

Episode 4 - Transcript

[00:00:00] Hello and welcome to the fourth episode of series two of *In Ten Years' Time: How to Live a Creative Life*. This is the 10th episode in total. So we're officially in double figures. Thank you so much for being here. I'm Tricia Duffy. I'm a creative person. I'm a songwriter, a media consultant, a singer and a podcaster. And I'm here with an aim to inspire you to live a creative life. To find a balance of creativity that works for you and to encourage you to make that creative dream a reality.

With a combination of small daily steps and the heady power of ten to help us, we will live a more satisfying life. If you'd like to engage with this conversation, please follow me @intentyearstimeofficial on Instagram or Facebook.

I respond to every direct message and if there's a topic or question you'd like me to research and discuss, I would love to hear about it.

[00:01:00] I've spent the last two years trailing ways to live a more creative life and I'm distilling all I have learned in thousands of hours of research into this podcast series so that you can embark on a similar journey.

This series has an overarching theme of overcoming challenges, setbacks, blockers, doubts, guilt and expectations. As a means for us to counteract some of these common themes, today I want us to confidently celebrate our creativity as a means to actually improve our health and wellbeing.

There's a direct correlation between creative living and long-term health. Isn't that great news? Some of the things I've uncovered in my research for this episode have blown my mind and I can't wait to share them with you. My bold provocation for this conversation is that not only is living a creative life good for us as individuals, it's also good for our immediate family and friends, our wider community and for the planet at large. Yes, really.

Now before we go [00:02:00] any further I think we should remind ourselves what we mean by creativity. The Arts Council in England say that 'creativity describes the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something that wasn't there before.'

That's broad enough for me to enjoy as a definition because it could encompass the things that we traditionally think of as creative in the realm of the arts, music, theatre, dance or literature. But it could also include a garden or something that you bake.

Okay, so let's start with the individual benefits. If you have creativity in your life, I'm certain that none of what I'm about to say will surprise you. We intuitively know and feel the benefits of living a creative life.

I can remember shortly after having my first child, juggling motherhood, domestic responsibilities, and a full-time job, I decided to join a local choir. Every Tuesday night I would walk up the street to practice. I could almost feel the weight of [00:03:00] the week lifting from my shoulders. I looked forward to it. For two hours there was nothing else to think about or do.

The concentration levels required to sing complex choral ensemble are quite high. On face value, this might seem as though I was adding more stress into my life, more requirements for my brain to work. But the truth is that it did the opposite. It had an almost meditative quality. When I left practice, I felt rejuvenated, refreshed, ready to face whatever life had up its sleeve for the next few days. And I want to explore why I had this feeling for us now.

The University of the Arts London and Brunel University in the UK conducted a wide reaching project between September 2023 and January 2024. Their extensive research showed that creative activities contributed positively to a wide range of wellbeing related outcomes. The specific activities they explored included creative writing, theatre

making, art, video [00:04:00] making, art therapy, clay handling, and virtual reality art making.

Through the rigorous collection of mainly qualitative data, they found that participants reported the following benefits: improvement to quality of life; reduction in stress, anxiety and depression; increased positive mood; improved self-esteem; a reduction of fear; and a sense of social connection. It's a great advert for living a creative life, wouldn't you say?

I'll add a link to the report in the show notes. As I've said already, I'm not sure that we need a scholarly research programme to clarify these benefits. They're obvious to anyone who has creativity in their life. But regardless, it is comforting to know that it's a shared experience backed up by the academy.

One of the things the report didn't cover in detail was the idea of having purpose in life, which I believe is ultimately tied to our creativity. And I also believe it is important for anyone going through any kind of transition. That may be something [00:05:00] dramatic like grief or loss. We discussed this in episode six of the podcast when I interviewed photographer Richard Cranfield about his creative journey after the death of his wife. Or it could be a more usual kind of change, such as children leaving home or a change in your working status, such as redundancy or retirement.

Having a creative passion and a long-term direction of travel - yes, it's that 10-year plan again - becomes part of your identity. It gives you meaning and purpose in your life. When other things around you are changing, it can provide a constant that allows you to continue to feel fulfilled. Professor Dr. Glenn Agung Hole, management philosopher and leadership expert, suggests that people who have purpose in life and a strong sense of direction are happier, more resilient and more successful than those who don't. I won't get into the success debate again now. Head back to the very first episode of series one if you missed it and are interested in that conversation.

But [00:06:00] happiness and resilience form a huge part of our personal sense of wellbeing. He also says that those people living with purpose are more likely to contribute positively to society and to the environment. I'll put a link to the article by Glenn in the notes.

Taking this health benefit theme further, there are numerous studies in the National Library of Medicine that state a positive correlation between having a purpose in life and the impact on Alzheimer's disease, both in reducing the risk of onset and the impact on cognitive function after diagnosis.

This research is absolutely fascinating, and as we have discussed in previous episodes, we are all living much longer as a society in general, and Alzheimer's is considered by the medical community to be one of the most significant public health challenges of our times. Progress into developing medical interventions that can help are so far very limited, but the science has proven that purpose and creativity can alter both your life expectancy and the quality of your life.

For those who are already [00:07:00] diagnosed, art and music has been found to have profound effects on those suffering from disease at all stages of its progression. In particular, the Alzheimer's Association suggests that art can offer a sense of accomplishment and purpose that is critical for anyone suffering from dementia, as it offers them a chance for self-expression, especially if verbal communication becomes difficult.

I don't want to get into politics right now, but I will say that given this extensive research by the scientific community, I find it utterly extraordinary that governments the world over are allowing funding for creativity in schools to be cut. It seems obvious to me that we should be investing in art, drama and music for our children and supporting them to continue in creative practice alongside traditional academic learning as a lifelong pursuit. They would all thank us on their 80th birthday!

But there are some places that are doing things a bit better. In Japan, they have a term, Ikigai, which refers to [00:08:00] the state of wellbeing

that arises from devotion to activities that you enjoy that also bring a sense of fulfilment. There are also some places in Japan which are these so-called Blue Zones. These are the places in the world where a significant proportion of the population live to be over 100 years old.

Along with expected dietary and exercise factors, there's another theme impacting these communities. Purpose, creativity, and learning. In Japan, they advocate for the idea of lifelong learning. There are even universities just for older people in Japan. This commitment to lifelong education is less focused on cultural betterment and employability, but instead predicated on social engagement and personal enrichment. And the benefits? An aging population that is in better health, which creates less strain on resources, and a population that contributes to society for longer. [00:09:00] Again, I will add a report on this in the show notes if you would like to read more.

There are some other individual benefits besides the impact on our general wellbeing and our health. As we heard in episode 6 of the first series, creativity gives us the ability to process difficult things. It can give us an outlet to express ourselves in a different way, an outlet for our feelings. I recently attended a conference about the transformative power of songwriting. The evidence provided by the academics in attendance included examples of people writing songs at the end of life to leave a legacy for their families, individuals using hip hop to communicate and process their place in society and songwriting to tell a story of trauma.

The conference also included a presentation from a woman who was a care experienced person and who had written an entire musical that not only offered her a way to heal herself, but also offered a narrative that dealt with the over [00:10:00] romanticised stories of orphans such as Annie and Oliver, offering other care experienced people a means to be seen and heard through art.

We all have individual suffering of some kind and art can be a means to process it all from huge loss and trauma through to minor daily

aggressions or issues. This week I was verbally attacked by a man in the post office. I won't go into details but it was unpleasant and it left me shaken and angry.

Fortunately for me, I'm working on an album at the moment and I wanted to include a song that had punk leanings. I was able to reframe what was a horrible situation, albeit a relatively minor one, to use the feelings of anger I had to write an angry song. Now it would have been better, perhaps, if I'd have turned up at the post office ten minutes earlier, or ten minutes later, but these things are unpredictable. And having an outlet for my feelings offered me a way to process them and allowed me to create something I'm very proud of.

There's one more individual [00:11:00] benefit that I want to discuss, and maybe it's one that's a bit less talked about, but I believe that living a creative life has enabled me to reduce my spending. I make different choices about how I spend according to my means. My income has reduced significantly but I'm happier with less. I don't get tempted by shopping choices. I've unsubscribed to those weekly sales notices from shops I used to frequent. I politely decline expensive nights out. I make my food from scratch and I keep takeouts to a minimum. Although, with two boys at home, I do sometimes lose this battle on a Friday night! I'm not a hermit, don't get me wrong, but I am more selective, which also gives me more time to create. Win win.

If you've ever taken a flight, you will know that before you take off, they give a safety demonstration. As part of that demonstration, they mentioned that in the event of the oxygen masks being required, you must fit your own mask before helping anyone else. I mentioned at the start of this episode, that I [00:12:00] believe our creativity has a positive impact on our family and friends.

And this illustrates what I mean. If you're caring for someone or you're part of any family or social group, you are better able to help and contribute to other people's wellbeing if you're in good nick yourself,

and I don't just mean physically, but mentally as well. You can't pour from an empty cup.

The proven benefits of creativity on your health both now and long term will mean that you are more able to participate in your social setting, more likely to prosper later in life, and you will have more resources available to you when someone needs your help. Not only that, but your art has the potential to be a gift in its own right: a conversation starter, or a means to communicate something difficult. Whether that presents itself as a beautiful garden for others to enjoy, a song, a painting, a handmade coffee cup, a performance, a piece of jewellery, a photograph, or a loaf of home baked bread. [00:13:00]

A few episodes ago I mentioned I was songwriter in residence on Johnson's Island, a tiny landmass in the Grand Union Canal in Brentford, which houses several small artist studios. Recently they had an open studio. All the artists were there with their individual rooms open to the public. They came together along with local residents and I was offered the chance to play the songs I wrote on the island as a short set.

I set up my busker's amp in the courtyard surrounded by the water and the art on a beautiful sunny evening and played 30 minutes of songs, all themed around the river. Then I got the chance to look at their amazing paintings and collages, chat with the local people and have a small glass of wine too. It was more than community, it was communion, connection. There was a shared energy of calm, contentment and joy. Art brings people together in all its forms.

So, [00:14:00] we have discussed how our creativity can benefit us as individuals, benefit our family, our friends, the wider community.

I said at the start of this conversation today that I also believe that living a creative life can positively impact the planet. So let me tell you why I'm making such a bold statement. By embracing art and valuing our time differently, we change the way we consume. I mentioned that I've

reduced my spending, but of course the byproduct of that reduction is that I'm reducing the amount I consume.

The climate crisis is a systemic problem that can't be solved by the actions of one person alone. However, household consumption is responsible for more than 60 percent of global emissions. This isn't always something that companies want you to hear, given that their success is measured against targets that rely on us consuming more and more.

And I want to be clear that I don't think it is your responsibility to solve climate change, unless you happen to be somebody in a position of great influence in government or corporate [00:15:00] leadership. But I do think that the way we consume influences the ecosystem. We all need to consume. We all need clothes, food, shelter to survive.

But we can decide to consume differently, and I believe that valuing your time over your stuff, valuing what you create over what you buy, valuing repurposed or homemade over mass-produced can help to move the needle on this existential issue.

It's time for me to pose my question, offer a challenge and a recommendation for this week. The question, or perhaps I should say questions, is what is your purpose in life? What are the things that give your life most meaning? What is it in your life that gives you most joy? If you think about those Japanese schools for adults, what would you like to learn if such a thing existed where you live?

Spend some time meditating or journaling on this. If you find it challenging, have another look at the 10-year plan template I've created to [00:16:00] help you with specifics. It's available on the website.

The challenge: I would like to challenge you to find a way to take your creativity into the community somehow. Perhaps you can participate in a performance. Create something that highlights an issue. Offer your skills as a gift, either via a piece of work or sharing your craft with

others. There will be benefits that you get from sharing, and you will reap the circular benefits of helping others to live a more creative life too.

And finally for the recommendation, I'm going to recommend two documentary series. The first is for listeners in the UK because it's available on Channel 4. It's called *How to Live to 100*. The second is of a similar theme and it's on Netflix. *Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones*. Now these are not strictly about creativity, but there are lessons in these series that relate to our creative living around purpose and meaning that I found both interesting and inspiring.

Thank you so much for [00:17:00] joining me this week. If you've enjoyed the podcast, please tell a friend about it. And don't forget to sign up for my newsletter via the website intoneyearstime.com. I send recommendations and creativity tips every fortnight.

I'm working hard to keep the podcast ad free. If you've got some value from the episode so far, please consider buying me a coffee. You can do that on my website too.

Next time we're going to discuss ways we can deal with creative blocks. Until then, I wish you peace and love.