

Julia Cameron Course – Walking in this World

I was browsing in the local bookshop when the book caught my eye. It was called *Walking in this World* and I got curious. It had a magical image on the front of a winding pathway thru a green forest and words like creativity, creative potential and connecting with your inner creative spirit hopped out at me from the page.

It sounded like just the book I was looking for. I had heard of Julia Cameron's bestseller *The Artist's Way*. This was the sequel and so I decided to see what it was all about. I had had notions of writing something, anything, for a while now. I seemed to be able to tell the story but when it came to writing, I ran out of steam very quickly.

I started reading it straight away and very quickly realised that this creative outpouring was not going to happen by itself. I had some homework to do here.

There were 3 morning pages to be written every day which would supposedly get the creative juices flowing. Also an artist's date, solo preferably, once a week, and a weekly walk.

There were also various tasks within each chapter and so I set about the increasingly lonely journey on a daily and weekly basis. After a few weeks, work took me away from my daily routine and though I brought the book away with me I did little more than read the chapters and pretended the tasks weren't there.

The summer went by and shortly after my return to Dublin, walking down Camden Street one day, I came across a billboard that had an enlargement of the lovely green cover of the book I have bought in the shop. It gave details of a 12 week course on *Walking in this World*. I decided to sign on. I thought there was a better chance of sticking to my homework and tasks if I was in a group situation where I had to produce.

The following Monday I joined 9 other people for the 12 week journey ahead. We were all coming from quite different backgrounds with jobs in teaching, the legal profession, the business world and more and our common goal was to create something by the end of the course. We had 2 facilitators who were there to explain, guide and encourage us in our endeavours. The aim at the end of the course was to complete a task or creative project of our choice. The choices picked ranged from rearranging years of loose photos to completing a piece of sculpture to writing a short story to painting a canvas. And finally we had to sign a creativity contract committing ourselves to the regular use of the 3 basic tools of a weekly walk, an artists date and daily journaling. Adequate sleep, good food and gentle companionship were all part of the deal. Each contract was then put into a frame and presented to us, and this had the psychological effect of feeling that one had to take this seriously.

Each week would start with the facilitators asking people how they got on during the week, how the journal keeping was going and where they chose for their artist's date and their walk. Depending on what was going on in peoples' lives determined how much they could complete the assigned tasks. For my part, I found the journal to be sometimes great, very helpful in getting stuff out that was going on, a form of exorcism and once it was all down on paper, you could close the page, put it away and get on with your life. The idea was to write and keep writing, a stream of consciousness that was not to be reread. Other days I would sit and stare at the blank page, wondering what to write, and

then again I could spend several days in a row writing the same stuff that kept creeping onto the page. Oh no, not that again. Thought that was done and dusted.

The artist's dates were a little bit trickier personally for me. They felt a little contrived. Something I had to do became not necessarily what I spontaneously wanted to do, though it did make me go visit places where I normally wouldn't have gone. Assigned play it was called and it didn't sit that easily with me.

The weekly walk was always an enjoyable experience, whether it was the same route every week or searching out a different one. The idea was that problems could be 'walked on'. The Aborigines do walkabout, walking clears the head and that task was enjoyed by most.

Our task in one chapter could vary from doing nothing, to in another chapter creating a God Jar for throwing creative ideas, thoughts and future projects into. Another chapter would advise on how to cope with worry, fear, restlessness, insecurity, self-pity and doubt and all the other issues that come when one is wondering about what path to take and if the path chosen is the right one.

Julia Cameron believed firmly in what she was doing and wanted to share her ideas with us. She felt that dealing with our issues by creating was a much more positive, hopeful and empowering solution than seeking therapy which she feels puts us into the victim/wronged state, looking back on the past rather than creating for the present and the future. For her art says, "I am" Therapy says, "They were, therefore I am". A reformed alcoholic, her creative method saved her from the bottle and helped her to achieve her creative goals.

Many issues were brought up and discussed during our time together, sometimes bordering on a form of therapy, because for many people, their creative blockages seemed to result from negative events in the past which unintentionally put a dampner on people's longings and/or ability to create. A cross word, an admonition or an insensitive remark made as a child put people in shutdown mode in some cases for many years.

There was a real bonding within our little group and most people looked forward to their Monday meeting. Some people who had hoped for a creative breakthrough within a short space of time became disappointed and lost interest within a number of weeks. The main criticism of Julia Cameron's approach was that during the course of the book she moved from the point of starting out on the creative path to helping us manage our millions and to recognise the sharks who were going to take advantage of our wealth. For most people, this was unrealistic and there was a touch of the American approach of 'you can touch the stars' and be President too that doesn't sit so well with the Irish psyche.

All in all, however, it was a great experience that got people writing and thinking, and opened up new avenues as to how to explore and develop our creative potential, which we all have. For some it was life changing, and by the end of the course, one person changed career, one decided to go travelling the world, and another applied to art college, and yet another had decided to take leave of absence from her job. All in all, this was a dramatic end to our 12 weeks together.