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The Path to Creativity

February 22, 2022 \$ 4 Comments

By **STEPHANIE WEAVER**

Stepping into the **labyrinth** on

March 1st 2020, I heard the polished gray river rock crunch beneath my feet. Dawn was breaking on the last day of a creativity retreat in the Santa Cruz mountains of Northern California. This movement-based meditation helped me see that living a creative life is like walking a labyrinth.



You choose to step forward. Not everyone does. I've met plenty of people who tell me they want to write *someday*. Stepping forward might look like breaking out of your comfort zone. Retreat speaker and storyboard artist **Domee Shi** could have continued in her role at Pixar, working on other people's films. Female directors are rare in animation. Yet she still pitched her idea about a little Chinese dumpling. **Bao** almost didn't get greenlit when Shi toned down her pitch to make it look "less weird." It went on to win the Academy award for Best Animated Short Film in 2019. "Step into your weirdness," Shi told us.

The labyrinth only works as a walking meditation if you follow its boundaries. You can leave the path and break the pattern, but then you aren't walking the labyrinth. Creativity requires discipline. It's easy to get impatient and want to finish. Yet getting to the center isn't the point of a labyrinth meditation—it's being present in the moment. **Professor, author, and cartoonist Lynda Barry** said, "The work comes first and the questions come later. We hold up our drawing and say, 'What does this mean? Am I a genius or a failure? And what do I DO with it?'" If we don't do the work, we'll never know.

Over the retreat weekend, the leader talked about thinking outside the box. I still believe the box is required—not something to break out of, but a road map to follow, similar to the constraints provided by the labyrinth. I returned home convinced of the absolute need for structure and limitations in order for creativity to flourish. **Chef Samin Nosrat** pushed the boundaries of what a **cookbook** could be with *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*, having it hand-illustrated and focused more on method than recipes, yet she produced something we all recognize as cookbook.

The attendees debated all weekend whether creativity required exploration or discipline. Most everyone chose exploration; I was nearly alone defending discipline. But the people I know who create—whether that's writing, art, or music—do the work. They do it because they must, not because it's glamorous or they want to be famous. I don't choose to write my books: they show up and demand I write them. I take that first step, then the next. The last two years have provided constraints like nothing we've ever experienced, and I've found keeping to my previous structure of daily creating difficult. I've made my steps smaller so I can keep inching forward.

You can explore all day, but I don't believe you're truly creative unless you sit down and produce on a regular basis, even if that's not a daily practice. The world is facing a host of scary problems, and unlimited exploration is not going to solve them. Discipline and focused creativity might. The late Amy Krouse Rosenthal made films waiting in the school pickup lane, what she called, "**making art in the crevices of life.**" As Amy's **short, bright existence attests**, we never know how much time we have. Don't wait.

Listening to Shi, Barry, and Nosrat inspired me to keep going with my writing, despite the challenges they've experienced. Barry noted she's never made a living at her art. Nosrat shared that her parents still "don't really know what I do" despite her best-selling cookbook and **Netflix series**. Mindfulness practices like walking the labyrinth help me stay grounded, focused on the present moment.

When you start walking a labyrinth, your main focus is getting to the center. Yet every time you think you're getting close, a turn takes you in the opposite direction. Keep walking and eventually you get there.

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But what is the center after all? Simply another place in the path. The labyrinth's design requires you to retrace your steps to finish. If you pay attention on the way out, every shift brings you a new perspective.

The labyrinth is a reminder: it's in the making of the art that the joy is found, not the result. Taking the next tiny step is worthwhile, even if only to feel the satisfying foundation of stone underfoot.

Stephanie Weaver, MPH is a writer, speaking coach, and recipe developer based in San Diego, CA. She's the host of *The Blue and Yellow Kitchen* and *The Resilience Series* on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Her fourth book, *The Migraine Relief Plan Cookbook* will be out July 12, 2022 ([preorder here!](#)). Follow her @sweavermph on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [TikTok](#).

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§ 4 Responses to *The Path to Creativity*

 Elizabeth Frank
February 22, 2022 at 7:20 am

Oh, I love this, Stephanie! "I returned home convinced of the absolute need for structure and limitations in order for creativity to flourish." May I quote this?

Reply

 buygreenchem
February 22, 2022 at 7:32 am

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 The Path to Creativity - MobsterTiger
February 22, 2022 at 7:32 am

[...] The Path to Creativity [...]

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 janpriddyoregon
February 22, 2022 at 9:59 am

Process over product.

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