

IT IS IN YOUR DNA, NATURE AND SOUL

Everyone is creative.

But, here's the rub: most people fail to achieve their creative potential. That's important, because all the evidence shows that creativity and inventiveness are crucial for personal well-being, happiness and success.

In Neil Francis's groundbreaking book, he looks at the key inhibitors to achieving our full creative potential – education, work, 'stuff,' news, concrete, stereotypes, technology and TV. The book explores why these hindrances block our creativity, and shows how we can clear the blockage.

Backed up with strong evidence, *The Creative Thinking Book* is packed with fascinating stories, ideas and insights, as well as practical examples of things you can do to get your creative mojo back.

As Albert Einstein once said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." So, let Neil's book fire yours up!

NEIL FRANCIS is the co-founder and Executive Chairman of Pogo Studio, a digital consulting and solutions agency based in Edinburgh, Scotland. He is the author of *The Creative Thinking Book*, *Inspired Thinking*, *Positive Thinking*, *The Entrepreneur's Book* and *Changing Course*. His books have been translated into multiple foreign languages, including Chinese.

THE CREATIVE THINKING BOOK



HOW TO
IGNITE AND
BOOST YOUR
CREATIVITY

CONCISE
ADVICE

CONCISE ADVICE

"Neil Francis latest book is well worth a read. I have organised the podge creative lunches for close to 30 years and love nothing more than being surrounded by people who earn their living from being creative. Neil has written The Creative Thinking Book and believes creativity is in the DNA and we are all a lot more creative than we give ourselves credit for. Great book, well done Neil."

PHIL JONES, Creative Influencer of the year, People's Choice, 2020
Founder of Podge Events & inducted to the BIMA Digital Hall of Fame

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NEIL FRANCIS



THE CREATIVE THINKING BOOK

NEIL FRANCIS



PRAISE FOR *THE CREATIVE THINKING BOOK*

“The Creative Thinking Book carries a fundamental message: we can all be innovators! It is in our DNA to be creative. This message should gladden the heart of any educator. At the same time, it is a call to action to all of us devoting our life to educating future generations – “mothers, teachers, coaches, professors ... creativity is contagious... cherish your creative potential and pass it along!”

DR SUE ROSSANO-RIVERO

Acting Professor for innovation management and business development.
FH Münster university of applied sciences, Germany

“Neil and I grew up together and he was my first ally as I began my own efforts at social innovation. His enthusiasm and curiosity are boundless and here he communicates the joy and value to our humanity we can discover if we value creativity. This book is stuffed with inspiring stories and practical ways to unlock your own imagination.”

DR SIMON DUFFY

President of Citizen Network

“Neil Francis has done it again! This time he has taken one of my favourite subjects creativity to provide us with a deeper understanding of how it works and to help us all to realise that it is part of our human DNA. Neil provides insights, stories, ideas and strategies to help us all be more creative. And he really helps us understand why we generally think we are not creative by exploring what inhibits our creativity. This is fantastic book I highly recommend for anyone looking to enhance their creativity, all delivered in an entertaining, thought provoking and insightful way.”

PAUL CORKE

Author, Speaker, Thought Leader & Influencer

“Neil Francis carefully captures the essence of creativity, associated myths and structured inhibitors that restricts our imagination. Neil is a scintillating storyteller who captures real world stories and applies them in a straightforward and simple manner, played out in the written word. Today is just another fun-filled feast of creativity for Neil.”

DAVID SPEIRS

Founding Director of Catalyst Business Solutions
and Chair of Stone Soup Group

“If you ever want to unlock your creativity and know more about how to develop your creative thinking, then go read this book. Neil’s step by step approach and practical tips make it such an easy read. This book offers a refreshing perspective on a subject which so crucial to human potential. I highly recommend it.”

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THE CREATIVE THINKING BOOK

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NEIL FRANCIS



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TO START, A STORY TO GET YOU IN THE RIGHT MOOD FOR MY BOOK

To Jack, Lucy and Sam

With love

One day, a professor entered his classroom and asked his students to prepare for a surprise test. They all waited anxiously at their desks for the exam to begin.

The professor handed out the exams with the text facing down, as usual. Once he'd distributed them, he asked the students to turn over the papers.

To everyone's surprise, there were no questions – just a black dot in the centre of the paper. The professor, seeing the expression on everyone's faces, told them the following: "I want you to write about what you see there." The students, confused, got started on the inexplicable task.

At the end of the class, the professor collected the exams and started reading them out loud in front of the students.

All of them, without exception, defined the black dot, trying to explain its position in the centre of the sheet. After all had been read, the classroom fell silent, and the professor started to explain:

"I'm not going to grade you on this, I just wanted to give you something to think about. No one wrote about the white part of the paper.

Everyone focused on the black dot, and the same thing happens in our lives.”

His message was that we tend to ignore so many things around us, or don't see them to begin with, even though they are right in front of our nose. They are things that would inspire you, from observing a beautiful butterfly in flight to watching the waves on a beach as they crash into rocks. All around you is a world packed with wonderful things that could light the touch paper that would unlock your mind, where you'd discover an exciting new world you never knew existed.

However, if you insist on focusing only on the black dot – wanting that new car, envious of a neighbour's holiday plans, constantly working through the weekend rather than spending time with your family, focused on which 48-inch TV you should purchase – all you will do is focus on the black dots. The white expanse, with all the possibilities it offers, will be invisible.

Take your eyes away from the black dots in your lives.

Find where the open, unexplored white parts are and you'll find the space where creative solutions to your problems and challenges will present themselves.

Understanding the power of creativity is the most exciting thing you can discover in your life.

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of North Berwick provide me the perfect space
and environment to plan the book

INTRODUCTION

ALBANY STREET

In the mid 90's, two businesses were started in Albany Street, in the New Town area of Edinburgh, Scotland.

At 20 Albany Street, the web development agency called Company Net started trading. I was the co-founder and CEO.

At 14 Albany Street, the Scottish edition of *Big Issue* – the street magazine that offers homeless people and those at risk an opportunity to earn a legitimate income – had already begun publishing. It was established by social activist Mel Young, who was inspired by the success of *Big Issue* in England and its 1990s forerunner, *Street News*, in New York City.

Today, *Big Issue* is the world's most widely circulated street magazine, and its Scottish edition has been a huge success.

Setting up shop just 80 feet away from one another, Mel and I got to know each other, and we've kept in touch over the last 25 years. I have always greatly admired Mel and his work as a dedicated and creative social entrepreneur. He has a passion for social justice, especially around homelessness.

In 2001, in a Cape Town bar, Mel found himself chatting with Harald Schmied, founder of an Austrian street paper. They discussed other ways they could help the homeless, and over a few beers the

creative juices started to flow. It seems that they both loved the game of football, and that was the creative spark that led them to set up a football tournament for the homeless. Even better they thought, if FIFA can have a World Cup for professional footballers, then why could they not set up a World Cup for the homeless.

Within two years, the first Homeless World Cup was held in Graz, Austria. It is now an annual football tournament, featuring men's and women's teams, organized by the Homeless World Cup Foundation, which advocates for the end of homelessness through soccer. Each year, the foundation's network of street football partners selects more than 500 players to compete in the event. These partners operate in more than 450 locations, reaching 100,000 homeless people each year.

To date, the Homeless World Cup Foundation and its partners have impacted the lives of 1.2 million homeless people around the globe. Mel is the current president of the organisation.

I recently met with Mel to catch up over coffee. He explained that while the tournament had to be cancelled over the last few years because of the coronavirus epidemic, plans were proceeding for the 20th Homeless World Cup to be staged in September 2022, in New York City.

I asked if he ever could have imagined, in that bar in Cape Town 21 years ago, that the event would turn out to be a global success that touched the lives of more than a million people.

"Absolutely not," he laughed. "But I guess that if you identify a need to solve a new or difficult problem, such as changing the lives of

the homeless, and you're determined to achieve that, then anything is possible. Obviously, in that bar, the atmosphere was perfect for being creative and inventive. That allowed us to link the two things that we were both passionate about, football and helping the homeless, and come up a new solution – The Homeless World Cup.”

It perfectly captured the power of thinking creativity, he said. “And from there, you have no idea where that journey will end.”

Inspired by the creative thinking that has had such a positive effect on homeless people worldwide, I set out to try and create the right ‘atmosphere’ in a new book that would help people become more creative in their thinking. I can’t guarantee that you will see the same world-changing results, but you never know!

First, a few definitions. I see Creative Thinking as a way of looking at problems or situations from a fresh perspective, leading to the conception of something original. This leads to Inventive Thinking, where that ‘something new’ is actually created. If you have a brainstorming session and dream up dozens of new ideas, you have displayed creativity, but there is no actual inventiveness until something gets implemented. The idea of an international sporting event to help the homeless was a creative one indeed.

Inventiveness happens when things start to be implemented using your creativity, imagination and knowledge. This could be a concept, a solution, a method, or an actual physical thing. In other words, whenever you physically try to do something new, it turns into an act of invention. The idea of The Homeless World Cup moved from being a creative thought to an inventive one when Mel and Harold moved forward with making the event a reality.

It all starts with firing up your imagination – conceptualizing novel ideas, images or notions in the mind without any immediate input from the senses. Every creative thought starts with your imagination, and it is your imagination that then leads you to be inventive.

So, creativity and inventiveness go together hand in hand, and throughout this book I will use the words inventive, inventiveness, creative and creativity.

It's time to become more creative, as it is in your DNA!

“

**Imagination is
more important
than knowledge.**

”

Albert Einstein



**WE WERE
BORN TO BE
CREATIVE**

FROM MARCUS TO HESTON IN OUR DNA

In the sleepy countryside village of Bray, about an hour's drive from London, the gastronomic world was turned on its head in 1995 with the arrival of The Fat Duck restaurant.

The owner and head chef, Heston Blumenthal, was to revolutionise restaurant menus. He was an early adopter of sous vide cooking ('under vacuum' in French), which involves sealing food in a bag with seasonings and sauces and slow-cooking it in a precisely temperature-controlled water bath. This gradual, controlled cooking technique produces dishes of unparalleled flavour, texture, aroma and visual appeal.

Additionally, Blumenthal's was first restaurant to harness the culinary potential of liquid nitrogen. Because the liquefied gas is so incredibly cold (-196 degrees Celsius; -320 degrees Fahrenheit), it is used to instantaneously freeze foods, forming microscopic ice crystals that yield an unbelievably creamy consistency.

With these and other 'molecular gastronomy' techniques, Blumenthal developed extraordinary creations like snail porridge, bacon and egg ice cream, and the lauded triple-cooked chips. Dishes are served with additional sensory inputs, such as 'Sounds of the Sea,' a plate of seafood served with a seafood foam on top of a 'beach'

of tapioca sand, breadcrumbs and eel. Alongside this fanciful dish – featured in a 14-course tasting menu – diners are given an iPod to listen to crashing waves whilst they eat.

The Fat Duck, with Blumenthal its helm, was hailed as a global game-changer. It has been called 'a temple to innovative modern British cuisine,' awarded a procession of Michelin stars and was in 2005 voted The World's Best Restaurant.

Now let's go back to the 1st century AD and Marcus Gavius Apicius, a Roman gourmet and lover of luxury, who contributed to one of the most famous ancient cookbooks, *De Re Coquinaria*. It contains hundreds of recipes, many of which are the earliest examples of their kind. There are chapters packed with detailed preparations for venison, gazelle, wild sheep, beef and veal, kid and lamb, pig, hare and dormouse.

It tells you a lot about Roman cooking, particularly for the wealthy classes, referencing exotic ingredients and complex methodologies. For instance, Apicius lays out two ways of cooking boar and seven different sauces to serve with it. Here is one aromatic accompaniment for your oven-roasted boar:

"Crush pepper, lovage, oregano, seedless myrtle berries, coriander and onions. Add honey, wine, broth and a little oil. Heat and tie together with roux. The boar, roasted in the oven, is masked with this sauce, which you may use for any kind of roast game."

But what really struck me in reading these ancient recipes was that even with nearly 2,000 years separating Apicius and The Fat Duck's Blumenthal, both were pushing the boundaries of what

adventurous cooking could be. They wanted their audiences to experience exciting new sensual delights. They saw their creations as a form of art.

It seems that inventiveness and creativity were baked into their DNA.

IT IS IN YOUR DNA?

Since the evolution of Homo sapiens – modern man – our world has been driven by flashes of inspiration. Civilization has evolved and progressed, driven by the process of creativity. The enduring question has always been whether the defining factors come from nature or nurture. Could it be that creativity literally resides in our DNA?

Potentially, yes.

In 1869, the English explorer and anthropologist Francis Galton, a relative of Charles Darwin, wrote a book on what he called 'hereditary genius.' Galton felt that the ability to come up with great ideas was passed down through generations.

A century and a half later – as recently as the early 2000s – we've continued to uncover new things about the brain and creativity. In fact, a number of recent studies seem to validate Galton's theory of genetic inheritance.

In 2009, a team from Cornell University's Department of Neurology and Neuroscience discovered that the brains of artistically creative individuals have a particular characteristic that may enhance imagination and inventiveness.

They found that the size of the corpus callosum, a bundle of more than 200 million nerve fibres that link the hemispheres of our brain, plays a crucial part in an individual's ability to think 'divergently.' Basically, the smaller this juncture was, the easier it was for the individual to be creative. It seems that a decrease in the connectivity between the right and left lobes allows each hemisphere to specialize, so ideas can develop more freely and fully. Writers, artists, musicians and other creative types were in fact found to have a smaller corpus callosum than others in the general population.

However, this does not tell the full story. Creativity is not only about divergent thinking, but also generating endless associations. Recent findings suggest that the secret to this lies in our DNA.

In 2013, researchers at Helsinki University looked at human genes and their relation to hereditary genius. Their study found that an individual's ability to be creative musically is linked to a particular cluster of genes known to be involved in the plasticity of the brain – its ability to reorganise itself by breaking and forming new connections between cells. The more plasticity your brain exhibits, the more creative you become.

This would seem to indicate that some people are inherently more creative than others. The key word here is the notion of 'more.' Everyone is creative; it is in our DNA. But we've been taught the myth that a lot of us are not creative because we were born to use mainly one side of our brain – the left side.

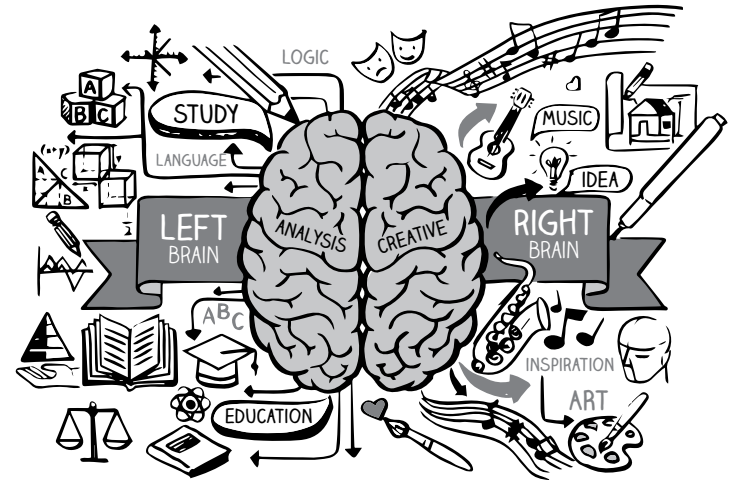
KILLING THE MYTH

Let's look at this further. The right side of the brain, is associated with things like creativity, imagination and intuition, whilst the left side is associated with things like planning, logic and rationality. The argument goes that 'left-brain people' are more logical in their thinking, rather than imaginative, and simply cannot be all that creative.

That's a long-held belief... but science tells us it's simply not the case.

The brain's right hemisphere is not a separate organ, working in isolation from the left hemisphere. It is also incorrect to say that the left brain is uncreative.

The link between creativity and the right brain is pretty clear. The specialized characteristics of the right hemisphere make it the seat of curiosity, synergy, experimentation, metaphorical thinking, playfulness, solution finding, artistry, flexibility, synthesizing and risk taking. In addition, it is likely to be opportunistic, future oriented, welcoming of change, and to function as the centre of our visualization capability.



Every one of these specialized modes is capable of enhancing an individual's creative thinking. For example, an intuitive idea that pops into your mind and appears to solve a problem can be experimented with, visualized, integrated with other ideas and ultimately developed into a possible solution. That's the right hemisphere part.

Now, to do something about that possible solution requires different specialized mental processes, and these, by and large, are located in the left hemisphere. Assessing the proposed solution to determine whether it represents a viable solution to the real problem makes use of our rational processes of analysis and logic.

The role of the right hemisphere is essential to the creative process. But, it supplies only a half of the thinking needed to realize the full creative process. We also need the left hemisphere and both halves of the limbic system to optimize creative output. This is where we start to become inventive: when we begin translating these creative thoughts into action.

Creativity is a whole-brain process. Kill the myth – which many are told from a young age, and believe, and live their lives by – that they are just not creative people. While factors such as environment and upbringing play a crucial role in your brain's development, work done by scientists in Scandinavia and the US has shown that having the right genetic makeup can make your brain more inclined towards creative thinking. Having said that, every one of us, every day, uses creative thinking. You probably don't realize it.

YOU ARE CREATIVE HUMAN BEING

Creativity is possible in all areas of human life. It can be evident in science, the arts, mathematics, technology, cuisine, teaching, politics, business... you name it. And, like many human capacities, our creative powers can be developed, cultivated and refined. Doing that involves an increasing mastery of awareness, skills, knowledge and ideas.

“

**There is no doubt
that creativity is
the most important
human resource of all.
Without creativity,
there would be no
progress, and we would
be forever repeating
the same patterns.**

”

Edward de Bono

Creativity is about fresh thinking that involves making critical judgments about whether what you're working on is any good, be it a theorem, a product design or a poem. Creative work typically passes through a series of phases. Sometimes, what you end up with is not what you had in mind when you started. Being creative is not just about having off-the-wall ideas and letting your imagination run free. It may involve all of that, but it also includes refining, testing and focusing on what you're doing. It's about blue-sky inspiration and original thinking, but also about critically judging whether the work in process is taking the right shape and is worthwhile, at least for the person producing it. It is about the right and left sides of your brain – the imaginative half and the rational half – working in partnership.

Creativity is not the opposite of discipline and control. On the contrary, creativity in any field may involve deep factual knowledge and high levels of practical skill. And, creativity isn't a linear process, in which you have to learn all the necessary skills before you get started. The real driver of creativity is an appetite for discovery and a passion to create fantastic new things that will enhance your life and the lives of those around you.

Going back to Marcus Gavius Apicius and Heston Blumenthal, both used creative thinking to produce wonderfully innovative food. But to do that, they also needed discipline, focus and logical thinking. Laying a sumptuous gourmet table takes more than arm-chair reverie. Creativity is a mixture of all these things, where you have great ideas and the courage to 'go there,' but you also have to dedicate the necessary time, put in the hard work, learn by experience and strive to continually innovate and do things better.

Don't let anyone tell you that you aren't creative. You are. Embrace the fact that it is in your nature. It is literally in your genes.

And with that, it's time to meet a Colombian archaeologist and anthropologist.

THE JAGUAR MEN IN OUR NATURE

Let me introduce you to Carlos Castaño-Uribe, a Colombian archaeologist and anthropologist. In the 1980s, Carlos was abseiling down one of the peaks of Chiribiquete, a series of tabletop mountains in the Amazon rainforest, when he made a startling discovery.

“Hanging 300 metres up the rock face, I arrived at a vast stone ledge and found myself face to face with a pair of jaguars,” he says. “They’re painted looking at each other, though I felt in that moment that they were looking straight at me. I nearly fell off.”

Since that startling meeting with the painted jungle cats, Carlos and his team have discovered more than 75,000 ancient cave and rock paintings, the largest concentration of rock art anywhere in the world. Some are 20,000 years old.

The density, size and positioning of the paintings – often high up on cliff faces – are unparalleled, and Carlos believes there are many more works to uncover. The mountain range was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018, and is part of Colombia’s largest national park, which covers 17,000 square miles. More than 80% of the mountains remain unexplored by archaeologists.

The paintings document the lives of ancient nomadic hunter-gatherers, showing in unusual detail their hunts, battles, dances and rituals, and a knowledge of plants and animals that suggest a sophisticated understanding of Amazon ecology.

“This makes Chiribiquete one of the few depictions of megafauna by a human hand in the entire world,” says Dr Alexander Geurds, a professor at the University of Oxford’s School of Archaeology.

By far the most commonly painted animal is the jungle’s fiercest predator, the jaguar. Nearly a quarter of the images feature the animal, which played a key role in the religion of the group, now known as the Jaguar Men. Other images discovered by Carlos and his team depict long-extinct creatures such as megatheres – 20-foot, four-tonne ground sloths that died out about 10,000 years ago.

“It’s the Rosetta Stone of the Americas,” says Carlos, referring to the inscribed ancient granite stone that was key to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics. “Chiribiquete allows us to interpret the cave art of the whole Neotropical region, the oldest history of the continent.”

My guess is that most of us thought that ‘art’ really started in the 16th and 17th centuries. Those were the days of Michelangelo, Titian, Rembrandt, Canaletto and Blake, who paved the way for Constable, Cezanne, Monet and Van Gough in the 1800s, and the modern art stars Picasso, Moore, Marhol, O’Keeffe, Emin and Bansky. But that notion is dashed when you look at the art of the Jaguar Men – it’s thousands of years old.

Or, you can go back further. One of the oldest examples of Sub-Saharan African art, the Blombos Cave rock art, consists of two pieces of rock engraved with abstract geometric crosshatching and a series of beads made from sea snail shells. They were discovered in 2002 and have been dated to around 70,000 BC. Then, there's The Venus of Tan-Tan, which dates to 200,000-500,000 BC and is said to be the earliest representation of the human form. The small quartzite carving was discovered in 1999 on the banks of the River Draa in Morocco.

Every civilization, in every part of the world where man has lived since Homo sapiens first walked the earth, has produced art. The question is, why? It is obviously an important means of communication; if had not proved so useful, our early ancestors would have stopped using it. As highlighted in the first chapter, creativity is in our DNA, and the Jaguar Men, the Blombos Cave art and The Venus of Tan-Tan lend that credence.

That all shows *how* we used art to convey information about ancestry and other culturally and spiritually important topics. But, *why* are humans are so creative — driven to create something out of nothing — and therefore want make art?

WHERE DOES THIS COME FROM?

One area of the human experience that seems not to have parallels out in nature is the arts. Indeed, only a few animal species exhibit even the faintest hints of creative artistry.

There is an Indian artist named Siri, whose drawings — ranging from abstract works to representational landscapes and self-portraits — have sold for thousands of dollars. As described in many articles and broadcast pieces, she trained for many years, and can now dash off a painting in mere minutes.

Siri is a 50-year-old Asian Elephant.

Species closer to us, like orangutans, chimpanzee and gorillas, have all been taught to draw and paint. Like Siri, some have proved to be quite good at it. But, they don't do it proactively. In every instance, people have prompted them to do so, while man himself has always made art. When our early ancestors looked up at the cave wall, dimly lit by a dying fire, they saw a canvas.

“

**Imagination is the
beginning of creation.
You imagine what
you desire, you will
what you imagine,
and at last, you create
what you will.**

”

George Bernard Shaw

But, why? It is in fact our nature; creativity is big part of being human. It provides us with beauty that can inspire, protects and keeps us safe, helps us recall past events or emotions, brings us together and aids in communication and education.

EXPRESSION OF BEAUTY

Throughout history, much artwork was made for no other explicit purpose than the expression of beauty. Artwork is to be beheld and admired. It is breathtaking, and can even make us emotional. It is with this beauty that I'll draw the first connection between nature and creativity that led to making art. Nature and art are both inherently beautiful, no matter how you define beauty. Both can dazzle us and take our breath away. They can inspire us and make us feel connected to something. They can both strike an emotional nerve that leaves an impact on us that's not soon forgotten. At their essence, art and natural beauty evoke an emotional response.

This is probably what the arts are all about in humans: they employ a visual stimulus to affect the mental or emotional state of the viewers.

A TOOL FOR SURVIVAL

Creative behaviours could also have evolved as a way to relate information that helps ensure our survival. It does not require a stretch of the imagination to see how storytelling could have been used to pass down valuable knowledge that helped people stay alive. Think of stories told around the campfire about the man who escaped the bear, or the woman who found a leaf to cure stomach sickness. These ideas could also be communicated through song, dance, drawing and painting.

Being creative makes us human. It separates us from the animal kingdom. Today, we get joy from the beauty we see in a painting or hear in a piece of music. They help us to relax by bringing down our stress levels. We live in a digitally connected world where, in an instant, I can learn new things from listening to a TED Talk, reading a blog or following someone on Twitter. I can instantaneously share this new information with whomever I like, and they can pass it onward with the push of a button.

All of this provides opportunities that make us more creative. Through our creativity, we can 'teach' our family, friends, peers and the next generation by sharing our experiences, knowledge and wisdom. Even though we probably don't recognise it, everyone is a teacher because everyone is creative. Every day, no matter who you are, where you reside or what you do, you inevitably teach someone something new, and you will be taught something new yourself.

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of creativity at the centre of our nature. Embrace and celebrate that fact. If, by your upbringing or the education, you've been led to believe that you aren't creative, then that wrong can now be put right. You are an awesome creative machine, and once you've accepted that, you will be on the road to unlocking your imagination and creating fantastic new things.

We can now explore how we have used creativity to not only survive, but how we thrived through innovation. This is where we rebel against entrenched ideas, adopt new perspectives and open the door to exciting new thought and expression.