

NURTURING & CREATIVITY

A GUIDE
FOR BUSY
MOMS



Erika Heston '03

RENEE TOUGAS

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Nurturing Creativity: A Guide for Busy Moms

Renee Tougas

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Disclosure: There is one affiliate link in this book. I include that resource because I truly recommend it. If you make a purchase using that link it helps to support our family. Thank you.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my children - Céline, Laurent-Auguste and Brienne. I didn't write this book *for* you but *because* of you.

What I share in these pages is what you have taught me. Being your mother has been the most life changing and character building relationship I've ever known. I honestly would not be who I am, without being your mother. *You taught me I am creative.* This is just one of the many gifts you've given me.

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Preface

In the Bible, there is a verse that when paraphrased, goes something like:

Do not despise small beginnings.

This advice, echoed many other places, has brought me a lot of encouragement over the past couple years.

This is my very first e-book. It's small. It needed to be if I was going to find time in my wonderfully full life as a mom, homemaker and homeschooler to actually write and publish it. For a while I thought that if I couldn't publish something big, something in hardcopy, I couldn't really publish at all.

Then I looked around and saw what amazing women - writers, artists, and teachers - were doing. Small scale.

And I asked, "why can't I do that?" And there was no reasonable answer why I couldn't except for my own fear.

Fear of not being good enough. Fear of rejection. Fear of good ol' fashioned hard work. (The ideas in this book have come easily to me but disciplining myself to sit down and write them and then edit, edit and edit some more has not always been easy.)

Fear can stop us in our creative tracks. In fact, there's a whole lot that can stop us from doing amazing work - in our homes and our world.

Living creatively requires a healthy measure of courage and also grace.

We offer this grace to our children, at least I should hope we do. We don't expect them to have it all together and produce an artistic masterpiece at the age of three, or ten or eighteen. We give them room to grow. We encourage them. We know that they will start in a small place, for they are small people.

But we know that they won't stay in that place. That with a bit of love and learning they will fly.

So too will you. So too will I.

This is a book about nurturing creativity in your life as a busy mom. And for many of us this starts small. With small projects, small amounts of time, and even small levels of skill. This is where you start, but it's not where you stay.

Be patient with yourself. Be patient with the process.

The goal is not to "go big or go home". The goal is grow creatively, to express the Divine beauty and creative gifts you have been given. And in doing so, to bless and serve others.

It is my hope for you that you will not despise the small beginnings of your own creativity. That you will grow and blossom beyond your wildest dreams, that you will honor the seasons of motherhood in your life. That you will experience the joy in using your creative gifts to make your home and the world a beautiful place.

Thank you for reading. I am honored that you are joining me in my small beginnings.

Introduction

Growing Creatively

I didn't grow up thinking I was particularly creative. My family is musical - piano, singing and concert band were part of my life - but "really" creative people were those that painted art to hang on the walls. Or maybe pursued a career in theatre. That definitely left me out of the picture.

Looking back now on my home, growing up, I see it was very creative. Building, cooking, sewing, handicrafts, an appreciation for natural beauty, in addition to music - all of these and more were modeled and lived by my parents.

But we didn't describe ourselves as creative - any more than we called ourselves artists - even though my parents created beautiful homes, beautiful meals and if I must say so, beautiful children (ahem).

I grew up and went to university to become a teacher. I studied biology and math and was on the track to teach these subjects to upper grade students.

As a student I met Damien, got married and started my journey as a homemaker while finishing my undergraduate degree. Sure I cooked, sewed, planned my wedding (down to the itty bitty creative detail), dabbled in decorating and started my love affair for growing pretty plants - but at the time I wouldn't have said I was creative. No, no, that wasn't me. My friends in the university's Fine Art Department (or even English majors) - now they were creative. They were studying how to be artists, musicians, actors, writers. Me, I was studying the hard facts of

biology and numbers and how to become an inspiring teacher.

The Gift of Motherhood

I never did set up my own classroom. Céline was born a month after graduation and instead of a teaching career I committed my energies full time to home and hearth. This was what I really wanted to do all along anyway - raise my babies (two followed after the first in short succession), manage our home, and eventually homeschool.

And it was in this space, as a mother strongly desiring to nurture my children's own creative gifts, that I started to recognize my own creativity. As soon as my children were old enough to chew a crayon I recognized they were creative beings. I didn't teach them "art", they just naturally wanted to explore, learn and express themselves, from a very young age.

I encouraged my children's innate creativity, giving them time to explore and play, allowing them to make a mess and make "mistakes". (There are no mistakes when children create, that was my hang up, not theirs.) I supplied a few tools (paints, play dough, markers, crayons, paper, goggly eyes) and made space for creativity in our home and then I watched them bloom. Just like the plants I tended in my flower garden.

It's not that my children were creating artistic masterpieces, they weren't art prodigies or anything like that. But they weren't afraid to try things, they saw the world from such a unique perspective (and I don't just mean two feet off the ground). They reveled in the newness of their experiences and saw beauty in the most interesting of places. **My children modeled for me how to open myself up to see, experience and create.**

Then it happened. My light bulb moment, or rather slow illumination that I, Renee Tougas, was creative. My children taught me this. And the example of other women, predominantly online, sharing their stories and their art, have taught me this.

I observed that in a loving environment, with encouragement, a bit of inspiration, and a few supplies, my children blossomed into creativity. **I wanted that too.** So I set out to give myself that gift, to create a home environment where not only did my children get to make a mess and create beautiful works of art but I got to do that also.

Recognizing myself as a creative is not about the giving myself permission to "make crafts" but is about a transformation in how I understand myself and view the world. Being a creative person is more than sewing a quilt, writing music, performing music, taking photos, etc. **It's about being a problem solver and a beauty maker and our homes needs that. The world needs that.**

My own "making something" with my head, heart and/or hands creative activities over the years have included household decorating and sewing, event planning, cooking, scrapbooking, video production, crochet, gardening, writing, playing guitar, knitting, soap making, needle felting, photography, and blogging, to name a few.

I've come to describe what I do simply as *creative living*, not defined by any one craft or activity but an overall approach to life. An approach to life, I might add, that is helping our family to live our dreams and create a livelihood consistent with our values.

Tending Your Creative Garden

I'm a gardener (and a writer) so indulge me this metaphor for just a moment before you move on in this book.

Creativity is like a seed. Recently the kids and I planted some seeds for container gardening this summer, and they can tell you (at least I hope they can!) all a seed needs to germinate is moisture, a certain temperature and a substrate of some kind.

In nature, seeds will germinate in the oddest of places - like in a sidewalk crack which weeds of

course are notorious for doing.

But to really thrive a seed needs to be planted in good soil. Rich, fertile earth. Oh I can smell it now!

That seed needs to be watered. It needs the sun. It needs a bit of nurturing.

If you provide a seed, and then a growing plant, the basics of what it needs - which honestly isn't very much - you will reap the rewards of either beautiful blossoms or fruit, sometimes both.

I'm not sure where you are in your creative journey.

If a seed has been planted in your heart, I want to provide warmth and water. I want to see that baby germinate!

If you are struggling to grow where you've been planted I want to encourage you that there is beauty in unexpected places. And that if all the space you have is a small garden, in this stage of motherhood, that doesn't mean you can't bloom.

Have you just been transplanted? Ouch, that does hurt. I want to mulch and water you deeply. You'll come back and those blossoms will be bigger and brighter and more beautiful. Just give it some time.

My dream for this book is to tend the garden of your creative spirit.

Are you ready to honor, value and prioritize creativity in your life? Are you wondering how to weave creative pursuits into your life work as a mother? (Who has the time?) Are you ready to bloom?

Yes?

Let's get started then.

1. The Importance of Creativity

I am going to touch on this only briefly since this topic is a book in itself.

People write Ph.D. dissertations on this topic, research and study the importance of creativity at universities and think tanks, and give world renowned [TED talks](#) on this subject (one of my all time favorite TED talks to date). And here I am, little mama in the woods, sharing my two cents.

A Creative Philosophy

These are just a few beliefs of mine that help explain why we place so much emphasis on creativity in our home.

- We were created in the image of God - the grand, awesome, blow-your-mind Creator of the Universe.
- Inside each one of us there is creativity and beauty because the Creator is creative and beautiful.
- Creativity is not about being able to draw and paint (though it might be for some). It's about making things, solving problems, experiencing beauty, and exploring ideas. It's a key piece to being "educated" and feeling challenged and fulfilled as a human being.
- Creativity is not synonymous with crafts, though crafting is definitely a creative expression. Solving a complex math problem with out-of-the box thinking, writing elegant computer software, and baking a loaf of bread are all expressions of creativity.
- Creativity resides in each one of us and it's a joy to discover, develop and share our

unique creative gifts.

- Creativity is connected to everything, it's a part of our overall wellbeing. Interwoven with our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health.

These are just a few of the foundational pieces to our family's creative philosophy. It's an evolving understanding and the more I create the more I understand the value of it in my life.

2. Motherhood: The Genesis of Creativity

I know what some of you might be thinking, "that's fine for you Renee because you like to take pictures and write but I'm just not very creative".

I wish I had the space and time to write a whole book debunking that lie. I'm sure someone has written about this already.

Instead I'm going to speak to something you do right now, every day. A creative gift you are investing your heart and soul into - motherhood.

Let's start with birth.

Birth itself, and conception that precedes it, is the most creative act we as humans are capable of - new life! And mothers have the privilege of bringing a new life - never seen before, never seen again, full of amazing human potential - into existence.

We mothers do this. Every day, the world over. Perhaps because it's so commonplace we easily forget the sacred beauty and immense creative life force in the act of conception and birth. And we say we're not creative!

A human being is the most exquisite piece of art.

Are you raising a child? Feeding a child? Wiping a kid's bum? Providing an education (school or homeschool)?

You are making a piece of art, right now.

It doesn't matter if you gave birth physically or not. Mothers both bring life into this world and

mold, nurture, and sculpt each child in their care. That is a huge creative gift and responsibility.

Think about it - the potential of the art you are creating knows no bounds. A human being's potential is bigger than a book, a beautiful painting, or lovely pottery.

Are you a mother? You are an artist. You are creative.

You are painting a masterpiece.

Believe it mama. If you never pick up a paintbrush, knit a sweater, publish a book, scrapbook your baby's first year, etc. it doesn't change the fact that already, in the very act of mothering, you are an artist.

3. Creativity Looks Like...

Whatever you want it to.

Referring back to the creative philosophy I laid out in *The Importance of Creativity*, creativity might look like:

- setting the table with intention
- an innovative solution to a parenting problem
- cooking a three course meal for your family
- cooking a one-pot meal for your family
- writing a silly limerick with your children
- making a pretty cover for your home management binder
- decorating on a budget
- the way the towels are folded on an open shelf
- dry beans in a mason jar with a pretty lid

I could go on and on. I see expressions of imagination and beauty all around me.

Open your eyes to see the potential for creativity in your own life. It's already there in everything you do and touch. And it has nothing to do with being a gifted painter, writer, or photographer.

4. Seasons in Motherhood and Life

Something I've learned over the years is that our creativity will look different during different seasons of motherhood.

To quote someone much wiser than myself:

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." -
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

I believe these words apply to this important work of mothering as much as any thing else. In fact I hang my hat on these words. They have given me much comfort and courage through the years as I have shelved certain projects and ideas during intense periods of mothering. Especially during the baby and toddler years.

This is not to say I wasn't creative during those years - I was. It just looked different than it does now. Specifically, I could not give the same amount of uninterrupted time to projects as I do now. So I invested more of my time in activities I could do with my children close by.

I also got "creative" in scheduling time for creativity - during naps, bedtimes, etc. Those making-time ideas are coming up in a few short chapters.

I just want to encourage you to not lose heart if you can't be everything you want to be creatively right now. None of us can, even those of us who don't have children, or whose children are grown.

I think of my mom, who is one of my role models and closest friends. She is long past those intensely active mothering years and is growing creatively by leaps and bounds but even she is limited by time, experience and resources.

I've asked a few mothers to share their wisdom and experience around making time for creativity in their lives. You will find their wonderful contributions sprinkled throughout this book. A couple of these lovely women are in those intense baby and toddler years. Take heart (and a few good ideas) from their words. I hope they encourage you.

Creative expression is one of the non-negotiables of being fully alive - of feeling vibrant and engaged in your world. Creativity also fills our well to give to our families. But our creative expression and output will evolve through the various stages of mothering.

Since becoming a mother, I've had to both let go of my old ideas about what it means to be creative and commit myself even more wholeheartedly to working towards creative dreams. While I may not always be able to have a regular, steady practice of writing, I can nourish my writer self by reading great writing, by keeping a freehand journal when I can't work at the computer, by letting creativity not be defined as only one thing, but as a way of life.

How do I make time to write? I sit down at nap time, after sleeping for a few minutes beside my daughter. I sit at my desk no matter how messy the house is. No matter how hungry I am (I do make myself a cup of tea), and I work. I recognize that now is my time to write, and if I put 10 words on the page or 1,000, it doesn't matter. All that matters is that I do show up. I work very hard to not look at blogs, to not check my email. Sometimes I get a few words written, sometimes not. But I try to keep the door open for them.

[Kyce Bello](#), mom to two daughters, ages 4 & 1

5. Celebrate You

We have a tendency to compare ourselves to others. I don't know if this is just a mother thing, probably not. But I do know we mothers fall into this trap so easily.

I do this and at its worst it makes me feel terribly insecure: my art is unworthy, my words meaningless, my contribution not appreciated.

That's a lie.

One of the best ways I've learned to combat this is to know myself better, do what I love and do it well. Not to follow someone else's pattern or their creative groove but to find my own and go for it with gusto.

Then instead of comparing myself to others I compare myself to me. Is this writing really expressing what I want to say? Am I closer today to writing what is true, lovely, honest, encouraging and beautiful than I was one year ago? If yes, that's progress. Do my photos share the story I want to tell? Is my skill improving?

Other people are not my benchmark.

I'm not competing. I'm creating.

You are beautiful. Your story is unique. Your insight is different. Your very life is a work of art. You have that to offer. Never say you don't have anything to offer - you do!

Do what fills your well. This is not a competition to be the best. It's about expressing your authentic creative self.

6. Priorities and Compromises

If you are like most mothers I know, who balance the needs of self, family and community, you're going to have to set priorities in your creative pursuits and be willing to make a few compromises.

Don't be discouraged by this. I'm not talking about compromising on your core values or principles but using them to make intentional choices.

I have friends who are artists and creatives of all stripes - jewelry makers, potters, musicians and recording artists, scrapbookers, photographers, writers, knitters, sewists, gardeners, and gourmet cooks - and I tell you they don't do it all. None of us can.

My current creative calling is writing and blogging and it takes a fair chunk of time from my day. Time I'm happy to spend, time that fills my well. But time I therefore can't spend on some other creative fling.

Here are a few creative things I used to do but don't anymore (or only sporadically):

- *Sew.* Thankfully I have a girl who can sew nice things for me instead.
- *Play guitar.* I do miss this, but not enough to pull back on my writing.
- *Knit.* Oh the poor project that sits neglected on the needles. Someday I'll pick it up again.
- *Keep memory albums.* My blog FIMBY is it now.
- *Gardening.* I am a gardener but I am currently in a non-gardening season of life. I didn't give this up so much as our living arrangements don't make this feasible right now.

I'm sure there are more, I just can't think of them right now.

Making creative compromises to pursue your art might look like buying handmade gifts instead of making them (thank goodness for Etsy) or bartering your creative services in exchange for an art you don't do.

Maybe you need to make compromises in your homemaking. Dusting is not a high priority in my home, meals are healthy but simple one-pot affairs. Now, if cooking was my creative outlet this would look different. But cooking is not my dominant creative outlet so it's not gourmet around here.

But you've probably heard all that before.

Maybe you're ready to take it deeper?

Creativity is hugely important to my family and so we've made big sacrifices and compromises (financial security, house size, where we live, how often we move, etc.) so we could bring Damien home - allowing all of us to have more creative freedom in our day. I'm not even going to go into all the sacrifices we've made but suffice to say, we've given up a lot - gaining a lot in return - so we have time, every day, to create.

This is big stuff but it starts with the little stuff. Saying "my art matters" and it brings me joy and therefore I am willing to give up a, b or c to pursue this thing.

In my current season, homeschooling and other classes and opportunities for my kids have taken a front seat, and music is a smaller piece again, but I know there will be seasons of more focus. In the meantime, I have found other creative outlets that scratch that itch for me.

This winter I have crocheted 4 hats, invented and made two new lotions, and am working on a new soap. If we need soap, and making soap seems stressful, I will simply buy some, because I want soap making to feel fun. Making beautiful things, whether useful or artistic (and perhaps there is not as much difference as I think?) makes me happy!

But I have to remind myself, instead of popping on the radio in the car, or in the kitchen, is there a new song idea percolating that I could be singing through? Instead of getting on Facebook to look at updates, could I be sitting at the piano working through a musical idea? Writing music makes me a healthier person, so even if I am not currently recording a new CD, I need to keep my finger in the pot a little bit.

[Spring Gouette](#), mom to two sons (one currently in the adoption process) and two daughters, ages 13, 10, 7 & 4

7. Dabble and Go Deep

Setting creative priorities is all fine and dandy but what if you don't know what you love to do? What if you're just starting to find your way in all of this? Or don't want to close doors by prioritizing one art too much over another?

Then take a season for dabbling.

Some of you write me and express that you think you might want to start a blog, or some other creative endeavor, but you're just not sure.

You don't say in as many words but you're afraid.

You're afraid to fail. You're afraid to (gasp) waste time. You're afraid to make a mess.

Well I'm here to say, failing is how we learn, which doesn't mean you're going "to fail" - I don't even know what that looks like in the context of creativity.

Nurturing creativity in your life will take time. But time spent creating, even if the end outcome is a flop or not what you envisioned, is not a waste.

Anyone who is raising children (which is you mama!) can observe this. To learn and grow we need to give ourselves permission to experiment, make a mess, to try and try, and try again. Even more importantly we need to give ourselves permission to shine in our creativity - sharing something of beauty we have made.

This has been one of the gifts of motherhood. Having my children teach me both how to open myself up to risk and likewise success.

I can give myself the same grace, freedom, enthusiasm, and encouragement I give to my children and their creative ventures. So can you.

That means encouragement to dabble. Maybe to take a pottery class. Or start a blog. Or watch a how-to-knit video on YouTube and buy some pretty yarn.

When (and if) you decide "this, this here is what I love to do" then dive deep mama.

Focus. Practice. Apply yourself.

But start by giving yourself permission to dabble. Giving yourself time, resources, and a (heaping) measure of grace. Creativity can be messy - physically and emotionally.

Then go deep and watch yourself blossom.

Always carry a notebook. Even if you're not a "writer", creative expression starts with an idea or an inspiration and you need to capture those thoughts so you can do something with them when you actually have the dedicated time to do so.

8. With Your Children

One of my goals, during this long life season of raising children, has been to weave my personal dreams, gifts and talents together with my husband's to mutually support our family (each of us contribute in different ways and it changes through different life seasons). To this end, we integrate a lot of our values into shared activities - working towards multiple goals at one time. Outdoor pursuits, income earning, creating together, home education, and many more, we do *together as a family*.

It's not always easy to go this route (there is a lot of give and take) but if this is something that speaks to you, I can say from experience the rewards of living this way are many. And the gains seem to be exponential as our children grow into more independence and we all start collaborating together. Sweet stuff I tell you.

Since this is a book on creativity for mothers specifically, be encouraged: you *can* nurture your creative self within the context of family life, alongside your children.

Creating with your children may be especially helpful for you mothers who work outside the home and have very limited creative time, assuming your work does not supply that need. **You can be creative with your kids in the time you *do have together*.**

There are a lot of creative activities you can do with children at hand, at breast, underfoot, or strapped to your back if you are willing to adjust your expectations of those experiences.

My only secret to making time to be creative is to be creative in the time I have.

As for other kinds of creativity--the handwork and art projects and such--doing them whilst being with my children is the way to go. I'm not much for sitting on the floor and playing with my girls, but if my hands can be busy with some project, usually knitting, then they are content knowing I am near, and I am happy to be making something. I enjoy working on sewing projects with my older girl at my side, while the little one sleeps. Sometimes I'll burn the midnight oil if inspiration strikes me, but not often.

Kyce Bello

Don't shove your little ones away from your creativity. People ask me how I'm raising my kids to be so creative - they draw, sew, write, sculpt, make miniatures, etc. And they've even started artistic entrepreneurial enterprises at a young age.

I think there are a few contributing factors to their amazing creativity.

1. We are wired for creativity and we all have the potential in us.
2. I give them lots of time for these pursuits (hint: academics are not the main focus of our early years education).
3. We limit media influence and consumption.
4. When they were little, and the foundation was being laid, *we created together.*

Choosing to create with your children does not mean you are limited to making goggle-eyed popsicle stick art.

Take a simple pottery class together. Children love to play with mud! If you really love it maybe

go back on your own later to focus on your own project.

If you like to knit, teach your children or let them play with yarn and sticks while you knit. They just want to do what you're doing.

Do you like fine art like drawing and painting? Spread the table with paper and writing utensils. Color and draw. Together.

If quiet, alone time art is your gig don't worry I'm getting to that in Schedule It.

But if a separate creative time is not possible in this life season try to create with your children.

Is this always going to be easy? No. But it's better than nothing and it's worth it in the long term if you want to raise creative thinkers. Not just crafty kids but kids who can solve problems and make their own entertainment, not relying on video games or electronic stimulation for fun. And when that happens, watch out mama, you're going to have a lot more personal time to create.

My creative outlet of choice is music. As a classically trained violinist, I have spent years (28 to be exact) learning and appreciating all that goes in to this art. Since the birth of my children, and now the advent of educating them at home, I have found less and less time to pursue my own musical aspirations.

During this season of life I have found a few key ways to keep music, both playing and teaching, an important part of my life. The first is to simply fill our home with the sounds of music; CDs, radio and our own musical instruments are all used to accomplish this. Daily listening and daily playing goes a long way in keeping me musically inclined.

One of my loves when it comes to music is teaching others to play and love music. When I set out to teach my own daughters to play violin, I had no idea how challenging yet rewarding it would be.

Finally, I have found that scheduling a violin performance at the local nursing home provides us with an opportunity to share the music we love with others.

Jill Foley, mom to two daughters, ages 7 & 5

9. Everyday Creativity

Creativity is a part of my everyday activities. It's not just my morning writing time or that knitting project I've currently shelved for who-knows-how-long.

One of the ways I work creativity into everyday activities is by making beautiful useful things. Or I use my regular chores and responsibilities, like meal making as a way to express creativity.

Think of a simple table setting (the plates can be mismatched and chipped even) with a centerpiece of wildflowers or even dandelions picked by a child's grubby hands. **Beauty and creativity - in the simplest of household tasks.**

Incorporating creativity into household work enables me to find room in the budget to both buy the materials and then "justify" the time spent on making that thing.

To be clear, I don't believe we need to "justify" creativity in our lives. If an activity feeds our spirits, which creativity does, that's reason enough for us to do it. However, I understand the realities of being a busy mom. There is only so much time in a day. And unfortunately, when push comes to shove, time for artistic growth and development can be the first to go.

Here's a couple examples from my own life to illustrate how you might weave creativity into everyday work and activities:

1. Soap Making (and other body care products)

I started making my own soap several years ago. That first year I used part of our Christmas gift budget to buy supplies to get me started. Then gave away the soap as a holiday gift.

Making soap for me is a creative activity that also meets one of our family's needs. We need soap. Do we "need" such beautiful soap? No. **But making it adds beauty to my everyday and it's worth it for me.**

2. Gardening

Creating and enjoying outdoor beautiful spaces is one of my interests. Learning about plants, bloom times, soil conditions - that's the science of gardening. But creating a showcase of color throughout the summer is pure art.

Gardening is an activity you can do with your children. In fact, it was my children's need and desire to be outdoors that really got me more serious about gardening. I wanted to do something while my kids played in the muck, sandbox or kiddie pool. And I wanted to make beautiful things. Flower gardening was perfect for that.

Vegetable gardening can also be gorgeous. Have you ever appreciated the delicate pink of a bean blossom? Edible creativity - how useful is that!

3. A Story Telling Blog

I wanted to tell our extended family what we were up to. I wanted to share the beauty in our lives, how our children were growing, what homeschooling looked like. I also wanted to record our days, like a scrapbook.

So six years ago, I started a blog. It's grown a bit since then but the purpose remains largely the same - to tell our family story. The writing I do then meets a personal need for creativity and family need to chronicle our life.

Photography does the same thing for me.

4. Homemaking in General

There are so many areas of homemaking and mothering where you can express creativity and meet a family need. Knitting socks or dishcloths, painting art for your walls (painting your walls!), quilting a baby blanket, photographing your children (so you can remember this moment in time), stitching a simple doll for a birthday gift, making a family video.

You might like baking. It's not a current creative interest of mine but I have enjoyed doing it in the past. Artisan breads and luscious desserts are works of art - and if you want to make them healthy, that can be done!

Remember you don't need to do all of these, or any. But so much of what you do every day as a mom can be done with an expression of creativity. Expressing yourself this way will bring more meaning to the mundane aspects of motherhood and will also open you up for further creative growth and development.

10. Downsize

I'm not talking about getting rid of stuff in your house, though honestly, doing that has [allowed more time in our lives](#) for creativity.

What I'm talking about here is downsizing the scope of your creative projects.

I don't know about you but I like to finish things. I'm all gung-ho at the start, full of energy and enthusiasm but as a project wears on, I'm likely to bail unless it's broken down into incremental pieces. Pieces I can feel good about finishing.

Since so many of my life projects, like raising children and keeping healthy, are long term I like my creative projects to be short and sweet.

A blog post, written and published. A knitted dishcloth instead of a sweater.

A small project looks different depending on your creative expression.

I was inspired by Erika's thoughts on this. Erika is a mother and artist and she did the painting that graces the cover of this book. She has this to say about small projects:

"With only bite-size moments to create art, I have moved away from large acrylic paintings and now work on smaller watercolor paintings, usually 9" x 12". It gives me a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction to be able to complete a painting in a shorter time frame with this medium."

A few other examples:

- a small scrapbook album of a special family trip vs. a whole year album
- a lap quilt vs. a bedcover

- a blog vs. a book
- re-arrange the furniture in a room vs. the whole house

This isn't to say you can't and won't do big projects. Dreaming big is very important to accomplishing even little goals.

I sometimes think certain people are better suited to living with process. And I'm not one of them. I need small, manageable, work-into-my-life as a busy mom projects.

If I'm not producing big creative projects, that's ok - I have a big thing going - it's called raising kids and it's my masterpiece.

11. Let Go of Perfection

This is not a new message. Whole books have been written on this topic. [The Gifts of Imperfection](#) by Brené Brown is one of my current favorites. I am simply another voice adding to the chorus of how freeing it is - in terms of creativity, time, resources, and overall life energy - to let go of perfectionism.

Some of us struggle more with this than others and as it pertains to the topic of this book **I encourage you to let go of perfection in your home, your mothering and your craft.**

I am a recovering perfectionist, learning to love life, right now, as is, while still working towards my goals.

Right now, in the moment I write this, I am surrounded by the morning bustle of my family.

A mere 2 feet away from me is the couch piled with clean, yet-to-be-folded laundry mixed up with winter snow pants, mitts and hats. The floor is littered with my children's miniature creations, a trebuchet stands smack dab in the middle of the floor surrounded by an explosion of lego pieces.

This is not a quiet cafe. This is not a writer's studio. Where I write is a small corner in the 750 square foot cabin we're renting this winter. I do not have "personal" creative space. What I do have is two hours to create so "ready, set, write" is my motto.

There is a time to deal with the mess of daily living, the next chapter will address that. I don't want to live in a pig sty and neither does my family, but if I waited for the conditions to be perfect before I sat down to write I never would.

And if I kept writing this book till it was perfect you wouldn't be reading it right now.

Quite honestly, this drive for perfection has stunted my creative growth in the past, not to mention caused tension in relationships, and I'm trying not to live like that anymore.

If you are struggling to prioritize creativity in your life maybe it is because you have raised the bar too high. Perhaps the "life conditions" that surround your creativity - my house must be x, y & z before I give myself permission to play, create, make art, fill-in-the-blank - are unrealistic in this stage of mothering. Or maybe you expect your creations to be masterpieces out of the starting gate.

It's easy to do this in our blog reading, internet age. We see what we perceive to be perfection in someone else's life and think that since we can't meet that level of perfection we shouldn't even bother trying. Or we feel we fail in our own humble, but honest, efforts. (Relationships in-real-life don't breed this as much since you spend time in people's messy kitchens, you observe how they treat their family, what they eat, how much they exercise, etc.)

You don't have to live to anyone else's standard of perfection. *You don't even have to live to your own standard of perfection.* Not only is the mark arbitrary and artificial, but striving for it can be destructive.

When you let go of thinking it has to be perfect - your creativity, your home, your family - you will experience more time, more joy, more freedom and even more productivity in those areas.

My lifelong passion is writing, and I learned a few years ago that nothing could keep me from writing. Neither failure nor children can keep me from putting pen to paper. It's something as essential to me as breathing.

A few years ago a small newspaper started in my county, and I submitted a proposal to write a weekly column. It was accepted, and since then, the newspaper has grown and so has my writing. This weekly deadline is a much-needed creative outlet for me. It is also a challenge! But I credit it for keeping my sanity, and the weekly discipline has kept the ideas flowing.

Being a mom has allowed me to develop other creative passions, such as storytelling and photography. I work in the afternoons when my two-year-old is napping, and my five-year-old watches T.V. I also work after they go to bed at night.

However, it must be noted that there's a lot I don't do. My house is not very clean, and my cooking has a lot to be desired. I don't exercise either. All of these things are important to me, but as a writer and introvert, I couldn't do anything without my quiet, creative time.

Being a mother has let me practice patience, and it's helped me to peel away what isn't that important. I do only the essentials: be there for my family, write, and breath!

[Shelli Bond Pabis](#), mom to two sons, ages 5 & 2

12. Schedule it

It's important to make time in your day for creativity. I hope you've picked up on that message already.

You can create with your children, you can express creativity in your homemaking and mothering tasks, you can shrink projects to be bite-sized and manageable. You can let go of perfection, freeing yourself mentally to create.

And you can do all of these things without having a regular personal creativity time in your schedule.

But at some point you may want to establish a set time for individual creative pursuits. And you'll definitely want to have a bit of a budget for it also.

My own creative blocks of time have changed over the years as my children have grown and depend on me less and less for meeting their basic needs.

In the early years when Damien was available in the evenings and on weekends I tried to schedule a once a week alone creativity time. I used this time mostly for sewing and scrapbooking, often at home (I was the nourishment for my babies) but sometimes at a studio or home party type gathering.

A daily rest time, immediately following lunch was non-negotiable when my children were little. Establishing a pattern like this will take some time and effort but it is worth it, at least it was in my experience. As my kids grew and slept better at night, and I needed less sleep myself during the day, I tried to use this quiet time for creativity. Even if it was only half an hour.

Now that we're all home together, creativity is not only a part of our work and learning, but is

scheduled into every day for both children and adults.

A designated time each day or week to write, draw, paint, sew, dance, sing, play music, take photos, etc. does two things.

1. When we schedule something into our lives it says it's important, it matters. Just like your daughter's dance lesson or your weekly grocery run. We make time for the things that matter to us.
2. When we schedule time for creative expression it brings peace of mind to our other activities, knowing that we will have time to fill our creative well or express those thoughts we need to release (through dance, art, music, writing, etc).

Get "creative" about finding time. Mothers are masters at multi-tasking. Use this to your advantage. I love Hillary's trick of using her weekly laundromat session for a creative recharge, [a creative hotspot](#) as she calls it. Is there a task in your life you can use similarly?

Likewise, I know not everyone works at home and I realize many moms don't have a lot of freedom in their days. If you work outside the home, what about reserving your lunch break for personal creativity? Or maybe consider an unplugged Sunday afternoon of creativity with your family or on your own.

I like the structure and freedom of a schedule. Scheduling, even loosely, my tasks as mother, homemaker, homeschooler, creative person, brings freedom to my days. **I am better able to focus on the task at hand knowing there is time scheduled for the other things I need to do also.**

For instance, as I write this with mess piled on the couch and dishes in the sink I know I'll deal with those later, during my morning clean up time. When I'm teaching the kids a lesson or cooking supper and an idea comes I write it down and know that I'll attend to that during my

time set aside for creative pursuits.

I've shared on my blog [how to make a family schedule](#). When you're a mom, you don't have the luxury of operating as a single agent, you have every body else's needs and wants to consider (don't we know it) but that doesn't mean your needs come last!

We all have different ways of managing time in the context of mothering and homemaking. I've written a few posts with specific time management tips and strategies. These might help you.

- [Making Time For Mama To Craft & Sew](#)
- [Homemaking & Homeschooling](#)
- [Weekly Blocks ~ A Planning Tool](#)
- [My 5 Favorite Time Management Strategies](#)

I like structuring time and then giving myself freedom (this goes for schooling, homemaking, personal reading and even my writing) within that time. But this isn't how everyone operates.

Use a time management system that works for you.

I do not often block out time for daily creative pursuits.

I expect to create most days and allow time for that in my mind so when a creative idea arises, we are free to pursue it. Sure, I can plan and prepare if I need to, but I find that our best creativity comes when I listen and react!

I listen to what my kiddos are saying and doing; they offer great inspiration! Then when an idea comes up, I react to it. I often find myself jumping up in the middle of lunch to run outside and collect supplies for a project that the kids and I are interested in, or entering into some strange game like "singing everything we speak for the rest of the day."

If I cannot react right away, I write the idea down or draw a quick picture. I do whatever I can to keep the idea close even when it cannot be in the front of my mind. I have also learned to kick the fear. Creating is an adventure, and adventures often have unexpected twists and turns. I am not afraid to try something new even if perfection is not the outcome.

Charity Johnson, mom to three daughters and one son, ages 9, 6, 4 & 2

13. Creating vs. Consuming

We all have only so much time in our days. You didn't need me to tell you this.

If you are looking for more time in your day in which to schedule creative activities consider taking an honest look at the amount of media you consume.

Something I've found to be true in my own life, as well as wisdom I've gleaned from other busy creative moms is this:

Seasons of abundant creativity often correspond with seasons of limited media.

There's a fine line in this internet age between being inspired and wasting time. I seek inspiration every day on the Internet. RSS, Pinterest, Twitter, etc. point me in interesting directions and broaden my horizons.

But if I'm actually going to create something myself I need to spend more time doing that than reading about what everyone else is doing.

We need to apply ourselves to our own art, our own work, our own children, our own lives.

Perhaps I'm just speaking to myself and if I am, that's ok. It's a message I need to remind myself of over and over again. I have experienced the creative fruit of limiting my time online but it's easy to forget as we are enticed by link after link, photo after photo of the beautiful art other people are making.

It's not just the *inspiring* Internet of course. There's TV, video games, movies - who knows what else. If you're not careful, these things can become a major distraction from the creative work you really want to do.

I think this is one of the really grounding aspects of spending time outdoors, as I share in the next chapter. It forces you away from these distractions.

Consuming less doesn't just apply to media of course. The over-consumption of "stuff" in general (that includes food) deadens our senses with the potential to stunt our creative expression which both engages and relies on our full senses.

Limiting your consumption of stuff - sometimes we do this by choice and sometimes economic realities "force our hand" - requires you to think creatively to solve problems. Ie: you can't just go buy the solution, you need to use your hands, use your head and often your heart to reach your desired goal.

We all have limits, either chosen or circumstantial, and have to work with those. And that's where some of our best creativity happens. The creativity that solves a problem or creates a masterpiece. I see this demonstrated in my children's lives all the time. (I wasn't joking - they have taught me so much.)

When children are bored the opportunity exists for great spurts of creativity. And given a bit of time, a few supplies, a seed of inspiration, and often some outdoor activity, they will have one of their great ideas. "I have an idea!", being one of our families favorite phrases.

As a mother, I don't remember the last time I was bored. But I do know there are limiting factors in my life - time being chief of these. **Choosing to create instead of consume is one way I work within this limitation.**

I like to think that we don't really have to make time for creativity in our lives. It just unfolds if we see that anything and everything has the potential to be creative and fill the need we have for self-expression.

Yes, we have to make time for specific creative pursuits, particularly those we want to do on our own; I have to carve out time to write if I want to avoid being on the computer while I am with my children. I have to set up for sewing projects. I have to have ingredients or materials for a special baking or art project. I do this both by being organized (planning ahead) and by letting other things go.

In this very moment, I have chosen to leave the floor unwashed another day, to allow myself time to write. Last night, I chose not to watch a movie so I could work on a photography project. Last week, I said no to a school activity I might have otherwise felt obligated to participate in, just so I could have a little time to sew.

But to fulfill the general need to create something, I can abandon the need for plans or solo time, and just let it unfold, often alongside my family.

Creativity sneaks into my life all the time. In our family's effort to live lightly on fewer resources, in a small space, we get creative with what we have, rotating where things go, what we use, and how we use it. I find immense pleasure in avoiding a purchase, simply because one of us was clever enough to create a substitute using something else. This version of creativity keeps things fresh.

[Nicola Alesandrini](#), mom to a daughter and son, ages 7 & 4

14. Spend Time Outdoors

There is something amazingly inspirational and idea generating about the outdoors. Wide open sky and fresh air, the majesty and splendor of creation.

When I am feeling either uninspired, antsy, physically lethargic (creativity is connected to our physical being) and simply needing refreshment I try to make the effort to head outdoors. I'm not always successful but I know being outside is a recharge for me. And the great thing is, you can do this with your kids.

Once a week as a family, we purposefully head outdoors for a whole day. For exercise, for inspiration, for connection - with each other and the earth.

Almost all of our big family goals and dreams: many of them involving creative living, creative income earning, creative projects, have come from time spent outdoors.

But here's the tension. It's easy to get that high from the outdoors, have creative inspiration and want to write, sew, paint, photograph, knit, sculpt from that recharge. And then be so engrossed in trying to make those creative ideas happen that you neglect the very activity that brought you that inspiration in the first place. I know this from personal experience.

If you live in this space long enough, just like eating unhealthy food for weeks on end, you'll deplete your creative stores. You'll drain the well.

I'm of the opinion that the outdoors is not optional. It's not a "when I've finished this creative project then I'll have time to walk, hike, take the kids to the woods, go for a run, etc." You're never finished and you will have to set aside other things, for a time, to prioritize being outdoors. Just like you have to with everything else.

That practice, of being in nature, will fuel your creativity. It will fill your creative well. It will revive you spiritually, emotionally, physically. You will brim with ideas. You will live - *better*.

I have a strong bias this way, obviously. But having experienced the benefits of regular outdoor time paired with exercise (especially for those of us who create at the computer) I would be remiss if I didn't include it in this book.

Conclusion

Nurturing creativity in our lives as busy moms does take some effort. But the rewards are well worth it.

We each have a drive to create and we don't experience fulfillment in life without creative expression of some kind.

I am certainly not the only voice speaking the importance of creativity in our lives and we have so many examples in this blog-reading age of mothers doing some incredibly creative stuff - in the context of both family life and work.

Unfortunately, sometimes when we look to these women for inspiration the opposite happens and we feel discouraged because our home isn't as nicely decorated, our words not as elegant, and our craft, whatever it is, not as beautiful (or so we think).

Do not give up on your creativity because you feel you don't measure up. Growing creatively starts in small spaces, often with little talent and little time.

Creative expression is something you can do while caring for your children. It can be woven into everyday chores, responsibilities, and housekeeping.

Do what you love (or are interested in trying) and keep growing. Unplug and get outdoors. Express yourself creatively in the ways that come naturally to you. You will be energized in body and spirit.

Nurture your creativity and watch yourself bloom.

Go Deeper

Dear Beautiful, Creative, Busy Mom

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this book and even spending a few dollars to do so. I sincerely hope you feel encouraged and inspired on your creative journey.

Creativity matters. It matters in our homes and in our world. We have the opportunity as mothers to instill this value in our children and just as importantly, to grow creatively as individuals. What a privilege.

It's been an honor sharing some of my personal story with you and I realize you might have questions about what I've written.

You want to know specifically how to apply these creative philosophies and practices to your own life - in your unique situation.

I'd love to help you.

There is a subscription forum that accompanies this e-book. A safe place for questions, encouragement, and personalized support.

If you're ready to Go Deeper [click here](#) to learn how to subscribe to this service.

Take care and be in touch,

Renee

Acknowledgements

Thank you Nicola Alesandrini, Kyce Bello, Jill Foley, Spring Gouette, Charity Johnson, and Shelli Bond Pabis for contributing your words of wisdom to this project. Individually and collectively, you spoke exactly what I wanted to add to this book.

Thank you Erika for your beautiful artwork. You took my vision and made it come to life. Your painting feels like my words in watercolor.

Thank you Karen Toews for editing this book (obviously any errors remaining are all my responsibility). Thanks also for birthing me, feeding me, raising me - instilling the values of motherhood and homemaking deep into my soul. I could go on and on - for believing in me, letting me fly, being my friend, caring for me when my babies were born, supporting (even when you have your doubts) every crazy thing Damien and I have done, for not offering unsolicited advice. Thank you for being my mom.

Thank you Damien for believing in my small beginnings in the most unwavering, "of course you can write an e-book!" sort of way. The whole process of publishing my ideas would not be possible, or at least very difficult, without your in-house technical support. We make a good team.

About Renee



Renee is a mother to three brilliant, creative, kind, intelligent and oh so beautiful children - Céline, Laurent-Auguste and Brienne. At the time of this writing they are 12, 11 and 9 years old. She is the wife to Damien, her lover and life partner for the last fifteen years.

Renee's mission is to nourish, encourage and teach; build relationship and create beauty. Investing first in her family and then others.

Fresh and honest, Renee's blog [FIMBY](#) is a story of intentional family living. With a focus on homemaking, mothering, and homeschooling in the context of nature inspired, adventurous, and creative family living.