

Series 5 Episode 5

Hello, this is episode five of the fifth series of *In Ten Years Time: How to Live a Creative Life*. And I am so glad that you are here. I'm Tricia Duffy. I am a songwriter, a media consultant, a singer, a writer, a public speaker, and a podcaster. And I'm here with an aim, an aim to inspire you to live a creative life, to find a balance of creativity that works for you and encourage you to make your creative dreams a reality.

I believe that there is a power in the combination of a ten-year plan coupled with small daily steps. The long-term vision lets us know where we are heading and taking one tiny action towards that vision every day, perhaps just for five minutes will make us instantly more content.

If you'd like to engage with this conversation, you can find me @intentyearstimeofficial on Instagram or Facebook. I [00:01:00] love hearing from you. If there's a topic you would like me to research, I would be delighted to investigate. I spent the last few years trialling ways to live a more creative life, and I'm distilling all I've learned in thousands of hours of research into this podcast series so that you can embark on a similar journey.

In this series, we are thinking about maintaining our creativity. About how we keep on keeping on when the going gets tough, when life gets in the way, or when boredom sets in. About how building good habits can support us, and about how we might manage the financial implications of living a creative life in today's economic system. About how we can always find something in our backstory to reinvigorate our creativity or our art, and how pushing through the darkness can sometimes reveal the most staggering work of all.

Today I'm asking, why me? Why am I [00:02:00] drawn to create when other ways to spend my time would be so much simpler? Why songwriting? Why podcasting? What is it about these practices that are so compelling to me and what can I find in my past, my circumstances and my personality to feed my creativity? How do I keep on keeping on when times are tough, when darkness threatens my very sense of self, perhaps in the face of diagnosis, loss, or change in circumstances?

What does it mean to ask why me, when it has the potential to lead me to disbelief, self-pity or sadness? When 'why me?' makes me feel like throw a tantrum rather than calmly picking up my pencil or my guitar. Why me? Well, why not me?

In every life, no matter how perfectly tuned it seems to be, sometimes difficult things happen. [00:03:00] I don't know a single person who hasn't at some point asked the question, why? Why is my life so hard? Why is everything stacked against me? It's a universal phenomenon. And in storytelling it has a name: 'The Hero's Journey'. And yes, most of us might not identify with the label of hero or even heroine, but this hero is an ordinary person, just like you or me.

It's a premise that was first described by writer Joseph Campbell, but drew on the work in archetypes from psychotherapist Carl Jung. Link to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* in the show notes, along with a more recent book by Joseph Vogler called *The Writer's Journey*, which is a resource I dip into frequently for my songwriting practice, even though it's not a songwriting book at all.

There are twelve phases in the Hero's Journey, and I can use each of them to map out my own journey to creativity, and I'm encouraging you to do the [00:04:00] same. In the face of challenges of maintaining our creativity, I believe it can really help to tell the story of our journey: from ordinary to extraordinary life. It helps us see how far we've come and where we're going next.

The first phase of the Hero's Journey is the ordinary world, the place, environment, and people that our ordinary hero or heroine is experiencing before the adventure begins. Think about the *Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy is just a simple girl, bored by her small-time life, feeling constrained by her aunt.

In the original movie, this part is in black and white. It's dull, predictable, ordinary. Thinking about our own lives, and indeed the life of Dorothy. This ordinary world can feel like a form of inertia when we're in it, but later in our story, it takes on new importance. Have you ever had such a rough time that [00:05:00] you've woken up in the morning and wished for a day in which nothing extraordinary happened?

Onto the second stage, 'the call to adventure'. Our protagonist receives a message or a call to embark on a quest or to complete a task. Can you relate to this? I know I can. Looking back on it, I can pinpoint several moments when this happened. Let me give you an example.

Around four years ago, I had lunch in a pub by the river with a songwriter friend from France called Virginie. She had completed a degree in songwriting at the West London University and it really changed her life. She suggested I do the same thing. A tiny idea, but a call to adventure. A message nevertheless.

It caused me to start researching things I could do. I explored the idea of a degree or a master's in songwriting. The call can come in many shapes and sizes. Dorothy's call to adventure is far more dramatic and comes in the form of a massive [00:06:00] tornado, transporting her to Oz with her dog. It could also be something much more devastating, like the loss of a loved one.

The third phase of the Hero's Journey is 'the refusal of the call'. Dorothy refuses to accept the challenge. Oh, all sorts of things here! Imposter syndrome, she's just an ordinary girl from Kansas. She didn't mean to kill one of the wicked witches, and she certainly isn't the great hope here to save the people of Oz that they think she is. She just wants to go home, quickly with no adventure.

My refusal of a call came in a smaller shape and size. A three-year degree full time was impractical. I probably wouldn't qualify for a master's and even if I did it in a year, it was too much for me to handle. I had a job, kids, a need to earn. There was no chance. End of discussion.

The next moment on the Hero's Journey is the meeting of the mentor, the Fairy Godmother character in [00:07:00] Cinderella, and for Dorothy, the Good Witch of the North, who furnishes her with red slippers and great belief.

It may be hard for you to pinpoint your mentors, these wise voices or guides that influence you and demonstrate utter faith in you as your

mind changes. I hope that you have multiple mentors that have shown you this belief and encouragement.

My mentors include my singing teacher and friend Rose, who has unwavering faith in my abilities as a singer. My producer for the Little Lore Project, Ollie, who always believes anything is possible, and Professor Sophie Daniels who I first met when I started exploring the idea of a master's in songwriting and told me in no uncertain terms that there was no reason whatsoever that I couldn't become a professional songwriter when I grew up, even though I was 51 at the time.

Who are your mentors? If you're finding it hard to pinpoint them right now, the self-appointed fairy godmother of creativity [00:08:00] is here, and I believe in you! You are creative. You always have been, and there is no reason at all that you can't be a painter, photographer, ceramicist, musician, writer, poet, glassblower, dancer, or singer when you grow up. Whether you are 20, 40, 60, or 80, it's never too late. Start now.

Okay, back to our heroine. What happens to Dorothy next? The next stage according to Campbell, is 'crossing the threshold'. Dorothy actually crossed the threshold when she landed in Oz, which in the story happened before she met her mentor. But Vogler points out that the Hero's Journey is rarely linear. I crossed the threshold into my new adventure, leaving the ordinary world behind on the first day I turned up at ICMP, a music school in London, to embark on my life-changing master's in songwriting.

But this is all going a little too smoothly so [00:09:00] far, isn't it? This is where stage six comes in, a series of tests and the introduction of allies and enemies, all the elements that help us build our tribe and grow along the way. Dorothy of course builds an unlikely but beautiful team with the lion, the tin man and the scarecrow. Together, they must face many trials, wicked witches, poppy fields, and their own inner demons: imposter syndrome again! The scarecrow that believes he has no brain. The heartless tin man, and of course the cowardly lion all have much to learn along the way.

My journey into studying a master's had me encountering many hurdles, how to feel safe sharing unfinished songs with a group of other songwriters, how to put myself, my grief, my loss, my heart into my

writing in a way that felt good for me. How to navigate and overcome the severe self-doubt [00:10:00] I had about my academic abilities. Bearing in mind I left school at 16 with just two qualifications and had repeatedly told myself a story for decades that I wasn't an academic person. And many more little hurdles besides relating to actually doing the work. Picking up the guitar, the pen, the keyboard, and just writing.

I want to talk about stages seven and eight together. Stage seven has the fantastic name of the 'approach to the innermost cave', and stage eight is the 'ultimate test or ordeal'.

This is the central challenge in the plot, the most dangerous or significant test. 'The innermost cave' presents itself when Dorothy realises, of course, she and her friends must challenge and defeat the wicked witch to reach the Emerald City.

My innermost cave took the form of my final research project for my master's. I've mentioned this project before in previous episodes, but I embarked on the [00:11:00] challenge to write an entire album from the perspective of a character Serafina from the *Rose Tattoo*, a play by Tennessee Williams. I used method acting techniques to get into character to see how they could help me write better songs from someone else's perspective. Simple to describe. But incredibly difficult to do.

Method acting relies on a technique called 'effective memory' or 'emotional substitutions'. It's a process whereby actors use their own emotional experience to conjure authentic feelings for the circumstances of the character. And this process required me to dig deep into some of my own unresolved trauma, and it was tough work. Of course the great benefits of this were that I processed a lot of grief and came out not only with a set of artifacts I'm proud of in the form of songs, but also a better sense of self and a new set of skills.

Internally, I had a moment when I realised what I was going to have to do, and then I took on the challenge. You can hear more about this [00:12:00] project in episode five of series three of this podcast. It's titled *Combining Crafts Skills and Medium*.

And what do you get for going through this ordeal? A reward of course!

In stage nine, Dorothy is rewarded with the knowledge and ability to return to Kansas, and I was rewarded many times over with beautiful friends for life, an album of songs I'm proud of, a master's in songwriting, which I passed with Distinction - it seems I was academic after all! - and a sense that being a songwriter is firmly part of my identity now.

These things that make the challenges and ordeals all worthwhile. But that's not the end of the story. These things come full circle, and as I mentioned at the start of this episode, there are 12 stages.

Stage 10 is described as 'the road back', the hero embarks on their return to the ordinary world, and [00:13:00] encounters some more obstacles along the way. For Dorothy, the biggest hurdles on the road back are emotional ones. She must leave behind the friends she has made along the way. Saying goodbye to the now-transformed Scarecrow who sees his own intelligence in a new light. The loving tin man with his beating heart, and of course the bravest lion in the whole of Oz.

Two more stages to go. The [00:14:00] penultimate one is 'the resurrection' or the 'final challenge'. Dorothy uses the ruby slippers she received from Glinda, the Good Witch right at the start of the story, Glinda telling her she just needs to click her heels three times and say the words, 'there's no place like home'. All this adventure, all these trials, and she had all she needed all along. The slippers have been on her feet the entire time. And this is such an important point and something I really want you to think about deeply.

All that Dorothy ever needed to return home was with her all along. All you need to live your creative life is with you now. It may not be a pair of slippers, but inside your soul you have everything. Everything you need to live a truly creative life. You might need to travel the Hero's Journey to access it, [00:15:00] but your inner strength is already there.

I had all I needed to create my final research project for my master's. It all came from me, and yet I wouldn't have been able to access it if I

hadn't have faced the challenges learned from the mentors and pushed through my final ordeal.

The final stage is the 'return with the elixir'. More than just a return to the ordinary world this full circle sees our heroine Dorothy land back in Kansas with a new appreciation and love for her life. She runs back to her auntie Em and the farm, and of course - as far as we know - lives happily ever after with all of the knowledge she has learned on her adventure in Oz. She no longer thinks of her life as boring. She cherishes her home.

My return to my ordinary world feels similar. I've left university a completely different person and embarked on the routine of my [00:16:00] life with new perspectives and appreciation. I had the confidence to create this podcast and do new things because I am, as it turns out, an academic person! And along the way, I realised how I could live a creative life. Who knew? Life feels pretty good. As I sit here with a copy of *The Writer's Journey* open on my desk, and my empty cup of coffee, and a plate of crumbs from the peanut butter toast I've been eating while I've been researching this episode, my ordinary life feels quite extraordinary. Why me? Why you? Why not?

The theme of this series is all about maintaining our creativity. I believe we will repeat the Hero's Journey many times over in our lives. Taking a moment to recognise the challenges, friendships, twists and turns in the context of this storytelling structure can aid us because the story is in progress. [00:17:00] What happens on the other side of the page has not yet been written, and walking into your challenges, embracing them might very well be the making of you.

I can think of many moments that set off a chain of events without which I wouldn't be where I am today. If I hadn't decided to go for a run that meant I fell over and wound up in hospital getting five stitches in my knee, I wouldn't have taken the next day off work and picked up a copy of Elizabeth Gilbert's *Big Magic* while I was lying on my bed with my leg up. If I hadn't allowed myself to fall in love, I would never have experienced the pain of loss and used that pain to write songs about it from the perspective of Serafina for my album inspired by a Tennessee Williams play.

By way of a more positive example, if I hadn't have created *In Ten Years Time*, I wouldn't have met some of the most inspiring people in my life. And if I hadn't had lunch with Virginie that day in February, I wouldn't even have thought about going to music school. [00:18:00] You have so much to tell, so much individual experience to offer the world. Put it into your art, your craft, and your practice, and share. We will all be better for it. Only you can tell your story or create your art because you are utterly unique.

Did you know that every single brain in every single person is completely different? Even in identical twins, our brains are influenced by both genetics and life experiences. We actually enhance parts of our brains by doing things. It's as individual as your fingerprint, and with that in mind, perhaps you have a duty to share your story and encourage others to do the same. I hope you're feeling encouraged by what you've heard, and it's been useful to explore the twists and turns of our own lives using the Hero's Journey.

I want to come to the ends now and offer the challenge [00:19:00] question and recommendation. The challenge is to spend some time thinking about when you've experienced the 12 phases of the Hero's Journey, or perhaps you can see that you are in one of the phases right now? Think about some specific thing that has brought you full circle with learning and insight. Perhaps you're in the middle of an ordeal right now. What might be the outcome, even in the depths of devastation can you consider how your journey might develop over the next 10 years?

The question is this, what's the one thing you wish you had, the one thing you wish you could do? The one thing you wish you were. Think about, Dorothy, the Lion, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow and the song: *If I only...* had a brain, a heart, the nerve. 'If only I was more creative, artistic, disciplined, intelligent, braver, [00:20:00] funnier', whatever! The lion, the tin man and the scarecrow had all the bravery, heart and brains they needed all along, all they really needed to do was change their perspective. You have everything you need. You are all you need. I believe in you.

The recommendation is to watch *The Wizard of Oz* with fresh eyes. Enjoy the Hero's Journey and let it encourage you to embrace all the

challenges and friendships life has to offer. It is these adventures that will enable you to access all the strength and creativity you've always had inside you.

Next time I'm honoured to share a special interview with my inspiring friend, Dr. Angela Chan. You've heard me mention her before on a previous episode. She was the artist who generously lent me her studio back in 2023 to write my collection of songs, *the River Stories*. She's an artist, a mum, a friend, a wife, an academic, [00:21:00] a writer, an inclusion expert, a storyteller. And earlier this year she was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

This is going to be a tough but important conversation in the context of maintaining our creativity. How do you carry on with anything when you are faced with such devastating news? Can our creativity help us deal with this kind of 'why me'? How should we think about the concept of 10 years and indeed, my entire philosophy in the context of facing up to a terminal diagnosis. It's a conversation I wish we didn't have to have, but sometimes life dishes out devastating blows.

We can skirt around the issues or we can face up to the realities and explore it. And that's what Angela and I have decided to do. She is one of the most amazing people I've ever known, and I can't wait for you to meet her too.

Until then, please engage with the conversation on Instagram [00:22:00] or Facebook. Sign up to my creativity newsletter on the website and if you know someone who might benefit from everything we've been thinking about today, please just open your phone right now and text them a link to this episode. I suspect they will appreciate that as much as I will. Until next time, keep creating, peace and love.