

## PlayTime

### Mary Walker

#### Developed in conversation with Zoe Thompson-Moore

'I'm upside down in the chair', Zoe said. She'd launched herself upside down in the chair she grew up with, the chair her children are now growing up with. 'I've never seen the room this way before. There's the ceiling down there.'

I was not the kind of child that did headstands. I was afraid I'd fall out of my body. (Imagination was my strong suit.) So when Zoe told me she'd done this I didn't wonder if I could do a headstand too, but I did wonder—"hey, do I still *play*?"

I watched and listened to Zoe's reflections as she brought *Pissing While* together and reflected on this idea of play for myself. But I was diverted, as I often am, by the notion of time. In fact, what you are reading right now<sup>1</sup> was written in parts, in pockets of time between tending to children and home and pets.<sup>2</sup>

Time is an idea Zoe and I frequently discuss. Time, and its close friends work, rest, play, practice and interruption. We both live, create, work, play and care for children at home. Life is an often happy, sometimes stressful, jumble. It all tumbles together. Nothing stands alone. Everything is interwoven to such a degree that it's hard to talk about one without touching on every other part. Zoe and I no longer try. Frankly, it's a relief.

Our regular chats about creativity, whether in person or by voice message, are piecemeal, patchwork affairs punctuated by side conversations with our children, by food-making and by tending to the things that make family life flow. Our

conversations have a rhythm all of their own. We might be sitting together at the kitchen bench with coffee in hand, dishing out apples and ready salted chips, children coming and going, video games and laughter in the background, but we are also on a creative adventure.

Gone are our earlier discussions about carving out time for 'work'. The longing for whole days and the presumption that long stretches of uninterrupted time are necessary in order to be an artist are topics that rarely come up now. We don't want to keep rattling around inside that paradigm. To do so is to willingly turn away from what we have discovered: creativity is richer—*life* is richer—when work, play and family are one.

We no longer talk about setting life aside so we can create. Rather, we think about reaching for our making the same way we reach to turn the jug on, almost absent-mindedly. We wonder if the daily creative practice could be the same as the daily practice of hanging out the washing. For sure, we agree, the self-awareness needed to parent in respectful ways is the same self-awareness needed to create honest art.

Our conversations feel like a kind of play. They are exploratory, boundless and rarely settle on any agreed truths. Instead, we find relief. We remind each other we aren't looking for answers. We return to, and tend to, what is unfolding in the moment, whether that be eggs on the boil, the running of errands or requests for more paper and pens.

We sometimes find ourselves pinned up against a wall of our own making: self-importance, productivity, fear, control—take your pick. When we get caught up

in this way, we often laugh, sigh or walk around the garden. Sitting next to the kids while they play Nintendo Switch is guaranteed to level things out.

Life can be informed, even improved, by interruptions, if we dare. A child's desire to play—their repeated requests that we play *with* them—threaten to derail our plans to get things done, but in fact make everything better. Playful interruptions pause the work, shift us and alter the work we return to.

We don't have to wait for an invitation, of course. We can interrupt our thoughts, our day and our life any time we want. We can do a headstand in a chair, or our equivalent. However we play it, the point is, life will look different if only we put our head down and our tail in the air.

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<sup>1</sup> This sentence was interrupted here by my son requesting more food.

<sup>2</sup> Here, unbelievably on cue, the sentence was interrupted by a wet cat jumping on my knee.