

The Pram in the Hall, part 1: Cyril was wrong

The writer Cyril Connolly famously said that ‘There is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall.’ In other words, he believed that having children meant that the parents’ creative abilities, outputs and opportunities would suffer.

I believe the opposite. Over and over again I’ve personally experienced, seen or heard evidence that actually what often happens is that having children brings with it a huge burst of creativity, a surge of entrepreneurial spirit leading to developing new material, increased output and achieving bigger dreams than might have been thought possible, not least by the individual themselves.

I’m very excited to have the opportunity to blog for Mslexia and I chose to focus on this topic because I find it interesting and hope you will too. I want to look at why and how this creative drive comes, and how to use it to your advantage at all stages from pregnancy through to older children, as well as the organisations and projects that can support you as a creative parent. If you don’t have kids around, I have a special post planned on how to harness the same creative triggers in a child-free context.

I’m going to kick off by looking at some of the possible reasons why I think this creative urge arises.

- 1 During pregnancy you are suddenly exposed to a prolonged period of change. You experience both good and bad physical and emotional sensations as well as changes to the relationships around you; find yourself dealing with products and services you didn’t even know existed; and have to strenuously use your imagination to prepare for a being you can barely visualise other than via a blurry image on a flickering screen. People who teach creativity emphasise the importance of seeking out new experiences so that your brain can create new connections. Pregnancy offers new experiences in bucketloads.

- 2 Having given birth by whatever means and however pleasantly or not, you will feel that you have just done something big,

brave and amazing. Not to mention that you have just created a new human being. So things that might have seemed like a big deal or a bit scary before may now lose their power. The mental barriers you might have had, such as sending out your work, can be shifted when looked at in this context. A rejection letter will not hurt as much as the pain of labour, that's for sure.

- 3 Your maternity leave, however long or short, is a rare time off work to think about your priorities in life. It can be a valuable time to think about what you really want to do and how to achieve it.
- 4 The author and publishing expert Alison Baverstock pointed out that little children fill your hands but not necessarily your head. You may get some precious time in which to just think while doing mundane physical tasks (never done so much clothes washing in my life) and this can be a rare gift in our hurry-hurry lives.
- 5 Being sleep deprived is awful, but bear in mind that often our good ideas come to us when we teeter between sleep and waking. Keep a notebook handy – for moments of inspiration or just zombie-like ramblings.
- 6 The sudden scarcity of time in your life makes you prioritise like never before. There just isn't time to sit and watch cats on the internet. You've got fifteen minutes before the baby cries again: do you want to watch cats being sharks or write 100 words of your work in progress? 100 words three times a day over a one-year maternity leave adds up to a full-length novel. This is why mothers returning to work zip through meetings at a terrifying speed: they've lost the taste for drawn-out wastes of their precious time.
- 7 Children can frequently be very tiring and difficult which doesn't contribute towards your creative spirit and projects at all, but they also see the world in a whole new way. Spend time absorbing their creative approach to everything from worms (yummy!) to bookshelves (for climbing!) and it'll probably come out in your own work.

8 Doing anything without children once you have them in your life feels extraordinarily freeing and full of possibilities. I can walk up stairs! I can just carry a small handbag instead of the kitchen sink! I can read a book without being interrupted! This joyous sense of being just yourself with no-one else to look after can also contribute to a rush of creativity.

These are some of the reasons I think you may experience a new creative energy even while you face the new challenges and exhaustion of parenthood. I'd love to hear your thoughts and experiences on this topic if you'd like to leave a comment: it would be great to read your stories. Tell me if there's something in particular you'd like me to cover during my three month blogging time here. In my next post I'll be focusing on using the creative push (sorry) of pregnancy.