

## Creative Warrior Jacquie Ann Riley

L - What does creativity mean to you?

J - To me it's who I am. Take everything else away, being a mom, being a business person, being a wife, creativity is the real me, my soul. I denied it a lot but I wouldn't be who I am without it.

L - How have you been creative in your life?

J - You can use creativity in just about anything you do in life, looking differently is creativity. I've been in the hotel business and I've used creativity to renovate rooms, to get people motivated, and the taking care of my guests, right down to how I serve breakfast. It's been hard to work the amount of hours I've worked and keep my own personal art forms alive and well. When my husband and mother were very ill, I was taking care of both of them plus the business. During this time, I gave up my creativity completely. For some reason, I was totally blocked after that and it has created quite a void in my life for the past 17 to 20 years.

L - What year did you start running the hotel?

J - My husband and I had a partnership in owning and running the Wort Hotel for 10 years. In 2004 we sold our Wort partnership and bought the Parkway Inn in Jackson, WY. My husband passed away in 2010 and at that point I pretty much gave up my life because I needed to ensure the hotel would be a success. It was what my husband always wanted and I carry a huge obligation to anyone I love. It will be 17 years in February 2021 that I've owned the Parkway. Now it's time for me.

L - What did this business mean to you?

J - I'm a fifties child and I was told in so many different ways that I couldn't, wouldn't succeed. I came from a poor background and had no education. After my husband's death, it was time to show what I could do. The Parkway was ranked about 16 or 17 of the properties in Jackson. When I took over the hotel in 2010, I worked to raise the Parkway's rank to number 3 or 4. It was fun because I had the opportunity to decorate the rooms the way I wanted to, to create woodwork, and I love to deal with people. I had opportunities to sell the Inn earlier but it wasn't done yet. I wanted to meet that commitment. Be careful what you promise people who are dying because you're going to have to live with it.

L - What did you learn running a business for so many yrs?

J - I learned discipline, you can't just decide to stay home or ignore a situation. I'm pretty much a push over for people because I enjoy pleasing people. I had to learn to be tougher. My husband was always the guy to meet with the bankers and do all the things that I didn't want to do. I couldn't do that any longer, so I learned a lot about myself and what I'm capable of.

L - You are in the process of selling the hotel, what does this mean for you, your life, and your creative life?

J - It's hard because I've worked full-time since I was 16 years old. I supported myself since I was 17 years old and I've never not had a paycheck. It's taking some time to get used to and know it's OK. I'm having to beat my little demon voices down that I should be doing more, when really all I want to do is explore all the things that give me so much pleasure. I'm getting my feet wet in my creativity again and if I didn't have that, I don't know that I could get through this sale, just because the unknown is the scariest thing in the world to all of us. Now that I'm getting back into the things I really enjoy, I'm excited.

L - How do you feel creating such a massive change in your life?

J - I will be 71 years old next May. It's so funny, age has never meant anything to me. My mind still works and I still see myself as a young person, even though the mirror may say something different. I get excited about things and I've never been a person to get stale. I have too many things that I want to explore, that I want to see. Age doesn't affect me. I do know that the women in my family lived to 85 years old and so I have a limited amount of time and a very finite time to get those things done. I have specific goals. I am a believer of setting goals for yourself because so many times we go along and we waste time and wake up 5 years from now and we didn't accomplish anything. So I write very specific, periodic goals about where I want to be and what I want to do. I already have a giant list for retirement, so I'm going to be very busy.

L - Would you like to share any of your goals?

J - Absolutely. Travel, there are three things my husband and I always wanted to do and I'm getting to do them now. For my first trip, I'm taking the Trans Siberian Express from St. Petersburg, Russia, across Russia, Mongolia, and you end up in Beijing. I already know the train I'm going on, it's just a matter of when they open things back up again. The next trip was my husband's dream to circumnavigate the globe in a ship and I have that all figured out. I've had women in my life who have given me so much and have supported me through so many things, so all the important women of my life get to pick a portion of the trip to go with me. The planning is a little complicated but we're figuring it out. My last trip is to explore Africa, it's the last continent that I haven't been able to get to.

As far as my artwork is concerned, I've slowly gotten back into it. My biggest goal is painting. I love to draw but I can't paint. It's a mental block for me, color just freaks me out. So that is the immediate goal and I've already signed up for a class. I want to have at least a half dozen paintings before I die that I approve of, so that's a huge one for me. To have time to be creative everyday without having to meet a work schedule, I'm so excited.

L - How do you overcome fear and regain your creative strength?

J - Fear is a part of everyday life. I've lived with fear and I know the only way to get over fear is by doing it. I remember being in high school and I was made fun of and picked on so much. I decided to go after things that you didn't have to be popular to do. I wanted to be in speech and debate and I had to give a speech and I was scared to death. I didn't think there was any way that I could do it and I just dove in. I practiced at home and I swear, I should have died on that stage, I was shaking so bad. After that, it was so easy and I learned young, you can't stop doing things because you are afraid. You have to just go for it because all of a sudden it's no longer scary. My husband hauled me all over the world and I was scared to death. I remember those first trips and I would think, oh my God, what are we doing here? It was so amazing the transformation and confidence that I gained from overcoming my fear by doing it.

L - This past summer you took my Artist's Way and Creativity Writing online classes, did these classes spark or reinvigorate your creative interests in some way?

J - Oh my gosh, yes, I had so much fun in both of those classes. The Artist's Way was remarkable, it gave me permission to stop the negative voices. I tend to be really hard on myself and The Artist's Way gave me permission to have fun and explore again. Those morning pages, I do them everyday. I had always thought as a young person that I wanted to write a book. In your writing class, everyone was so inspiring and I thought, you know, I can do this. I just had to break it down and set my little goals and follow up on my writing. All of this allowed me to be able to sell the hotel, to get past the fear of selling the hotel, because I now have this new life to look forward to. I don't have too many little voices in my head anymore.

L - As you look ahead, what are you excited or inspired by?

J - I wake up every single morning and I think, thank God that I woke up today. I thank God for another opportunity to make something right and to have the opportunity to continue. I've never felt sorry for myself, I've felt fortunate. I'm looking at myself now and I think oh my gosh, if I'd only known that everything would turn out OK. I have this opportunity now to not just take care of people that I love but to actually take care of myself for the first time. It's gonna be fun.

L - What advice do you have for others who may not think they are creative?

J - I am of the belief that everyone is creative. I can remember someone saying to me, your drawings are so beautiful, I could never do that. It's just practice, it's just devoting yourself to it. It's like anything else in life, I didn't know how to run a business. I learned from my mistakes and any kind of creativity is the same thing. Part of the reason I stopped doing my artwork, is because I knew I wasn't going to be as good as when I quit. That was a stumbling block but fortunately The Artist's Way helped me to get through that and I realized that I just had to practice again. It's important that you try, even if it's a hidden thing, good grief, I never let people see the things I did in the beginning. Everyone has creativity in them and it's extremely sad if someone feels they're not good enough or they think they can't earn a living from it so it has to be set aside. Don't do that or you'll end up like me at age 70, rebuilding again. Keep it up and keep practicing because you will be good, without a doubt you will be good.

L - This is a difficult and stressful time in our world, how can our innate creativity help us during this time?

J - I had been diagnosed with terminal breast cancer, I was told I would maybe have 5 years. I had a 4 year old daughter. It was extremely stressful, it was everything you care about in the world stressful. I had a surgeon who told me, "Jacquie, you are always doing things for everyone else, now is the time, if there's something you want to do for you, you better do it." It hit home. One of things that I've always wanted to do, was to look at something, draw it on paper, and have it turn out. So, I decided to take a class at the local University, Drawing On The Right Side of The Brain. I didn't learn to draw but for the first time in my life, I learned to see. They asked me to draw a flower and a person and I drew a daisy with a stem and a stick person. When I came out of that class, I had a drawing of the person sitting next to me that I was pleased with and it taught me that art was so healing. I became passionate, I drew every second of the day while I was going through chemotherapy. I am still here some 30 years later. It was such a powerful experience because it's like meditating. You go in a place in your brain, none of the voices of the outside, the politics, the people who told you that you're not going to be good enough, all of that goes away, you're in this wonderful, warm place in your brain where none of that other stuff exists. I believe creativity heals so many things. You can't change the politics of the world but you can change how you deal with that in your own head.