

What is a Walden Experience you may ask:

As mentioned on page 40 in *Staying in STEPP*, stress is sometimes lessened by becoming "one" with what you are doing. It is called a peak experience by Abraham Maslow and being in "flow" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Others studying creativity and the role of spirituality in allowing one to truly experience the world around us also look to an aesthetic experience as healing. Read the file attached below with excerpts from *The Artist's Way* by Julie Cameron and the slide about Thoreau to give you a sense of the purpose of this assignment.

You are to find a quiet place in nature to spend 20 minutes to half hour alone, observing, and paying attention. Bring a sketch pad to capture your observations. Be in touch with your five senses. At the end of the twenty minutes reflect on the experience and post the sketch and response in your Me Book.

The Artist's Way



Autumn Softness Mandala

More than anything else, attention is the act of connection.

The reward for attention is always healing. It may begin as the healing of a particular pain – the lost lover, the sickly child, the shattered dream. But what is healed, finally, is the pain that underlies all pain: the pain that we are all, as Rilke phrases it, “unutterably alone.”

More than anything else, attention is the act of connection. I learned this the way I have learned most things – quite by accident.

When my first marriage blew apart, I took a lonely house in the Hollywood Hills.

My plan was simple. I would weather my loss my loss alone. I would see no one, and no one would see me, until the worst of the pain was over.

I would take long, solitary walks, and I would suffer. As it happened, I did take those walks, but they did not go as planned.

Two curves up the road behind my house, I met a gray striped cat.

This cat lived in a vivid blue house with a large sheepdog she clearly disliked. I learned all this despite myself in a week's walking.

We began to have little visits, that cat and I, and then long talks of all we had in common, lonely women.

Both of us admired an extravagant salmon rose that had wandered across a neighboring fence. Both of us like watching the lavender float of jacaranda blossoms as they shook loose from their moorings.

Alice (I heard her called inside one after afternoon) would bat at them with her paw.

By the time the jacarandas were done, an unattractive slatted fence had been added to contain the rose garden. By then, I had extended my walks a mile farther up and added to my fellowship other cats, dogs, and children.

By the time the salmon rose disappeared behind its fence, I had found a house higher up with a walled Moorish garden and a vitriolic parrot I grew fond of. Colorful, opinionated, highly dramatic, he reminded me of my ex-husband.

Pain had become something more valuable: *experience*.

Paying Attention Continued

Snapshots from *The Artist's Way*: Paying attention



My grandmother knew what a painful life had taught her: success or failure, the truth of a life really has little to do with its quality. The quality of life is in proportion, always, to the capacity for delight. The capacity for delight is the gift of paying attention.

In a year when a long and rewarding love affair was lurching gracelessly away from the centre of her life, the writer May Sarton kept 'A Journal of Solitude'. In it she records coming home from a particularly painful weekend with her lover.

Entering her empty house, "I was stopped by the threshold of my study by a ray on a Korean chrysanthemum, lighting it up like a spotlight, deep red petals and Chinese yellow centre.... Seeing it was like getting a transfusion of autumn light."

It's no accident that May Anton uses the word 'transfusion'. The loss of her lover was a wound, and in her response to that chrysanthemum, in the act of paying attention, Sarton's healing began.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not when I came to die to discover that I had not lived.

Thoreau - Walden

Creativity: A spiritual journey

