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Songwriter's Seminar

Lesson 1:
Developing a Routine; Dream Pages

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The key to writing good songs is to keep writing.

In order to be creative, you have to be ready for it. It takes skill to bring something from your imagination out into the universe. No one is born with that skill. It is developed through exercise, through repetition, through a blend of learning and reflection that's both painstaking and rewarding. It is done with the right preparation and routine.



" If art is the
bridge between what you see in
your mind and what the world sees, then
skill is how you build that bridge."

— Twyla Tharp

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Though we may go through phases of our lives where we feel less creative, less inspired to sit down with pen to paper and think of good songs, it's still important to get the thoughts down on paper, regardless of what judgments we may inflict upon ourselves. I've gone through pages and pages of self-proclaimed mediocrity before stumbling upon one good idea. The more I write, the more I gain an understanding of what works, as well as what doesn't. It is with this experience that I have come to realize the importance of developing a creative habit, a routine that I carry out every day.

The following is one suggestion for a daily routine. You are welcome to try it out. I realize everyone has a different lifestyle, schedule, and time constraints. However, if you can find the time to do this, I believe it will bring you closer to realizing your own creative goals. I call it "Dream Pages."

Dream Pages

1. First, get a blank journal book. I like ones without lines in them, specifically because I hate conformity (what if I want to write in a circle, or draw a picture?)
2. Open the book, and at the top of the first page, entitle your book "**DREAM PAGES.**"
3. Keep the book and a pencil somewhere next to your bed.
4. The moment you wake up, grab the book and write one page of stream of consciousness. Don't think too much about what you write; just get it out. There is no wrong way to do this exercise. If all you write is, "I have to go to the bathroom" for one page, then that is all you write. Although Dream Pages are often negative, repetitive, fragmented, even silly, occasionally, they are full of color. Keep it up!
5. Repeat this exercise every morning, or as often as you can.

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If you try this exercise for one week, you might find some material for future songs. Maybe it will help you to remember your dreams and learn something new about yourself. Maybe you get out all the stuff that stands in the way of you and your creativity later in the day. I've noticed that at these "half-awake" times, I am less aware of my own judgments. I am also able to conjure up the voices inside me that tend to get silenced by distractions and conscious thought throughout the day.

Sample Dream Page

I awaken to this day like
a wounded dreamer standing
alone just an idealistic
believer on my own though
this castle crumbles
away riding faith
come what may like a
baby born in
flight in the middle
of flying free I am
humble, stuck in the middle
of hope and grief I am
given new eyes to see the
beauty inside the truth
rather than the blind
fairy tale like an optimistic
seeker woman in a mirror

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After many revisions based on the dream page, here is the song.

New Eyes

by Sarah Brindell (Copyright Dragon Lady Music, 2003)

I am just a wounded dreamer in a fairy tale
Like an optimistic seeker on a boat without a sail
Building my castle but it just keeps tumbling down
Now the walls are gone, and I can finally see my way out

Like a baby born in flight
I am humbled by the pain, but it's given me
New Eyes

Staring at the mirror, looking for myself
Waiting for my destiny to steal me from the shelf
I was a queen on a throne, till perception came around
Now the mirror's broken I can finally take off my crown

Like a blind girl finding sight
I am humbled by the pain, but it's given me
New Eyes

Like a woman bathed in light
I am humbled by the pain, but it's given me
New Eyes
New Eyes to see the beauty
And now I know my suffering is just love in disguise

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