The Creative Wild *invites us into a posture many of us have forgotten, a willingness to be surprised. Steve Brock lays out maps, tools, and rich stories for the journey. This call to creation comes with a cost, and this is what the book illuminates so well; it's worth every penny.*

— CODY F. MILLER, mixed media artist

The Creative Wild *is written so well. It is both deeply thought-provoking and entirely practical. Several times while reading the book, I had to pause for a minute to contemplate another profound insight into the creative process, especially how God works with us while we create.* The Creative Wild *is also immediately applicable, with scores of tools and pathways to help with obstacles to production, always in a joyful and encouraging manner.*

— PAT SCHANTZ, writer and President of the Northwest Christian Writers Association

The Creative Wild *is a beautiful and brilliant antidote for every believer who thinks they are ordinary, uncreative, or just plain stuck. With so many practical take-aways, like Doses and Dives and the reminder that friction is part of the process, this is a book that I will return to over and over again. Once again, Steve Brock, you have created a worthy gem.*

— KAY EDWARDS, author of *Hunt With Your Pack*

Whether you need encouragement, motivation, or a kind fellow traveler on your artistic journey, The Creative Wild *is the book for you. Steve Brock has written a book that is equal parts inspiration, practical advice, and hands-on exercises and reflections to help empower you to accomplish the art you've been called to create.*

— MATT MIKALATOS, author of *The Crescent Stone* and *Journey to Love*

THE CREATIVE WILD

GET UNSTUCK, CREATE MORE ADVENTUROUSLY

By Steve Brock

SUBLIMITY PRESS

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1. Creativity, 2. Spiritual Growth, 3. Christian Living

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

PART I: SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS FOR CREATING ADVENTUROUSLY

1. IDENTITY, CALLING, AND GRACE 11
2. STUCKNESS, ABIDING, AND CREATING AS AN ACT OF GRACE 19
3. CREATING ADVENTUROUSLY 26

PART II: ESSENTIALS FOR CREATING ADVENTUROUSLY

4. MINDSET, MASTERY, AND MOTIVATION 34
5. ENVIRONMENT 45
6. NAVIGATING THE CREATIVE WILD 53

PART III: TOOLS FOR CREATING ADVENTUROUSLY

7. READINESS 64
8. RHYTHM 76
9. RE-CREATION 88
10. DISCOVERY 100
11. MOVEMENT 112
12. PERSPECTIVE 124
13. PLACE 135
14. OTHERS 147
15. INDIRECTION 158
16. INCOMPLETION 170
17. RIGHTNESS 181
18. NEXT STEPS 192

APPENDIX: THE CREATIVE WILD QUESTIONS.....201
ENDNOTES 206
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....213

INTRODUCTION

Where you learn what The Creative Wild is, why you belong here, the reasons for writing this book, and what's to come.

Creating is not extraordinary, even if its results sometimes are. Creation is human. It is all of us. It is everybody.

— Kevin Ashton, *How to Fly a Horse*

You've likely heard the story of the little kid tasked with cleaning out a very dirty stable. When asked why he scooped out the mountain of manure with such joy and enthusiasm, the kid replied, "Because there's gotta be a pony in here somewhere!"

Cute story. But what you may not have realized is this: You're the little kid.

And that pile of manure, well, that's your creative idea. Bear with me.

See if this doesn't sound familiar.

You have an idea for a new creative product. A book. A painting. A new recipe, tattoo, board game, cure, or business. Whatever it is, you're excited about it.

You spend more time dreaming of it. Jotting down additional details. Working out your Oscar or Nobel acceptance speech. Figuring out some witty retort for your interview on *The Today Show.*

And then you start the work. It goes something like this over days, weeks, months, maybe even years:

"This is garbage."

"This is garbage."

"This is garbage."

"Wait. This could be… Nope. This is garbage."

"What made me think I could do this?"

"I have a new idea that will change all this!"

"Not bad. Not bad."

"Nope. This is garbage."

"I should start over."

"I should just give up."

"Didn't people tell me the idea was good? C'mon. Stick to it! You can do it."

"Nope. This is garbage."

"Wait. What is that? Is that a hoof?"

"Is that a pony's tail?"

"This looks like a pony. Kind of."

Refine.

Refine.

Periodic bouts of impostor syndrome.

Refine.

The sheer panic of an approaching deadline.

The motivation of the deadline to overcome those nagging perfectionist tendencies.

"This isn't bad."

Refine.

Refine.

"What do you think?" you ask a trusted colleague.

Refine.

Refine.

And then one day, you take the near-final product, and you ask another trusted friend (who knows your area, medium, genre and shares your tastes). They look at it, read through it, listen to it, etc.

And then they look at you.

Then back at the work.

Then back to you.

They say nothing, but you realize they have tears in their eyes.

You say nothing, fearful those tears mean they are empathizing with you for wasting the last two years of your life on this thing.

And then they smile and say three small yet mighty words.

"This is beautiful."

They've found your pony. And so have you.

WELCOME TO THE CREATIVE WILD

Let's change the metaphor since "horse poop" and "beautiful" have likely never coexisted in the same sentence before this one.

To make something new, useful, or even beautiful, you'll need to enter what I call "The Creative Wild." As the name implies, it's an untamed place. Picture a vast forest filled with endless trees, occasional meadows, rivers, waterfalls, and rocky cliffs. It doesn't have street signs—or even streets. There are paths, but you may not know which one goes where. It is a place of wonder, mystery, beauty, and, often, the scary unknown.

I like this metaphor of a forest, but you can come up with whatever one works for you—a jungle, desert, old castle, ocean depths, complex urban environment, or overflowing closet. Any place you can picture that has elements of mystery, wonder, intrigue, and anticipation (so maybe the closet is out) will work. It's the concept that matters more than the analogy.

Everyone who has ever created has experienced The Creative Wild. It's where we go when we make things or even dream about what might be. It can be as tame as a sunny glade or as rampaging as a storm. It invites us and terrifies us. It is less an imaginary place and more a place of the imagination. A place of curiosity and inspiration and all the elements you associate with creativity. And many, you might not. It is the mental, emotional, and even spiritual space you enter—much like a studio, atelier, or workspace—when you desire to make something new. It's a figurative place, just like your happy place, only bigger, better, and with a much cooler name.

Some of you, however, may not think it's a place you belong. You may do many creative things without considering those efforts creative. Planning a meal, organizing a classroom, conducting a meeting—these and so many other everyday tasks get classified as that: everyday tasks. Not creative, and definitely not artistic or innovative.

The problem isn't with your creative abilities. It's with your labels and classifications. Creativity comes in two general forms: compositional and improvisational. And yet, most people only consider the former when thinking of their own creativity. If they've never written a book, composed a song, penned a sonnet, painted a picture, or any one of a million other examples of compositional creativity, they don't think of themselves as creative. They don't consider that coming up with a new recipe, figuring out how to motivate a co-worker, or devising a new way to sort the laundry are all forms of creativity, just the improvisational kind.

Most people don't grasp that because we are all created in the image of our Creator, each of us bears in the fiber of our being, both the ability to create and the drive to do so. But you're not "most people." You wouldn't be reading this if you didn't have at least a glimmer of hope that you have some creative abilities. Indeed, you do. In the following pages, you'll discover just how many. You just may have not yet realized or embraced that. But keep reading. You will.

For the rest of you, if you already have some sense of your creative potential, the way you navigate The Creative Wild—I mean truly thrive there and make it work for you as opposed to looking in from the perimeter—is to learn how to create adventurously. And how you do that is what this book is about. In fact, the goal of this book is to ease you into—or help you grow in—your identity as an adventurous creative. Someone who longs to do something exciting, something that matters. Who grows in wisdom and grace. Helps others. Makes something beautiful. Glorifies God. Someone who becomes the creator your Creator Father created you to be.

The Creative Wild will be a new place for some and feel quite familiar to others. But no matter how long you've been in this world of creativity, The Creative Wild will always retain elements of mystery, even as you gain mastery navigating it. It bridges many spheres, from art to science to commerce, from individual self-expression to group or even communal action, all aimed at bringing something valuable into the world: a work of visual or written art, an innovative product or a new way of doing business, a symphonic movement or a social one.

KEY QUESTIONS WE'LL EXPLORE

In your journey through The Creative Wild, you'll likely have many questions. Here are just a few of the ones we'll explore together:

- What if, as we saw earlier, I don't think of myself as creative?
- How does my creative work relate to my sense of identity, meaning, purpose, and belonging?
- Where do I start if I'm a beginner in this world of creativity?
- How do I finish or know if my work is any good?
- What difference does believing in Jesus make to my creativity and vice versa?
- How can I make a living doing the creative work I love, or at least sell more of what I make?
- How do I overcome ruts, stuckness, impostor syndrome, and all the other forms of anxiety that pop up around creating?
- How can I make something beautiful or useful that makes a difference to others and for God's Kingdom?

Do any of these questions sound familiar? Likely so, because as we'll see, while creative people all seem to be wildly (get it?) different, we also share similar traits and interests. And when

you add in the element of faith, you find our commonalities run both wide and very, very deep.

MY CREATIVE BACKGROUND

Since I'll be your guide through these questions, their answers, and so much more about The Creative Wild, let me give you an introduction.

I spent the first part of my life thinking you had to have a lot of talent to create and the last part (so far) discovering that the most creative people I know simply work harder than the rest of us. I've led a branding and marketing agency for the last 25 years, working with many of the nation's top corporations and ministries. That impresses people in corporations and ministries but earns me minimal cred with my artist friends. They see it all as business and thus not as creative as pure art. Until they realize they need branding and marketing to help them sell that pure art. Suddenly, my star rises. Kind of. I balance all this with other creative pursuits, from writing to photography, from woodworking to cooking, and from sketching to composing music that you'll learn more about in short photo essays sandwiched between the chapters in Part III.

Because of these diverse passions, I have created in many kinds of media and contexts, some for pay, some not. That gives me enough sense to empathize with both experienced professional creatives who live by deadlines and commissions, and those who may only "dabble," but for whom their creative work means everything. I understand the need for innovation in businesses who want to make a profit and can still relate to artists who resist any commercialization of their work. I've found that creative individuals exist in all fields because almost everything you use or appreciate in life results from a creative effort. That intersection of multiple areas of creativity undergirds much of this book.

So too does a deep appreciation for the wonder of making. It's a feeling of inarticulate awe I've known ever since I was a child. You've likely experienced it as well, that inexpressible delight not just in the thing you're creating, or even in the process, but in the very thought of engaging in both. Much like the bliss you derive when anticipating an upcoming trip or pleasant event, there's a joy in the dreaming of what you'll make or are making. Particularly when you're young, there's an innocent pleasure in savoring the very idea of creating. It's akin to the similar happiness that comes from merely caressing your materials, gawking at your tools, or contemplating the time you'll spend essentially playing while you make something new.

When I was small, I loved the imaginative play of taking a toy from a cereal box and using it in a Rube Goldberg-like contraption to catch a passing bug (which, alas, never passed that way). Or marveling, in an age of cheap plastic toys, over the precise metal wheels and gears of my first N scale model railroad set and repurposing parts of one train car to make a mini roller coaster. Or forming mountains, carving out riverbeds, making miniature trees, trellises, and towns, and other aspects of crafting scenery as part of that railroad. I didn't realize it then, but I was engaging in a kind of world building—even on a micro scale—that became part of so many creative efforts later, from storytelling to interior design.

Around the age of 11, I got my first magic trick. Sure, it was fun to amaze my family and friends, but even more fascinating was the intricacy of the props, both those the audience sees and the secret parts they don't. I eventually started performing illusions professionally, from high school through college and beyond.

Later, whether writing a play while studying in Germany in college, improving my photography skills in China, or learning to design my own furniture, there was always a common

thread. With each new creation, I experienced this combination of joy and wonder. I knew what I was making was more than fun, but I couldn't tell you why.

It was much later in life that I made the connections and realized that this mystery of making had many of the same characteristics as the mystery of faith.

MY REASONS FOR WRITING THIS BOOK

It is that intersection of creativity and faith, that led me to write this book. I've been a follower of Jesus since I was in college. And I realize in hindsight, I've had questions all along about how God works in and through us to do anything, but especially something creative. Over time, my curiosity about faith and making has grown into a passion. It's a quest, really, to explore how my faith affects my creativity—and vice versa—in ways I can apply to create better, and to enjoy a deeper relationship with God. In both the enjoyable moments of inspiration, flow, and joy, and in the hard ones. Those where you feel frustrated or stuck and the way forward seems not just hidden, but as unlikely as a unicorn running up to you and whispering (in that breathy way only unicorns do) the winning ticket number for the next lottery.

This intersection of faith and making lies at the heart of creating adventurously. We'll start in Part I with my journey. I discovered that getting unstuck creatively had everything to do with my identity, calling, faith and, most of all, God's grace. Adventurous creating begins from a place of knowing who you are in Christ (identity). From that firm foundation, we find freedom to explore and work through the four essential elements you need to create, which we cover in Part II. And finally, in Part III, we'll examine the often-surprising, generally paradoxical, and always practical tools that most help you create adventurously.

If you're antsy to understand this concept of creating adventurously, you could jump ahead to whatever chapter seems most appealing for your current needs. But here's a better tip: You already know what it's like. Think of when you felt the greatest joy making something. It likely has traces of that childlike delight you knew as a kid when there was no sense of stuckness, no impostor syndrome, no comparison to others, no feeling of inadequacy or inability, no worrying about the next step because you were so caught up in the bliss of this one. It's where you experienced momentum and felt you were in complete control of the work you were making, even as you were helplessly caught up in its pull. You felt bold, excited, and incredibly grateful just to be doing this work in which you were both lost and found.

That's what it feels like to create adventurously. The goal of this book is to give you a framework or way of thinking, and tools that become the guide rails to help you spend more time in that feeling, that place of both purpose and passion. You won't find prescriptive paint-by-numbers rules here because those rarely show up in the realms of creativity or faith. Instead, you'll find principles, practices, and techniques to make your own way through The Creative Wild. And most of all, as you'll read over and over in the following pages, you have the Spirit of the Living God in, with, and for you at each step. That's a pretty powerful combo for creating.

That's also enough background.

Now, it's time for you to find your pony.