



Playing With The Muse

by Sylvie Kurtz

Artists often describe the muse as fickle. I think of her more like a child with ADD. I picture her a bit like Tinkerbell, bright and bouncy, flitting here and there, her attention diverted by anything that catches her attention.

My critic, on the other hand, looks like a pasty white blob poured into a throne-like chair. He wears a purple robe adorned with silver stars and, given half a chance, will expound on (and on, and on) any topic with enviable certainty.

Both the muse and the critic have their functions. But they tend not to play well together. If the muse shows up first and spills her vast reserves of glittery energy, that gives the critic something to work with. The trick is giving the muse a chance to do her thing before the critic tries to create order out of her chaos.

So how do you invite the muse out to play?

Show up, open up, listen up, and follow up.

1. **Show up.** Like any ADD child, the muse thrives on structure. If you make a play date at a specific time and place, she's more likely to show up. And if you keep that date regular, it becomes habit, and she might already be waiting for you when you sit down.

You may want to create a ritual that allows you to quiet down and get into the present. The muse doesn't think about yesterday or tomorrow. She's all about the now. I have a salt lamp I turn on to let my muse know I'm here and ready.

2. **Open up.** The muse wants to play. Play is what she's all about. But to engage her to play with you, you have to let her know that you want to play, too. So start writing. Doesn't matter what you write; just write. Keep the pen moving.

When I first started writing, my confidence level bordered on the non-existent. I set a timer for fifteen minutes and forced myself to write. For the longest time, all I could do was write things like, "This is stupid. I can't write. Who do I think I am?" But eventually, the critic got bored and took a nap. That's when the muse started whispering. "If you were to write a real story"

3. **Listen up.** Like any kid, the muse wants to know that someone's listening to her. My son used to come home from school, flop into the rocking chair in my office and spill his day. This was a gift I loved, but sometimes, especially when I was on deadline, I tried to multi-task--one ear on the conversation; the other on the work. And even though I could repeat what he'd told me word-for-word, he'd sigh and say, "Mom, you're not listening." He needed eye contact to feel heard.

Transcribe what the muse tells you, even if it doesn't make sense. Write fast. The muse loves speed. Forget the "rules" of good writing. Forget proper punctuation. Feel the emotions she brings up. Ask her questions and let her answer. Feeling listened to will thrill her and make her want to play more often.

4. **Follow up.** To make the muse feel as if you appreciate her, she wants you to do something with her gift. She doesn't like to see her pearls lying there unused. In the mess of words on the page, you'll unearth gems.

And this is where she won't mind the critic stepping in. Because patience and skill are the critic's strong points, he can string those pearls together into a satisfying whole.

The muse wants to play. All she's waiting for is your invitation to a play date.

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