



A WRITER'S
GUIDE TO
CREATIVE
BREAKTHROUGH

BURN
Wild

Christi Krug

SQUIGGLE PRESS

Copyright © 2013 by Christi Krug

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system without written permission of the author except in the case of fair use for personal purposes only.

ISBN: 978-0-615-64118-8

All the song lyrics used are in the public domain.

Portions of "Authenticity," in different form, have been published in *Personal Journaling Magazine*, February 2003.

Portions of the "The Incineration of Procrastination," in different form, have been published in *Writer's Guide to Creativity*, August 2003.

"Creating through a Crisis," in different form, was published in *Writer's Digest*, March 2004.

The following authors have graciously granted permission to use these works:

"Barn," by Sage Cohen, *Like the Heart, the World*, Queen of Wands Press, 2007.

Poem excerpt by Kate Gray, from "What Poets Do," *Another Sunset We Survive*, Cedar House Books, 2007.

"boy's first pencil," by Harold Johnson, *Dixon Ticonderoga*, Redcat Press, 2010.

Poem excerpt by Toni Partington, from "Sustained on Leftovers," *Wind Wing*, Toni Partington, 2010.

"Ink," by Paulann Petersen, *Kindle*, Mountains and Rivers Press, 2008.

Printed in the United States of America

Squiggle Press

Dedication

*For my husband, Paul Krug,
who makes so many dreams possible.*

Table of Contents

7	Introduction
11	Chapter One: Sparks
16	Chapter Two: Are You Licensed?
18	Chapter Three: Striking the Match
21	Chapter Four: Passionate Discipline
23	Chapter Five: Taking Down Dr. Codger
32	Chapter Six: Firestarters
34	Chapter Seven: Wildwriting
37	Chapter Eight: The Book of Fire
39	Chapter Nine: Emotional Dynamite
42	Chapter Ten: Breaking Rules
47	Chapter Eleven: Tinder Memories
53	Chapter Twelve: Flaming Targets
58	Chapter Thirteen: Roughing It
60	Chapter Fourteen: Catch Your Breath
62	Chapter Fifteen: The Gaze
65	Chapter Sixteen: Ignore It
67	Chapter Seventeen: Burned Down to the Truth
71	Chapter Eighteen: Lying Tongues
74	Chapter Nineteen: Fired Up for the Journey
88	Chapter Twenty: Authenticity
93	Chapter Twenty-One: Fake It 'Til You Make It
96	Chapter Twenty-Two: The Taming of the Groke
99	Chapter Twenty-Three: The Incineration of Procrastination

103	Chapter Twenty-Four: Creating Through a Crisis
108	Chapter Twenty-Five: Beware the Creeper
110	Chapter Twenty-Six: The Art of Inkling
113	Chapter Twenty-Seven: What You Know
116	Chapter Twenty-Eight: Slow Down
120	Chapter Twenty-Nine: Speed Up
122	Chapter Thirty: Speak Up
125	Chapter Thirty-One: Shut Up
127	Chapter Thirty-Two: Energy
130	Chapter Thirty-Three: Torch Your Excuses
133	Chapter Thirty-Four: The Fear of Success
137	Chapter Thirty-Five: Fear of Failure
138	Chapter Thirty-Six: From Boredom to Bonfire
141	Chapter Thirty-Seven: Your Right To Be Wrong
145	Chapter Thirty-Eight: Ways and Means
148	Chapter Thirty-Nine: That's Insanity!
150	Chapter Forty: Now You're Smokin'
156	Chapter Forty-One: Small Things
160	Chapter Forty-Two: Big Blazes
163	Chapter Forty-Three: Sizzle
165	Selected Bibliography
167	Acknowledgments
168	About The Author

INK

Night in a bottle,
stars swimming
inside glass.

When we quit
dipping our pens,
when we emptied

darkness out of
its vessel,
did we stop

a constellation
from writing itself
onto a page?

by Paulann Petersen

Introduction

**Remember when you wrote whole chapters in the sand
and flight was the nexus of wish and might**

—from “Sustained on Leftovers,” a poem by Toni Partington

DOES CREATING have a place in your life? As children, most of us had boundless fantasies about what we could make and do. As years passed, however, these dreams seemed a waste of time.

Perhaps you imagined being a poet or a glass artist, a woodworker or a novelist, a gourmet chef or a mime. You fancied yourself a rock star, fashion designer, songwriter or tap dancer.

As life went on, the demands of work and relationships cooled the embers of these dreams. You learned to keep them secret. Gradually, fear soaked your creativity, like a wave washing over driftwood.

This book will help you bring back the fire. It will teach you how to enjoy your creativity rather than spend your energy fighting, procrastinating, resisting or denying it.

This book is for people who were once children who staged homemade plays or made up jokes or decorated the wall with Mom’s lipstick. Who invented recipes and composed love songs and flew passenger kites for caterpillars. Who built hideouts and mapped treasure hunts. Who wore superhero capes and made paper boats and changed clothes six times a day.

This book is for people who’ve always wanted to create with words or images, with poetry or play-dough. It could be you tried and gave up, because deep down you never felt like a writer or an artist. This book will help you

rekindle that faith. This book is for people who long to let their imagination play a daily role in their lives.

This is a book about living and writing. It offers the courage to do both more creatively.

Why I Wrote this Book

When I was a kid, I loved to draw, make up stories, paint pictures, write poems and make messes. Parents and teachers said nice things about my creations (except the messes), and I loved this. I thought: *I can be a writer! I can be an artist!* My grandmother submitted one of my cartoons to the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* where it was printed. My mom photocopied my drawings, making a coloring book for kids at church. I borrowed an old typewriter and submitted poems which were published nationally—once, twice, three times. But a strange thing happened. Gradually, I came to value only the things that others valued.

As a young adult I would enter writing contests but I was distracted by opinions. Did other people think I was gifted? Could I get published? No longer was I creating for the joy.

When my writing got rejected, or when people didn't compliment my art, I decided I was mistaken about having talent. A person had to grow up and get a real job, after all. So I did that, and forgot about writing anything "real."

Instead, I tried my hand at journaling. The problem was, I couldn't keep anything in a journal. I would take an Exacto knife and slice away the single page I had managed to write with "mistakes" on it. I hated everything I wrote.

Then I met Noelle, who wrote in her journal every day. She would transform an empty notebook into a companion brimming with musings and poetry, doodles, prayers and complaints. "How do you do it?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Nobody's going to see it but me. It doesn't *have* to be good."

I talked to creative people I knew. I stumbled on books explaining the dichotomy of the creative process: *Writing on Both Sides of the Brain* by

Henriette Anne Klauser and *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards. I discovered principles that had little to do with technique and a lot to do with mindset.

Over the next three years, I put the principles into practice. I trained myself to stop being intimidated about journaling, writing, or auditioning for a play. I practiced my creative dreams instead of denying them. Paradoxically, because I didn't care so much anymore, I could risk rejection. I submitted and sold freelance articles and stories. I was bringing new words into the world, and feeling the joy.

I began to meet people who admired my work and would sigh about their own lost ambition. "If only I was good enough, I would . . ." They had reasons for not writing or painting, doing stand-up comedy, or dancing. They were stifled by obligations, people, and circumstances, but most of all, by the idea that they weren't "good enough."

I wanted to share what I'd learned. I created the class, Wildfire Writing.

Students showed up. The prompts got them laughing and crying. They picked up their pens. They wrote. They reversed directions, firing up lost dreams.

Wildfire Writing students not only became writers, but also painters, photographers, gardeners and craftspeople as well as columnists, novelists and picture-book authors. Students crossed life-changing thresholds: losing forty pounds or standing up to a controlling spouse. The new ideas helped them to *live* better.

How to Use this Book

Read the chapters in any order. Write in this book. You don't have to wait until you take a vacation, retire, win the lottery, or stumble on a block of free time: start now. Do a ten or fifteen minute "spark" and feel the difference it can make in your day, week, month, year. This is your creative life. Live it!

Disclaimer #1:

This book will tap emotion. That's a shady thing to do. In our society we are distrustful of anything that encourages us to be emotional.

Once I met a tall, dramatic woman who said she wanted to be a writer. "But I can write only one or two sentences at a time," she said. She kept shifting on her feet and tossing her auburn hair behind her shoulders. "My words are all bottled up. I need help. I'm thinking about taking one of your classes."

I began to describe my approach in Wildfire Writing, but before I could get the words out, she blurted, "I can't do a touchy-feely class. Is this a touchy-feely class?"

"Yes," I said. "If you put it that way. It will help you get in touch with what you need to say."

"Um, no thanks," she said, shaking her head, and fled the room. I understood. This was the very reason she couldn't put down more than a few words. She was terrified of her own feelings.

Disclaimer #2:

This is a feel-good book. It will support positive feelings and help you . . . well, *feel good*. It will make you feel good when you take in the concepts and act upon them. It can't make you feel good if you don't do anything about it. As Benjamin Disraeli said, "Action may not always bring happiness, but there is no happiness without action."

For those who dare, and aren't intimidated about making positive changes, you may gain insight into relationships. Or mountain climbing. Or prayer. You will come to understand your own creative process.

I didn't invent these principles. They have been recognized by artists and poets and writers throughout time. I have found some low-key ways that any busy person may put them into practice, fostering growth and awareness.

This is not a complicated manual asking for a sobering commitment. It's an invitation. *Oh, come and play, creative one.*

The invitation is for you.

CHAPTER ONE

Sparks

**“Hark! The fire-alarm is sounding,
see, the air is lit with flames.”**

—from “Fire! Fire! Fire!” a song by T.B. Kelley

THERE’S A CREATIVE FIRE inside you ready to happen. You can’t see or touch it, but sometimes you feel it. Even so, in the day to day, there are so many other things on your mind that the fire seems to fade. Besides, someone once told you that your poetry, or watercolor painting, or magic show wasn’t all that brilliant.

A teacher’s red pen may have slashed your pride. Or the question of money may have destroyed ambition. “That’s fine for a hobby,” Dad said about a poem, novel or cartoon, “but you can’t make money at it.” Whenever we glimpse our pens or paintbrushes or mosaic supplies, those words come back to us, and we find something else to do.

Fear drives us away from creativity. We’re afraid of looking stupid, wasting time, whittling away our lives, making people angry, making people laugh, ending up at a curb with a cardboard sign. In short, we fear failure. But the prospect of success can also be terrifying. There’s the unknown territory that means a loss of control, comfort and predictability.

Maybe you’ve bided your time with a matchbook of potential ideas,

hidden away for later. Next chance, you were going to light that fire. Trouble is, the chance never happened. Your matches disappeared into a pocket somewhere and got lost.

You decided to get serious. But then you enrolled in a degree program or remodeled your kitchen or dated someone new or changed jobs or had a baby or moved cross-country. Last you checked, the fire was a fading wisp of smoke.

Without addressing our mental, emotional and spiritual states as creators, we will never sustain the creative fire.

We won't start projects or finish them. We'll putter. We'll raise an occasional puff of creativity, but it won't burn high and hot.

To light the wildfire, the first step is to honestly examine your creative life. Let's start by taking a look at writing.

Starting Mode

Uh-oh. Writing. Starting a writing project can be murder. At your desk in third period English, the blank paper stared you down with its watery blue lines and accusing white face. *Go ahead, dummy. You're a lousy speller.* (Tapping foot.) *Better come up with a dynamic opening.* (Chewing eraser.) *Watch that topic sentence!*

Wildfire Writing recognizes two opposing forces when it comes to creating. One mode is creative, one critical. They aren't necessarily "left brain" and "right brain" because the physiology is complex and research is ongoing. Regardless of any physical demarcation in the brain, you can feel the shift when you are working in one mode or the other.

Spiritual teachers call these two modes the flesh and the spirit, or the ego and the true self. Deep down, we all recognize what it means to act from the heart rather than the brain. The important thing is to recognize this distinction in your own life. I've named the two styles of thinking Dr. Codger and the Dream Kid, the seats of contrasting characteristics.

Dr. Codger	Dream Kid
Logic	Emotion
Structure	Free-flow
Analysis	Hunches
Order	Chance
Language	Storytelling
Labels	Essence
Editing	Creating
Plans	Spontaneity
Schedules	Timelessness
Revisions	Ideas
Work	Play

Dr. Codger is the mode in which we live our everyday lives—going to work, paying bills, fulfilling obligations. Always focused on results, Dr. Codger watches the clock, responsibly getting us where we need to go. Dream Kid, on the other hand, springs from fire. She is burning with curiosity and passionate about life. She savors experiences, whether or not they produce a particular result. Dream Kid dances with joy and sadness, intensity and exhilaration. Passionate, creative writing can only begin when this wild child strikes the first match.

In that conversation inside our heads during English class, Dr. Codger dominated. Dream Kid didn't get a word in edgewise. Unfortunately, many of us listened to Dr. Codger, thinking only he could provide the impetus for writing our essay. Truth is, Dream Kid is the lone supplier of ideas.

Most of the time our society trudges along seeking to appease the rules and regulations of Dr. Codger. Writing for fun seems purposeless—unless, of course, you can make a living at it.

So we send Dream Kid outside to play with the other children. Or, we envy her role in the lives of people lucky and talented enough to be dancers or novelists or children's book illustrators or musicians. With Dr. Codger as our guide, Dream Kid can't lead us to our own creating.

Check in with this Dream Kid of yours. Remember how it feels to let her take over.



Spark 1

Think back to an occasion when you completely lost track of yourself. You looked up from dancing or writing a letter or skiing down a mountain and realized that a huge chunk of time had elapsed.

- Close your eyes and relive the experience.
- What were you doing?
- What was Dream Kid saying?
- How did you feel?

Words people have used to describe their experiences: *thrilled, proud, surprised, natural, effortless, flowing.*

Jot down a word to describe this sensation. Now write another word or two.

Whenever Dream Kid shows up, remember this feeling.



Spark 2

Call up a memory of yourself writing like a maniac. Did you ever produce a story, poem, Christmas letter, essay, or school newspaper article that made you proud? Imagine how you felt about this work and the ideas you were able to express. Complete the following sentences.

- *While I was writing, I felt . . .*
- *I enjoyed this project because . . .*
- *Positive feedback came in the form of . . .*

Soon you will feel this sense of accomplishment again.



Spark 3

Reflect on a time you felt completely alive, from your hair follicles to the soles of your feet. Think about what your body experienced.

- What did you see?
- What did you touch?
- What did you taste or smell?
- What did you hear?

Focus on the images and sensations, not the words. Then see if you can translate each sensation into a word or sentence. Forget trying to sound brilliant, just do the best you can. Notice how interesting it is to move from feeling to language.

CHAPTER TWO

Are You Licensed?

“I dare not break the seal! What fear, what doubt I feel.”

—from “True Love from O’er the Sea,” a song by H.B. Farnie

TWENTY-SOME YEARS AGO when I sold my first magazine article, I was raising a toddler and juggling priorities, babysitters, naptimes and chores. When I spent time writing I felt guilty about “neglecting my real duties.” I wasn’t convinced I had a right to do this.

So it is with our choices about time. We rush from on-ramp to exit ramp, churning minutes into miles and paychecks, chafing in checkout lines, lurching through parking lots. We toss kids off to school and catch them again like rebounding basketballs. We reel with bills to mail, teeth to fix, cars to service, lawns to mow, people to please, taxes to pay, meals to choke down, paperwork to stash, bodies to groom, cell phones to answer.

But who’s in charge here, anyway?

More than any other force in your life, you must respect the fire of creativity. You must give yourself permission to spend time, money and effort—regardless of the outcome of your work. Only then can you negotiate the disappointments and needs of others around you. It all starts with a license.

So here it is. Sign it. Seal it. Display it for the authorities. Remind the world, every time they pass your refrigerator door that this is your right.

There are two versions of the license. The first is for writing, the second for everything else.

My License To Write

I, _____, am a writer.

This license grants me the right to write. I may do so whenever I choose. I can spend time, money and resources on developing my skills. I can try new forms and genres, with or without an outline. I can take on the task of any novel, poem, or scene, even when I don't know how to go about it. I have permission not to finish everything I start. I do not demand compensation, but welcome it when provided. As the owner of this writing license, I can write nonsense or dreck, making grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. I can seek out fellow writers for support.

I do not require that the writing process be comfortable. I can persevere in completing projects I believe in. I will let writing be a force that helps to shape my life, guiding me into greater awareness of myself. I may decline obligations that inhibit my creativity or consume my time for writing.

I assert that I am the owner of unique feelings, perceptions, memories, opinions, ideas and observations. I will put forth my words. I will tell my stories.

Dated: _____

My Creative License

I, _____, am the owner of my own creativity. This license grants me the right to be creative whenever and wherever I choose, to try new forms of art, to dabble, experiment, invent, and make things up as I go along. I will not deny or relinquish my creative talents to any outside individual, group, or entity. I can make messes, devise plans, ask questions, take classes, and set aside time for creating. I will allow myself to grow. I can spend money on creative tools and seek out fellow creators with which to associate.

I may change my mind about any project at any time or set new goals as new desires unfold. I may rightfully decline obligations that inhibit my creativity or consume my time for creating.

I exercise my right to express my sensibilities in my own way. I am original and talented, with much to offer the world.

Dated: _____

Selected Bibliography

Bayles, David, and Ted Orland. *Art and Fear*. Eugene, OR: Image Continuum Press, 2001.

Cameron, Julia. *The Artist's Way*. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1992.

Chea, Terence. (November 29, 2010). Living Small Looms Large Amid Real Estate Bust. *Associated Press*. Retrieved from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40414941/ns/business-real_estate/t/living-small-looms-large-amid-real-estate-bust/#.UJ86PYZmqVo

Claxton, Guy. *Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2000.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1997.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. July 1, 1996. The Creative Personality. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199607/the-creative-personality>.

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974.

Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1989.

Edwards, Betty. *The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999.

Ferriss, Timothy. *The 4-Hour Work Week*. New York, NY: Crown, 2007.

Glover, John A., and Cecil R. Reynolds, and Royce R. Ronning. *Handbook of Creativity*. New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1989.

Greggerman, Alan. *Lessons from the Sandbox*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2000.

Jansson, Tove. *Moominland Midwinter*. Translated by Thomas Warburton. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992.

King, Stephen. *On Writing*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002.

Klauser, Henriette Anne. *Writing on Both Sides of the Brain*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986.

Murphy, John T. *Success without a College Degree*. Seattle, WA: Achievement Dynamics, Inc., 2001.

Procrastination. Study Skills Download Library, Academic Skills Center, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Retrieved from <http://www.sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl/procrastination.html>. Used with permission.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York, NY: Random House, 1984.

Sandburg, Carl. *Rootabaga Stories*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1922.

SARK. *The Bodacious Book of Succulence*. New York, NY: Fireside, 1998.

Schwartz, David J. *The Magic of Thinking Big*. New York, NY: Fireside, 1959.

Stanfill, Laura (Ed.). *Brave on the Page*. Portland, OR: Forest Avenue Press, 2012.

Strunk, William Jr. and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style*. New York, NY: Macmillan, 1979.

Tharp, Twyla. *The Creative Habit*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006.

Ueland, Brenda. *If You Want to Write*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1938.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to all the writers who have allowed me to quote them. Concerning the song lyrics that begin many of the chapters, I am indebted to the Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music at the Sheridan Libraries of the Johns Hopkins University.

I want to thank the many people who have shaped my writing and teaching. I'm grateful to Robin Jones Gunn for her encouragement and inspiration. I am changed by the hours of dedication and discovery by Joanna Rose and Stevan Allred. I owe much to educator Nancy Fertig and her wise process. Thank you to all my critique cohorts through the years; I'm grateful for each of my fellow writers around the Pinewood Table. I am indebted to Babs Griswold for her skillful editing and proofreading, and to Charity Heller for her advice and editing contributions. To my dear writing students and clients, you have inspired me as much as I have helped you. And, to my darling family, thank you. You are a part of everything I do.

About the Author

Christi Krug is an award-winning writer whose poetry, fiction, essays, and articles have appeared in everything from international magazines to hand-made publications. She has been teaching Wildfire Writing for Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, for over sixteen years. She is an enthusiastic, disarming presenter, conducting workshops for conferences, schools, and libraries as well as independently. Christi works with writers around the globe as a coach and editor, bringing out-of-the-box solutions. To learn more about Christi, or to get inspired by her blog, visit christikrug.com.