

DEAR MOTHERS,

Motherhood for me was a revelation. I never knew or understood how much mothers had to bear, how much they did—despite having had a mother myself—and how much it went undervalued and unacknowledged. I became a mother in another country, the Czech Republic, far away from family. And motherless – by that time my own mother had already died. I was also already in my 40's. It is a particular experience of new motherhood. I struggled with feeling extremely isolated and powerless, but from talking to other mothers, this is common to some degree regardless of the circumstances.

What surprised me the most about motherhood is the enormous amount of energy and care that's required to keep a child at, bare minimum, alive – a child who in the first few months and years of its life can do nothing for itself. Can do nothing by itself. I found all of my energy and time taken up by care work.

This zine is written to provide a moment of pause, a breath, in the sometimes relentless days of mothering. I wrote this for myself, I wrote this for mothers I know.

It is a writing practice zine, but you don't have to be a writer. The writing process can help us to reconnect with ourselves again. But it also allows writing mothers to connect with writing again, with their creative energy, something that might have been lost during the throes of motherhood, especially the early years.

I hope through this zine you will be able to treat yourself with moments of tenderness and care, just like you would with your child.

Warmly,
May

How to use this zine: The writing exercises are in bite-size pieces, so you can dip in and out of it, or you can work through it chronologically. You can respond to what resonates, ignore what doesn't. You can come back to it later. Time and energy is precious as a mother, so please use this zine in whatever way that gives you rest/pleasure/regeneration.





a moment of pause RITUAL

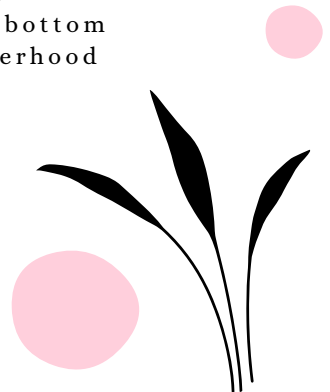
Rituals are important markers - as a moment of pause, as a reset, or to mark the beginning or end of a moment of writing. They signal to body and spirit that this is sacred time. Rest is sacred, creativity is sacred.

And as mothers, rituals have to be short, small, do-able. Some examples:

- Boil some water. Put in a teabag. Do some other necessary task. Come back to sip your tea.
- Light a candle. Whisper an intention to yourself.
- Close your eyes. Take five deep breaths, in and out.

Is there one small thing you can fit into your day that will give a small moment of pause?

‘Motherhood is the ultimate confrontation with yourself. Whatever is there to discover at the bottom of your soul, whether dross or treasure, motherhood will help you find it.’ - Lisa Marchiano



WRITING PROMPT...

Loss

We don't often get opportunities to acknowledge and grieve our losses as mothers. Instead, motherhood is often portrayed as only joy and gain. With these writing prompts, you can explore what has been lost, and tend to your grief with care.

1. List all the things you have lost since you've become a mother. Don't think too hard on it, just write down as many things you can think of, no matter how small or silly they seem.

2. Write a letter to yourself from an alternate world. In this alternative reality, you did not have children. In the letter you talk about your life without children, where you are not a mother - What would you be doing? Who are you with? Where are you living? How do you spend your time? What does your life feel like? Are you happy? The letter gives you a glimpse of the life you didn't end up choosing, but at the same time allows you to live it imaginatively.





‘Motherhood is the
great crucible of
identity, the point at
which the self is either
annihilated or
transformed.’
- Rachel Cusk





Micro-reset

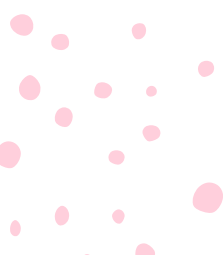
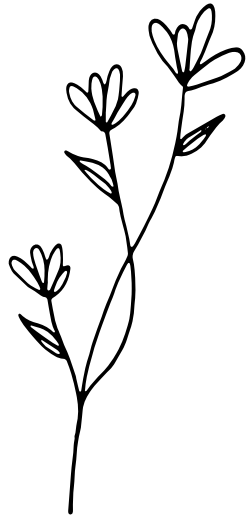
Do something small, soft and nourishing for yourself. For example:

drink a glass of water

open a window

play one song
and dance to
it, alone or
with your kids

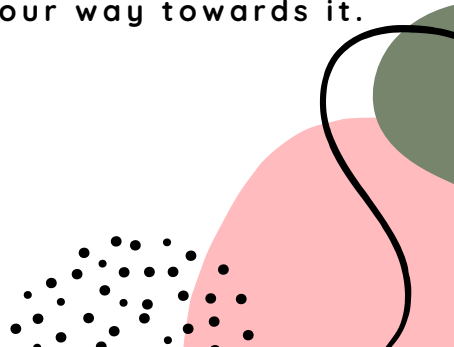
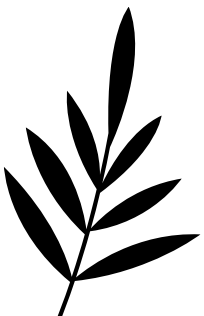
a big stretch up and then
touch your toes

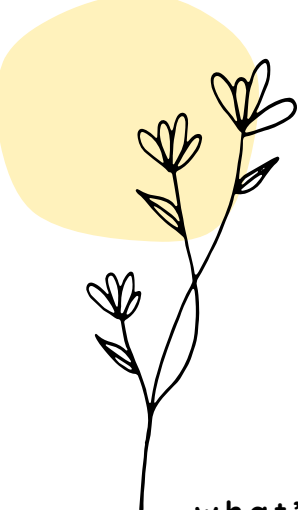


Mum, interrupted.

Part of coming back into the world after staying at home and raising my daughter was the desire and ambition to do things other than mothering. But - also acknowledging that it will take me longer, because the priority will always be my child, especially while she is still little and her needs dominate. An example - since she started daycare 5 months ago, we have been on a cycle of her picking something up from there and getting sick, then giving it to me, then both of us recovering before she picks something up again and the cycle begins again. Great for building her immune system but it literally just knocks me out, especially because being sick while taking care of a toddler means there is no real rest. I'm exhausted and just want to sleep and never wake up. It is within contexts like these that we're trying to connect with our desires and ambitions, and we have to accept there will be delays and things will take longer to get done. A certain acceptance, a certain grace of going with the flow, a different concept of the 'hustle', is required.

Being clear about what we want can help us to prioritise where to put our limited energy, and where to withdraw it so we're not further depleted. So we can make those little steps towards what we truly desire, so we can slowly move our way towards it.





WRITING PROMPT...

Clarity

what's something I want more of?

how will I get it, who do I need
support from to make it happen?

what's something I want to say no to?



FUTURE YOU exercise



IMAGINE an ideal day in the future. No-holds barred, what you truly desire, no matter how unrealistic it seems right now or no matter how long it might take to get there. Now write:

- **What does your environment look like?**
- **Who is around you?**
- **What are you doing?**
- **How are you feeling?**
- **Your senses: what can you smell, sound, touch, hear?**



Note - this is not a manifesto nor a roadmap set in stone. What you want can change and evolve over time. This exercise is meant to help connect you with some of your desires. If you struggle to write something, think of this exercise as a playful trying on clothes, trying on a future life and seeing how it feels.

I value...

Creativity

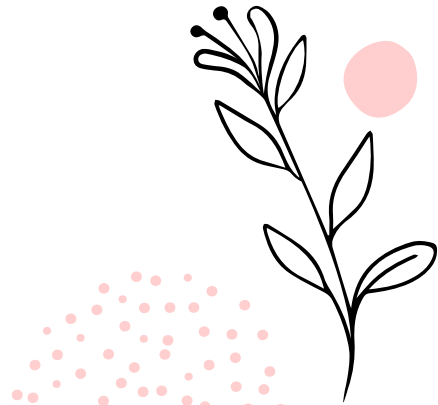
Sovereignty

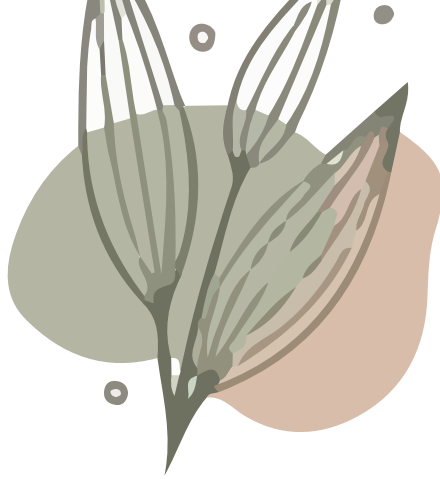
Agency

Fun

Connection

**Write your own
values here...**





‘I’m afraid of mothers who sacrifice their lives to their children. I’m afraid of mothers who surrender themselves completely and live for their children, who hide the difficulties of motherhood and pretend even to themselves to be perfect mothers. I prefer mothers who proceed consciously through trial and error, looking for an equilibrium but knowing that any equilibrium is precarious.’

- Elena Ferrante





Being a mother and the creative life:

To slowly come back into a writing/creative practice, I did this ritual whenever I had a pocket of time:

- 5 mins yoga with @yoginimelbourne
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvuwyklcvbE>
- Then 5-10 mins free writing/journaling

Celebrate the small wins. If you wrote something down, that's a win. If you had an idea, that's a win. If you read something, that's a win. You can take pleasure in the creative process without focusing on the outcome.

You don't have to wait for the perfect environment to create - we can do it in the middle of the mess. There may never be the perfect point where everything is balanced, where you have everything you need, where your creative and family life is exactly where you want it to be. That's OK. You can still start. The important thing is not to wait for the perfect circumstances, but to find ways to create within the life that you actually have.

Give yourself permission to create without needing to know exactly where it's going to take you. Like motherhood, you don't have to have the whole thing figured out yet.



May Ngo

吳玉美



Who am I?

I'm a Teochew-Cambodian Australian writer and mother living in Prague. Here to help people connect with their creative energy through writing, especially those who don't believe it's for them - immigrants, mothers, the working class.

My website: mayngo.net