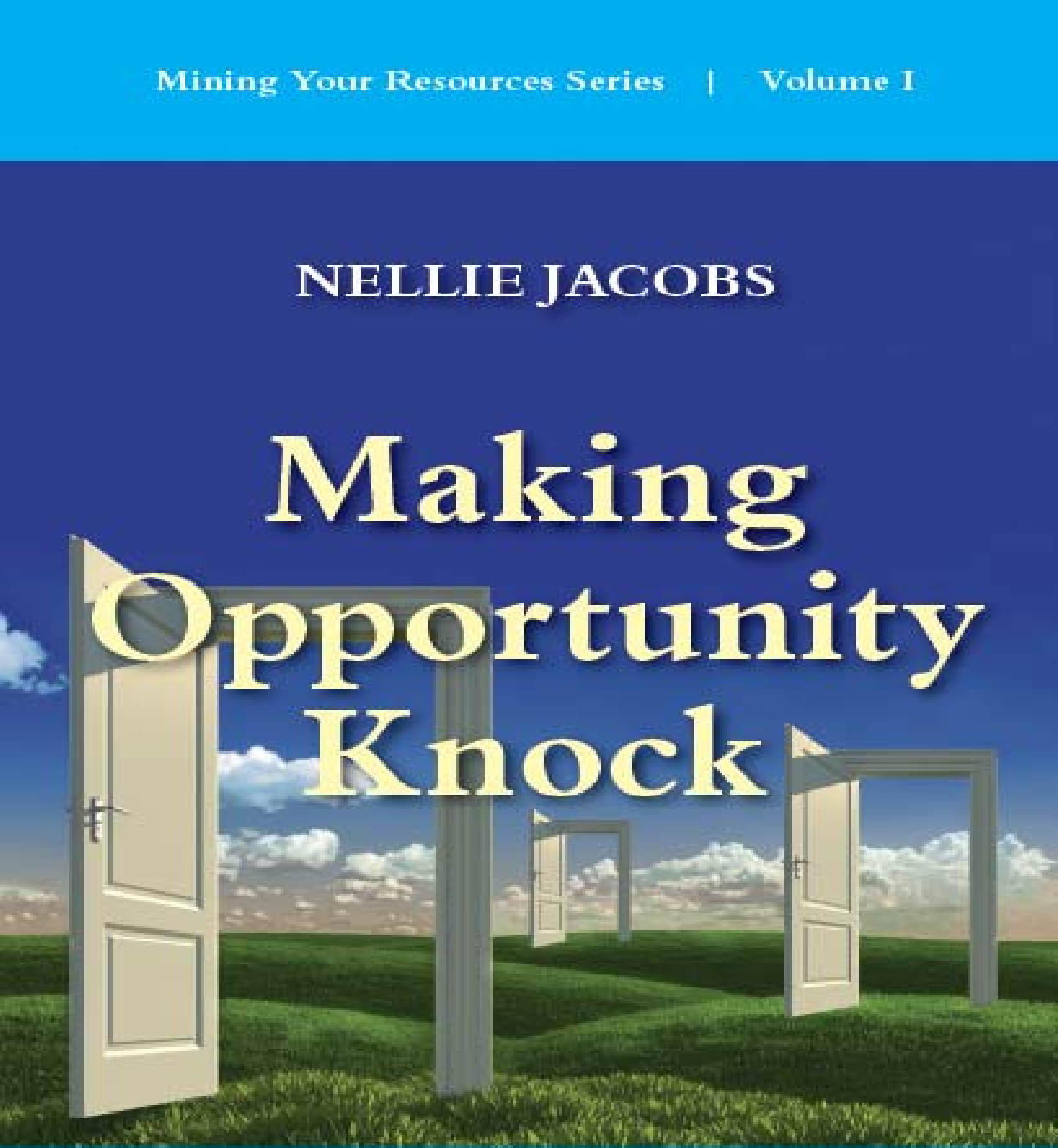


Mining Your Resources Series | Volume I

NELLIE JACOBS

Making Opportunity Knock



Probing Interviews | Personal Insight Activities
Group Discussion Topics & Questions

Nellie Jacobs

MAKING OPPORTUNITY KNOCK

Mining Your Resources Series

VOLUME ONE

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Introduction

"A moment's insight is sometimes
worth a life's experience."

Oliver Wendell Holmes

The intention of this book series is to help readers identify, mine, and actively apply their own multitude of resources. Vincent Van Gogh is noted as saying, "If one is master of one thing and understands one thing well, one has at the same time insight into and understanding of many things."

I've always been fascinated by the how and why of the creative process, from the seed of an idea through development to completion. Interested in this process, I've researched, interviewed, and written about creative people in all kinds of fields. What drives them? How do they get their ideas? Was using their imagination encouraged at home? What, and who were their influences? Why do some people follow through with their inventions or projects and others do not? How does anyone reach their creative potential? In fact, what *does* creativity and creative potential mean to an individual? These are only some of the questions I tend to ask.

Why focus on these interviews? In many ways, they serve as case studies. We are each part of the human family.⁵ Rather than the widespread belief of "six degrees of separation", I really believe less than one degree *connects* us.⁶ If we are truly interested and dig deeply, paying careful attention

⁵Read Harry van Bommel's comments on page 46.

⁶You are welcome to use any of the scores of questions throughout this book to connect with others. To read Nellie's article about this concept online, visit www.womenspost.ca/articles/life/just-one-degree-connection

If we are truly interested and dig deeply, paying careful attention to other people's stories, not only do we learn a great deal about them, we can also discover a lot about ourselves. The more insight we have, the more opportunities come knocking.

to other people's stories, not only do we learn a great deal about them, we can also discover a lot about ourselves. The more insight we have, the more opportunities come knocking.

Countless nuggets of information and inspiration are offered up in these pages. The individuals featured in the following chapters readily share their lives and philosophies, revealing their creative secrets with remarkable candour while generously offering loads of stimulating practical advice, ideas, suggestions and lessons learned.

To best serve you, the book includes five sections: 1) *The Interviews*, 2) *Pull-outs*, 3) *Lessons Learned*, 4) *Insight Activities*, and 5) *Discussion Topics and Questions*.

Following are descriptions of each section.

1. The Interviews

These interviews are meant for your reading pleasure, to encourage self-thoughts, solicit creative responses and provide opportunities to pause and think at many levels. They cover a wide range of topics including family and work relationships, education, home-schooling, alcoholism, good/bad parenting, résumés, perceptions/misperceptions, and strategies for success. I believe these personal stories will touch you in different ways and degrees, ignite your imagination, and motivate your creative thinking. Following is a brief synopsis of each chapter:

Interview One: MICHELE MELE. The very first person to be interviewed for both radio and book series, Michele so

thoroughly symbolizes her title "You're Never Too Old to Follow Your Passion". Now into her forties, with children who are teenagers, Michele decided to "go for it" launching a career as a singer and songwriter, recording CDs and performing her music in cabaret style.

Interview Two: HARRY VAN BOMMEL. An entrepreneur in every sense of the word, Harry has converted his knowledge into dozens of books and several simultaneous careers. In the section "Personal Experiences = Opportunities" he describes how his own career choices came from his life experiences, particularly caring for his dying parents.

Interview Three: KAREN FRASER. With a keen wit and her understanding of trends, Karen offers her opinions, frankly discusses her childhood "secret", and outlines tips for "Making Opportunity Knock". She's an entrepreneur, futurist, owner of a woman's network, and co-founder of a gourmet pet food company.

Interview Four: NEIL DOCTOROW. His early years were spent being expelled from one school after another. He is now the co-founder and director of a private school for elite athletes. In the section entitled "Perseverance", although almost half the age of some of our featured interviewees, Neil offers powerful insights about what he's learned about himself and how he applies that knowledge. He gives valuable advice to parents, and also provides a number of lessons he's learned about starting a business.

Interview Five: MARCI SEGAL. With no family support and having met negative reaction throughout her career time after time, Marci is now president of her own company,

Creativityland Inc. She was originator of the idea and co-founder of World Creativity and Innovation Week, April 15-21, today celebrated in more than forty countries worldwide. In "Optimizing Your Creativity", Marci shares the road she's travelled from being an unknown with no support to an award-winning world leader in creativity.

Interview Six: WENDY WOODS. Principal of Watershed Training, Wendy discusses her epiphanies, and details how she assesses where she's been and where she wants to go whenever she reaches a crossroad in her life. She also explains her section's title "Laughter. The 'Ha-Ha' That Leads to 'Ah-Ah!'"

For the purpose of this book, pull-outs are meant to be sources of discussion, self-reflection, and debate.⁷

2. Pull-outs

Note the pull-outs on the following pages. For the purpose of this book, pull-outs are meant to be sources of discussion, self-reflection, and debate.⁷

3. Lessons Learned

Consider the lessons learned, conclusions, and suggestions generously offered at the end of each interview. If you have not already done so, apply those that "speak" to you, or adapt others to your own situation.

4. Personal Insights

Utilize this section as a means for self-discovery. Specific questions and exercises help access and identify the vast

⁷This is an example of a "pull-out", a technique used in printed material to emphasize a particular point within the main text.

unexplored resources within each person. If you keep in mind the meaning of “insight”⁸, this section may help you dig deeply into such things as your history, your personal resources, what you currently offer, who you were, who you are now, who you’d like to be, and where you’d like to go.

5. Discussion Topics & Questions

The discussion topics and questions are valuable for encouraging self-reflection for individuals, group conversation and debate. Take notice of the recurring themes, concepts, and advice overlapping throughout the chapters, yet all given from different perspectives.

Anyone can identify with many of the issues discussed on these pages. Every reader is sure to be inspired in one way or another, and at one level or another. Not every significant point is addressed, so please *do* make your own discoveries. Delve into whatever captures your attention. You may want to make notes as you read, using issues raised as points of reference for yourself, and for discussion with others. Consider keeping a personal journal for private contemplation or to return to at various points in the future.

⁸Refer to any dictionary for definitions and any thesaurus for substitute words.

The greatest achievement of the human spirit is
to live up to one's opportunities
and make the most of one's resources.

Marquis de Vauvenargues

INTERVIEWS

One

Michele Mele

**Never Too
Old to Follow
Your Passion**

Michele Mele

**Mother. Sister. Wife. Aunt. Granddaughter.
Teacher. Singer/Performer. Songwriter.**

"It took me twenty years to actually *get* to that place where I could break out and show the passion that I felt inside."

In many ordinary houses, when siblings come together, they argue. In Michele's family, she, her parents, and her three siblings make music.

Music is a part of Michele's blood: if she wanted to escape it, she couldn't. She was born into a family of professional musicians. At the age of seventeen, her mother Joanna Bernardi won a trip to Italy in the Canada-wide Kiwanis Music Festival's accordion competition. She'd already met her future husband, Nick Mele, also a musician.

When Michele was growing up, whenever many of their friends would come over to their home, everyone would pull out their musical instruments and start jamming. Imagine the creative environment in that household!

Now a mother of four teenagers herself, Michele says she's finally finding her true path. While working around her busy family schedule and obligations, many of which are self-imposed (she throws parties for holidays, friends and family) Michele has gone into full swing developing and promoting her own music career.

*Michele currently performs jazz and rock in a cabaret style. She previously released three albums in the jazz genre of original music. Her more recent fourth album, showcasing the live performance of her one-woman show, *Naked on the Rocks*, incorporates various genres of music, including pop, classical, jazz, rock and country.*

In many ordinary houses, when siblings come together, they argue. In Michele's family, she, her parents, and her three siblings make music.

During this interview, Michele is asked such questions as:

- *Embarking on a new career is not for the faint-hearted. So, why is she doing this?*
- *Why work so hard to build a career at the very age and stage where so many people think about stepping back and taking it easy?*
- *What are Michele's goals and expectations? What is she doing to achieve them?*
- *Who and what are her influences? Does she have a mentor? What is her support system?*
- *What exactly is her creative process?*

We talk about the road she has taken. She reflects on its joys and travails. She shares details of her life's journey, and ten key conclusions about life that she has learned. She also provides a list of her favourite reading and listening material.⁹

INTERVIEW ONE

Michele, tell us about your years growing up in such a vibrant household.

There was always music, ever since I can remember. We all had to play the piano. Eventually, we branched out. But whenever there was any kind of family gathering—especially Sundays—we'd all sing and dance with my grandmothers. One grandmother would sing opera; another grandmother would sing an Irish jig or Jewish folk-song such as "Hava Nagila". My dad and Ruben Rivas, another wonderful musician he worked with and who always brought his guitar,

⁹www.michelemele.com

would play Mexican, Spanish, and Latin songs. My uncle would come over and play beautiful opera and Italian songs on the piano. It was always fun.

I was always left out of this because they'd say, "Michele played *classical* piano", and nobody wanted to hear that. Everyone wanted to hear sing-along songs, so I'd just sing along. Eventually, we expanded to jazz and pop tunes and standards. It was just a whole joyous time, always.

You mentioned your uncle coming over to play classical piano. Your dad has two brothers. Aren't they both involved with music?

My grandfather, who was a barber when he came to Toronto, also played the trumpet. All three of his sons and his daughter, my aunt, were all very musical. My aunt had a lovely soprano voice. She sang with the Leslie Bell Singers who performed during a little tour of New York.

My dad and his brothers were in the first classes to attend St. Michael's Choir School when it opened up back in the 1930s or 1940s. They all sang in the choir. Uncle Vic¹⁰ was in the first graduating class. As part of his curriculum he played the piano. He also starred in their musical production of *The Mikado*. He has a lovely baritone. My other uncle Joe went off and became the musical director for the Four Lads and then moved to New York to conduct the house band at the Copacabana nightclub for years. He became the musical director for Connie Francis, Vic Damone, Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé, Dionne Warwick, Lou Rawls and, most recently, Joan Rivers and Don Rickles. Rickles still tours with his band. My uncle is almost eighty and he's still going strong.

¹⁰Dr. Victor Mele

My dad turned eighty in June, 2008. He's still a jobbing musician in Toronto, and I think one of the oldest musicians in age and long-time playing in the city. He's self-taught. In those days the Conservatory¹¹ did not acknowledge the guitar, for some strange reason. As far back as we go in history, the guitar has been a household instrument. Everyone had a guitar. The piano became the household instrument only in the 1800s. Dad found a few people to study with, and made his way on his own. He's been jobbing, supporting his family ever since.

What do you mean by the term "jobbing?"

Playing one night gigs: weddings, maybe clubs one or two nights, a little bit of studio work in the 1950s and 1960s. He had a steady job at The Old Mill¹² where he played with the Ellis McClintock Band for a long time. He still plays at various restaurants and parties.

Both my brothers are musicians. One plays the drums, the other plays the bass. They're in my show. My sister used to play the flute and now she's taking it up again. She was a dancer too. My mom played the accordion and sang.

At my parents' fiftieth anniversary, my mother sang to my dad and my dad actually sang to her, even though he *never* sings. That was the first time we'd *ever* heard him sing!

How did your family influence your dreams?

It was the opposite. For the longest time, I felt intimidated by my family. Everyone is so proficient, wonderful and gifted. I always felt somehow inferior.

¹¹The Royal Conservatory of Toronto

¹²An event venue, conference centre and supper club in Toronto

Was that a self-imposed feeling or was it imposed by someone else?

It was probably self-imposed. My parents always led with good intentions. They would be shocked and appalled if they heard I always felt that way.

Who can we blame?

It's *always* your parents' fault!

When my daughter-in-law came home from the hospital with her first baby, I said, "Welcome to motherhood; from now on it's all your fault!" Taken aback at first, she responded with, "Maybe I should start making him feel guilty from this point on?"

That's right! My brother and I always have these wonderful talks where he says, "It's always mom's fault!"

When did you begin to believe in yourself?

It wasn't until I was almost forty, after our kids were in school. I always had the desire to perform. The first time my mom and grandmother had ever heard me sing was when I was Pinocchio in our grade five school musical, and then as Fatima in grade six, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. They couldn't stop talking about it.

Then, for some reason, I stopped singing.

I always wanted to write, even in university. In third or fourth year I was sitting in the common room next to Victor Feldbrill, a prominent Canadian symphony conductor who was one of

For the longest time, I felt intimidated by my family. Everyone is so proficient, wonderful and gifted. I always felt somehow inferior.

our conducting teachers, when he asked me, "What do you want to do with all of this?"

"Do you want to know the truth?" I answered. "I want to be a rock star."

I thought he'd burst out laughing and say, "You moron! Go back to bed!" Instead, he said, "Why don't you do it, then?"

It took me 20 years to actually *get* to that place where I could break out and show the passion that I felt inside.

"Do you want to know the truth?"

I answered.

"I want to be a rock star."

After you graduated from university, did you go immediately into teaching?

Yes, teaching music.

You directed plays and musicals and composed classical work for orchestra and choir. How did you do that? How did it get out there?

While I was in the Faculty of Education, after completing the Faculty of Music, I taught at two schools that didn't care yet that I didn't have my Bachelor of Education degree. They were happy with my Bachelor of Music.

I don't know if they still do it, but back in 1984, the music education program required the whole music department to create an original musical to be performed for public schools around March Break. It was a wonderful experience for everyone. We created a play called *The Boy Who Wouldn't Sing*, written by Stephen Hatfield, a prominent composer now.¹³ They all selected me to direct the musical. I love directing! I don't know how they knew, but they knew. We performed it for a week in front of all the Toronto elementary and high schools.

¹³www.stephenhatfield.com

Michele's Ten Suggestions to Following Your Dreams

1. Keep on! Just do it!

2. Be true to your heart.

3. Acknowledge that there's something inside that has to come out.

You just have to let it out.

4. The universe wants you to succeed.

If you just stay positive and believe in yourself, then it'll come together.

5. Everything happens for a reason.

6. Treat people with respect and kindness.

As a person doing my own thing, being my own boss and incorporating the work and knowledge of other people, I have to remember that's of the utmost importance, and I always try to do that.

7. Find people you can work with and respect.

Encourage them to bring out the best in what they do—and trust them. Some people think about me, "She's too nice," and that I don't know anything. But to me it's more important to have the people I care about around me and supporting me, than someone who has only more knowledge or could possibly do a better job.

8. Learn *how* to get the results you want from the people you're working with.

This is a life lesson for anyone. As a woman in the music business, this is where the directing comes in handy.

9. Welcome anything creative that comes to you. It's all good!

Years ago when I was taking an art course at university, we were required to keep a portfolio of all our rejects. What our instructor Peter Kolysnik said at that time was, "You don't really know what's good or bad; you can't judge it yourself. Just do it, and go with it." As it turned out a number of those rejects were actually chosen for the final art show at our college art gallery.

We tend to reject things too early. Any one of those rejected items could possibly lead or be the basis or the seed to something else.

That's the thing; if you trust your heart, then you welcome *anything* that comes. It's the truth.

10. Choose to see mistakes as learning experiences.

My husband told me a story about Jack Nicklaus. When someone came up to him to say, "Hey, you missed that putt on the seventeenth hole," he replied, "I don't remember that."

To me it's more important to have the people I care about around me and supporting me, than someone who has only more knowledge or could possibly do a better job.

Michele's Recommended Reading & Music List

To stimulate creative-thinking and appreciation, Michele recommends:

Books

<i>You Are the World</i>	J. Krishnamurti
<i>This Is Your Brain on Music</i>	Daniel Levitin
<i>The World in Six Songs</i>	Daniel Levitin
<i>The Courage to Create</i>	Rollo May
<i>The Sense of Beauty</i>	George Santayana
<i>The Way of the Wizard</i>	Deepak Chopra
<i>Golf in the Kingdom</i>	Michael Murphy
<i>The Singing Neanderthals</i>	Steven Mithen

Poetry

Ovid • Rumi • Dante • Shakespeare • Emily Dickinson
• Robert Frost • Carl Sandburg • e.e. cummings

Music

Bach's *Piano Concerto in D minor* • Beethoven's *7th Symphony* • Mozart's *The Magic Flute* • Verdi's *La Traviata* and *Rigoletto* • Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and *La bohème* • Bernstein's *Overture to Candide* • *West Side Story*, music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim • Chopin's *Piano Concert No.2* • Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique Symphony* • Debussy's *L'Après-midi D'Une Faun* • Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* and *Peter and The Wolf* • Duke Ellington's *I'm Beginning to See the Light* • Billy

2. Describe your growing-up years within five sentences.

3. How did/does *your* family influence your dreams?

4. Explain if, how, and why you do or don't believe in yourself.

DISCUSSION TOPICS & QUESTIONS

**Michele Mele:
Never Too Old to Follow Your Passion**

1. "Then, for some reason, I stopped singing."
What reason(s) might have stopped Michele from singing?
2. "I thought they wanted me to be a doctor."
We often make conclusions based on inaccurate assumptions. Discuss. Give examples.
3. "I don't like to *claim* the songs... I'm ready to surrender myself to the music."
What is your opinion about Michele's viewpoint in this passage, and why?
4. "However, I've met a lot of people who believe, 'It's *delivered* to you. You have to be open to it.'"
What is the "it" that is being referred to here? Discuss.
5. "Because we are moving and changing our environments, our minds need to be able to adapt and think in a creative manner."
What do you think about Michele's conclusion? Explain.
6. "Creative ability is within all of us."
What is your opinion about this statement? Why?
7. "Why work so hard to build a career at the very age when most people think about stepping back and taking it easy?"
Discuss.
8. "I feel at this stage, I have to work three to four times as hard."

To whom is Michele comparing herself? What do you think about her comment?

9. "Many people in the industry who are my age don't want to waste their time getting in someone new. They want to move onto other things."

What's your opinion about Michele's conclusion and why?

10. "I believe it's about the music. It's not about me."

What is your opinion about this statement?

11. "I don't do the Joan Rivers thing."

What does Michele mean by this? Why does she make this comment?

12. "It's endless. The more I do the more energy I have to do it."

Do you agree? Share your experience.

13. "I'm at a disadvantage...[a] little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

Discuss this passage.

14. "I don't remember that."

Why did Jack Nicklaus answer in this way?

NOTES:

Further Reflections

A. Use the following assessment after each chapter to measure its impact upon you.

1. a) On a scale of one to ten, how did this chapter resonate with you?

(Least) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Most)

b) Explain why.

2. a) Which section of this chapter touched you *the most*, and why?

b) Often, we can learn a lot about ourselves if we explore what bothers us. Which section touched you *the least*, and why?

3. What factual information did you learn?

4. List three insights you discovered,
a) About yourself.

b) About the interviewee/or his/her story.

5. List three conclusions as a result of this chapter.

6. State/outline at least one action you might take as a result of this chapter.

B. Which chapter resonated the *most* with you, and why?

C. Which chapter resonated the *least* with you, and why?

NOTES:

About Nellie Jacobs

An award-winning artist, best-selling author and trend-setting creativity consultant, Nellie is dedicated to helping people of all ages realize their creative potential.

She is a keynote speaker and workshop facilitator who specializes in creativity.

A former elementary school teacher and television host, Nellie is a veteran media guest on television, radio and the Internet. She currently hosts an Internet radio talk series, *Igniting Imagination with Nellie Jacobs*, all episodes of which are numbered and archived online.

Nellie and her husband live in Ontario, Canada, dividing time between Toronto and Muskoka.

For more details about Nellie's radio show, her Igniting Imagination Virtual Café, and other products and services, follow the links on her website. To be notified about upcoming radio broadcasts, creative opportunities, events and news, as well as writings, opinions, and personal experiences shared by creative-thinkers worldwide, sign up on www.nelliejacobs.wordpress.com.

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