

Rachel: Hello, thanks for joining us today. We are going to have a conversation with Ellen Palestrant about creativity. So in today's show, Ellen and I will talk about just different things you can do to inject creativity into your life even if you're completely busy. If you're one of those people who thinks you are not creative, we talk about that. We talk about what to do. She has a fundamental exercise about how to know what would bring you joy, what you would want to create.

So even if you think there is nothing I would want to create right now, I think that little exercise is really cool. The way that she phrases that and everything can really get you some very good insight. So we go through that and we talk about different things that bring happiness and why people start to feel like they are not creative, starting really young. So this is a short interview but we got pretty fast paced and it's definitely enlightening and I hope that you enjoy it. Hey, so Ellen, thank you so much for being here.

Ellen: It is my pleasure. I'm really delighted to be on your show. Thank you, Rachel.

Rachel: My pleasure. I think this is going to be great. I'm excited to dig in to creativity. And before we get started, the intention behind A Better Life is to show people that if they have a choice, they can choose a better life. So in that spirit, can you take a minute with us to just show us some of the things that you are most proud of in your life?

Ellen: I think, you know, one of the things I am the most proud of is that I'm a finisher. And by that, I mean, if something feels and seems good to me, an idea, a glimpse into a possibility, I do focus on it. And it doesn't matter how much work it turns out to be, I finish it. Of course, if the idea isn't a good idea and I realize that along the way, then I don't finish it. But most things, I finish. I think that is really important is completion because the concept is not enough. It's what you do with that concept.

Rachel: Interesting. So that leads me to immediately thinking, don't you have like a ton of ideas?

Ellen: So many ideas. It's not a problem because somehow the ideas that are the most important to you are the ones you develop. They're not all equally appealing to you. So I don't find too much conflict in terms of that. But there is certain things that have one particular ... I could [inaudible 00:02:40] more than a project but life's work almost that has been a river that has run through my life and that is a fantasy world that I

have built called [The World of Glimpse](#) that became a book eventually and offer now a [DVD](#), a 95-minute book DVD, of the complete book. And I also did all the paintings for it as well. So something you just can't let go of and this is one of the things. And this also led me to my exploration of creativity. What is it? What is creativity? It's not something you can teach but it is something you can explore.

Rachel: So one thing I'm immediately curious about is I've heard that kind of some people say, "If you have an idea and you don't take action on it, it goes to somebody else." Do you believe that? Because you were saying that those ideas that stick with you.

Ellen: I think even if it goes to someone else, it doesn't matter because you are going to do it your way. Because as long as it comes from within and you have that real connection to it, it's going to have your mark on it. You know, obviously if it's something like inventing a particular kind of coffee machine that has a certain design that other people will easily replicate and so on, you might miss the boat on that one. But if it's something that is really a concept in terms of becoming bigger and bigger and more and more, you will be able to put your own personality into it and create it in a way that is really original because it's part of you.

Rachel: That's a great point. And so for people who feel like they are not creative, why do you think that would be?

Ellen: I've heard that so often. You know, "I'm not creative. I wish I was." I really do feel that most people are far more creative than they realize. And creativity is not a competition. It's something you do your own way and there are very often obstacles that stand in the way of people and they create a potential. And these accumulated over their lifetime, from the time they were children. It could be the close critical voices that now exist in the heads but came from the criticism of others, from teachers, from tremendous fear for whatever reason. So this is why I actually wrote my book, [Have You Ever Had A Hunch? The Importance of Creative Thinking](#), because I wanted to explore creativity and what stands in the way of people meeting their own creative potential which is just so important for them for many, many reasons.

Rachel: And what are some of the reasons that you came up with?

Ellen: You know, I started with myself because that often happens. And as I said, I had this desire to complete my book, [The World of Glimpse](#), but I was an immigrant. There was a certain need to earn a living not

through speculative work at that point and I was teaching full time at a college in the English and Humanities department, and then the Creative Writing department. And there really was just so little time to, and even I enjoyed that, there was just so little time to work on something that was very important to me.

So one day, sitting in the office and a poem just popped into my mind, you know, poems do and it was called Day-Not-Long-In-Office. It's very short, I'm going to read the original one to you and then just see how I altered it. And I said to myself, because I wrote this down, "Are you suffering from day-not-long-in-office, a [inaudible 00:06:40] not catching [inaudible 00:06:41], a touch of giving-up-itis, and a dose of why-bother-itis? Then call the No-Time Crisis, make an appointment for your demises. It's also futile-itis. Time is running out-itis.

And I thought about it. This is just so depressing. So I changed that last verse. Instead of, "It's also futile-itis. Time is running out-itis," I said, "Then call the No-Time Crisis, press 0 for advises on slowing the clock, beating the chime. It's also futile-itis if time runs out-is." So you know, you could something pro-actively. It's in a way, it's just up to you to keep things going however busy you are. Just little bits of time in building whatever it is you want to build until it can become your main career.

Rachel: There is a lot of people who said that we are all creators. Do you believe that?

Ellen: I think I would say so because there are so many different fields in which we can create. I call creativity something that you relate to in a way that is almost it's outside of ego. It comes from instinct, from a hunch, from that intuitive moment when you're connected to it. And it might even be something like knitting where you just want to do that extraordinary, wonderful, long scarf or whatever it might be. There are just so many different things.

For me, it's writing and painting and thinking, I guess, and also doing film, all of those things. Creativity kind of connects into many different areas and therefore people who are addicts of creating, who've had experience, often explore many different areas. So yes, I believe that everybody has creative potential and also I believe that it's very important to tap into it, to play with it, to explore it, because you cannot only rely on one career. Things change. And we need to be adaptable. So it's important to develop other skills as you go along and particularly skills that resonate with you.

Rachel: Yeah, I love that. And so for people who are listening and they are just crazy busy and they have a million things going on, what is something really tangible and practical that they can do to explore their creativity and just kind of get going with this?

Ellen: Okay. Recognize that sort of desire you have to do something that you have sublimated along the way because you have to be practical or you're told you have to be practical and you entered an area of work that was practical. And that's good because it actually gives you freedom, because you can depend, you hope on that work to support you. But also in the meantime, think about yourself when you were a child. And what were those things that you really, really enjoyed doing? If you like, I can give you an exercise for everybody, a brief one.

Rachel: Yes, please.

Ellen: Just to try and help you get back into that person that you really are. You might be doing just what you want to do but if you're not and you have this all the sadness within you of lost opportunity, just imagine. And this is what I've given to a lot of, you know, there were classes and groups and even superior court judges, this particular exercise.

Imagine that you only have 24 hours left to live. The world, as you know it, is going to cease. It's no longer going to be and everybody in this world including your family are going to die. However, they're going to be new beings who are going to come who speak in English or whatever language you happen to be speaking and you want to leave your mark behind for those to come. What is it that you want to do in those last 24 hours? And because this is a fantasy, everything is achievable. In other words, if you want to write a 700-page novel, you can do it in those 24 hours. Do you want to build an amazing garden with every plant on earth? Within it, it's achievable.

So I'm really asking people to extend their imagination enormously. Paint a huge work of art, whatever it's going to be. And why I say nobody is going to be left on earth including your family is that it's very, very hard for people to actually just see who they themselves were before they had all the responsibility of all the people they loved. So what is it?

I have found people who want to be ballet dancers and suddenly this is what they were going to do. Gymnasts. Build a gigantic bridge. You

know, various things that they had been in a way yearning to do but had absolutely suppressed that. So this is a way of kind of examining yourself. What is it you want to do because so many people don't know what they want to do?

Rachel: Yeah, I think that exercise is awesome. I love the way that you phrase it. I love the idea of just making it so that everybody is gone and all you can focus on is yourself. And so then where my mind takes me is okay. Let's say I think of somebody or something to do, something that'd be really exciting, let's say it's writing. And then I think people might say, "Yeah, fine, I'd love to write but I have a family and have so many things going on." How do you recommend that people put time into their creativity?

Ellen: Okay, let's take writing for example. You know, I had young kids and so on. Very, very busy life in so many different ways but I always had a notebook with me and even if I stopped at a traffic light, I somehow put down some notes if it occurred to me. All ideas, I captured. Some of them became poems eventually. You know, I have a book of poetry. They became different things. Some of them became nothing. They weren't worthwhile. The next time I looked at it, I thought, "Yitch!" But I put it down and then made my decisions about them afterwards. So I say use time well without getting anxious but don't forget about those other things you want to do.

Rachel: Yeah, I think that's a really great response and I loved it. You're having a notebook at the stop light, I think that's great. Just make it nice and easy for yourself about having to sacrifice or make any major changes. Do you know at the top of your head, I'm just very curious, about creativity and health, what the correlation is?

Ellen: Okay. Well, I have to believe because I think it's incredibly energizing and positive. And I can tell you in terms of myself, I was slim at 20s. I had very young children and my sister, who was 10 years older, died of cancer and my mother was ill with cancer as well. And I was slim at 20s, grieving a huge responsibility and wanting that responsibility because I cared about the people. And this is when I changed my life and my direction. I was driving with my husband in the car and I had a special education practice at that point that was successful but I knew I needed something different, something new, something life-affirming. I needed to bring color into my life.

And this is something that if you driven into yourself, you'll find it. With me, it came in a strange way because I had always written and always created but never taken myself seriously. And I was driving with my husband in the car and telling him that I had to do something else. I wasn't going to give up on my remedial practice because I owed it to the kids. I had to bring them to a point where they were ready to leave me. And so I wasn't going to let anyone down. I just wouldn't take any new students. And he said to me, "Why don't you write?" I just said, "Yes, why don't I?"

The things I had even written a play at college but I never took myself seriously. So that's another message, take yourself seriously. And so I'm going to once more give you a verse. A verse popped into my head, a very simple verse and it's four lines and at that point it was, "In the Land of the Grisibles, far away in the sky, lived many Invisibles, who were able to fly." It's a simple little verse but it's full of potential to be developed. And this became [The World of Glimpse](#). And I couldn't let go of it. And what I did is I introduced color into my life, I introduced joy and positivity. Creativity comes with practice. And so if I ever feel down or anything, I know I can bring color back into my life by merely doing. And for me, bright colors are very important.

Rachel: I think that's such a great way to look at that and just a little bit of writing, so helpful. I think the thing is, like you were saying before about coming back to when we're kids and stuff, we live in this world of infinite possibility and it does. Even just like coloring in the coloring book for me or something, just adds so much joy to the day.

Ellen: That's right. And you say color and I think that is really important as well. I actually painted with 100 children in a gym room. I was teaching them how to story board. And they first heard these stories. I told them what a glimpse was and how we could just develop it into anything we wanted to if we focused on it. And on the next day, we would paint. We would paint freely abstract painting.

And the one kid the day before had done the gloomiest story, violent, darker day that really was just gloomy and dark. The following day, I said, you know, this is abstract painting and I was teaching them to layer, "We need color and you're going to need to work with color." So he worked with color and then came to me and said, "I don't like my story, I'm not going to use it." And he went home with a couple of really nice pieces of art because I showed them how to find something good in what they painted. That was a very positive experience.

Rachel: Interesting. I think that makes sense like there is so much about color psychology. And I think about even you add a little bit of color to your outfit or something and your day is completely different.

Ellen: That's right. So that takes you back to your question of health. I think color, brightness, sunshine, all of those things are really good. And of course, if you are able to exercise and get those rhythms going as well, that is just good for you. Just keep moving and doing if you can.

Rachel: Absolutely. And the other thing I wanted to touch on is you mentioned create until you can make it your whole time thing?

Ellen: Yes, you see, it's a fact really that creativity comes with practice. You're going to make many mistakes along the way. And that's good because they are learning opportunities and anyone who doesn't make mistakes hasn't tried anything. You just remained in your safe little category. OP [SP] category but it's safe. You're going to keep on repeating your previous act. When you try something new, it's exploration. It might take you on a completely different route to what you anticipated but you're going to learn along the way and it might even be a better route. So whether you are writing, whether you are painting, whatever you are doing, practice is extremely important. Creativity comes with practice.

Rachel: Absolutely and so then, you just meant like your full time, let's say hobby, not your career or something?

Ellen: It's your full time hobby that can become your career. In a world, eventually, when you become good enough at it and if it's a marketable thing, in other words, that can support you because sometimes it's just not marketable. It's just something you really, really want to do.

Rachel: Yes. So also, the idea just came to me. You had said you've worked with adults, you've worked with kids. If you had to distill to like the number one take away that kids got from working with you and then that adults get from working with you, could you and what would they be?

Ellen: Yes. I think it's recognizing that they are creative and that nobody owns creativity. There's not a competition in fact competition can lead to something that could be very ordinary because you're just repeating what someone else has done or making it slightly different. It's that

wonderful thing that you could find within yourself. I certainly found this with these children which was just about a month ago that I did this in Elko, Nevada and it was quite wonderful. These were fourth graders. And they had such a good time. We were so proud of what they took home.

The same with adults. I love to watch people create, help people create. I think in many ways, I'm marrying it, when they do it, I feel it. And this is really part of the reason why I wrote the book is just to help other people along. And as I say, creativity is just so broad. There's so many different areas but it's all about energy and productivity and curiosity and building. And that is very, very healthy.

Rachel: And I'm surprised, children don't think that they are creative?

Ellen: No, at a certain point, there are many who don't because they've been crunched at some point. They have been told to paint, for example, in a certain way while that's not really what they wanted to do. They had their own vision. Even coloring in within the lines can be very, very constraining sometimes or limiting. Of course, you got to learn to do all those things. But what about the fact that maybe you want to go right out of the lines and do it your own way. So I think the many reasons why they sort of feel modified at various points. The other kids does it better than them and so on. But once they realize that what they have within them is unique, that is very, very freeing for them to express themselves. And of course, they've got to learn in three hours. This is not a competition, the day is long enough. That's the way I feel in terms of education.

Rachel: Yeah absolutely. So now, I'm kind of like jumping around in my mind. You've said so many interesting things. The other thing now I'm curious about is, and I think you make - before I even go on to that - I think you make an excellent point about... We can for sure learn three hours and then also not have to have the color in the line and stuff and be able to just, I mean not be completely standardized.

Ellen: That's right. And I know the teacher's days are very busy but, you know, not always so easy for them, but those little bits of in-between time are really important. And that you can find the time to do. When the kid has finished their work, I used to have cards that I made when I taught, because I taught at different levels from elementary school to high school, to college, which I call possibility cards. And when they finished, they'd pick up a card and it gave them a possibility to explore in



between. Some schools have bigger budgets than others so they could introduce the arts and so on. But I really think that you can keep this going and make a big difference sometimes in a child's life, sometimes in a short amount of time.

Rachel: Also, I love the idea of possibility cards. It reminds me of story cubes. Have you seen those?

Ellen: Yes. Isn't that very terrific?

Rachel: They're terrific. I loved them. So basically if you don't know what they are, for people listening, they're basically these dice and you roll multiple pairs of dice and each die has a side with some kind of a noun, maybe an animal or a face or all kinds of things. And then you take the different dice and you make a story of whatever showed up on the dice. It's like a fun way where you can just come up with new things.

Ellen: It is so clever and I think anybody could just take any subject. Take a boiled egg in an eggcup. And just think about it and what you could do with it. I mean, as far as it becoming a story, maybe it'll jump out of the eggcup and go flying into the universe and so on. You just keep being as absurd as you wish to be because this is just a very freeing way of looking at things and those story cubes do that.

Rachel: I think that's another really good point. We had some friends over the other day and my boyfriend and his friend are going into business selling necklaces. They're selling a bunch of things but one of the things is necklaces and so they're getting hundreds and thousands of orders of these necklaces. And so right now until they go, full time and get ... I mean they're full time, but until they get like a major production facilities, his friend and his wife are going and putting these necklaces together and it's like very tedious. They are doing like 500 plus a day. And it's like you know, it'd be really fun to do. It's just like every single time you have a necklace, just make up a story about the person who's getting it. Like, "This person is named Marie and she is a janitor and she has six pit bulls." Right? It could be so fun.

Ellen: That is such a good idea.

Rachel: Break up the monotony. I do that off the phone. Sometimes, we go on Amazon wishlist and I'll just type in random names and I'll just buy random presents for people and I'll just make stories in my head about

the types of people that I'm getting the presents for. Oh, man. It's so much fun.

Ellen: That is fun. And you know, you're having fun.

Rachel: Yeah.

Ellen: And it's humor and I think humor is also just so important in terms of health, in terms of everything. I mean we don't do things for our health. We do things just because we are drawn to do it and of course it's going to be healthy but it's because we are doing it with joy.

Rachel: Love that, absolutely. And so the last question I was curious about was, so you were saying how you are a finisher in the beginning. And when you are finishing something, does it feel like an obligation? Does it feel fun? I guess when I'm curious is like is there ever a point where it feels like it starts to get obligation and you have some kind of a re-frame around it to keep creativity going, to keep making it fun?

Ellen: You know, it's not going to always be fun. It's going to be incredible fun when you start out and a large part of it will be fun but there's going to be the tedious aspects as well especially when you're doing something really, really big. But it's almost for me, I make a contract with myself because I'm very self-challenging. I've told myself I'm going to do it therefore it doesn't matter how many hours or years or whatever it might be it's going to take, I'm going to finish it. It's something that I expect of myself. If you're doing it for a company, then of course you have an obligation to do it and you will do it because that's the smart thing to do. But I really think it's important to challenge yourself and then to deliver to yourself. And in that way, you'll deliver it to the world.

Rachel: I'm really glad we touched on that because that's a really good point. It's like it can be super fun at the beginning. And a lot of entrepreneurs we have, a zillion and one ideas and then it just gets to the point where it's just boring and tedious and [inaudible 00:27:54]. So having that contract with yourself and knowing about your ... Like even seeing yourself at the end goal and just knowing that you're going to get there, awesome.

Ellen: And not worrying about how much work it is. Don't focus on the work. And if you're sleep-deprived, so be it. You'll eventually catch up

with your sleep. That's the way I see it. Otherwise, I'm not soft on myself. I think that's my advice. Don't be too soft on yourself.

Rachel: That's funny. That's great. Awesome. Well, thank you. This has been really enlightening. I really love the different things that you've mentioned. I really loved the exercise. I think that's super practical.

Ellen: Oh great, and thank you. I've really enjoyed this, Rachel.

Rachel: Me too. And can you let people know, I'm sure they're going to want to know more about you. Where can they go and find you?

Ellen: Okay, this for my website, [EllenPalestrant.com](http://EllenPalestrant.com) and Palestrant is a mouthful. They always say, "It took me three months to remember the name." So it's phonetic: Palestrant P-A-L-E-S-T-R-A-N-T.com. Also I'm on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#). My books are on [Amazon](#). You'll find me on [Goodreads](#) as well. I can be found.

Rachel: Awesome. And we will have all of the links to find Ellen in the show notes. Well, awesome! Thank you again.

Ellen: And thank you. I really enjoyed it.

Rachel: Me too.

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