



## Inspiration

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<sup>6</sup> **W**HERE DO YOU GET YOUR IDEAS? I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked that question. Inspiration is too often regarded as a mysterious, intangible part of the creative process, reserved for the anointed few — the inventor, the great artist, the genius. But inspiration is just ideas, and we all have those. I believe we are all creative and we all experience moments of inspiration every day. Don't believe me? Try this: Carry a notebook with you for one week. Every time you have an idea, make a note. It can be anything, big or small, extraordinary or banal. Don't censor yourself and don't judge your ideas; no one else has to see them. Jot them down and move on. At the end of the week, review your notes. You might be surprised at how often the muse strikes, and how frequently we bat her away, like a bothersome fly, because we're 'too busy right now'. We have ideas all the time. The key is paying attention.

In her book *Big Magic*, Elizabeth Gilbert claims, 'Ideas are disembodied, energetic life forms...and the only way an idea can be made manifest in our world is through collaboration with a human partner.' She backs up this concept with a more practical caveat that ideas will only come to us if we're willing to listen. Most of the time, that's about doing the work.

Rose Tremain, in her *10 Rules for Writers*, says, 'Along with the gathering of hard data, allow yourself also to dream your idea into being.' When it comes to writing, most good ideas take time to blossom from initial spark to executed concept, and most of that growth comes out of the work, the 'gathering of hard data.' Research, writing and thinking time — for Tremain,



these are inseparable. As artist Chuck Close once said, ‘Inspiration is for amateurs — the rest of us just show up and get to work.’

When I sat down to write this piece, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to say. I could have waited for the perfect circumstances: a day free from obligation, time to contemplate, and for the muse to grace me with her presence. I’d have been waiting a long time. It’s true that, once or twice in my writing life, I have experienced something close, when a piece of writing has come to me fully formed, spilling onto the page almost faster than I can write, and needing very little editing. Those times were exhilarating and otherworldly, but I can count them on one hand. On reflection, they only happened after I’d laid the foundations. Somewhere in my subconscious those ideas had probably been forming for some time. I had already done the work. Because, as seductive as the idea of transcendent inspiration might be, the reality is usually more mundane. As Charles Bukowski puts it, in his myth-busting poem about the perfect conditions for creativity, ‘Air and light and time and space/ have nothing to do with it/ and don’t create anything/ except maybe a longer life to find/ new excuses/ for.’