy Shea Cameron,
Luciano Charles Scorsese,
and Catherine Cappa Scorsese,
whose artistry
runs in her veins.

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chosen to help me anonymously.

*Wherever you are is
the entry point!*

K A B I R

Setting
Out

The book you are about to embark on is a pilgrimage, a journey of healing. In Native American traditions, you might call this a vision quest. My Celtic roots prefer the simpler term: quest.

Name this journey as it serves you.

Some of you will conceive this quest as a spiritual journey. You will consciously use your creativity to encounter your Creator. For others, the journey may be viewed psychologically. You are questing for wholeness and a healthy autonomy from the expectations of others. Still others of you may politicize your process. You will experience this work as a radical act, a severing of ties with outmoded hierarchies that have subverted your own considerable powers.

The journey I guide you on will be your journey, not mine. I would be lying if I told you the journey would always be easy, or comfortable. I expect—and so should you—that other words will apply: fascinating, arduous, magical, difficult, rewarding, and above all, personal.

All of us are far richer than we imagine. None of us possesses a life devoid of magic, barren of grace, divorced from power. Our inner resources, often unmined and even unknown or unacknowledged, are the treasures we carry, what I call our spiritual DNA.

When I speak of “spiritual DNA,” I am talking about a stamp of originality that is as definite and specific as my blue eyes, blond hair, medium height. Just as our physical potentials are encoded at conception, it is my belief that we also carry the imprint, or blueprint, of our gifts and their unfolding. Often we have far more gifts than we imagine. For example, a love of music may indicate a gift for it as well—a gift we may not have developed due to the circumstances of our birth. Similarly, many voracious readers are closet writers, afraid to step into the arena of their dreams. This arena, the panoply of a more colorful self, is our spiritual DNA, the treasure chest we bring into the world and are charged with developing.

The tricky part is recognizing it.

For a decade and a half, I have taught a process of creative individuation and emergence, *The Artist’s Way*. (Many of you may be familiar with my first creativity book by that name.) When people ask

Making art is a journey.

MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD

I am still learning.

MICHELANGELO

If the first response to interdependence and to our sharing the common, grace-filled soup of the cosmic womb is to celebrate, the second response is to heal.

MATTHEW FOX

We live in a time in which most people believe there is not much inside them, only what teachers, parents, and others have put there.

MICHELL CASSOU AND
STEWART CUBLEY

me what it is like to work with people seeking their creativity, I tell them it's like being a prospector. After all these years, I still find it exciting to catch a glimpse of gold. Finding our gold and mining it is what this book is about. Through alignment with this vein of gold, we are able to manifest our lives in a richer way. It is, however, less a matter of productivity than a matter of alchemy. Alchemy is a process of transformation.

At its essence, art *is* an alchemical process. By practicing art, by living artfully, we realize our vein of gold. What I refer to as “the vein of gold,” Egyptians referred to as “the golden ray.” It is the individual, indisputable, indestructible connection to the divine.

The vein of gold in every life is located in the heart of that life. The heart is the origin of creative impulses. If that heart has been wounded, it must be healed for our vein of gold to flow freely. That is why this book must be a pilgrimage of healing, a journey home to the self. As we travel further and further into our own interiors, we will be taking the dross of our lives—the disappointments, wounds, and burdens—and we will make them into gold through the power of creativity. All of our lives are already golden—in potential—if we are willing to do the necessary work of transformation.

The Artist's Way was a book of reunion and discovery: “Ah-hah! I do have inside me an artist, an inner youngster, who had been lost to me!” That artist self, the Creative Child, or Divine Child as it is called in spiritual tradition, had been stolen away. The recovery of that inner artist, like the recovery of a kidnapped, lost, or missing child, was a cause for great celebration. “I’ve got you back! I can barely believe it! Think of all the wonderful things we will be able to do together. . . .” Those were heady and lovely feelings. This book is about putting those feelings into action.

If *The Artist's Way* was a book of discovery and reunion, *The Vein of Gold* is a book of healing and rehabilitation. “I’ve found you, but you’ve been beaten, battered, starved, malnourished, neglected, discounted, and disowned. I must restore you to health so we can have our adventures. . . .”

To restore our artist-child to health, we must be willing to go to any lengths—just as we would for a child of flesh and blood. This means that like parents of an ailing child who make a journey to



Mecca—or the Mayo Clinic, for that matter—we must be willing to undertake a pilgrimage, with all the challenges that implies.

If this sounds daunting, like an awful lot of *work*, let me assure you that what we are going to undertake is something radically different from what you might conceive. Because our aim is to strengthen and heal a creative *child*, we will be undertaking instead a whole lot of play. On our autobiographical pilgrimage to the self, we will explore our lives through tools that may seem like child’s play: movement, writing, sight, sound, and silence. We will create, recreate, and recreate. We will work, yes, but we will really learn to play.

Many of the tools of this book may appear frivolous to your adult self. They are far from frivolous. This is a book of deep, thorough creative healing—and the tools are creative ones. It is the use of creativity which heals the creative wound. Nothing else works. Creative recovery is *not* an intellectual process. Our adult self merely “understands” a wound. Our creative artist, that inner creative child, must actually *heal* it. The job of your adult self, for the course of this book, will be to walk your creative child back into health. You will notice that I have used the word “walk.” I have done so deliberately.

A pilgrimage is a physical process, a process that engages our heart and soul, not merely our well-honed intellect. What this means is *that the tools of Vein of Gold will be more deeply felt, and therefore more deeply resisted*, than the tools of *The Artist’s Way*. The dark horseman of intellectual skepticism (also known as doubt) will be your constant traveling companion.

As you explore the Kingdoms of Story, Sight, Sound, Attitude, Relationship, Spirituality, and Possibility, you will be learning simply to “do” and you will be learning by simply doing. Ironically, by allowing yourself to make what you conceive of as “bad art” or even “crafts,” you will heal yourself and give yourself the necessary strength and humility required to make good art. In other words, by working with these childlike beginner’s tools, you will be reawakening in yourself your artist’s right to a child’s wonder and sense of play. It is from that freedom that your mature creativity must be born. In other words, in order to go forward, you must first go back.

*The tradition of pilgrimage
is as old as religion itself.*

DR. LAUREN ARTRESS

*Skepticism, as I said, is not
intellectual only; it is moral
also; a chronic atrophy and
disease of the whole soul.*

THOMAS CARLYLE

*Pilgrims are persons in motion
passing through territories
not their own—seeking
something we might call
completion, or perhaps the
word clarity will do as well,
a goal to which only
the spirit’s compass points
the way.*

RICHARD H. NIEBUHR

*To create is always to learn,
to begin over, to begin
at zero.*

MATTHEW FOX

It is, of course, my hope, that you will choose to work—and play—with these tools. If you do, you will reclaim your keys to the creative gifts locked within you. You will discover that the keys have been yours all along. This means, of course, that it is not my place to name you an artist. Such power would be lovely, but it does not reside with me. You are the one who must name yourself. You are the one who must seek—and claim—your creative destiny. No one can do that for you, but you can do it for yourself.

“This doesn’t make sense. It’s not productive. This is like kindergarten. What does all of this craft have to do with art?”

These whispered doubts are like the trolls who hide under the bridge in fairy tales so that the traveler is afraid to pass.

“Where is this getting me? This is a waste of my valuable time!” the skeptic will protest when presented with a spiritual tool such as walking. I just don’t *get* this!”

This is not a book that can be “gotten” by reading it. This book cannot be read and evaluated any more than India or Bangkok or Jerusalem can be experienced without going there. A travel book is a travel *book*. I am asking you to take the journey instead. The tools of this book are rigorous, albeit playful. They require commitment and engagement. In other words, this is not a book of creative theories. It is a book of creative practice. Again, these tools cannot be read and evaluated, they must be worked.

Can you feel the hackles of your intellect rising at this suggestion? Are you dubious, even a little angry? If so, that’s good. Anger is energy. We have located some energy and energy can be used for change.

“Change,” of course, is the polite, modern word for transformation, and transformation occurs through action: “Faith without works is dead.”

This insistence on learning through doing, on healing through feeling, may make your skeptic furious.

“This is a lot of bunk! I don’t see how this could possibly work! It’s just so silly. . . .” Your skeptic has been trained to think this way.

“No pain, no gain,” is a truism of therapy circles as well as fitness spas. “Go for the burn,” we are taught, and so we roast on the spit of

self-examination, turned in on ourself with excruciating intensity. Habituated by decades of therapy, we believe in what we conceive of—and experience—as “inner work”: most often undertaken through talk therapy. We have an idea that insights and healing must come to us through our intellect. We seek to understand our wounds intellectually and alleviate them through that understanding. We attempt to think our way into right actions rather than act our way into right thinking.

It is time we approach self-healing in a more heart-centered and holistic way. This book asks you to experiment with the idea of growth and healing occurring through the process of “inner play.” I ask you to resist your own resistance, doubt your own doubts, and take the risk of moving through and beyond your own intellectualism. For many of you this will be very frightening at first, like stepping out onto the ice or the dance floor when you are not sure you will be able to perform well. (“Well” is the voice of your Perfectionist, the Skeptic’s sidekick who insists on perfection rather than progress.)

So? Perform anyway. “Just do it.”

When I speak of a “vein of gold,” many people think in terms of productivity. “Once I find my vein of gold, I’ll strike it rich.” It is more accurate to think of the vein of gold as a heart vessel, carrying the precious cargo of the flow of our true nature. Viewed this way, we don’t need to “get” rich. We already are rich. This is a book about coming to that recognition; therefore, these tools are about process, not product. Once we undergo the process of healing and valuing ourselves, once we know our own worth, then we will be able to know the worth of what we create and can therefore create more freely.

From my perspective as teacher and witness, transformation is available to anyone willing to pick up spiritual tools and use them for creative unfolding.

Why do I specify *spiritual* tools? Couldn’t we call the tools in this book something else? We could, but I believe we would be short-changing ourselves and mincing words as well.

As long as we remain closed to the possibility of spiritual help in our unfolding, we are choosing to operate off the battery pack of our limited resources. When we open to spiritual assistance—however

*With everyone born human,
a poet—an artist—is born,
who dies young and who is
survived by an adult.*

CHARLES-AUGUSTIN
SAINTE-BEUVE

*A frontier is never a place; it
is a time and a way of life.*

HAL BORLAND

Fun has a sacred dimension.

ADRIANA DIAZ

Creative breakthroughs are experiential. They don't come from intellectual analysis.

LUCIA CAPACCHIONE

We are so captivated by and entangled in our subjective consciousness that we have forgotten the age-old fact that God speaks chiefly through dreams and visions.

CARL JUNG

tentatively, however experimentally—we tap into unlimited supply. No longer restricted by the circumstances of our birth (or our current life, for that matter) we are able to receive sustenance, guidance, and even material resources that support our dreams and our flowering.

All of the tools of both *The Artist's Way* and *The Vein of Gold* are instrumental in assisting spiritual opening. In the world of spirit, there are no orphans or stepchildren. Each of us is a child of the Universe with an enormous endowment available for our use. The recovery of that endowment is the reward of working with these playful tools.

This contact with the first—or authentic, or original—self can feel as magical as encountering a deer in a mountain clearing. “Could that magical creature really be *me*?” we may wonder as the first shimmers of self shine through our doubts.

And so we start. We become pilgrims. Because our pilgrimage is an internal one, to the riches locked within our own hearts, we become prospectors and miners as well.

In order to arrive at paydirt, the valuable ore they are seeking, miners must sift through and discard a great deal of worthless material known as “the overburden.” In personal terms, our individual overburden can obscure the gleam of a creative gift.

Buried under the negative (or simply ignorant or misleading) interpretations of others, the glistening veins of our talents, dreams, and aspirations must be actively sought in order to be found. Like miners, we will dig for these secret lodes of riches. We will pick out the nuggets of self we find hidden below our surface lives. We will haul these treasures to light, clean them off, and claim them. Each bit of authenticity we are able to own constitutes a part of our vein of gold. Once uncovered, the original self is vital and vibrant—not at all the colorless, lackluster depressive so many of us have felt ourselves become!

This book is about becoming—*recognizing*—your original self. Recovering your original self is a withdrawal process, one in which we pull our energy back into our core, depositing it within our self, in our center, where we can access it for our dreams and goals. In other words, we withdraw our energy from any mis-investments in the priorities, expectations, and interpretations of others. It is with this



recognition as the goal that I devised the set of tools you will be using to excavate your vein of gold. And for many of us, finding ourselves may take quite a bit of digging!

We don't always know what makes us happy. We know, instead, what we think *should*. We are baffled and confused when our attempts at happiness fail. We get the dream job and it is a nightmare. We find we miss the dead-end job we left behind. We finally purchase a swank new condo with high-rise views, only to find we miss the old back porch on the railroad flat we shed like a seedy coat.

What's going on here? Shouldn't we be smarter? How could we be so . . . dumb?

We are dumb, no question, but only in the sense of being mute. We are mute when it comes to naming accurately our own preferences, delights, gifts, talents. The voice of our original self is often muffled, overwhelmed, even strangled, by the voices of other people's expectations. The tongue of the original self is the language of the heart. It is the purpose of this book to amplify that voice.

That's what we'll be doing in the exercises that follow: Working with autobiographical writing, collage, mask-making, doll-making, spiritual disciplines such as walking meditation, song, and silence, we will ask ourselves the questions, "Who am I? What do I love? In what directions do I choose to extend myself?" Some of our answers and explorations will be surprising. This book may at times feel like a maze or a labyrinth.

"How is this going to pay off? Why isn't she teaching me something?" the skeptic will shrill.

This book is not about *my* teaching you something. It is about your teaching yourself. This book is not about my answering questions. It is about your asking and answering questions yourself. You are both the traveler and the destination. Your destiny is the arrival at your internal truth, the place within you that's so still, so central, and so *you* that you are the midpoint—the eye and the "I."

In this fulfillment, we have the active partnership of what I call the Great Creator. Others call this power God or Higher Power or Christ or Great Mother, or simply the Tao or the Force. While each of us may name or envision or experience this power differently, working with the tools of *The Artist's Way* and *The Vein of Gold* does es-

*To believe your own thought,
to believe that what is true
for you in your private heart
is true for all men—that
is genius.*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

If you are seeking creative ideas, go out walking. Angels whisper to a man when he goes for a walk.

RAYMOND INMON

Art is a definite way of knowledge or approach to truth...

PETER ROGERS

establish the spark of connection and the eventual sense of an ongoing collaboration in which our plans and dreams are both manifested and improved through the power of this creative source.

The tools and understandings of this book are the fruit of thirty years as an active artist. I could tell you that I have been a *working* artist, but that would not be true. What I have been is a *playing* artist, and it is in that sense of play that I have found the keys to continual, abundant creativity.

In *The Artist's Way*, a reconnection to the inner artist was established. (The pivotal Artist's Way tools are reviewed in this book to be absolutely certain they are in place for those who have worked the Artist's Way and to put them in place for those who have not. You will find them in the next chapter, "In Your Backpack.") The process of inner healing both proceeds and inaugurates productivity. An artist, in order to function fully, must be both vulnerable *and* resilient. This requires spiritual autonomy, and that is the gift of the healed heart.

The vein of gold is the sense of self connecting to self that comes when we are utterly true to ourselves. It is, in short, a sort of power beam that we can access in our heart of hearts. This beam is the dazzling light of spiritual clarity: we see our gifts as God-given and realize how to actualize them. When we are centered in our hearts, when we act in accordance with our truest nature, we access and express our vein of gold. We do it automatically, creatively, and consistently. It is the aim of this book to so strengthen and heal the inner artist that such living becomes an everyday reality.

Most of us are not raised to actively encounter our destiny. We may not know we have one. As children, we are seldom told we have a place in life that is uniquely ours alone. Instead, we are encouraged to believe that our life should somehow fulfill the expectations of others, that we will (or should) find our satisfactions as they have found theirs. Rather than being taught to ask *ourselves* who we are, we are schooled to ask others. We are, in effect, trained to listen to others' versions of ourselves. We are brought up in our life *as told to us by someone else!* When we survey our lives, seeking to fulfill our creativity, we often see we had a dream that went glimmering because we believed, and those around us believed, that the dream was



beyond our reach. Many of us would have been, or at least might have been, done, tried *something*, if . . .

If we had known who we really were.

But how were we to know? We were being told stories that didn't tell us all of the possible happy endings—or even all of the possible meanings of the stories themselves. The Ugly Duckling did not know it was a swan because it had never seen another swan.

Turned in on itself, creativity becomes both a consolation and a source of isolation. Many an imaginary playmate was invented from the yearning for shared creative adventures. The bottled-up wish for a more magical life is often the unspoken grief carried by the creative adult who has forgotten, abandoned, or marginalized the creative child he used to be. That child had stories to tell and knew it. Those stories, buried below the surface of our life, are still waiting to be mined and told—first to us and then to others.

All of us have lives striped in our own colors. All of us have stories embedded within our official life story that are the stories of our own truest heart. The trick—the one we will be practicing in these pages—is to separate out our version of our story, our version of ourself. The pilgrimage we are making is to our own core, our own reality, our own sense of self and self-expression.

Although the tools we will use are often three-dimensional, involving not only sight but also sound and touch, this book is, at its base, a book about stories. It is about the stories others tell about you, and the stories you tell yourself. As we work, we will be asking, “What stories do I tell about myself? What stories do others tell about me?”

You may find your stories quite different from the stories told about you. Or the stories may be the same, but the meanings assigned to them very different. As you work with your life stories, you may find yourself seeing your character quite differently and realizing that you yourself can alter the plot you have been living out.

And yet, for all its involvement with story, this is not a book about writing. It is, more accurately, a book about *righting*: we will right the wrongful images we have of ourself. We will use tools of many descriptions to change our faulty descriptions of ourself.

*Art provides a healing force
which aids both the maker
and the viewer. . . .*

RICHARD NEWMAN

*The poor need not only
bread. The poor also
need beauty.*

MONSIGNOR HILDEBRAND

*It takes a long time to
become young.*


PABLO PICASSO

Some of you may enjoy thinking of these tools in mythic terms: the tasks of Hercules, just smaller. The word I use for many of them is “challenging,” often because they seem so whimsical that your Skeptic will rear its head and howl.

Remember that your Skeptic is the dragon at the gate. The riches you are seeking lie within. You must evade, even slay, your Skeptic to enter your heart. And yet your Skeptic is not your enemy. Your Skeptic is the adversary that will make you strong. Each time you grapple with your doubt, each time you doff your intellectualism to experience a tool rather than analyze it, each time you choose to actualize rather than theorize your creativity, you will move ahead.

I am asking you to experiment, to employ these tools by entering them experientially. Their benefit lies in discovering their result not in distancing yourself intellectually by trying to figure them out. Many of the tools you resist the most strongly will be those which serve you best. In a spirit of excitement and adventure, I invite you to experiment and see if this is true. Unlike *The Artist’s Way*, *The Vein of Gold* is not divided into weeks. Nonetheless, teaching it over the years has given me a time frame most appropriate for moving through the Kingdoms. I would suggest spending four weeks on the first Kingdom, and two weeks apiece on each of the Kingdoms which follow. This is a general but flexible guideline. Pilgrimages, after all, are personal, and you may wish to linger in the country which fascinates you most deeply. The choice is yours.

Art is made through a series of moments—choices—leading each to the next. Life is made the same way. When we desire to live artfully, we must live not only consciously but concretely. We must shape our life. This book is a series of healing tools intended as a prescription for artful living.



In Your Backpack: The Basic Tools

MORNING PAGES

For the duration of this pilgrimage (and I would hope, long beyond it), I ask you to employ three pages of daily, longhand morning writing called Morning Pages. Yes, they must be longhand. Yes, they must be done in the morning. (If you have done *The Artist's Way*, you have done your Morning Pages. Hopefully, you do them still.) You may think of them as anything from “brain drain” to meditation.

Morning Pages will center you, steady you, empower you, enlighten you. They will comfort you, console you, stimulate you, intrigue you, challenge, irritate, and *activate* you. For Westerners, they are a potent form of meditation, and like all meditation, they will make you intimate with yourself, with your personality and all its fears, foibles, and quirks. Practiced over time, Morning Pages become a reliable bridge to the Universe itself. Through them you will encounter the workings of your spirituality, the great Creator within, with all its grace, wisdom, and power.

Here's how you do them:

Every morning, write three longhand pages (single-sided, eight and a half by eleven inches) of whatever comes into your head. Not

It is necessary to write, if the days are not to slip emptily by.

VITA SACKVILLE-WEST

This is the practice school of writing. Like running, the more you do it, the better you get at it.

NATALIE GOLDBERG