

On finding ideas

Leah Chillery

I often say I am one of those wacky writers who believe that we get our ideas from some mysterious creative force that flows through us. Some of us just seem to have been born closer to this source, or are more susceptible to this creative energy, than others. But I genuinely believe we all have access to it and we use it in our everyday lives to do all sorts of things. It's where genius comes from. We are either allowing this energy in or we aren't, but it's always trying to get through. It's always there trying to tunnel its way through the interference of the trillion non-stop thoughts that make up the noise in our minds.

I read Julia Cameron's incredibly insightful book *The Artist's Way*. One of the recommended exercises is 'Morning Pages' in which you write three pages of automatic writing every morning to clear the debris and allow creative energy to flow freely. This confirmed what I already believed, that ideas, characters, words, dialogue, plot – all of it – gets downloaded to me from some higher force.

We could also use the metaphor of a computer. When we ask the computer to search for something, it temporarily goes offline to look for the answer. There are a lot of processes going on in the background that we are unaware of, but eventually the answer will be presented at the front end. This is like our creative brains. We ponder something and then, later on, usually when we are doing something completely unrelated, we have our eureka! moment where the solution pops right into the front of our minds. Almost like magic. When I am writing a play, it writes itself in my brain in this way before I write it into a Word document. Sometimes it comes slowly, like a shadowy figure coming through the fog into plain sight, and sometimes it comes thick and fast, to the point where I have to open the laptop in the middle of the night.

This all sounds terribly mystical. I do think there are practical ways to generate ideas, too. Such as looking through newspapers or photographs for stimulus, eavesdropping on buses, taking note of any gossip or rumours, and exploring why certain things move you strongly in some way. But, again, it appears to me that these are all just other ways of creating the environment and the conditions in which creativity can thrive. Inspiration seems to be born out of putting yourself in the right state. We can't control the force, but we can harness it, and to do that we must create an environment in which ideas can be born and grow. We can also get more skilled at reading the signs, recognising notions and ideas as they are beginning to emerge in our consciousness. In the end, it seems that the best place to find ideas is in your own mind, but only if you have your dial and antenna set to Creative FM.

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Leah Chillery is a graduate of the BBC's College of Comedy where she story-lined on *Two Pints Of Lager And A Packet Of Crisps*, *Grown Ups* and her own sitcom pilot, *Ebony's Yard*. She has written four BBC Radio 4 afternoon plays – her most recent being *Losing My Penny*.

Leah co-wrote the Bush Theatre hit *50 Ways To Leave Your Lover* which returned for a second season as *50 Ways To Leave Your Lover at Christmas*. Her play *Earl of Mo'Bay*, which premiered at the Lakeside Arts Theatre Nottingham, was shortlisted for the Alfred Fagon Award.

Leah is one of the first Felix Dexter Bursary winners, completing a comedy writing apprenticeship with the BBC. During that time, she developed her own sitcom *White Washed* and also gained experience on shows such as *Newsjack*, *Famalam* and *Mrs Brown's Boys*. She wrote the screenplay for *Samuel's Trousers*, a short film released in 2020.

A recording of this talk can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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