

# **Metamorphosis by Marian: Transforming Our Dormant Selves with the Art of Play**

Using a teacher's perspective to unlock a lighthearted approach in realizing long-forgotten goals.

## **Unlocking Childhood Cues**

As a children's educator, Marian C. learned long ago that the path of least resistance in learning was one of play. Kids were easy to lead to knowledge if it was packaged in games, creative presentations, and hands-on fun that woke them up and begged for attention. It didn't always have to be logical or straightforward; sometimes the best thing was to give some guidelines and let them work it out for themselves. No two solutions would be the same, and yet everyone had solved the problem, in one way or another.

As adults, we lose that ability to be blissfully unaware of consequences, absorbed in the here and now, and totally focused on whatever comes to mind for the project or issue at hand. Everything has to be logical, orderly, done with a proper risk analysis, and thoroughly planned, with plan A, B, and C lined up in pretty much every area of our lives. If we don't take those steps, we start to feel irresponsible, inadequate, and unworthy. All that planning makes sense, yet can feel constraining when it bleeds into every single area of life over time, even hobbies and holidays. Sometimes even fun gets squeezed into a flow chart, and life gets so busy that anything lighthearted or carefree feels miles away. Impossible, even.

But for Marian, this was inspiring. It meant there was room to wander, room to grow, and room to go beyond the ordinary boundaries of what people had become used to as "themselves". What if something lighthearted, fun, and out of the ordinary daily routine could help people recapture a sense of joy and possibility? It didn't have to be big, it just had to connect with another way of feeling and thinking through life issues. So she started little get-togethers to do crafts, visit local sites, and discuss issues close to the heart. The gatherings grew through word-of-mouth, and an official MeetUp was born. From making photo collages to mulling over dating after age 50, women wanted an outlet to be selves they did not get to experience in other contexts, be creative with no specific results-oriented pressure, and be allowed to talk about subjects that might be taboo with their usual circle of friends and family.

## **From Art to Action Steps**

Expanding the group's membership and activities, Marian drilled down into what methods might work best to keep the group's creative juices flowing and the honesty strong. She referenced her teaching experience and experimented with that old standby, play. The crux of the transition from buttoned-up to speaking up, from hidden dreams to new plans, took the form of "play projects". Whatever subject or interest it was, what were ways to take the stress off, make it fun, and see where the muse struck? Often art was the way to show visually what was lingering inside, and get to the words needed to articulate feelings, goals, and passions that had been put aside long ago. The words then became the path to new freedom of expression in doing an activity, trip, or project that connected deeply with who

that person wanted to be, that someone they were not yet getting to be for themselves in their daily lives.

The skill is in the wandering, and who you wander with. Nagging neglected dreams and budding new interests need to be handled in a compassionate environment. So Marian developed one-on-one sessions to guide people through their *“this is who I want to be”* process. For one participant, it was entering into a prestigious gardening competition. For another, it was finding a way to write short stories again. Bringing things down to a simple, achievable level of experimentation was natural to Marian as a former teacher, and understanding the step-by-step nature of growth in any implementation process was just as relevant for adults as for children. With no demands for a linear pathway and no ties to any other high-pressure area of life, the passions could take their own form, their own time, and live in a supportive context.

Gone were the spreadsheets, the flow charts, the modules and worksheets of more intense self-help programs. Gone was the tracking, the reporting, the sense of owing other people an analysis of how you were developing, on which you would be critiqued. The free-form splash of art, quiet chats, book suggestions, video and music selections, and whatever else popped up as relevant material for the person in need opened up a vista of deep breaths, random inspirations, and enjoyment in meandering down a path of choice, footloose and fancy-free.

### **Surprise to Realized Success**

When participants played, they often surprised themselves with how much they accomplished in such a short time, and how motivated they were to go back for more. Participation in joy-based activities reframed the concept of work, learning, and achievement through repeated hands-on activity, helping to retrain the brain (without the brain noticing enough to protest). Often this lead onward; instead of stopping at one goal, the Play Project format launched newfound confidence, sustained interest, and ongoing pursuits. Dormant dreams turned into action steps, over and over and over again, leading to expanding horizons and increasing skill levels. The art of experimentation translated into continued exploration at ever-higher levels of challenge and satisfaction.

We know this, right? We know all of this. Some of us have kids, all of us were kids, but how quickly we forget. How reluctant we are to believe that a formless nebula could hold some very bright stars; when’s the last time you looked through the telescope? Just going with our gut or going where our hearts lead us gets a lot of lip service, but isn’t the reality of how most of us feel we can make our decisions or live our lives. We forget how to take a deep breath, we’re not sure where to turn to get a better sense of ourselves, we’re disappointed we gave up on things that were once so appealing. Life happens. Bills happen. Being an adult with responsibilities happens. And there can come a point at which that’s not enjoyable or inspirational anymore. We’re supposed to tough it out and be practical and realistic, be grateful for what we do have and are able to do...but sometimes we just want more, we want better, we want to feel like we’re creating an experience we want to be a part of, rather than doing everything we have to do as the main memories we’ll have of how we spent our time on this planet.

Marian understands. She's had to face her own desire to have a less conventional work life and create something new. She's cared for aging parents, been to the school reunions, joined small business groups; she's heard the pain, the regrets, the deep need to recover from the pressures of the status quo and connect with a sense of true self. In wondering how to get her own inner drive back after losses and change, Marian created a rejuvenating yet down-to-earth practice that might just inspire you, too.

*Article written for Marian C. by Amy DeCew [www.amydecew.online](http://www.amydecew.online)*