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Field Notes on the Care and Feeding of the Artist

by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg * www.CarynMirriamGoldberg.com

There's so much to balance as a writer or as any artist: your "day job" (whether that's going to school, holding down a job, taking care of a family), the usual and unusual demands of life, and our art. Some ideas:

Feed the artist luscious and soul-satisfying words:

- Read. Read in your genre, read outside your genre, read in the dining room, read in the bedroom, read in the bathroom, read on the porch or deck, read on trains and planes, with foxes and in and out of boxes.
- Books on tape: Let someone else read to you, especially during long drives.
- Write: Get yourself a journal you like, and then paste inside (that glue stick again) pictures, quotes, poems, images from magazines, flowers and leaves that speak to you. Write truly for yourself as well as for others.

Let the artist play with more than just words:

- Try collage You can collage around certain themes or questions, such as: What should my work be next? How can I fulfill all my obligations in life without going out of my mind? How in tarnation can I get through the holidays with my family? Where should my writing or storytelling or acting go next?
- Make mandalas. Simply get some watercolor paper, and some cool, gel pens, and a compass. Make concentric circles with the compass, and then color them with the gel pens in without thinking about what you're doing too much.
- Listen to or play music.
- Dance or move in some way that feels good.
- Hang or post words of wonder on your walls.

Let the artist play, work, learn and teach with others:

- Get thee with artist friends – in and/or out of your genre and medium. Meet for coffee, pizza or sushi. Talk how you keep yourself going, cope with general artistic angst or anything else.
- Coach yourself and/or find a friend or real coach to help you periodically re-evaluate how things are going, and what you need to do next:

There's nothing like a good witness to help you see where you're driving yourself into the ground and how to stop.

- Communicate with your ancestors: Look at the legacy they left you – whether they were vibrant artists or depressed refugees or both. Then use art or reflection or whatever is your practice to dialogue with these myths and legacies.
- Maybe it goes without saying, but the world is material for you! But use material without using people.

Give the artist time and space enough to create:

- Do nothing enough to open up the space in your soul. Take time out to stare at walls, trees, into darkness or the light.
- Quit things and say no: When you realize you're doing too much, start quitting things.
- "My precious!" may apply to the ring Frodo carries, but it also applies to our bodies. Treat your precious self – body and soul – to what you need most for your health and healing. Most of all, get enough sleep – at all costs – because that what will help you feel your sanest and strongest.
- Practice a practice – yoga, meditation, walking, yodeling, singing, finger-snapping, etc. – on a regular basis for overall health and to diminish/transform stress.
- Be of the world and not just of the world: Pay attention to community and culture issues, news, urgencies, but also take time to get outside (literally!) of worldly concerns.

Cultivate continual beginner's mind:

- Do all you can on an as-needed basis to banish judges inside you, or transform them into fine editors who nap when you're in first-draft mode.
- If, when you sit down and start to do something, you realize that you have no idea what to do or how to do it, then you're ready! Intend to dwell in whatever comes as opposed to intending to make specific things happen.
- Work like a dog, sleep like a cat, and sing out

the names of all the elephants in the room. Do excellent work and tell your truth.

- Remember that the heart of creativity is in the

space between the heart beats – what you create, and also the space between where you learn to let go, and instinctively follow what comes.