

EDITOR'S CHOICE BOOK REVIEW

BY: Carol Hardin'

BIG MAGIC

Creative Living Beyond Fear

By Elizabeth Gilbert

I have two comments before I begin the review: First, our publisher, Anne Groebner, discovered this book and sent to me for reading and review and second, Elizabeth Gilbert is one of our very favorite writers. You may know her as the author of *Eat Pray Love*. When I am looking for a good book, I look for good writing (something I don't have to edit as I read!), a good story or concept and enough excitement or new knowledge to keep me reading. Elizabeth Gilbert has never disappointed me so I am recommending any of her books as worth your time to read.

First, she asks: What is creativity? The relationship between a human being and the mysteries of inspiration. The book is divided into six sections: Courage, Enchantment, Permission, Persistence, Trust and Divinity.

She introduces us to a poet named Jack Gilbert, not related to her, who was born in Pittsburg in 1925 and who you probably have never heard of...me, neither. She said he became a poet the way other men become monks: as a devotional practice, as an act of love and as a lifelong commitment to the search for grace and transcendence...a good way to become anything that calls to your heart and brings you to life. Jack would write a book of poetry and it would win prestigious awards and much acclaim for Jack was very handsome, brilliant, a magnet for women and an idol for men. He was even photographed for *Vogue* but then, he would disappear for a decade or more. He lived in Europe for 20 years, in Italy for a few years and in Denmark but mostly, he lived in a shepherd's hut on a mountain in Greece. After 20 years, he wrote another poetry book followed by great acclaim and by his disappearance again and a decade later, he wrote another, again much ballyhooed. He never stayed and "enjoyed" his fame because he found it boring! But he took a teaching position in the Creative Writing Department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Elizabeth Gilbert followed him in this position after he left. That's where she first read his poetry.

And that's where she started asking questions about Jack Gilbert. Students told her he was the most extraordinary man they'd ever met. He seemed not quite of this world but seemed to live in a state of uninterrupted marvel and he encouraged them to live the same. He told them they must live their most creative lives as a means of fighting back against the ruthless furnace of this world. And, he asked them most of all to be brave. Without bravery, they would never know the world as richly as it longs to be known and their lives would remain small without bravery. Elizabeth never met Jack because she said she had developed such a vivid picture of him and his philosophy that she didn't want to change it. That is what some people can do to our lives. Change them just by knowing ABOUT them!!! Could you be that kind of person?

Do you have the courage to bring forth the treasures that are hidden within you? Surely something wonderful is sheltered within you. We all have something of value to share with the world. She says she believes we are all walking repositories of buried treasure and we just have to dig it out! The search for what is hidden within us is the difference in a mundane life and a more enchanted one. The result of that search is the name of this book, *Big Magic*!

She lamented that many of us stop looking for the Big Magic in our teens when the very talented are officially shunted off from the herd and the rest of us are pretty much told that we are the more commonplace. NO ONE IS COMMONPLACE! We all have jewels embedded in ourselves that just need digging out and no one should live a commonplace life when so much more is there for the asking, just for the bravery of asking! When we step away from the commonplace and we “indulge” ourselves in achieving something we love, that is creative living. You don’t have to give up your job, leave your family, live on a mountain in Greece. You just have to follow your dreams. Maybe you excelled at something when you were very young but you weren’t “the best.” Not good enough to make a career of it but didn’t you enjoy it? If so, then why stop. And about that job, try to find something that you can work on every day that you truly enjoy. It may not be the best paying job. It may not be what other people call “creative” but, if it makes you happy, go for it!

Then Elizabeth addresses fear. That may well be why many of us never achieve a truly creative life. (We are not talking about art, theater and other areas usually thought of as “creative. Having a creative life is having a life being your best self.) Elizabeth said she can talk about fear because she has always been an exceptionally fearful person which led her to this journey. She said her fear started as a child but she had a Minnesota farm raised mother who took no nonsense. You’re scared of the water, in you go. Not a sophisticated strategy but consistent. She fought her mother through much of her childhood but, finally, in her late teens, she realized she was fighting to keep a weakness. Who does that?! “Argue for your limitations and you get to keep them.” Most important? Understanding the difference in bravery—doing something scary and fearlessness---not understanding what the word scary means. You need your fear for basic survival. Fear is triggered though by creativity because you are working with uncertain outcomes and fear hates uncertain outcomes. So, if you are going to have creativity in your life, you have to learn to cope with fear.

Now this part is truly what this book is about: This is how Elizabeth believes creativity functions: Our planet is inhabited not only by us and other animals, etc. but also by ideas, a disembodied, energetic life-form, able to interact with us...They have consciousness and they have will. Ideas are driven by a single impulse: to be made manifest and they need collaboration with a human partner to achieve this. All ideas: artistic, scientific, industrial, commercial, ethical, religious, political, are looking for that human partner who can bring it into being. And you can say “yes” or “no” when an idea comes knocking on your brain. Maybe it’s the wrong time, the wrong idea for you so you say “no” but maybe it is the right time for you and the right idea for you and you say, “yes.” Elizabeth says she believes through most of history most people approached creative ideas with full cooperation, humbly and joyfully. She believes you should receive your inspiration with respect and curiosity, not with drama and dread. Clear out whatever obstacles are in way of your most creative life.

You will love the story of how she met writer Ann Patchett (another favorite of mine) and how an idea she lost got found, as ideas will do as they are alive and they seek the nearest available collaborator who will work well with them. There is also something usually called “multiple discovery,” a term used in the scientific community when two or more scientists in different parts of the world come up with the same idea at the same time or about the same time. (Calculus, oxygen, black holes, the Mobius strip, the existence of the stratosphere and the theory of evolution are just a few ideas that had multiple discoverers. And remember what happened when personal computers started hitting the market in the 1990s?!

Your life and my life, they are composed of the results of the choices we have made. Reading this book may just lead you to change some of those choices...or not. Whichever, it is a book well worth reading!

