

# KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

©2009, Glenn Campbell, PO Box 30303, Las Vegas 89173  
familycourtguy@gmail.com www.KilroyCafe.com



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# Dorothy

## AND THE RUBY SLIPPERS

The Yellow Brick Road  
is not the path  
to creativity.

By GLENN CAMPBELL

Probably the greatest movie of all time, at least for its metaphorical value, is *Wizard of Oz*. Here you have a girl engaged in a long journey to achieve her “heart’s desire.” She thinks the best way to get there is an appeal to the Mighty Oz, but it turns out she never really needed him. The power to fulfill her own dreams was hers all along!

That’s a mistake all of us make in the beginning. When we want something, we think we need some outside force to give it to us, so we engage in some sort of complicated multi-year process to pander to that force. Years later, we may discover that the “man behind the curtain” was a fraud. All we ever needed, it turns out, was the self-confidence to do it ourselves.

Tell me: Why haven’t you written that song, novel or screenplay you always dreamed of? You may think it’s because you don’t have an agent or contract, or because you haven’t taken the right classes, or because you don’t have anyone to believe in you.

Rubbish! The responsibility for any creative achievement lies wholly within you. If you fancy yourself a musician, then you should be making music—not just *performing* music, but creating it. If you are a writer, then you should be writing. There is no other way.

Dorothy could have gone back to Kansas anytime she wanted. The power was in her ruby slippers all along, but frankly she didn’t even need the shoes. That’s just another magical belief, another substitute for responsibility.

If there’s something you want to do, that’s important you, **YOU JUST BLOODY DO IT!** No matter what prison you may be trapped in, you will find a way if you choose to. No Oz can give it to you.

Budding artists tend to get caught up in marketing and the myth of “discovery.” Instead of actually producing a great product, they become fixated on convincing others of their talent. This inevitably turns into some form of prostitution where you are pandering to the selfish needs of some outside agent or sponsor (or the fickle public) who is a failure at the art themselves.

All of this energy should be focused on the art itself, on the *quality of the product*. Appealing to power might get you ahead in the short term, but in the greater arc of history, only quality lasts.

Nowadays, you don’t need a publishing or recording contract to create a work that lasts forever. The internet now gives you that, practically for free. Your product may not be noticed, but at least it won’t be lost in the attic, and it will be noticed eventually if the quality is really there.

Why were the Beatles a success? Why are we still listening to them today? It wasn’t because they had recording contracts or good agents. It was because they produced *really great songs*—even before the contracts or agents. They had a singular focus on quality long before their “discovery.” In fact, you could say it was the discovery, agents and contracts that destroyed them. How can any artist remain productive when

assaulted by so much success?

Of all the people who dream of doing creative things, only a tiny portion actually do them. That’s because everyone else gets sidelined by some irrelevant journey. They get sucked down some mindless Yellow Brick Road that ends up diverting them from their goals and taking up most of their lives. They take this journey thinking Oz will give them something that can really only come from within.

Why do they fall for it? It’s the blank page problem: People stare at the empty canvas in front of them and panic. “I don’t know what to do!” They sit down to write the great novel but can’t think of anything to say. That’s when they start looking for external solutions—for saviors and magical fixes.

The blank page isn’t so frightening if you step back and look beyond it. All around you are tools and opportunities, and you have to listen to them. You can make art out of anything, but you have to resolve to work with what you’ve got and go where it leads you, not demand a certain end product.

If you become obsessed with writing a bestselling novel, you probably won’t, but if you decide to be creative with whatever tools you have today, you are far more likely to produce a quality product. That process, if you are flexible enough to follow it, may lead to an Emerald City you never expected.

If you are going to create, you can’t put it off. You have to do it now.

—G.C.