**Starting-Over Guidesheet #3**



**What Do You Really Know?**

***Judith Couchman***

Lately I’ve been reading books by Julia Cameron, the woman who wrote *The Artist’s Way,* the bestselling book and workbook about getting creatively “unstuck.” In her seminar and book, she’s encouraged thousands of wannabe artists of all types to make their creative dreams a reality. However, I think Cameron’s insights about fulfilling our desires can reach us all, and especially if we’re starting over.

Cameron works from the inside out, coaxing us to discover what we harbor deep within: not only our unfulfilled dreams, but also the personal myths that keep us from pursuing those adventures or even liking ourselves. The good, the bad, and the ugly need mining so we can push past our inner roadblocks. She believes that, especially in childhood, we absorb negative remarks about our personalities and abilities, and carry those opinions throughout our lives. Unless we excavate these disparaging falsehoods and replace them with positive truths, we constantly limit ourselves and live in disappointment.

You’ve probably heard this wisdom before, but have you applied the excavation work to your starting-over process? Does somebody’s assessment of you block your forward movement? Have others shamed you into believing myths about yourself? Read what Cameron says about this shaming in her book, *The Vein of Gold.* If you’re not pursuing artistic dreams, then substitute your own words in the parentheses I’ve inserted. I think the words “creative” and “dreamer/dream” can be used interchangeably in these paragraphs. Her insights apply to everyone.

*Any severe artistic [or other] shaming is sufficient to cause such a self-displacement, and the results can be catastrophic in terms of both identity and productivity. Our gift for design, our gift for poetry [our gift or desire for \_\_\_\_\_ ]—some part of us is judged and then disowned. This disowned gift goes underground. Yes, it would be lovely if we were resilient enough to shrug these shamings off, but we often can’t.

Since the creative [dreamer] part of us is always childlike no matter what our chronological age, we have no sophisticated defenses that are proof against volleys of disparagement. The very vulnerability and openness that makes us creative [dream, wish, hope, plan] makes us able to be wounded, hurt, and misled. This is why these epithets must be made conscious. They must be dragged into the light of reason and dismantled like rifles lest we turn them on ourselves.*

I think we also know we’re worth more than these people’s remarks. In our quiet moments *we know we’re better than this;* *we know we’re capable of much more.* In this guidesheet, review the negative assessments other people made about you and what you really know about yourself—what’s true and positive. Take time to make lists, write about how your feel, and then ponder what you can do.

1. *What did they say?* What have people said that marred your self-esteem, underestimated your abilities, or otherwise kept you from believing in yourself and moving toward your dreams and goals?
2. *What do you really know?* What do you really know about yourself, deep within? What is good? What are your true abilities? What are you capable of achieving? Who are you, really?
3. *What can you change?* The answer might seem obvious, but what can you change so you won’t live by the negative assessments?
4. *How can you live by what you really know?* How can you begin to change, live by a true and positive assessment of yourself, and start over?

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