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Single Moms
Do It

Guide to
Pet Care
Resources

The Bond(ages)
of the
Umbilical Cord

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Finding My Mother's Voice

by Pam Robbins

MY MOM LOST HER VOICE a few month's ago. Her creative voice, that is.

It was October 16. I remember the date because it was two days after I opened my new business. Not great timing—but, then again, these things never are.

My sister called and said that mom had, apparently, been in a car accident. I booked a flight to St. Louis and packed my bags. Since it was still touch-and-go, I took clothes for hanging out in the hospital and clothes for attending a funeral. I'm practical like that.

As it turned out, my mom's car had rolled into a pylon, but it was in a parking garage, and it was because she had suffered a cardiac arrest. Her story is filled with all kinds of serendipitous events: she happened to be driving past a hospital when she started feeling poorly; there happened to be two student nurses leaving the hospital as she pulled into the garage; she happened to have cracked her window before passing out, so the nurses could unlock her car; etc. She arrested two more times before her "angels" were able to get her into the hospital, and, according to the doctors, it was a miracle that she survived.

My mom ended up needing a double-bypass, which she got later that week. Physically, she recovered just fine, but, mentally, she struggled. After the surgery, she fell into a deep depression and, at one point, asked her doctors if they would help end her life. Every day, we lost her a little bit more until the only thing left of my once vivacious mom was a lifeless shell.

Then, one day, we got a second miracle: my mom returned from wherever she had been and started to recover. Little by little, she became interested in life again and, eventually, was released from the hospital, and then the rehab center, and moved back home.

My mom is an artist, so engaging in life, first and foremost, means creating. Prior to her experience, she had been a photographer, first doing portraits, then moving into more experimental images. After her illness, however, she lost interest in her work. It didn't call to her like it once did. She had lost her creative voice—and, to some extent, herself.

Like my mom, we all have a need to find and express our creative voice. For highly creative people, making stuff is necessary for survival. For the rest of us, creating isn't essential,

but it helps give meaning to our lives; it makes us feel more fulfilled.

What's difficult—and what's challenging my mom—is figuring out what makes your "heart sing." It intrigues me how so many people are drawn to painting, for example, and it really does nothing for me. I, on the other hand, am fascinated by the process of deconstructing and reconstructing images, and not everyone sees the fun in that.

Besides time and experimentation, finding one's creative voice requires letting go of judgement. Some people believe that fine arts are the only true arts; crafts (like knitting, quilting, collaging) are considered less valuable. That simply isn't true. If creating a mosaic stepping stone gets you excited, good for you! If making jewelry puts you in the zone, go for it! Who's to say what is and isn't "art"?



If, like my mom, you're struggling to find your creative voice, I encourage you to play around until you find something that captures your attention. Creativity begets creativity, so, even if you find out something isn't your thing, doing anything creative will make you more receptive to what is.

Although my mom still hasn't found the thing that gets her really excited, she's been exploring. In the last couple of months, she's taken a writing class, read books on watercolor painting, and played with her bead collection. If she can outsmart death three times, I'm confident that she'll be "singing" again soon! *OM*



Pam Robbins is a life coach and owner of Purple Crayon, a shared play space for women hobby artists just north of downtown Asheville. She loves helping women find their creative voice, either through workshops or creativity coaching. If you're looking for a perfect gift for Mother's Day, consider a Purple Crayon gift certificate! Please visit Purple Crayon's website or email Pam at pam@purplecrayonavl.com for more information. www.purplecrayonavl.com)