



Dig Deep



Introduction

During the '92 Olympics in Barcelona, a runner named Derek Anthony Redmond competed in the 400 meter race.

At the beginning of the race, Derek appeared to be in top form—strong, speedy, making excellent time. But halfway through the race, the unthinkable happened. Derek's hamstring snapped. He collapsed onto the ground, grimacing in agony.

In a split-second, his Olympic dreams were shattered—torn into ribbons like the ravaged muscle in his leg. There was no conceivable way he could finish the race.

But Derek was determined to finish no matter what.

As the audience watched, dumfounded, Derek climbed to his feet and began hopping on one leg, making his way towards the finish line. Derek's father, Jim, rushed to his side, wrapping his arms around his son and supporting

him. Together, at a snail's pace, they crossed the finish line together.

Sixty-five thousand spectators leapt to their feet—applauding, cheering, and sobbing—as Derek and his father reached the 400-meter mark on the ground.

Derek wasn't the fastest runner that day. He didn't win any medals. Technically, he was disqualified. But he displayed an astounding level of commitment, devotion, and courage. He demonstrated the power of the human spirit. He showed the world, "Human beings are capable of so much more than we think. We're stronger than we think. We're braver than we think. Yes, challenges will arise, but if we choose to keep moving forward no matter what, we can make miracles happen."

This is what it means to dig deep.

With any type of goal—whether it's completing a 10K race, launching a business, becoming a published author, or recording the first season of your podcast—merely "considering it" and "day-dreaming about it" is not

enough. To make big things happen, we need focus, determination, and grit. We need courage. We need to dig deep.

We chose to name our class DIG DEEP as a reminder of this fact. Because when it comes to writing, we all need to dig deep. We need to make a full-hearted effort, not a half-hearted effort. And Lord knows, we need persistence, because there are so many situations that can derail our focus and make us want to give up.

Because life happens, right? We get busy. We get tired. We get stuck. We compare our writing to other people's work and feel inferior. We lose momentum. We figure, "Nobody wants to read my dumb writing anyway. I'll never get published. I'm not even that good." We experience a metaphorical "torn hamstring" and give up. We stuff our unfinished book manuscript into a drawer and walk away. We start projects but rarely finish them. Even the strongest, most courageous people get overwhelmed and discouraged sometimes. We've all been there.

We created our class, DIG DEEP, to inspire people to keep writing, writing, writing, and never give up. To cross the finish line no matter what—even if you're hobbling and hopping, even if there's a typo, even if your work isn't perfect, even if you'll never be a New York Times bestselling author, who cares? You're writing. You're doing the work. You're sharing your stories and ideas. You're touching people's lives through your words. You're a champion.

Since launching DIG DEEP in early 2017, we've had over 100 people join the classroom. People who want to build more visibility through blogging and podcasting. People who dream of writing a book. People who yearn to write articles for top sites like HuffPost and BuzzFeed. People who feel ready to share their writing publicly for the very first time. A wide range of people, all sharing a singular goal:

To stop waiting and start writing.

To honor our students and their beautiful work, we've created this digital magazine. Inside this magazine, you'll find true stories, essays, articles, and more, all contributed by DIG DEEP students.

We want to shine a spotlight on their work and congratulate them for submitting a piece by the magazine deadline, for following through, for making it happen—despite the innumerable distractions that can interfere with writing. The people you'll see in this magazine? They are gold medalists, as far as we're concerned.

Whether you're part of the DIG DEEP class, or not, we hope you love this magazine. We hope it reminds you to pursue your personal, professional, and creative projects with one hundred percent determination.

Even if it's December 31st when you're reading these words, this year is not over yet. If you want to write a five-line poem, dust off your long-forgotten blog and boot things up again, or submit an article for publication in a newspaper, magazine, or website—it's not too late to make it happen. Why wait? Why not go for it? What have you got to lose?

You have untapped reserves of creativity inside of you. We all do.

Dig deep. Make a full-sized effort. See what you can create with your heart, mind, laptop, and typing fingers.

You might astonish yourself.

—Susan & Alex

Co-creators of DIG DEEP, an online writing class

Join the class anytime at: shyatt.com/digdeep/

Table of Contents

- 6 You Get What You Need (Aka, How to Press the Pause Button in a Sensory Tsunami)**
Lisa O'Brien
- 8 Grilling the Goodbye**
Patti Sponsler
- 9 How I Overcame My Fear of Happiness**
Maya Henry
- 11 When You Don't Know, Don't Go**
Mindy Meiering
- 12 Palomino Winter**
JoRene Byers
- 13 Spirits' Kindred**
Phyllis Ranallo
- 14 Shattering the Barriers of Single Motherhood...Begins Today!**
Sang Thi Doung
- 15 7 Life Lessons Learned While Hiking the Cascade Mountains**
Kelly Beischel
- 19 Weighted Down**
Carole Cassell

- 23 I Refuse to Choose**
CrisMarie Campbell & Susan Clarke
- 26 Did You Wait Too Long to Euthanize Your Pet?**
Mary Vernal
- 28 Changing the Face of 50: Let's Teach Our Daughters Differently**
Dr. Anna Garrett
- 29 Alive & No. 5**
Heidi Ann Webber
- 30 UNLOCKED Series**
Ellen Fondiler
- 34 What Lies Within**
Kelley Melsted
- 36 Love Letters Through the Ages**
Tonia Winchester
- 39 Thank You My Friend**
Brenda Finne
- 39 A Journey Within**
Brenda Finne

- 40 Part 1: Confessions of an International Traveler**
Brenda Florida
- 41 Part 2: The Living Obituary**
Brenda Florida
- 42 Part 3: Create Your Own Paris Transformation**
Brenda Florida
- 45 Travels with My Dad**
Fiona Jefferies
- 48 How to Date with Self-Confidence**
Jen Mallinger
- 49 Home Is Where Your Dog Is**
Joyce Belcher
- 51 Break Free & Find Your Creative Voice**
Susie deVille
- 54 You Got Attitude?**
Amy M. Matthews
- 56 Development or Decay?**
Alexandra (Sasha) Heinz
- 57 Your Self-Talk—Is it Destroying You?**
Susan Wagner

- 58 Life Takes Time to Become**
Mara Wai
- 61 Feeling Confident About Dating is a Skill**
Lindsey Christine
- 62 Do the Work**
Lindsey Christine
- 63 I am Not Welcome**
Heather LeRoss
- 63 What I Learned on My Solo-Trip to New York, When I Faced a Tough Life Choice**
Christel Van Gelder
- 66 Don't Forget Your Underwear**
B. Love Smith
- 67 Redolence**
Missy Bird
- 69 I'll Rise up a Thousand Times**
Cathyann Greenidge-Ellison
- 71 Dig Deep Course**
- 72 Acknowledgements**
- 73 Stop Waiting. Start Writing.**

You Get What You Need. (Aka, How to Press the Pause Button in a Sensory Tsunami)

by Lisa O'Brien

“You don’t have to go to a mountaintop in the Himalayas to learn meditation,” a friend of mine opined to me just before I left for glorious India. But I’m eternally grateful that I did.

I went to India because I wanted to immerse myself into presence. To press pause on the hamster wheel (I think you know the one), where there’s always one more step or thing to do. I found myself late to almost everything — to pick up my kids, to yoga class (ironic) — and I finally decided, I don’t want to be late for my life.

So when an opportunity came to go to India, I leapt at it.

We did create profound meditation time, but what I found myself immersed in was the sensual onslaught that is northern India. The enveloping noise and smells and poverty amid the richness of color and so many people. Living. Praying. Suffering. Dying. All there, as if hung like laundry on the line.

With a documentarian lens, I looked at the people we passed down and up the hills of Rishikesh, India, with an air of inspection still embedded in my Western perspective. Through the incessant noise of horns honking, near-miss crashes on lawless roads, I found my heart skipping beats...taking gasps...looking with pity and holding back on really seeing them, out of fear of feeling connected. I documented the moments; filed them away, not feeling them, not being there wholly.

A few days in, bit by bit, I began to feel that lens start to shift. The rhythm began to change in my heart. Personal

judgments gave way to open observation, even a dollop of understanding occasionally, and my sense of unease towards the trash strewn about, the dirt floors and tin roofs and the haunting eyes of those residing within, found itself moving towards compassion and curiosity. I began to see the richness of it all against the depths of my assumptions.

But still, one night as I lay in bed, tears streaming down my face as I held — grasped! — images on my phone of my loved ones continents away, my mind untethered by any of its usual comforts or routines (but missing them too), I wondered, How am I going to make it through eight more days of this?

“
So when an opportunity
came... I leapt at it.”

I learned how.

Rishikesh. A perfect first stop: other Westerners. Porridge with peanut butter, smoothies, double espresso. A hike on Mount Abode: clean, clear air. Healthy puppies and kittens. An expanse of quietude. Close to the sun. Clear and peaceful.

Varanasi. Mystical. Death in the open range. Hidden temples. Roadside dentist. So many emaciated dogs, skinny like greyhounds, sleepy all the time as if to preserve their energy. It’s a cultural difference, I later learned, and they look at our dogs as overfed, overindulged, and treated like toys.

Bodhgaya. Poorest state in India. Site of the Bodhi tree, where it’s said Buddha received enlightenment. Tiny ones, children and the elderly unable to walk they’re so emaciated. “Don’t give money to them; they’ll never stop

following you,” well-dressed visitors warned us. Hot hot hot. Dog fights outside the window. Was it bed bugs that made me itch all over? Orphanage, school, health center for the poor and HIV orphans. I don’t want to forget this when I’m back home. But India cannot be unseen, I think.

It all happened in slow motion, a cinematic experience....

India pulled me out from behind my camera. As time went on, I learned to stop and observe, to watch rather than to judge. To let the tears flow, to deeply exhale. *It’s all right to cry.* It feels so right, actually. Not out of pity, but out of solidarity, oneness. Almost like a freeze frame, interspersed between these moments I began thinking of my own life at home—bustling, busy, six children and a dog. I saw the melee of my life as it’s structured and how difficult it is to give time and attention to presence.

Talking with my travel companion Kimm, who lost her only child (incredibly, named India), about the banalities of life — in my case, the obsession with phones, TV watching, piles and piles of laundry, dishes in the sink, so much time in the car, so many hurried meals, rarely eating together — this dear friend offered me these words of advice, tucked away in the file to recenter every time I get off track:

“Wrestle your children to the ground, kiss them all over, hold them tight, even if they fight you off. Forget about phones. Forget about laundry... Just love them, kiss them, hold them... Touch them... The rest doesn’t matter.”
-Kimm Fearnley

By the time I left, I’d gained a very clear sense of the way I want my life to be. And careening into the last year of having all of our children under one roof together, I returned home feeling an overwhelming urge to immerse, to steep, to pause again.

The way for me to show up and not be late for my life, I

learned, is to enter deeply into it.

And so I’ve decided to press the pause button. I’m stepping away from Lifyum and my own storyline to gently unwrap my life and practice presence. To invert the gaze upon myself and my own life; to cast my documentarian lens upon my own setting, and to peel back the layers of what I’ve realized are judgments and opinions built on privilege, not on presence.

On this site I’ve said I believe an exhale can change everything, and I still believe this is true. It means a natural letting go, but is not an ending. I feel a Great Work still within, and it needs time to gestate. I’ve decided to take a sabbatical to come back to its essence and dig deeply to its roots. My hope is that by taking a long inward breath of refreshment and readiness, when I return to the scene — whether it appears as a business or a calling or a project (I’ve yet to see)— the next exhale you might hear from me is a song, a lesson, or the fruits of what I find through this daily “onslaught” and being fully present to it.

I also, of course, intend to wrestle my kids to the ground, kiss them all over, and hold them tight, even if they fight me off. To learn how to forget about my phone a little more. To do more listening, even if it means a little less laundry. To love, and hold, and touch my life, and to find what really matters.

You can (always) still find me exploring, discovering, and sharing on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/lifeyum). If you’re on a similar path, I hope you’ll join me there on this next great journey. “It’s in life that you discover how open you are, how closed you are. Your life is it. There’s no other place to practice.” -Pema Chodron

To the Right Here,
Lisa
www.lifeyum.com

Grilling the Goodbye

by Patti Sponsler

So, it was me and the fucking chicken. Again.

As it became inevitable that my late husband's prolonged tete-a-tete with cancer would be ending sooner rather than later, we talked about most of the things that would be necessary to carry out his final wishes and help me carry on with life.

The discussions and resolutions about The Big Stuff were fruitful but we overlooked some of the seemingly inconsequential.

When the person I had loved the largest and the longest took his final leave, my despair and grief became palpable in all matters simple or complex.

But it's funny how life can use the minutiae to help heal the cavernous.

There is not a soul on earth who could beat my husband's ability to grill chicken. It always turned out tender, flavorful and paired with my Greek salad and a nice Chardonnay—became our favorite at-home meal. After the Secrets of His Grill joined his ashes in the urn, I began to embark on a waltz of discovery soon after he died.

Once the music began, however, I was unable to dance. Week after week, I'd emerge from the grocery store with two hormone-free chicken breasts, my mouth watering thinking about the culinary delights they could become. And several days later, each of those packets that had held those high hopes would be tossed in the trash. My life had been reduced to a revolving door for dead poultry.

I could not understand how something so seemingly simple as learning to grill would leave me paralyzed, lost, wasteful and alone.

In reality, it was a metaphor for what my Existence Without Spouse had become: paralyzed, lost, wasted and lonely. For several months I had self-isolated as much as possible not really caring whether I lived or died. Only the love for Lucy, our chocolate Labrador, got me out of bed most mornings.

The first glimpse of hope for healing began when I shared the comedy of my weekly chicken routine with a close friend last month.

As the words tumbled out, the absurdity of the situation left us both gasping with laughter. I realized how odd it must sound that a woman with some degree of intelligence or at least access to Chef Google was unable to get down and grill.

My friend, however, realized that it was the one thing left that I had not been forced to do on my own. And to do so, meant saying goodbye to the last piece of my late husband's life on which I still depended.

She walked me toward the grill, showed me how to fire it up and helped me turn my previously insurmountable resistance into ashes. An hour or so later, we dined on an incredibly tasty, toasted feast.

That seemingly mundane act cracked my heart open enough to again let in some light and hope. I also tossed something into the trash that evening—not the chicken this time—but some of the weight of sadness, fear and anxiety.

How I Overcame My Fear of Happiness

by Maya Henry

I really got to know grief in 2004 when my brother died from anorexia-related complications at the age of 22. For years it was a multi-faceted kaleidoscope I saw the world through.

As I healed, I also fell in love and started my own family. Along with the roots that planted in me, I also began to feel a pervasive feeling of dread.

You see, there was one surprising fact about my brother's death I had never had the courage to acknowledge. I had just decided to be happy when I got the call.

A few days later I was shocked to again notice the vibrant beautiful colors in a world that had seemed only black and gray for so long.

I know that my husband would be proud of me. He and I knew I could probably move forward on the Big Things but only he realized I would need help with the small. And for that he sent an angel wearing an apron.

As I grilled alone last night, I lifted my Chardonnay and offered my late spouse—and the chicken—a loving toast of gratitude.

Patti Sponsler

Patti Sponsler is an encourager, writer and life coach helping others laugh, love and live large in spite of the Life's Lemons. Contact her at Patti@pattisponsler.com.



Wholly imperfect though I was, and battling my own confusion and sadness that comes along with broken hearts and a lack of direction, I had just sat down to give myself a talk. “Now is the time to lift yourself up” and I felt hope for the first time in awhile, and I saw the road stretching out in front of me, and I looked forward to it.

But just as I started on the journey (and I mean, just, I had literally just stood up from my chair) the phone rang and my life changed forever. I was so excited that I didn’t even pick up the phone when I saw it was an unknown caller. Later when I checked my messages I heard a voicemail from the hospital letting me know my brother had been admitted and was in a coma – a coma he would never wake up from.

And just like that my vision clouded, and I spent a decade stumbling down the road in fear, anger, grief and pain. I forgot I could choose happiness, and every time it chose me I found myself walking around with a low-level dread growing in my gut. What would happen next? What horror would find me?

The better things got the worse I felt. And then self-sabotage would start showing up. Extra glasses of wine that made me fight with my husband and be snippy with my son. Hours of stubbornly working on projects that didn’t bring me even a little bit of joy.

My big realization about my grief came out in therapy. It was the simple fact that in life I could feel both happy and sad, angry and surprised and whatever other combination my brain could come up with. I had been fighting so hard (and sabotaging so hard right along with it) because I thought I was fighting for pure happiness, for a moment far in the future, one that even without my grief was impossible to achieve.

I began to recognize and acknowledge the ways I sabotaged my own happiness. I realized that the fear

could be part of happiness. I might not be able to control the sadness, but I could control the anger and fear by cutting out alcohol, by taking better care of myself. By changing jobs and writing in my journal again. Fear might not ever go away but I could choose to not let it keep me from experiences pure joy.

The other day I rounded the corner onto a busy street I loved, the sun was shining, the breeze fluttered deep green leaves in the trees and I was still carrying the sweetness of my son’s goodbyes. I felt good in my body, full of energy and I was buoyed by the thoughts of the work I was on my way to do. I felt happiness and contentment deep inside and then the felt the old knot of dread nestled right behind my belly button. Unconsciously I laid my hand lightly on my belly, I breathed in deep and long and felt the joy rise up and loosen the knot of fear.

•
Maya Henry helps busy moms increase their energy and get happier through her signature program Healthy Moms First www.healthymomsfirst.com

Maya is passionate about creating moments of pure joy in each day through conscious living and she believes that through taking care of ourselves first and cultivating a practice of patience and presence we can more fully enjoy parenthood.

Download a free meal plan www.mayahenry.com with 5 days of meals you can prep in two hours and get started simplifying your life today.

Maya can also be found on Facebook www.facebook.com/mayahenryhealth, Instagram www.instagram.com/mayahenryhealth/ and Pinterest www.pinterest.com/mayahenryhealth/ where she loves to post recipes and tips to support healthy living.

When You Don’t Know, Don’t Go

by Mindy Meiering

•
We all have an inner GPS that steers us in the right direction if we allow its voice to be heard. I like to call it your “inner wise woman” or your “higher, wiser Self.”

Sometimes we allow that voice to be overridden, though, and it can come back to bite us in the butt. Sound familiar at all?

About a year ago my husband, Patrick, and I were making lots of back and forth trips to Hawaii from Colorado as we got closer to breaking ground for the retreat center we’re building on the Big Island (our longtime home has been in Colorado for 15 years, but now our business and a big dream were taking us to Hawaii).

We were also moving through a time of deep personal loss. After a year and a half of pouring our time, energy and intention into two cycles of IVF, I had just recovered from getting extremely sick during the second cycle.

And – a double whammy—our doctor had just told us the IVF wasn’t working. If we wanted to get pregnant, the best chance was going to be using a donor egg... But there weren’t any guarantees if we went that route, either. You can imagine the sadness we felt after all the time, love and energy we’d been putting into this dream of having our own child.

In the midst of all this, Patrick had a trip coming up back to the Big Island for a week... and my plan all along had been to stay in Colorado. But then... I started doubting myself.

“Maybe I should go with him.” “It’s probably better for

us to be together right now.” “If I stay here, in Colorado, alone, I might just slip into more of a funk and that wouldn’t be good.”

I also resorted to an old habit I thought I’d left behind, one you might even be familiar with in your own life: polling my friends. “What do you think I should do? Stay here? Go?”

Here’s the bottom line, though: no one, except me, knew what I needed at that particular time. And when I walked up to the ticket counter the next day to check my bag *I almost didn’t do it*, a sign I chose to disregard.

There was a voice in my head that kept saying “Just go. It will all be okay... you’ll be with Patrick and the time away on the island will be healing for you.” But, it wasn’t.

From the minute we landed in Kona, I felt uneasy. I was anxious, tearful, and barely able to stay focused during a 3-hour meeting we had with our architect the next morning. As we sat at the coffee shop with him, discussing timelines and plans for the next year, a voice within me kept saying “What are you doing here?”

Later that day, I had a phone session scheduled with my therapist... someone who know me well and was an integral support throughout the years of infertility treatment I went through.

When I told her what had been happening, she stopped me and said “Honey, when you don’t know, you don’t go.” I could feel the relief in my body when she said it, too. Like, “Oh yeah, if I’m not sure.. I don’t HAVE to do anything.”

Of course, we also unpacked some of the bigger things going on in life that had impacted my decision, but these simple words of wisdom were what really stuck with me.

So I took some quiet time and a walk by the ocean later that day... and really tuned in to what I needed. More than anything, my sad and grieving heart needed time at home in Colorado, time with my dogs, and time to just be quiet and let my heart heal.

So, the next day, four days earlier than my planned return, I hopped on a plane and flew back to Colorado. And every bone in my body said "THANK YOU" when I decided to change my flight and go back early.

For me, this was clear confirmation that I was making the right decision. It was the opposite feeling of standing at the ticket counter feeling totally ambivalent about checking my bag and getting on that plane to Hawaii in the first place.

When you don't know, don't go. Words of wisdom that have guided me many times since then. They remind me, and I hope you, that when we're not sure about something or don't have the answer that it's perfectly okay to not know. To not go. To give ourselves the time we need for the answers to emerge.

So often, like I did before this trip, when we're not sure what to do we look for "the answers" outside of ourselves... when, really, we always have the answers we need within us. It often just requires a little stillness and quiet time to reflect before they emerge.

Trust your inner knowing... it will always guide you in the right direction.

Mindy Meiring is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker & Certified Life and Retreat Coach and Co-Founder of The Inhabit Sanctuary, a world-class retreat center currently under construction on the Big Island of Hawaii. She brings over 20 years of experience to her practice & is

devoted to helping others learn how to inhabit their lives with more wisdom, ease and joy through her 1:1 coaching, mindfulness classes and custom retreats. Mindy divides her time between the mountains of Southwest Colorado and Hawaii. When she's not with clients or poring over architectural plans you can usually find her at a yoga class or out on the trails hiking with her husband and their two rescue dogs.

Palomino Winter

by JoRene Byers

The little girl offered her noble friend
a sugar cube.
He nuzzled her hand,
lips soft as velvet.
She whispered into his ear
how much she loved him, and added a secret or two.
They could ride anywhere together ~
from Central Park to the moon.
So she quit dreaming about it
and decided to ride away with him.
They soon became invisible
as the snow swirled about them.

JoRene Byers is besotted with roses, tea in lovely teacups, and books. She is a bit of a gypsy in her writing, and keeps company with the mountains in Oregon as living art. This good happiness is shared on the porch swing with her dear husband, dog and cat ~ and all the Mourning Doves and jackrabbits that come by.

Spirits' Kindred

by Phyllis Ranallo

Good...night
Fright...night
Gazes through the mirror.
Side by Side
Beckoning eyes, pointed chins, our smiles, our sins.
Your hands, my hands, your eyes, my eyes
...Rings of fire.
Mirror cracked, fire bright, darkness absorbs light
An angle takes flight...come back.

Your mirror's other side
Mine's a river of tears...frozen.

Time lapse, years pass
An open door, another light
Good...night
Bright...night
Gazes through the mirror.
Side by side
With younger child, laughter bound, running wild.
My hands, her hands, thumbs a pair. My eyes, her eyes
...Rings of fire... three girls share... their spirits' kindred.

Phyllis Ranallo is a legal docket clerk by day ...but always in her mind a visual storyteller, collecting images and listening for words to capture moments in time...Sharing and Asking "do you feel this, can you see this too".



Shattering the Barriers of Single Motherhood... Begins Today!

by Sang Thi Duong

Today...I am making an entrance. Without my heels, without my glitter, without my Starbucks in hand, without my mascara and or my lip gloss.

Today...I am speaking with the truth.

Today...I am telling you like it is. No more holding it all back.

Today...I am choosing to no longer be the doormat for others.

Today...is the beginning of the beginning. For me. For you.

Today...is whatever you decide it is.

Because today is not over yet, the year is not over yet, your life is not over yet.

I see you Single Mother. You are enough. Just as you are. When I became a mother, I never dreamed I would do it alone. Because no one wakes up and says, "let me just do this parenting thing ALL by my damn self." I had dreams of what love looked like—having the infamous white picket fence with a beautiful house, kids frolicking in the yard waiting for their father to get home, having wonderful friendships with women and the feeling of the happily ever after.

That vision was crushed. Only for me to see what was really REAL.

Real was taking my son to college classes with me because I didn't have support.

Real was being on welfare and food stamps.

Real was being in relationship after relationship with no picket fence.

Real was struggling to stay on top of my finances barely keeping the lights on and food on the table.

Real was feeling guilty for even being a Single Mother.

Real was crying at night because I felt I was never enough and feeling I was never going to make it out.

Yet, there was always a voice in my head that was constantly whispering to me...

Being a Single Mother is not a bad thing.

Being a Single Mother is not about being broke, poor, and abandoned.

Being a Single Mother is not automatically giving others permission to step all over you.

Being a Single Mother is not the societal statistics I have to own.

Being a Single Mother is what I decide it is.

Because at the end of every day—I am a woman. I have a voice. And, most importantly, I am a mother.

"
Today... I am speaking
with the truth."

A mother who cares for her kids.

A mother who wants more for her kids than she had.

A mother who wants to make enough money to be financially free.

A mother who wants to laugh, make memories, and give her kid's life experiences.

A mother who wants to stand up for other Single Mothers and give them a place to thrive, be accepted, not judged, and hand them tools and resources to be great.

And I want YOU to know that I am committed to you—the Single Mother.

7 Life Lessons Learned While Hiking the Cascade Mountains

by Kelly Beischel

Our family vacationed in Seattle recently. There are 7 of us, including significant others. Planning an entire vacation for a group of this size felt overwhelming.

So I messaged everyone and requested that each person text to the group 1-2 activities they wanted to be sure they accomplished while in Seattle.

I accumulated their wishes and then assigned each person(s) to organize an activity or event.

Mine, of course, was a vineyard and wine tasting tour. My son-in-law, Brandon, planned a hike for us in the Cascade Mountains.

Now for my unpopular revelation...

I don't get the appeal of hiking.

I love walking and exploring but I don't understand why one drives to a mountain to make a grueling trek up the side of it.

What's the point? Is it exercise? Is it communing with nature? With self? Is it a race? To get to the top? And then what? What is the objective when hiking?

I NEED to know!

As you can imagine, I wasn't my typical adventurous self before the trip up the mountain. Mind you; my brand-spanking-new-whale-watching-souvenir-travel-mug caught on fire in the microwave just as we were leaving

I want to hold your hand. Hug you. Show you that you CAN have everything you want.

I believe in you when others do not. I know you are capable of running a Fortune 500 company if you want. You can do the impossible. You are unstoppable. I believe in your talents. Your dreams. Your desires.

I want to know who you are, where you are, and what makes you the perfect form of you. I want other Single Mothers, just like you, to know they are not alone.

I accept you for the woman you are. The places you have been. The hurt you have. The decisions you have made. Together, we can shatter the barriers of single motherhood—we deserve to have it all.

Today—we get to decide how tomorrow will begin and how today will end.

From my fingertips to your eyes

Sang Thi Duong is a Communication Strategist and is the Founder of the Single Mother Academy. A place where Single Mothers learn just how unstoppable they are and they stop asking for permission and begin living the life that makes their heart skip a beat. Sang is practically a Single Mother master since she has been a Single Mother for 173,603+ hours. You can indulge in her selfies over on Instagram (@MsSangD) or Snapchat (@Sangtastik) or you can visit the Single Mother Academy at www.SingleMotherAcademy.com and dare to become relentless.

the house.

At the start of the trail, I berated myself for not having thought to pack a backpack. I mean, I knew before we left Ohio that we were going hiking. Duh!

After my 105th iteration of how dumb I was Joe, my husband, patiently said to me, “Quit beating yourself up about it.”

And it clicked.

I realized that I could relax and find the fun in spending time with my family or be miserable for the next 4 hours.

The choice was mine.

I decided to have a good time. And to see what I could learn about hiking and myself along the way.

Though, just to be sure we’re clear, it wasn’t all rosy from there on out.

In fact, I called hexes down on Brandon when we were picking our way through the ankle-hazardous rock scrambles.

Lessons Learned on that Hike:

1. Beating yourself up serves no one.

“I’m glad I beat myself up about that incident; I learned a lot.”

Said No One.

Ever.

Instead, talk to yourself as you would talk with your best friend.

Be patient.

And kind.

2. There is value in a coach who won’t leave you behind – who challenges you to finish what you start. A coach who believes in you.

A little more than 1/2 way up the mountain I wanted to quit. In fact, I tried to stop. You see, before the hike, Joe assured me that if I was ever too tired to continue (I was just coming off of nearly two months of being ill) I could stop and wait for the group on the way back down. I thought I had an out.

But, when I told him that I had enough, Joe wouldn’t leave me behind.

Joe was my coach that day. (And if truth be told, he’s my coach on most days.)

A coach encourages, motivates, and gets you unstuck. A coach doesn’t desert you when you most need the encouragement.

3. Knowing the goal, the objective, or an answer to the “why” elicits buy in. Knowing what to expect is key.

When the brain tunes into the objective, it attempts to fulfill it. Our brain seeks the answer, to accomplish the goal.

Will, our youngest son, challenged us all to find and photograph the most impressive tree, animal, and plant, giving us something a lot more pleasurable to concentrate on than our burning quads and weary feet.

I loved his challenge because I love goals and objectives. I need a purpose like I need water.

4. Feedback is paramount for sustainability and motivation. How close are we to the top?

Where are the slippery rocks? How many times will we stop? What will we do when we get there?

Plodding along without feedback is frustrating. Similarly, timely formative feedback is valuable when motivating our students to learn deeply. Formative feedback offers learners an opportunity to readjust, to recalibrate their efforts or strategies.

5. Getting uncomfortable is necessary for growth – personally and professionally.

Discomfort increases creativity, enabling us to see things from an alternative perspective. On the other hand, being clothed in the cocoon of what’s comfortable leads us on a path of stagnation.

Accomplishing what we thought we couldn’t is a heady feeling.

While, yes, I was uncomfortable climbing that mountain, I finished believing I could accomplish about anything.

6. Maintaining momentum is paramount to success.

Continually putting forth energy toward a project is important whether we’re hiking, writing, or preparing coursework.

Our momentum comes to a screeching halt when we stop. Making it harder to begin again.

Whereas, working on a project each day catapults the project toward completion, even if we work on it merely minutes a day.

I wrote my latest published academic manuscript by committing to writing 10 minutes a day.

7. When faced with doubts and fears, ask yourself, “What story am I telling myself?”

You see, I discovered that my reluctance about going

hiking in the first place arose from my fear of failing.

Hiking is not my favorite activity. This is true.

But, my story was one of potential failure.

One would think it would be easy for me to speak the truth to the people who love me most.

Until it wasn’t.

While I’m not hiking up a mountain anytime soon, I’m happy that I did the climb. I’m thankful for the uncomfortable experience from which I will draw strength the next time I face a daunting proposition.

I’m thankful that I persisted beyond my fears to enjoy time with my family and learn more about myself.

What story, born of fear, are you telling yourself that’s holding you back from all that you could accomplish?

•

Kelly Beischel PhD, RN, CNE, is an author, researcher, teacher, mentor, and firecracker for women who want to thrive, women who seek a kickass life. When she isn’t working, she’s busy being a lake bum. You can find Kelly at DrBpresents.com.





Weighted Down

by Carole Cassell

•

“When are you due?” asked the smiling stranger standing behind me in the line at a public restroom. She glided her hand ever-so-gently over my extended tummy.

“I’m not sure,” I replied, barely able to make eye contact. Luckily a stall became available and I didn’t have to figure out what to say next. The previous occupant was narrowly out of the way before I dashed in, latched the lock, fell back against the cold metal door and wept.

You see, the thing is, I wasn’t pregnant ... I was overweight.

This event set in motion a battle with my weight that developed into a crippling experience that impacted my life for many years and in many ways.

I’d always been thin growing up. In fact, I’d been teased throughout school because of it. The other kids called me names like “Skinny Minnie,” “Beanpole,” and “String Bean.” It never really bothered me. I was what I was and I was fine with that. Even after the birth of my two children, I quickly bounced back to my slender body. I ate what I wanted (within reason), exercised several times a week and that was pretty much the extent of my thoughts around weight. That is, until my early forties when I began taking steps towards my dream life.

When I met my husband, Roger, I was at my ideal weight. But during our first couple of years of dating, I gained 100 pounds. We joked it was my “happy weight” as my pre-Roger life was filled with stress, bouts of extreme depression and lots of anger. I’m not suggesting that upon marrying Roger those emotions vanished. Quite the opposite. They magnified.

However, there was something different about this relationship. I knew, deep down inside, this man showed up in my life to challenge all that I believed, to illuminate how I reacted to situations, and to support me in uncovering the true me—the “me” that lurked beneath the incredible pain and disappointment that had plagued

me most of my life and was desperately longing to be free.

The same was true for him as well. We were the proverbial soulmates. Both incredibly supportive and encouraging of each other’s growth. But even though we offered each other a safe place to heal, our journey of self-growth was not a smooth one. We endured a lot of pain and suffering in the name of growth. Everything we’d stuffed down and ignored over the years, floated to the surface for healing. And every bit of pain, insecurity and fear rose up and manifested in unexpected ways.

My deepest pain could be traced back to being told repeatedly by my father that I was a “worthless piece of shit”—despite successes I’d achieved in life that proved otherwise. And although I healed this deep-seated belief in the areas of relationships and my general health, as I began to step into the truth of who I was and serve others from my Higher Self, those old insecurities found a new way to stop me from shining. Crafty, little devils.

And what does this have to do with my weight?

Everything.

The Bully

Years ago, I received a call from the Divine to leave my corporate job as a controller and enter the world of the healing arts. I followed my calling to open a massage and bodywork practice and became successful very quickly. To complement my business, I studied to be a life coach. I wanted to help people make peace with their pasts so they could be free to create a life they loved—just like I was doing. But it was also during this journey that I began to gain weight. Lots and lots of weight.

As I trained for the various licenses and certifications to assist clients in areas such as assertiveness, stress management, Law of Attraction and Louise Hay’s “Heal Your Life,” more of my own “stuff” came up for healing. I’d work on one thing, and then another would surface. I’d heal that, and then another would come up.

Being an overachiever by nature, I welcomed the awareness and opportunities for growth. I enjoyed the challenge of learning something new and then figuring

out how to apply it to become an even better version of myself. And over the last seven years I healed childhood abuse, the pain and guilt from multiple failed marriages and family drama among other issues. If it came up, I healed it and moved on. My life was finally becoming the life I'd envisioned.

Except for one little thing ... well ... maybe not so little.

With each step I took to becoming more in alignment with my true essence, the bigger my goals and dreams became. The bigger my goals and dreams became, the bigger my dress size became. And as my weight climbed, I reacted the way I'd been taught to react.

I dieted.

I tried everything, but my weight wouldn't budge. And when dieting failed, I consulted my doctor. I knew there had to be something amiss in my body. He agreed; knowing weight had never been an issue for me before. But he couldn't find anything wrong and said I needed to face the fact that I came from a family with weight issues and should make peace with it.

He asked me a question, however, that stuck with me all these years later. He asked if I'd rather be fat and happy, or go back to the way my life once was, but be thin. Without hesitation I said I'd rather be fat and happy. Yet I wondered: *Why couldn't I be happy AND thin?*

My doctor suggested I watch what I eat, exercise regularly and see what happens. So I hired a nutritionist and a personal trainer and worked diligently. I ate exactly what they told me to eat, exercised precisely for how long and how often my trainer prescribed, and I lost nothing.

Nada. Zip. Zilch. My weight remained unchanged.

After a few months, I felt defeated. I called it quits and decided to make friends with my weight. After all, my husband still looked at me like I was the most beautiful woman in the world (thank you, Honey). And my family and friends didn't care how much I weighed. So for the next couple of years, I did my best to accept that I was simply a bigger woman. And that's when things got worse.

I became my own personal bully. Each time I saw myself in a full-length mirror, I'd say the most horrific things to myself like:

Disgusting!

Look at you, you're no good for anything.

You're a fat pig.

You're an embarrassment.

You're a worthless piece of shit!

Yep, you read that last one right. I used the exact line on myself that my Dad used to say to me. I picked up right where he left off. Every time I saw my reflection, I'd stop and verbally abuse myself, taking care to point out all of the things that were wrong with me. I'd call myself names, names that I'd never dream of calling anyone else who looked like me:

Fatty.

Loser.

Heifer.

Ugly.

Worthless.

I made fun of myself on a regular basis, joking about my size when I was around other people. No one else said a word to me about my weight. I was doing all of this to myself. I bullied myself into tears day after day. I became a skilled tormentor, inflicting verbal beatings, slowly ripping away at my soul and dimming my own light.

By the time my "making friends with my body" experiment came to a close, I'd been so ruthless that I once again felt the worthlessness I'd felt most of my early life. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I'd found another way to feel "less than" and to keep myself down. All of the lovely healing I'd done felt like it was for naught. I'd lost my shine and let my weight define me. I became a hermit. I declined social invitations and stopped going to things like festivals, concerts, or the beach—all things I loved. I quit everything that once brought me joy because I was so uncomfortable in my own skin. It was a living hell—but a hell of my own design.

The Gift

I begged the Universe to help me figure out the root cause of my experience. I cried, begged, and then cried some more. I couldn't figure out what I was doing wrong. I'd done everything society tells you to do to lose weight—but ended up heavier than ever. Then, during my meditations, I began receiving messages that my weight was a gift from my body.

A gift? Are you kidding me? Seriously?

Although my mind rejected this theory, my Spirit recognized the truth. And after months of meditation, more messages from Spirit and many conversations with people I loved and trusted, I began to see the truth too, and applied the healing modalities I'd been trained in, upon my own body. I changed my mindset, repaired my abusive relationship with myself and practiced self-acceptance and unconditional love for my body.

And what I came to realize was that because I still had an underlying belief (albeit deeply buried), that I was worthless; each time I stepped into my power, my body added a layer of fat—that is, protection—to keep me safe. Protection against the pain and disappointment I was certain would follow any good I allowed into my life.

Diet and exercise alone was like rolling a boulder uphill. Until I healed the deeper issue and changed the focus of my thoughts, I would continue to "fight" the battle of the bulge. But once I accepted my body, showed it appreciation and changed my focus to what I wanted to create (instead of what I didn't), everything began to change.

This was the missing piece to my painful puzzle. *This* was the key to ending my pain and suffering. And *this* would help me heal the damage I caused my Soul.

Once I truly accepted my body's gift of excess weight, I could get on with the business of healing. Once I truly realized that the transformation needed to come from the inside out, not the outside in, I could use the beautiful tools I'd been trained in to change my reality and create the body I wanted. And once I truly released what society told me about weight loss, and began to listen

to the wisdom from within, I became empowered.

And that's when my body began to lovingly release the excess weight.

Unconditional Love

Sometimes we're too close to a problem to really see what's going on. Sometimes we're so used to reacting in the way we've been conditioned, that we ignore our inner guidance that's screaming there must be another way, a better way.

Because I was so focused on changing my outer world—spending my time and energy dieting, exercising or beating myself up—I wasn't in the space to hear what my soul actually needed—kindness, acceptance and unconditional love.

I have since apologized to myself—body, mind and Spirit.

I now accept myself just as I am and that acceptance has created an environment for my body to return to its natural state of wellbeing.

And now when I pass a mirror, I stop and tell myself things like:

I love you!

You're so beautiful!

You're an amazing woman!

You deserve to have it all!

You are worthy!

I spend time each day in gratitude for my body and the way it was trying to protect me. I thank it for showing up for me 100 percent while it carried around 80 extra pounds and suffered the negative effects of yo-yo dieting, punishing workouts and verbal abuse.

I spend time each day feeding my Spirit with positive self-talk—loving words that honor me and highlight my worth.

And I spend time each day meditating and visualizing my future self, deeply connecting with the feeling of once again having my ideal body and the freedom of no longer feeling weighted down.

I'm both happy and excited that my body is

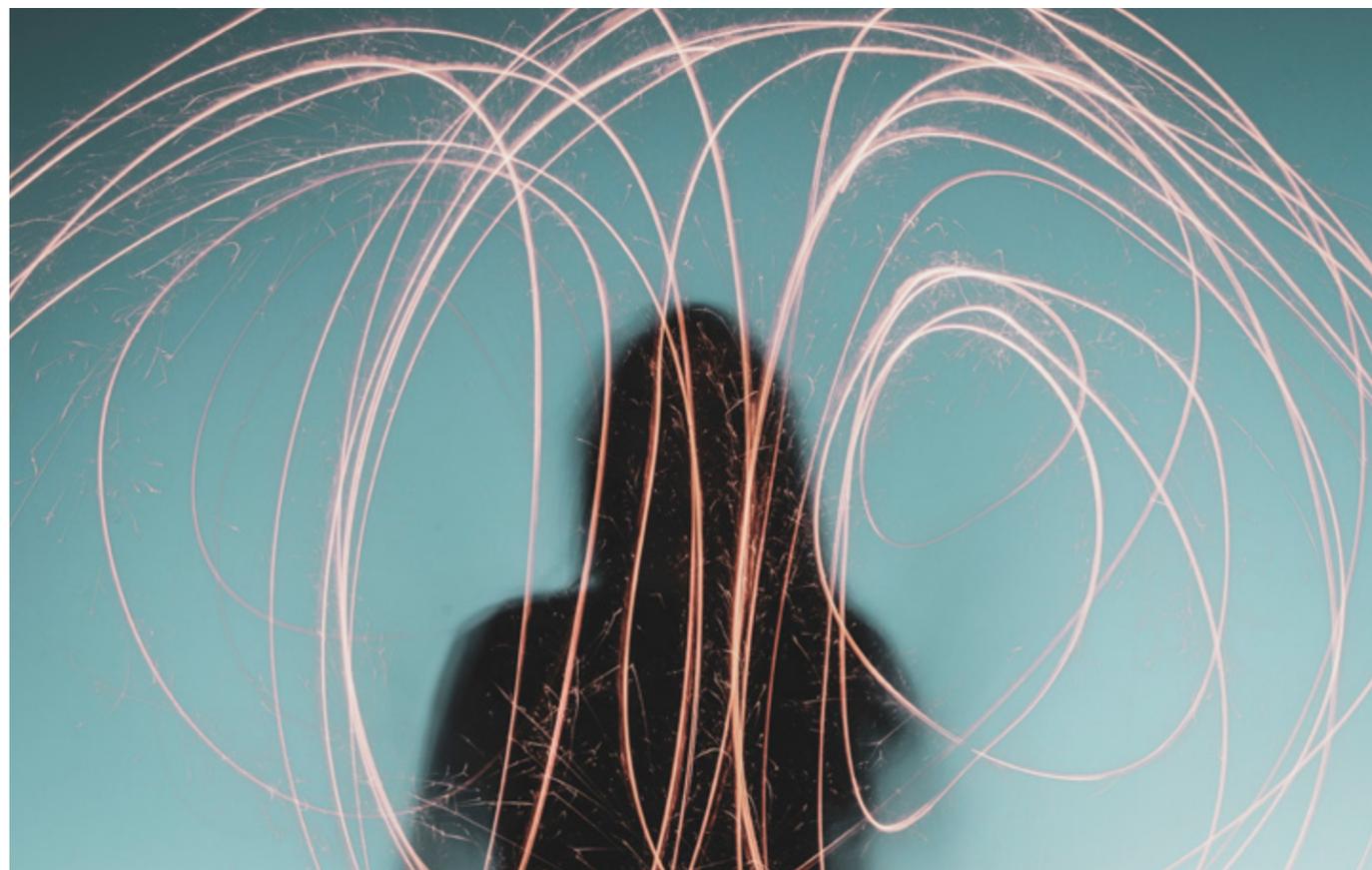
releasing its excess weight naturally. No more diets, no more brutal workouts, just simple, healthy eating and exercise I enjoy.

And of course...the power of the mind.

•

Carole Cassell is a certified life coach & workshop facilitator. She is passionate about helping others reconnect with their inner wisdom, find the gifts in their life experiences, heal from past wounds and design a life rich in love, happiness, inner peace, confidence and abundance. Happily married with two amazing sons, she lives in the lovely little resort town of South Haven, Michigan.

Find Carole's work at: CaroleCassell.com.



I Refuse to Choose

by CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke

•

Have you ever had someone say to you, “The only way you’ll be successful is if you focus and become an expert on one thing.”?

I, CrisMarie, have. It doesn’t work that way for me.

I’m a coach and have been a coach for almost a decade. I’ve been told by marketing gurus that the key to success is choosing a niche, meaning a single focus like:

- how to lose weight
- heal your chronic pain
- get the sizzle back in your relationship
- be the leader you admire
- how to be a successful entrepreneur

Well, forget it!

Why?

Because I’ve been challenged with each of these areas myself, and I’ve had to become an expert in them all. I’ve walked—and continue to walk—each of these paths myself.

I’m a mind-body coach, a relationship coach, and a leadership and business coach.

I refuse to choose!

I’m a Mind-Body Coach

I’ve spent so long feeling like my body was betraying me and have struggled with:

- yo-yo dieting
- hating my body
- looking for experts to fix my chronic back pain
- trying to get rid of my chronic fatigue, allergies,

skin, and gut issues

I searched for the perfect expert and magic formula. Nothing worked, at least for long. There was a sense I was missing something.

It wasn’t until I started to look at what was underneath each of these issues that I found the missing ingredient. It was me – my inner guidance: how I felt, what was important to me, and what I wanted.

Sure, I needed help learning to connect to my guidance, which is how I became a mind-body coach.

Once I started listening to my inner guidance as the expert source, my weight leveled out and my back pain lessened. After being allergic to about 20 different things, I’m now only allergic to one. My skin and gut issues have cleared up. I have so much more energy, now.

No, I’m not perfect, but I now know my body is always trying to communicate with me, not betray me. My job has been to learn how to listen.

What about you? Do you:

- feel like your body is betraying you?
- keep trying to find the perfect expert?
- look for next magic pill to solve your problems?

Believe me, you have the answers *within you*. As soon as you start listening to and honoring yourself, your body is going to respond positively.

I’m a Relationship Coach

I spent a decade in a relationship where I was so lonely, yearning for connection. I tried to:

- be the perfect partner
- not rock the boat
- become what I thought my partner wanted me to be

I worked super hard and was desperate to make the relationship work. But I only wound up frustrated, resentful and doing way too much. It wasn't until I collapsed in despair that my relationship success started to turn around.

I asked for help and went to *The Haven* where I focused on learning about myself and how to communicate.

I realized that I couldn't change my partner. I took the focus off of her and turned it on to me. I discovered what was important to me, and took up painting, dancing and acting – even though those activities interfered with “our time.”

I found my voice, started asking for what I wanted, began setting boundaries, saying what didn't work for me. As I became more of me, I felt alive and experienced the emotional intimacy and passion that I'd been craving.

Today I have a very fulfilling relationship with my partner Susan. I get to be me. I matter. I speak up. I act, dance, and do my own thing. We fight and we make up. It's hard, and it's completely worth it.

Susan and I have our business together. We designed and lead in person couples programs, *Couples Alive*. Currently, we're launching Ignite Your Relationship Mojo, an online relationship program to help you work on your relationship, even if your partner doesn't want to.

What about you? Are you:

- getting the connection you crave?
- feeling alive and passionate in your relationship?
- feeling like you matter
- speaking up and getting to be yourself?

Once you start making yourself a priority, your relationship is going to turn around for the better. It's a process but it works.

I'm a Business Coach

I started my career as an engineer at Boeing, and then I went back to school to get my MBA and worked for a high-faultin' consulting firm. I kept getting promoted, but I felt like an imposter and was miserable, afraid someone was going to figure out that I was a fraud.

I was so exhausted trying to be what other people wanted me to be, that I decided to leave.

I learned that I enjoy helping people see and step into a bigger vision and work together as a team to make that vision a reality.

Susan and I started, *thrive!* doing leadership development, coaching, and teamwork. Thank goodness we didn't pay attention to the fact that it was right after 9/11. We were successful right off the bat and have been successful every single year since.

The reality is—I wasn't a fraud. I was just spending way too much energy focused on whether people liked me or not, rather than on whether I liked me or not.

What about you? Are you:

- doing the work you love?
- focused on meeting other people's expectations?
- worried about what you should do?

Once you shift your focus to making yourself happy and doing the work you love, the results will follow. You'll be building your success from the inside out rather than the outside in.

I refuse to choose. What about you? Maybe choosing fits you just right, but be sure to check and listen to your insides before you decide.

CrisMarie

P.S. How about you? What do you crave? Let me help you to connect to you. Check out my Personal Coaching page. Work with me. Sign up for a package or a session. I'd love to work with you to create the body, relationship and career you adore!

CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke,
Master Certified Life Coaches and Business Consultants

CrisMarie and Susan work leaders and teams, individuals and professional women. With leaders and teams, they turnaround dysfunctional teams into high performing, cohesive teams who trust each other, deal with differences directly, and have clarity and alignment on the business strategy. CrisMarie helps over-performing professional women who are frustrated, resentful and doing too much reconnect to their passion, joy, and magnetic presence and apply their tremendous resources in new ways to create both results and fulfillment in their work, relationships and lives. She does this through Executive Coaching, Personal Coaching and Ignite Your Relationship Mojo, an on-line program. Susan helps people reconnect to their mojo, “muchness,” magnetic presence in their relationships, work and life. She does this through Leadership Mojo Coaching and Build Your Mojo, an online program. They also have an in-person, three day, all-inclusive retreat working with horses, Find Your Mojo in Montana where they partner you with a horse to access your mojo and transform your relationships both at work and at home.

Check out their website: www.thriveinc.com. Find them on Facebook @thriveincmt. Watch their TEDx Talk: Conflict – Use It, Don't Defuse It!

”

It wasn't until I started to look at what was underneath each of these issues that I found the missing ingredient. It was me – my inner guidance: how I felt, what was important to me, and what I wanted.



Did You Wait Too Long to Euthanize Your Pet?

by Mary Vernal

I know, it's a horrible title, but it is a valid question. Having been blessed with four incredible dogs in my life, I have been there. Buttons was our first and only dog in our home growing up. She was a Cockapoo Schnauzer mix. She belonged to my mother's hairdresser who had to give her up so she came home to us. The only memory of her death I have was she was there and then she wasn't.

Shortly after I got married, we decided it would be great to get a dog. We chose a Golden Retriever puppy that we named Maui. Now, we had no idea what we were doing which would explain why it took so long to housebreak her. We finally got the hang of it and when Maui was three we decided she needed a pal. We adopted Sasha who was a 1 ½ year old Golden/Lab Mix. There was an adjustment period but Maui and Sasha become the best of friends. They were our first "kids". They had our hearts in a big way. We had a lot of great years with them.

When Maui was 7, she was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma. The Big "C". We took her to an amazing oncologist Dr. Gerald Post. Now if you told me I would do chemotherapy on a dog, I would have called you crazy. But we did, and I'm so glad we did. She was given 18 months to live and ended up having 5 really good years of life. The chemo was in oral form that we could give her at home. There were checkups and blood work but she tolerated everything well. Sasha, not so much.

A few years later, Sasha was diagnosed with Lymphoma. What???!!!! Now Dr. Post had both of them as patients. This was a whole different story. Sasha's chemo was given by IV. That meant a long visit to the vet. It was a lot harder on her system. She did not tolerate it well. She

did not have a good quality of life. We were heartbroken. We both knew what we had to do. Neither of us wanted to do it but looking at Sasha we knew.

It was one of the hardest things I had ever had to do. I had since become a mother and my son was just a toddler at the time. I understood the responsibility of holding this dear dog's fate in my hands. This was a decision that once done, could not be undone. Still, I knew I had to love my girl the best I could and not let her suffer. She was not going to get better. Dave and I were with her the whole time. I talked to her and pet her and told her how much she meant to us and how grateful I was that she came to be with me. It was horribly hard and then it was done. Just like that. She lasted three months from diagnosis to death. Three short months.

Maui's story was very different. She lived with cancer for 5 years. She would have a set back and I would take her in to see Gerry and we would adjust her treatment and on she would go. She had some bad days but not many and nothing horrendous until her last day. My son was 3 and I was pregnant with my daughter. Maui was lying on the floor and couldn't get up. You could tell by her breathing and looking at her eyes that she was in trouble. Do I stay or do I go? Do I go with the dog and leave my son or stay with my son and send Dave with the dog? I knew that I was the one. I would be the one to stay with her. I would be the one to make sure she was okay. I would be the one who could be present even with all the pain.

Dave put her in the car and I drove to the Emergency Vet. This is where Dr. Post saw her so all her records were there. They ran some tests and confirmed what I had already feared. Her body was shutting down and there was nothing to do. I don't know how long I lay on the floor of the vet with her. Talking to her. Petting her. Telling her it was okay to go. Thanking her for all the joy she brought and forgiving her for a few incidents of aggression. The vet was incredible. They let me have

all the time I wanted with her. I lay on the floor with her until the end. Twelve years. My first "child". After living with knowing that she could take a turn anytime for five years, here I was with the reality of it. It came out of nowhere and now it was over.

Then came Cody. My daughter was almost two when Dave came home and said "Mare, you gotta see this dog!!" I wasn't interested. Maui had become aggressive over the years and it had been very stressful to manage her with my son. I wasn't about to take in a dog that I didn't know with now two young children. But, here Cody came. This tall, gorgeous Yellow Lab with eyes that matched his fur. He caught Dave's eye because he looks a lot like Sasha, a lot. He even rode in the car the same way she did with the chin resting on the window. Shit. It is one of the best decisions I ever made. He is an amazing dog. Before we spoiled him, you could leave food anywhere and he would never touch it. I knew he was meant to be here when my daughter was sitting on a stool on the floor with a cookie in her hand and Cody just lay there and looked at her. Maui would have bitten her hand off to get the cookie!!

Cody came to us when he was 5. He is now 15 ½. Yes, you heard right, a 15 ½ year old Yellow Lab. He can't hear too well and his eyes are going. His back-end is getting weak but he is happy and healthy. I fully realize that every day with him is a gift. I pray that he will just go peacefully in his sleep when it is his time. I know that probably won't be the case. I will be there for him for whatever he needs, no matter how hard. He deserves nothing less.

What's this really all about? Why am I telling you all this? Because it matters and because I want to make you think and question. This isn't just about dogs and death. It's about relationships and responsibility. I can look at my relationships through the lens of my dogs and ask myself –

Did I keep this person in my life too long? Did I let the pain linger?

Did I draw the death blow too soon because the pain was too great for me?

Did I fool myself into thinking that "they" would get better when really the case was terminal?

Do I need to be the strong one and deal the final death shot?

Unfortunately, with the dogs, the final shot is truly final.

Fortunately, for our relationships, most of the time, final isn't always final. Choosing to end a relationship or setting strong boundaries around it can usually be revisited. Healing and forgiveness can occur even if both parties aren't on board with it. In our relationships, if a choice doesn't go the way we planned, we can make another choice. Our job is to choose.

I am so grateful for the animals in my life and all the wisdom they provide.

I encourage you to take a moment and see where this may hit true to you. What are your answers to the questions above?

If you want to explore it further, I'm here for you. Reach out. Let's talk. Let's honor our amazing pets by taking their teachings to heart and being better humans for their existence.

With Love & Light,
Mary Vernal

Changing the Face of 50: Let's Teach Our Daughters Differently

by Dr. Anna Garrett

One of the participants in my Fit, Fabulous and Fierce over 40 class said something a couple of weeks ago that really struck me. She said, "The weight gain thing in menopause isn't the worst part of it. The worst part is looking in the mirror and seeing how old I look. I hate how I look."

A long-time friend who recently spent time with me at the beach showed up with a bathing suit that has a skirt. Not because she WANTED a bathing suit with a skirt because it was cute, but because she believes she has parts that shouldn't be out in public anymore. Never mind that last year she was rocking a bikini. The truth is (from my vantage point) that she looks just as fit and fabulous as she always has...just in an older version of her high-school self.

Both of these women are gorgeous. Both are in their mid-fifties. And somewhere along the line, both have bought into the idea that they should look perpetually 25. Getting older is difficult for many of us to accept in a culture that places so much value on looking young and hot.

The problem is that midlife women are portrayed as hot all right, but not in a good way. Just pick up any piece of marketing material that targets 40-50 something women and you are likely to see a woman fanning herself or throwing a tantrum. Magazines are full of ads that encourage us to fill every line and get our cellulite Cool Sculpted. The natural changes of midlife and menopause are to be avoided at all costs!

Changing the Face of 50

So what to do? We can either accept being lumped into midlife stereotypes or we can push back and change the conversation... and hopefully the mindset of marketers when it comes to women and aging. Men are portrayed as distinguished. Why should we settle for anything less?

What would happen if confident, happy, beautiful midlife women decided to skip the whole anti-aging craze in order to show the next generation that lined, real faces and cellulite are beautiful? What if we decided to stop throwing away millions of dollars on the myriad of available procedures, plumpers and potions? Even as I write this, an email comes in (from a respected physician) selling me Aging Reset Essentials.

We are creative and vibrant. And we don't have to look 25 forever to be worthwhile or beautiful.

How could simply owning (and treating kindly and speaking nicely about) our "imperfect" bodies affect not only our own lives, but those over whom we have influence (like our daughters)? Is it possible to slowly but deliberately change the perception of these "flaws" as something to shame, hide and fix at any cost to something acceptable and embraceable in all their human, womanly realness?

I'll bet THAT would change the conversation.

The happy truth is we are more than our bodies. We aren't all sitting around fanning ourselves or bouncing grandkids on our knee all day long. Nor are we dusty old crones who have passed our expiration date and have nothing left to offer to the world.

Alive & No. 5

by Heidi Ann Webber

We are wise. We are powerful. We are creative and vibrant. And we don't have to look 25 forever to be worthwhile or beautiful. Think about your own relationship to aging. How are you buying into the myth that it must be prevented, fixed or covered up? What is one small change you can make to move closer to a better relationship with your aging body?

Dr. Anna Garrett is a menopause expert and Doctor of Pharmacy. She helps women who are struggling with symptoms of perimenopause and menopause find natural hormone balancing solutions so they can rock their mojo through midlife and beyond. Her clients would tell you that her real gift is helping them reclaim parts of themselves they thought were gone forever.

Find out more about working with her at www.drannagarrett.com/work-with-me/.

I am alive.
Diamonds and more stolen.
Heirlooms, investments, gifts all gone.
This deed this theft happened at dawn.
It had to be a joke. I wasn't choked and I am NOT broke.
I am FULL, loved and breathe to pause,
I surface to emerge once more focusing on this broken law.
Objects come, objects go. I have much much more to explore.
With no invite to enter through my door,
The questionable soul helped them selves,
Vanishing into plain sight through my front door.
I see Life is still beautiful and life is an ebb & flow.
I dream and hope there will be a trial to not ignore.
My memories serve me I will not forget
My health, my wisdom are my wealth.
I am alive and my No. 5 was left.

Heidi Webber is based in Southwest Florida. She lives with 2 black labs China & Apple and a mini-schnauzer Casey who believes she is a black lab. As an Ayurveda Minded Therapist, Heidi focuses on the positive, self-care and remaining in present moment, influencing her community and individuals one breathe at a time. Heidi is the owner of Chapter 1 Wellness – A Holistic Atelier

LMT, LE, CHC.
Chopra Center for Wellbeing Instructor Perfect Health
Ayurveda Lifestyle & Primordial Sound Meditation
Heidi@chapter1wellness.com
Chapter1wellness.com



UNLOCKED Stories

by Ellen Fondiler

To do the work you love, you've got to unlock a few doors. UNLOCKED Stories are honest conversations with people who chose a path + made it happen.

A note from Ellen: I'm thrilled to spotlight [Zoe Boekbinder](#)—a musician, social activist, and founder of [The Prison Music Project](#).

I almost don't have the words to describe how deeply Zoe's story has affected me. So, I'll skip my usual preamble. Instead, I invite you to simply... read on.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

[Zoe]: I make music.

I've been making music for a living for nearly 9 years—since I was 20 years old.

I've done a number of different projects in that time—including forming a band with my sister called Vermillion Lies, releasing some solo records, and at one point, writing and recording 100 songs in 100 days.

Getting to make music and touring the world is definitely a thrill.

But four years ago, I began a project that changed the course of my life.

I started working with poets and songwriters at a maximum-security men's prison called New Folsom. It all started with collaboration between myself and a rapper I met at the prison. He goes by the name of "Shell Dog," and he was incarcerated when he 18 years old.

Shell Dog gave me permission to use his rap lyrics for a song.

Word got around, and soon, other writers at the prison were approaching me with their raps, lyrics and ideas. That single song evolved into a full-length album that includes about ten incarcerated songwriters.

Its working title is [The Prison Music Project](#).

WHY PRISON? SEEMS LIKE THE LAST PLACE ON EARTH THAT ANYONE WOULD WANT TO GO, LET ALONE WRITE MUSIC!

[Zoe]: Some of the most important stories come from people currently behind bars. The fact that people that are suffering that much can still make art is beyond inspiring to me. I want to amplify their voices.

I don't want their work—and their stories—to go unheard.

I have other motivations for doing this work, too.

For starters: there are studies that show that art and music programs in prisons lower the incidence of violence within the prison as well as significantly lower the recidivism rates for those involved in such programs. This benefits everyone: the prison, the incarcerated people, and the society that these people will eventually re-enter.

Music can provide an outlet, it is humanizing.

I believe that music can help to stop the cycle of incarceration.

In every career, there are a few "locked door moments"—moments where it seems like all hope is lost, or the project is blocked.



WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST “LOCKED DOOR MOMENT,” SO FAR?

[Zoe]: With the work that I’m doing, there are...literal locked doors.

One of the biggest challenges has been finding a way to collaborate with the writers inside the prison, without violating prison protocol.

I am allowed into the prison, but I’m not allowed to carry anything out that I didn’t bring it with me. I can’t accept anything from any of the people incarcerated there. If I correspond with them through the mail or phone, I won’t be allowed in anymore.

Recordings of any kind must be approved, as New Folsom is a maximum-security facility, and that is a long process. We did get approval to record inside, but only in one isolated section of the prison, and now need to go through another lengthy process to get approval to use these recordings.

I am not hopeful about this last step but prepared to move forward either way. If we cannot use these recordings, the songs will be performed entirely by a broadcast of artists who are not incarcerated. If we do get permission to use them we are excited to add production and secondary instrumentation to these existing recordings.

AT THIS TIME, THE PRISON MUSIC PROJECT IS STILL... A WORK IN PROGRESS. YOU’RE SEEKING FUNDING TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT AND BRING THIS MUSIC TO THE WORLD. WHAT’S THE NEXT STEP?

[Zoe]: The record is a non-profit project. We are looking for grants and private donations to help cover the overhead costs so that the profits from sales can go immediately to supporting re-entry programs for

people getting out of prison. There are currently a lot of challenges facing people re-entering society, like the denial of government assistance with food and housing. The success of this project matters so much more to me than anything else I’ve ever done.

I feel responsible for the writers I’ve been working with, to make their stories heard, because they have been made incapable to do it for themselves.

Their stories must be heard, because they illustrate the injustices that so many people face. Poor people, people of color, addicts, transgendered people, and people with abnormal mental abilities/disabilities are not given a fair chance in this country.

One statistic to illustrate my point: people of color (non-white) make up 32% of the US population but 66% of the incarcerated population. This is a problem. Take for instance the facts that have been coming to the surface recently about police brutality that is disproportionately aimed at minorities.

But getting back to your question: you asked about “next steps.”

One thing I did recently—that I’ve never done before—was to approach a hero that I have always wanted to work with.

I asked [Ani DiFranco](#) if she would produce the record... and she said yes.

Our first recording dates are set to take place before the end of this year.

WHAT’S THE NEXT DOOR THAT YOU NEED TO UNLOCK? (AND WHAT’S THE PLAN?)

[Zoe]: I know that while The Prison Music Project is captivating, it is also complicated.

I don’t know if everyone will feel comfortable with the idea of these stories being shared, because of whom they belong to.

I don’t know what any of these people did to end up incarcerated. I don’t have access to that information and I don’t want to. It isn’t the point, as far as I’m concerned.

I’m not saying every action is forgivable. I’m just saying that we need to look at how to restructure a society that has the highest incarceration rate in the world.

On the other side of things, some people may take issue with my role in this project. I think it would be understandable to question whether my use of words and songs written by these incarcerated people is appropriate or appropriative.

I have confidence in my convictions and am trying to be respectful, delicate, radical, and responsible with this project. I don’t want it to be about me, or any of the artists who will end up performing these songs in place of the people who wrote them.

I simply want to be a microphone and I hope that message is clear throughout this process.

The next door that I need to unlock is approaching people to get involved in the project either as guest performers or as funders.

I’m prepared to reach out to my dream collaborators and wealthy philanthropists, even if I hear a lot of “no’s.” I know not everyone shares my views and I have to be ready

for some rejection and criticism. I do hope, though, that they feel as inspired by this project as I am. We’ll see what happens.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: WHAT’S YOUR BIGGEST PIECE OF ADVICE FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS TO STAY MOTIVATED, DO AMAZING WORK AND UNLOCK MAJOR DOORS?

[Zoe]: Find the thing that inspires and drives you the most, and you won’t need my advice.

•

UNLOCK YOURSELF

Three questions to think about, write about—or talk about with a friend.

1. Zoe started her music career as many musicians do—writing songs, playing in a band, and touring the country. She enjoyed it, but something was missing. She was searching for a mission that was “bigger” than just...her. She found that cause with The Prison Music Project.

: Is there a facet of society—the prison system, the education system, the healthcare system, or something else—that bothers you, deeply? What’s one way you could work to do something about it?

2. Zoe took a big risk by approaching one of her personal heroes, Ani DiFranco, and asking her to produce the album for The Prison Music Project. Happily, Ani said “yes.”

: Is there someone—a writer, a leader, a hero—that you would love to collaborate with, someday? Who? And why?

3. Zoe knows that not everybody will be happy about The Prison Music Project. She may even receive some harsh criticism. But she's ready to face it, because she believes in the project so strongly.

: How do you handle criticism and rejection? What could you say to yourself the next time you're facing an unpleasant rejection, to stay strong...and keep going?

A great article about the Art's program in the prison and Zoe's project can be found [here](#).

To learn more about this project and to see how you can support it—visit Zoe's website [here](#).

For more UNLOCKED interviews, [click over here](#).

Know somebody that ought to be spotlighted? Write to me [here](#).

See you next time for another inspiring conversation!

Ellen Fondiler is an award-winning entrepreneur, career and business coach, and the creator of two interview projects called UNLOCKED Stories and How Did You Do That? She has worked as a death penalty attorney, launched four businesses, and has raised millions for charities and nonprofits. Her motto is: "Every door can be unlocked."

What Lies Within

by Kelley Melsted

2:00am

My cell phone rings. Is my partying brother really calling me in the middle of the night? He knows I am three hours later.

2:05am

Dude, Peter I am sleeping.

Dad... died.

What?!?

Silence

The cops just came to my house...Dad...hung...himself.

Confusion, paralyzed, shock, total despair or whatever adjective that describes total hell. Screams & hysterics come belting out of my lungs. The type that you only see in trashy horror movies.

I must be dreaming. What the f--k is happening?

I blindly walk downstairs to let my girl Koda go outside. It's pouring down rain and at this moment the water hits my skin I realize that I am not in a dream.

I must be awake but how can this be true? I just saw Dad days ago when he flew out to see me for my birthday. We were laughing, he was telling me about all his plans for the house and his next trip to Mexico. How did I not know on our phone call this afternoon? I didn't say I love you when we hung up...

The next few vague hours consisted of finding plane tickets home, hastily packing, throbbing tears and pockets of numb stares. Mentally I am in shock.

What happened over the next week is a daze of drama and full-blown depression. Second-guessing my every word & action I had with my daddy. What did I miss? How did I not know? Who really was my father?

My dad was the guy with the "Take it easy" mantra. Living life to its fullest. Always telling me to not worry and inspiring us all by the way he carried himself and lived his life.

How could someone so happy, carefree, healthy, charismatic and driven muster the ability or need to take his life? How could he keep this deep depression from the entire world? No note, no guesses—everyone in his life is speechless. All in different shades of denial, shock or needing to find some logical reason for this complete tragedy. Everyone, speechless.

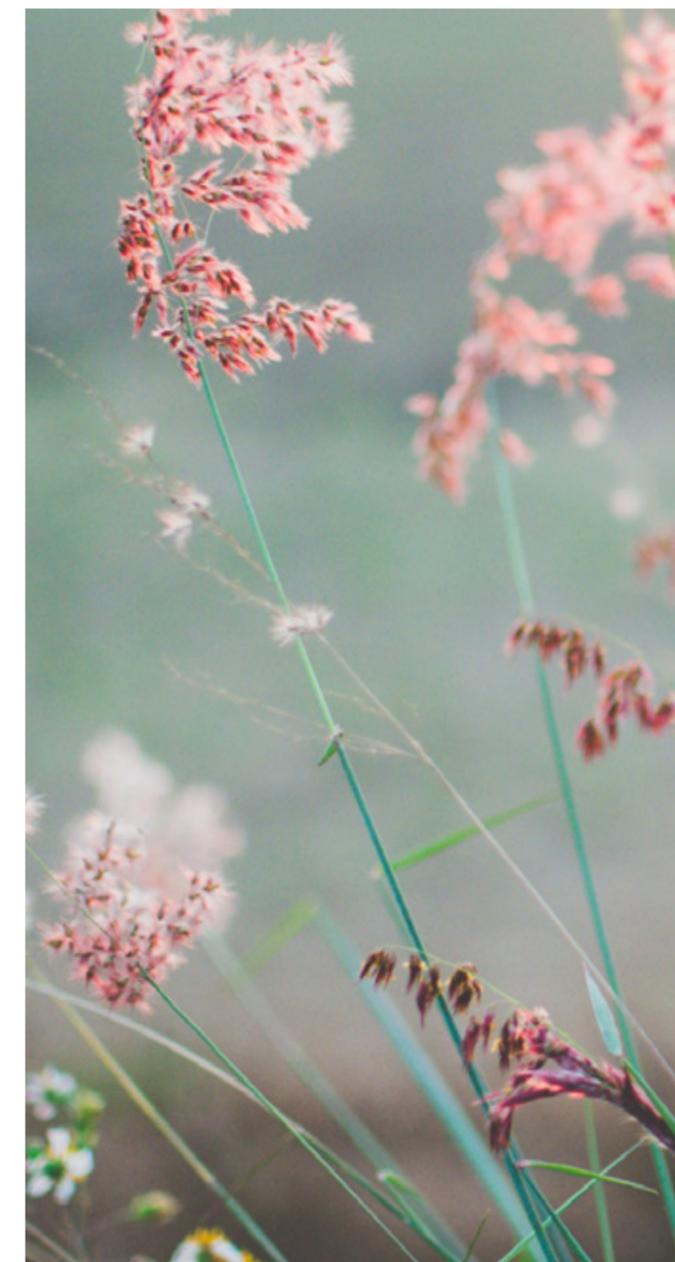
Years later I am still grieving and missing my daddy and live on in this shadow. He was the one that got me—always believed in me—my daddy.

It's still a mystery to me with so many damn hard lessons learned.

You can't judge a book by its cover. We can never know the wars everyone is fighting below the skin or their stories untold. You are bound to what is not said and your own inner workings. My father did not live to tell his whole story and what was buried within him was slowly killing his soul. Secrets to whatever degree kill. Period.

Tell your story. Speak your truth. Be kind as everyone is fighting a battle we know nothing about.

I work with people that are unfulfilled in their work and want to confidently make the big changes. I help them get exactly what they want, which is total clarity and confidence, amidst a world hiding behind digital smoke screens & small talk. The skills I teach help to engage clients, save relationships, and build careers. It's all about being brave and getting real.



Love Letters Through the Ages

by Tonia Winchester

This is a series of love letters to myself at different ages (fetus, child, teen, young adult, current age, to an older version, from an older version, to future ancestors) were written as responses to prompts from a course called Personal Mythmaking by Janelle Hardy.

Dear To Be Named Tonia,

I wanted to write to let you know that you are...hack... hack...is this place on fire? Oh yes...your Mamma is smoking while pregnant with you. Don't worry, Sweet One, this won't set you back too much, maybe just shorten your height a little. But you'll marry a tall someone who loves you and will help you reach high places. Speaking of high places you'll go far, and meet all your dreams. You're coming into this world with a set of special gifts: being able to see the whole picture with a keen eye for niggly details, solving problems like a boss, and finding humor and kindness as a present listener. Also creativity. People will love you and you will change lives. Even on the days that you wonder why you do any of it, you'll find out later that you were making a difference the whole time. I promise you this. But for now, Sweet One, rest. Use this time to quiet your mind. It will be busy later and have a hard time calming down. Practice this now. Breathe. Rest.

Dear Tonia,

You're adorable. You really are. Do you know how great your parents are? You and your sister play a silly game where you take shade of your Raggedy Ann lamp off and you stare into the bulb. You jump around the house,

pretending to be Wonder Woman trying to catch the spots before your eyes. Your Mom has no idea what you're doing but she lets you play and explore. Your relationship with them isn't as tough as you think it is. Don't trap yourself in non-existent trauma. They love the real you, and allow you to be your goofy self. You'll learn later to treasure this when you hear tragic stories from countless patients whose parents wanted them to be someone they weren't, and didn't allow them to thrive in who they actually were.

You, for some reason are a nervous child. You worry about everything. You worry about strangers, rape, and drugs, and cancer. These things scare you and keep you up at night. All you'll want is for your parents to invite you into their bed and they won't. Oh Sweet One, know you won't have done anything wrong and they still love you. They'll make this choice to help you be strong and independent.

Take a breath Sweet Tonia. You're safe and unharmed.

Remember to communicate your needs. On the playground, in kindergarten you break your clavicle and they don't take you to the hospital that night. They don't know how bad it is. It's your job to let them know it's really bad, broken you think. Make sure you're heard. Your voice is important and powerful. Your energetic acrobatics will cause the doctors to threaten to put you in a body cast instead of a sling unless you settle down. Don't worry. It never comes to pass.

Dear Tonia,

You're making life harder than it needs to be, putting so much pressure on yourself to do well. You're uptight about a lot of things especially what others are doing. It's okay to just breath. Just be you and just do you. Paul worships you and isn't cheating on you. I promise, Sweet one. Why you feel so insecure, I'll never know. You're

amazing. You're on track to do incredible things in your life, and not just for you but for the people you will eventually be helping. There is no reason to get upset. You use your natural gifts and talents throughout your life. Let your burdens fall. You're on path girl. Trust me. I've been there. Oh! And you don't have to decide between science and dance, you'll do both. It's all just energy anyways. Grades aren't everything—they don't matter down the road. Yours are excellent and get you into every school you want, including naturopathic college. Relax, and have fun, it all goes by too quickly.

Dear Tonia,

Sex won't always be scary, or even painful. It sucked with Paul, but at least he was willing to support your needs in other ways. It was really lame with Rob, but meh, spoiler alert, he's gay, and was a cheating whore bag so whatevs. You do loosen up about the whole thing. It does become incredibly fun and enjoyable, and this is mostly thanks to the "Cowboy!" Just wait until that night—you'll be blown away. Also, you get really good at telling people you have crushes on them and asking for what you want. Sometimes it doesn't work out in your favour, but trust in the divine timing of things because it does when it counts. The last crush you unveiled married you and loved you for ever.

You work really hard, and you'll be rewarded for it. I know you exist under a slimy film of pressure and anxiety. You know you've got this, right? You're totally supported. You love university. You get to dance and study kinesiology, learning about the body in the studio and the classroom. You also get introduced to alternative medicine which ultimately becomes your best tool for sharing your original medicine: listening and problem solving. At this age you learn white wine is delicious, and zouk dancing feels made for you. Relish in your young and able body. You soon discover you're a part time introvert. Know it's okay

to feel shy. You'll find incredible tribes of people that you can be completely you with. There'll be peeps all over the planet who will just love your crazy smarts and wicked sense of humor.

Dear Tonia,

Oh Sweet One. Let's be gentle with our sensitive self as we know some people are just more easily affected than others. That is definitely us. And that's okay. Let's not be mad at our body. Let's love our self. We are gorgeous—thick, curvy, feminine. We need gentleness and tenderness. Give that to us. Don't see our reflection as our enemy. See her as our best friend. Respect our needs and desires. Don't let people walk on us. Don't walk on others. Be kind, be silly, show what's in our heart. Let love in. Every day. Write. Create. Dance. Play. Laugh. Giggle. Hug. Orgasm. Breath. Make things and give them to the world. People will love them, but not everyone. And that's okay. In fact, that is more than okay. That means we're being bold. Don't let haters foil the mission. Stay on path, keep walking. Be strong. Follow those universal breadcrumbs. Remember to slow down to smell your cat Maurice. Why does he always smell so good?

Dear Future Tonia,

I am looking to you for guidance. I know you've seen the other side so tell me. Do I get out of my own way? Do I allow the universe to speak through me? Do I share my gifts in the way that makes the most for the most? Do I drop my need to please others and focus on what serves me? Do I die happy, knowing that I what did was enough? Do I live happily knowing that I am enough? I trust your wisdom so much. Thank you for writing back.

Dear Past Tonia,

What a life you end up living. You'll never believe all these amazing things that happen for you. Where you are right now you don't know that you publish many books and they are good books, important books, meaningful books. You can't imagine that people read your work and it changes them. You don't predict the impact. I'm so glad you trust and stay on purpose throughout your life. Thank you for giving the gifts that kept showing up for you. The ripple effect of your soul being in this body on this planet at this time is deeply profound. It is widespread, and powerful. At this stage, you can't even know just how far it stretches. We might never know for generations. So. Sweet One, know that you make a difference. Not just a little one, but a rippling one, full of mounting potential. Your courage to accept what was given to you and to pass that on to the rest of us is inspiring. At times you have to make hard choices but keep following your heart, the world needs you. You heal your periods because you realized how sensitive your body is to everything—the external chemicals and the ones inside you. Your body's clarity and wisdom makes feels vulnerable and fragile. And it makes you strong, determined, and kind. Your sense of humor blows many a dark cloud off the horizon. Your contagious laugh brings sunshine to many over and over. You are fondly remembered for your continued curiosity and childlike wonder. You give incredible hugs. Your friends, colleagues and patients love you dearly. You inspire so many to live and choose differently, bringing heightened consciousness of joy, love and peace to the masses. Thank you for getting me to this place where I can die peacefully knowing that I am standing on your shoulders.

Dear Ancestors,

Life is pretty different for you I imagine. You're likely living in a crazy, high-tech world—if it still exists that

is. But maybe the opposite is true. Perhaps the world recognized its flaws and went back to an easier time, based in nature and not in achievement. Maybe the matriarch is back. Hallelujah! Maybe there is peace on earth. No matter where you are right now, please be kind to one another, be yourselves, and don't judge others. Don't exploit each other or the resources around you. Live simply, breath, and laugh. You'll have a good life that way, and the planet will live a long time yet.

Sincerely, with all the love that ever there was,
Tonia

Tonia Winchester is a naturopathic doctor and acupuncturist on Vancouver Island in BC. When she is not helping people live their healthy, most delightful lives she is writing witty blog posts on health and life at drtoniawinchester.com, doodling, relentlessly throwing the frisbee for her dog, and spending time with her greatest teacher, nature.



Thank You My Friend

by Brenda Finne

How do you thank a friend for being a friend?
For just showing up—no matter the time it's been, or
distance you are
 Voice to phone
 Pen to paper
Sharing a thought,
 a fear
 a joyful moment.

Thank you my friend, for being a friend
For talking straight and thinking strong
No matter where you are, or
 where you've been, or
 where you're going.

Thank you my friend for being a friend
For setting things right when they sometimes falter;
 my knees weak,
 my shoulders slumped,
 my eyes sad.

You gently pull me back up on the horse riding with us on
this wild journey;
 Brushing off the dirt, hugging the bruises.
Due to your action, I sit up a little taller, stronger, and
confident

Thank you my friend for being a friend
Because of your kindness;
 the bruises fade,
 my heart does not harden,
 the bitter herbs no longer linger
 on my tongue

I am mindful of the lessons you teach me and for this...
 I thank you for being my friend.

A Journey Within

by Brenda Finne

I want to go inside myself and visit my heart, do tailspins
down my esophagus, eat a full banquet in my stomach,
sleep on my toes and slide down my arm.

A deep breath stops my heartbeat for a blink of a second...
and then, starts pump'n again.

As I let go of my hand hard on my veins the river of blood
mixed with the whiskey I drank at the bar tonight flows
by me. My legs move slow, my head spins loud, so I travel
lightly not wanting to scare my shadow.

My shadow is the tattoo of my soul, showing everything as
I walk into a garden filled with people under the midnight
sky.

Together our breath fills the air as a whistle plays in the
distant hill behind us. The parrots gather in the nearby
trees watching us dance in the windswept blades of tall
wheat-grass.

Fearless, calm, we hold onto the parrot's wings and travel
towards the moon,

Drinking chocolate milk and Eating moon cakes,
We cheer each other with songs of the Heart Howling
Loudly.

Brenda Finne incorporates her experience as a choreographer and writer into tangible designs and storytelling. She treasures the daily surprises that people, books and dogs bring to her life. You can find her at www.brenda-finne.com and www.everydaycuriosities.net

Part 1: Confessions of an International Traveler

by Brenda Florida

I'm packing for a trip to Paris. Why must I confess? I'll be honest with you, this trip has pushed me up against my 'edge' over and over.

I won't take you back through the details of my childhood, but I grew up in a middle class (at best) family. Between my religious background and my family, I grew up in a culture of, "it's noble to be poor and if you're not, you probably did something to take advantage of someone."

Of course, I don't remember anyone saying that, but it was the Truth of our values and how we lived.

Honoring my True Self

I'm going to Paris for five days in five-star style. It's who I am. There's a little part of me who feels ashamed to say that...and...it's true. That doesn't mean I can't be satisfied with less. I am committed to finding the joy in every experience. I was almost homeless three years ago. That's not a metaphor; that's true. I have no judgment or shame for those who can't (yet) afford a five-star trip, or frankly, don't care about it.

Your True Self

It's all about being your true Self. No, that's not a typo. I mean Self with a capital S. The true you. The you that came to life that beautiful day you were born. Not the self (small "s" here) that was fashioned by culture, religion, family, fear, abuse, trauma, school, or anything else. I'm talking about the most perfect expression of yourSelf. Yummmm...breathe that in. Give yourself a moment to think about the most perfect expression of yourSelf. I've

turned it into the simple phrase: owning my brilliance. When I own my brilliance, I own the most perfect expression of mySelf.

Who Would You Be?

Who is the most perfect expression of yourSelf? He/She isn't perfect, in the ordinary sense of the word. You make mistakes. And every 'wrong turn' is designed by the Divine to bring you closer and closer to that perfect expression of who you are. Not all of those turns are fun. Trust me, I understand that. Yet, each one brings you closer to that perfect expression of who you are, closer to owning your brilliance. And, by the way, that's the you that will change the world.

Intention

Here's my intention as I pack for Paris: to come home a more perfect expression of who I am. I want to leave the shame behind and boldly claim the truth of who I am. I want to own my brilliance.

What do you want to leave behind? Who do you want to boldly claim to be?

Bon Voyage!

Part 2: The Living Obituary

by Brenda Florida

Brenda Florida, loving mother, grandmother, daughter, sister and friend. Many viewed her as passionate, ambitious and determined.

They were right. She loved life and the people in her life.

She was also often ashamed of the money she spent, her body and her failed relationships with men. At times, her shame was so deep she felt like she took up too much space, was unworthy, flawed, defective.

She was ashamed to feel proud of herself. As a child, she was told, "pride cometh before a fall." Confusing feeling proud with being arrogant, as many do, she wasn't able to own her brilliance. The brilliance of living as the unique expression of the Divine that she was in the world. She limited herself in what she believed she was capable of. The lives she could touch. The change she could be in the world.

She died in Paris.

Thankfully, she was also reborn in Paris.

She heard the message, "It's you. You're the one." She cried; something in her previous life that rarely happened. She saw the beauty of Paris. She experienced the beauty of the women who had joined her on a retreat. Most importantly, she saw the beauty of her Self. Her unique expression of the Divine.

Her brilliance.

She does not know all the answers or what will happen next in this new life. But she does know that she will run towards the light of her own brilliance. Listen to what it

says, go where it leads.

She knows that others will not always understand. That's okay.

She knows she will fail, and will do so spectacularly! Knowing that what the world interprets as failure is the space where growth and beauty are born, where her brilliance will learn to shine brighter.

Her passion, love and determination are magnified because she owns her brilliance. She seeks her own answers from the Source of that brilliance. She doesn't expect others to understand or approve. She follows the light.

Paris, the city of lights, beauty, fashion, architecture, history, art and it's own brilliance was her birthplace. She knows who she is. She knows her worth. That she is the one.

She owns her brilliance.

She wants you to know, you have your own unique brilliance. By owning your brilliance, you will be changed. And when we are changed, when we each live in our brilliance, the world will be changed.

Part 3: Create Your Own Paris Transformation

by Brenda Florida

What if you can't go to Paris? This was my first visit in 15 years to the City of Lights. How do we transform in the 'glamour' of everyday life?

I am the first one to rebel against a formula for change. There is something fundamentally not "programmable" about true transformation. That being said, I've come to see a pattern that is in motion when I have deep insights and transformation in my life.

Here's what it tends to look like:

Intention

I know, you've heard this before, but don't underestimate it. Setting an intention helps with clarity. Be clear about how you are answering the question, "What is it that I am wanting/longing/yearning for right now?"

Then watch for the smoke-screen and blinders that your mind and ego will create to keep you one step away from your true desires. The mind and ego are tricky that way. They feel threatened as you move towards your brilliance. For me, that usually took the form of an idea that pulled me away from owning my brilliance. Owning my brilliance is big and it's about owning my talents, skills and who I am. Along the way, my ego and mind would get me focused on an idea like, "I can't own my brilliance until I get a promotion, or get my writing published, or launch a successful online program." While there is nothing wrong with any of those things, if I make owning my brilliance dependent on a specific accomplishment or event, I've created a this-for-that scenario. Without the promotion, I can't own my brilliance. Without the successful launch, I can't own my brilliance.

Trust me when I say, that's a setup for failure.

Feeling States

I prefer intentions that are based on a feeling state. What is a feeling state? It's how you think you will feel when you get the promotion, get the relationship, move to the city, etc.

We all tend to think, if I get _____, then I will feel _____. I say, skip the middle-man! Get the feeling regardless of whether you got the _____ or not. It's actually the energetic space of creation to set an intention based on the feeling state. Actually put yourself in the feeling state of what you want to create. Get your inner life aligned with that feeling, regardless of your external circumstances, and then the manifestation can occur. Or, you learn that you don't need the _____, you have the feeling you wanted and now your dream is bigger or changed in some way.

Think about what you are truly wanting/longing/yearning for. I love the word 'yearning.' It feels juicy and powerful. If you yearn for something, it isn't fleeting. It doesn't come and go. It takes root in the essence of who you are. I was yearning to own my brilliance. The thought has been with me for years. Owning my brilliance is a feeling state to me. It's a feeling of owning and celebrating all that I am, not just a single accomplishment or skill.

Find your feeling state.

The power of words

The words you choose matter. Find words that resonate deeply with you. The feeling state you yearn for may be around abundance. If so, does the word abundance resonate? Or does wealth, luxury or lavish resonate more deeply? There are no wrong answers here. But, it is important to find the words that are juicy and delicious to you. I love the feeling state of beauty. Some people think of beauty as a descriptive word for something they like the

looks of. Me too, but beauty is also a feeling state to me. I can feel beauty.

Select a feeling state that has meaning and resonance to you.

Create the space

It's not a coincidence that my transformation took place while traveling. It's why we travel and go on retreats. By leaving our day-to-day environment, we are exposed to new sites, smells, activities, people and places. All of our senses are engaged in new surroundings. When we interrupt the normal routine of our senses we allow for something new to arrive. We open up to new possibilities.

You can create that kind of space at home too. Be intentional about it. Create a sacred space. Place objects in a different way or bring something into the space that is unusual, like flowers or feathers or a rock you found on your walk. Play some soft music. Light a candle. Wear different clothes than you normally do.

Create a space and arrive in that space a little differently than you would in your day-to-day life. Just like you do when you go on vacation or go to a retreat or approach a new activity. There's a freshness, an openness to the unexpected, because you're in new territory.

Allow yourself to let go

Here's the truth: you have everything you need, right now, to be the best possible you. All your brilliance; your talent, truth, beauty, your voice, your skills, the you that is unapologetically authentic, it's in you right this second.

The journey is about letting go of anything, all the things, that block you from that brilliance. I didn't need to get anything to own my brilliance, all I needed to do was let a lot of things go.

That's why I died in Paris. I died to the things that kept

me from knowing and owning my brilliance. There was a lot of shame, criticism and negative thoughts that were in my way. There's no easy way to say it, you must be willing to die to be reborn.

It's worth it. Oh, soooooo worth it.

The Own Your Brilliance Challenge

We all have our unique brilliance. Yours looks different than mine. Our brilliance is our unique expression of the Divine in the world. It's our highest and best expression of our beautiful unique Self. I challenge you to own yours. Here's how you do it:

1. Set your intention
2. Find your feeling state
3. Create your space
4. Allow yourself to let go

Even in Paris, my transformation took days, plus I have been thinking about this concept of owning my brilliance for a couple of years. Your transformation may come in the flash of a moment or it may take repeating the steps over and over. It's okay either way. Remember, there's no specific formula. Trust the process of transformation.

Brenda Florida is a certified life coach, mother of four adult children with three grandchildren to love and adore. Her mission in life is to help others 'own their brilliance' by finding the truth of who they are, slaying their limiting beliefs and obstacles, expressing their brilliance and spreading that brilliance into the world.



Travels with My Dad

by Fiona Jefferies

Scene: On a Qantas flight to Los Angeles. My second trip to the USA, his first. It's 2005.

Hurting down runway, Dad and I seated in the very back row of the aircraft which is technically the toilet, but whatever, I'm just trying to not hyperventilate with the thought that I have two weeks in the USA touring Los Angeles and New York with my dad in tow. And I need to deliver him back in once piece to mum. Probably.

Wheels aren't even up and dad dives into the area underneath the seat in front and starts raking around the backpack at his feet. Very loud rustling sounds are heard, causing the woman in front to turn around in alarm, like a 60 year old man has packed an explosive device in birthday printed cellophane.

"Dad...what are doing?" I whisper, with an exasperated edge.

He emerges triumphant from the back pack, clutching a plastic bag of Weet Bix cereal.

"Ah...I was just checking to make sure I still have my cereal". Most people would make sure they have house keys, wallet and phone. But my dad is not most people. Cereal is his safe place.

"What, in God's name have you bought cereal for?!?", I say, this time very exasperated.

"Because I wasn't sure that they'd have cereal in the USA..."

"Dad, this mob INVENTED cereal. They have cereal".

"Even Weet Bix?" He asked curiously.

"...Or something that approximates it, yes" I confirmed.

"...but you're not sure that it would be an exact match?"

"DAD! The cereal would be so close most people wouldn't tell the difference."

"But I'm not most people" he reminded me.

I stare at him hard. It's only been 8 to minutes into the flight and I want to jettison my seat from the plane.

Scene: In a lift at a Seoul Hotel. I'm there to receive a Stevie Award for my business. Dad is there...actually he invited himself along. In lift with 6 other Koreans going from 25th floor to lobby for breakfast. Doors open on level 1, I get out, Dad stays put.

"Are you coming?" I ask.

"No, you're on the wrong floor." Dad confirms.

"This is the lobby level, where the buffet is." I say, jamming my putt against the lift doors to stop them from closing on him and this witty repartee.

"It says "Level 1" Dad says, pointing at the illuminated level display.

"Yeah...but sometimes ground or lobby level is also known as "Level 1" I spit out, now with my leg jammed against the opposite lift door.

"Well that is just stupid, why would they do that?" Dad, totally mystified.

(Picture now 6 other lift passengers getting mightily fucked off with no lift action taking place and this deep

•
Fiona Jefferies owns Diva Works and lives (mainly) in Sydney. When not designing and delivering displays, you can find her rowing on the Lane Cove river at 5.30am, dancing in heels at hard rock concerts or baking devilish chocolate brownies. See more at www.divaworks.com.au

How to Date with Self-Confidence

by Jen Mallinger

•
 Let's go out on a limb and say most of us feel nervous around dating, especially if we're out of practice. We've been fed all these ideas about how to act and look to be most attractive, yet also told to just be ourselves. We've heard so many conflicting perspectives on dating: Is it most important to try to be friends first? Or not waste our time on anyone we don't feel chemistry with?

It's no wonder when we get into a dating situation we often find it incredibly difficult to sit with all of our thoughts and confusion and breathe, get present, and take in the person we're out with. But seeking to avoid our discomfort makes us prone to falling for anyone charming enough to put us at ease. It can also cause us to develop fantasies about someone we barely know.

Neither of these paths leads to self-confident dating. Self-confidence comes from being a discerning dater, rather than looking for someone who makes us feel good.

When you're discovering a new person, can you focus on your curiosity about them? About their character, what they want from dating and for their future, how giving and caring they are? Because I guarantee, if you are excited

because you're having such a good time and you're NOT looking at these things, you're in the romance high.

When we're up in our heads the tendency is to make up stories about what is happening, based either on our fantasies of who we're dating, or on our insecurities about who we are. Getting present in our bodies is a great way to date with discernment.

Here are a few easy ways to get centered before and during your dates:

- Workout before the date.
- Meditate and breathe deeply for a few minutes right before you meet up.
- Remind yourself often of the result you want from dating. Is it a reciprocal committed relationship? If so, getting centered with this intention before (and during!) your date will help keep you focused.
- If you (like me) have a tendency to drink alcohol to deal with social anxiety, consider coming up with a fun, fizzy, non-alcoholic beverage you could order instead of a drink. Even if you order a glass of wine afterwards, you'll have a chance to calm yourself at the beginning of the date and as a result, have much less tendency to over drink.

The most important way to get centered, though, is to decide. Decide this will be the time you don't choose the excitement of romance over the peace of mind and well-being that come from staying present with yourself and your date.



We're all looking for someone to trust, and when you can trust yourself on a date you are setting the foundation for something wonderful, either with this person, or the right one just around the corner.

•
This is the third section of an ebook entitled, Highly Successful Dating for Highly Sensitive People, available for free on my website, www.jenmallinger.com.

Home Is Where Your Dog Is

by Joyce Belcher

•
 Cross-stitch, violet and yellow letters on a linen background, in a faded mahogany frame. "Home Sweet Home." Hung by the door, greeting each guest with its saccharine promise. I remember versions of this décor in several houses I visited as a child, assuring me that home is sweet, and where the heart is. But you won't find anything like that in my house. No such claim carefully stitched in cloth to seal the promise, the prayer. No pre-meditated order—or request—in cheerful letters on our wall. Instead, you'll find some photos of good times, perhaps a little faded and outdated. Some art, homemade and otherwise, that speaks of nature, colour, and life. A guitar. Some cracks and partly repaired holes. And on the floor...certainly some socks: one here, one there, rolled into the dust under the couch, along with a pencil, a quarter or two, and a good bit of dog hair. Always dog hair.

If I were to have a sign, it would say in slightly irregular hand-lettering on painted paper: "Home is Where Your Dog is." This I know to be true.

When G and I were first married and trying to find a house to live in and to make a place a home, "home"

continued to be where I grew up. There, my faithful and enthusiastic (even if tongue-dragging exhausted) horse-back-riding companion, Noka, still lived. King Noka, as my brothers and I reverently referred to him, presided over the 5 acres I loved, and continued to do his walkabouts, patrolling his route daily, watching his home, his people, and quietly accompanying whoever was outside. Noka was my family's gentle German Shepherd, and still my dog. And so the acreage with its big garden, mature trees, and fields where my horses had lived, was still my home. Until the day Noka left, gently lifted into the back of Dad's Mazda truck, for his trip to the vet, and brought home for his burial under the Mountain Ash, not too far from his predecessors. Dad stayed with Noka at the end, and told me the news over the phone that evening, adding "When it's my time, take me to the vet."

But then that place where I grew up, while still my childhood home, was no longer my primary home, no longer the magnet that pulled me. G and I had a fine-boned German Shepherd of our own. Kala. Black-faced and graceful, she had lively hazel eyes rimmed by tan fur like a set of spectacles. As a puppy, she provided me with the perfect schedule to get my thesis-writing done: break when she needed to pee, write when she needed to sleep. She grew to be 75 pounds of peaceful power, a fast runner and effortless jumper. She knew the precise height and angle of a ball as it made its first bounce from a strong, weak or uncoordinated throw. She got it every time. Kala, who joined us in our first house in Aylmer, Quebec, greeted my nephew with as much care and love as I felt for him, and put up with the whims of her feline superior, Segue. She rode patiently, nervously, in the back of our Toyota pick-up, her crate alongside Segue's, when we drove 3 days west to Regina. She slid right into her new life in a city yard without the wooded playground backing it that she'd enjoyed for the first part of her life.

Over the next few years, Kala happily occupied her own solid canine niche and did her best to fill the growing hole

we felt as we hoped to start a family. She was there loving, being loved, throughout our search, our wait, and as the cycle of possibility and disappointment grew harder. The two weeks we spent in London, while a friend looked after her, the cat and the house, went by, and she gently healed our wounds when we came back without the little girl we had cared for and so quickly grown to love. The little girl was with her young birth parents, who had changed their minds about adoption. Kala was happy to have us home, trying out a few new things, like getting up on the couch, with that look of delight, trepidation, and inquisitiveness—a guilty question on her face when discovered, and easily jumping off when asked. She made us laugh. She appeared in my dreams, wise and reassuring, when my 3:00 am mind got carried away. She loped beside me as I covered my territory each day, and walked my way back to hope. Her needs and companionship provided the rhythm for our daily lives as we continued on. She belonged to us, and we to her, every day.

And then, two years later, we packed our bags and our hopes and spent a month in Ottawa. And we came back—a sleeping bundle in a car seat baby bucket, placed carefully on the dining room table while I went outside to be with my 4-legged girl. Bounding around the yard, Kala managed to contain herself for a few strokes on her silky head, and the embrace around her strong neck I needed to give her. She snatched up a red ball from among the leaves layered over the lawn, and with a practiced flick of her head, tossed it at my feet. I picked up the ball, hard and smooth, its weight familiar in my hand. Cupping the ball, I swung my arm down to the ground, bending at the knees and then flung arm and ball skyward as I straightened. I watched the red orb shrink as it moved through the glowing yellow cottonwood leaves and further into the clean blue sky, and grow again as it descended toward us. Kala was crouched in front of me, compact and ready, and then exploded upwards, her body lengthening toward the ball. “Thwack!” Her mouth met the ball and closed around it, and she returned to earth with a satisfied

“Hmph.” She dropped the ball at my feet again. Throw. Jump. Over and over, love and joy in each muscled move. I took a deep breath of the cool, musty, October air. And the tears began to flow, breaking open the disbelief, the distance I’d managed to maintain during the previous few weeks, even while loving and caring for the beautiful little boy I only dared hope would become my son.

Dog. Ball. Baby—our child—just inside the house. The truth of it finally dawning on me in waves. Home is where your dog is.

Joyce Belcher is a certified life coach who helps people live their own Great Big Small Life. She loves books, learning, tea in a pottery mug, and nature, and can't help grinning when walking, biking or kayaking. She lives in Regina, SK, with her musical husband, two creative sons, and a precious Border Collie who holds them all together. You can find her work at: joycebelcher.com

Break Free & Find Your Creative Voice

by Susie deVillie

“*Ancaro imparo. (Still I learn.)*” –Michelangelo

When describing his approach to sculpture, Michelangelo said that he could see fully-formed statues inside each massive block of marble. His job was simply to remove the excess marble and, in effect, set the figures free.

Some of his statues were only partially liberated.

Lining the Hall of Prisoners inside Florence’s Academia Gallery are four statues begun by Michelangelo for the tomb of Pope Julius II. Due to difficulties with funding (and Michelangelo’s own challenges), the statues were never completed. Standing mere feet from the grand statue of David, the Prisoners remain partially encased in their marble, appearing to try to escape.

On a hot September day in 2015, I stood in the Hall of Prisoners and stared at The Awakening Slave. In a moment of fascination blended with horror, I recognized myself.

Even though I had made significant strides (essentially rebuilt my entire life) since the 2008–2013 Nuclear Winter of My Personal Life, I was still, in many ways, hiding. I was hiding my creativity under a cloak of “not enough time,” “too busy,” “too tired,” “too sluggish from numbing out,” “too afraid of judgment,” and “too worried I’d find out I really couldn’t do the thing that called me the most.”

All that hiding has a cost. In that moment in Florence, I understood—fully—what that cost was to me personally, as well as to all of us, collectively.

Like Michelangelo’s Prisoners, we are all—in some form or fashion—trying to break free from the casing that holds us captive, especially when it comes to our creative expression.

I am going to guess that at some point during your childhood (or young adult life) something happened that caused you to believe that you are not a creative person. Maybe you shared a piece of artwork or something you wrote, and the response that you received when sharing your tender, young creative act was something akin to shame and ridicule. And that moment that happened long ago lodged deep inside your psyche—deep inside your cells—causing you to firmly believe as a grown adult you are simply not “creative.”

Nothing could be further from the truth.

If you are like me, over the years, you most likely hid the painful belief—“I am not creative”—under layers of thoughts and actions that distracted you, numbed you, and kept you conveniently too busy to stop, reflect, and make any real changes in your daily life.

New York Times best-selling author and research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, Brené Brown, says we are by our nature, creative. She argues that unused creativity is not benign; it turns into grief, rage, judgment, sorrow, and shame. That is, not expressing your creativity is toxic!

So, how exactly, do we reclaim our creativity and find the courage to express our authentic voice and vision? And why does it matter?

Inspired by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, I developed deVillie’s Hierarchy of Innovation & Creativity™. Food, water, and shelter—that is, physiological wellbeing—comprise the base of Maslow’s hierarchy. Similarly, I chose “Vessel & Spirit” as the base of my innovation and

creativity pyramid. From there, the ascending layers in the hierarchy are “Culture,” “Habits,” “Strategy,” and “Leverage.”

Vessel + Spirit.

If we are not in good physical and mental condition, our ability to tap into our creativity and build creative confidence is highly compromised. Often, we numb ourselves with harmful lifestyle choices *because* we are not expressing ourselves creatively, and thus the vicious cycle begins. If our system is filled with gunk, our energy is low, our continuity of thought is low, our idea generation and execution are low, and our ability to spot trends and find solutions is low.

Conversely, if our bodies/vessels and spirits are clean, well rested, and strong, the positive ripple effect of same impacts our willingness to be vulnerable, authentic, and courageous in our creative expression. Ideas for projects will flow to you like water from a fire hose. Once the faucet is turned on, you will be astounded at how quickly the water pressure builds. You will be scribbling and typing ideas everywhere, just to keep up with the torrent.

Culture.

Are you immersed in a strong, healthy culture (even if you work and live alone)? The organizational culture in which you are steeped (whether created by others or only you) either fosters or impedes innovation and creativity. Are there aspects of the culture that support/reward taking risks, experimenting, as well as tolerating and actively learning from failure?

Review how you and others in your organization go about the business of generating new ideas. Further, and potentially more importantly, how do you go about the process of deciding which ideas to pursue and not discounting ideas due to fear? Is the organization “flat” with regard to how innovative ideas are heard and implemented? Or, are only a “chosen few” in charge of

ideation?

Habits.

When I took a long, hard look at my habits, I realized that if I were to clear the fog and champion healthy habits and rituals, everything would change for me. I began with creating a nighttime ritual of stepping away from the electronic drip an hour before bedtime. No phone, no computer, and no TV (in fact, I began leaving the phone in another room and bought a regular clock for my bedside table). No more sleeping with my phone!

I began to limit wine to one glass with dinner so that my sleep would be sound. I am an early riser, so waking up at 4am and having a huge block of quiet time to create tapped me into a divine channel of ideas, clarity, and newfound courage to share my work. I also included journaling, meditation, and an hour of exercise into my morning routine. I am not always on point with each morning ritual, but when I accomplish 3 of the 4, I feel as if I could scale Everest.

For those who are not morning people, do not despair! You can simply create a set of evening rituals that fill the well and clear the creativity deck for you.

Strategy.

Standing at the edge of the woods, decide where you ultimately want to be at the end of your creative journey (whether that is to start a blog, write a speech, publish a book, or complete your first poem). It’s time to map the strategies. It’s time to think through what your strengths are and how to sure up those strengths before you head into the woods. Write down all the assets, tools, skills, and resources you have for your creative adventure. Make a note of what is missing.

Next, free up your thinking by doing a very quick, down and dirty, mind map. Take out a sheet of paper and draw a circle in the center. Inside the bubble, write in your

ultimate outcome (e.g., write a speech). Then, without stopping to let the Censor come in for a long visit (telling you all the reasons why this or that will not work), create lines from the center bubble and brainstorm all the possible ways to get it done. Write down what you need, ideas for the speech itself, what your next actionable items are, and any and all perceived obstacles. Remember, you will continually course-correct as you go; tweaking, refining and iterating are a part of the strategic process. Leave room for serendipity and unexpected support to rise up when you least expect it.

Leverage.

Atop the hierarchy are the points of leverage that enable you to operate with maximum agility, responsiveness, positive workflow, and consistent value creation. What is the key to leverage? In a word – systems.

Before you run screaming for the door, saying that you are a creative and free spirit and will not be shackled to a bunch of “conveyor belt” systems, please know this: systems will free you.

I was not always a believer.

I had the faulty belief that the task would be completed faster and better if I were to just do it myself. Plus, I’ll fully admit I had trust issues and a tendency to micro-manage when it came to delegating tasks. These limiting beliefs kept me stifled, stagnant, and exhausted for years.

When I finally learned the art of letting go and letting someone create systems for me in my business, the entire world opened up. My creative output grew exponentially, my revenue quadrupled, and I got my life back.

There are phenomenal resources available for creating systems for every aspect of your personal and business lives. Turn it over to someone else who is a master at system creation so that your only job is to implement what

he or she co-designs with you.

So, why bother with amping up our creativity and freeing ourselves from being stuck?

Perhaps more than any other time in our history, we need powerful leaders with clear, clean access to their creativity and innovation to step forward. We need you to be the leader of your own life first and foremost, as well as a creative and innovative leader of our organizations, our teams, our companies, and our nonprofit organizations.

Each of us needs all of us. We need you to reclaim your creative confidence and uncover that spark that’s inside of you that absolutely has the power to move mountains; shift organizational cultures; solve problems; create new, innovative products and services; and disrupt entire industries.

Dylan Thomas described creativity as “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” There is such a force deep inside of you.

It is time for us all to break free. Just as we learned the false belief that we are not creative, we can just as easily dissolve that thought and replace it with one that is true. We can learn how to build creative confidence – it is the ultimate liberation.

Let’s get to work.

•
Susie deVillie, Founder & CEO,
Innovation & Creativity Institute

I am your creative confidence catalyst! With over a decade of creative leadership experience and a lifetime of entrepreneurial practice, I help organizations grow and reach their full potential by getting you to unleash

your inner creativity and foster innovation within your business—and yourself.

As Founder & CEO of the [Innovation & Creativity Institute](#), an executive and entrepreneur coaching and consulting firm, I strive to help you and your business find lasting success by cultivating creative leadership development. An expert in entrepreneurship and anthropology in my own rite, I apply my keen intuition in human behavior toward helping executives and entrepreneurs achieve breakthrough results and growth.

You Got Attitude?

by Amy M. Matthews

Here's a story about my sister, Susan. Susan is four years older than me and we've always had a special relationship. I was her greatest fan growing up, as little sisters often are. I was forever complementing and supporting her because I thought, and still do, that's she is a beautiful human being inside and out. As an older sister, she has looked out for me. To this day we are very close. I am grateful for our friendship and sisterhood.

Susan has a Type A personality and is 110% an extrovert. She's a dedicated mother, wife, sister, aunt and friend. She cares deeply for everyone in her life, including people she has just met. She is smart, capable and accomplished. She's a committed advocate for causes she firmly believes in. She has more energy than she knows what to do with. And like many of us, she can get a bit crazy at times. In her case, it's because she cares so intensely about the things to which she gives herself that she can get too emotionally involved. Picture a dog with a bone who just won't let go. This also means that the girl makes things happen and gets shit done. She still somehow finds the time to fill her life to the brim with fun, fun,

fun. Everyone loves Susan because she puts so much love and positive energy out into the world. If there ever was a "You Get What You Give" campaign, she would be the poster child.

Growing up, ever since I can remember, when Susan tried to convince our dad to say "yes" to something she desperately wanted to do, she'd say, "Dad, I have to do this now, it may be my only chance!" Susan has continued to live this way since childhood and has never looked back.

I call this "Eating the Brownie". Living fully, out loud, with #noregrets. My sister Susan is a perfect example of someone who eats the proverbial brownie every day. As a Life and Freedom Coach for Women and the founder of Woman UnRuled, I believe in taking action towards what you really want, whatever it is: the things which bring you more joy, inspiration and meaning.

That's the backdrop of the story. Here's the second part.

Susan and her husband recently went out of town for a few days. After being abnormally tired one night, she woke up the next morning with tingling in her feet and found she couldn't walk straight. Something was wrong. They had a jolt of coffee and rushed to the emergency room. After a series of tests to rule out the worst illnesses, she was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune syndrome. She needed immediate treatment and was quickly taken to a nearby hospital where she would spend 5 days. Once treated, the illness left her unable to move her extremities and complete everyday functions. She went from working out on a stair climber one day to not being able to brush her teeth the next. CRAZY... right? And terrifying! She spent the next 10 days in a rehabilitation facility to get back on her feet. Susan has always been a Chatty Cathy so we were all very grateful that she could think and express herself clearly. But she did have to learn how to do things all over again, like walk, dress and write. Things she—and we—take for granted on a daily basis.

Susan felt more vulnerable than ever before in her life. She was thinking "What happens if my whole life is different now?" Her family and loved ones—were all wondering too. Truly frightened, she vehemently declared to her doctors, "I don't want to die, I have too much to live for! Please don't let me fall through the cracks!!" Her medical team was top notch and of course, they didn't.

Susan, miraculously and admirably, has had a positive attitude and outlook through her whole ordeal. Despite intense waves of fear, she went out of the way to be friendly to everyone she met in the hospital, including all the other patients. She was a bright light in other people's lives during her most difficult moments.

Susan loves her life and everyone in it. She is determined to get 100% back to normal. She believes she will, and so she will. No ifs, ands or buts. Her doctors agree there's no question that she will. Susan has always found a way to go after what she wants, because she believes wholeheartedly in it and then works hard to get it. I say, it's a testament to her unwavering positive attitude and determination. I also say, boy do I still look up to my big sister.

Life is amazing and full of surprises. Some good and some not so good. When times get tough, are you able to rise above it with an unflinching can-do attitude, bringing positivity and kindness to those around you? The choice is for each of us to make. I think it can be simple: if you will, you will.

Amy Matthews

Woman UnRuled

W: www.womanunruled.com

E: amy@womanunruled.com

Amy M. Matthews

Woman UnRuled

I am an entrepreneur, business coach, and Women's Life-Freedom Coach. Throughout my life, I've always been passionate about empowering people to go beyond their limits. And that includes myself. I help women break free from what's holding them back. I encourage them to live the life they really, really, REALLY want. Because life is precious and meant to be experienced fully. We've only got one and I am here to help you live it with #noregrets.

Before creating Woman UnRuled, I founded an executive search practice and a sales consulting business. And prior to running my own show, I developed markets for cutting edge technology companies and led sales teams to overachieve revenues. I have a strong business mindset, a head for strategy and I focus on the bottom line. I am also highly intuitive, receptive, and creative. I see opportunities which others don't see for themselves. I'll help you connect the dots, and together, we'll develop a thoughtful plan to take you or your business to wherever you want to go.



Development or Decay

by Alexandra (Sasha) Heinz

Potential. When was the last time you thought about it? If someone asked how you've been developing your potential, or yourself, in the last year, what would you say? What if they asked you about the milestones you're using to mark your progress? Would you be able to rattle off a quick answer?

Many of us may be surprised to find that we answer "no." At some point during adulthood, our goals and ambitions take a backseat to completing the day-to-day tasks and chores of life. We just become so *busy*.

It wasn't always so. Think back to when you were a child. I bet you would've been able to point to a number of new skills you acquired each year. My 6-year-old son could easily tell you how many reading levels he's climbed or how he's learned to spell and type well enough to find all sorts of crazy stuff on YouTube (yikes!).

Development is the context of childhood. As our children grow, we implicitly expect them to learn new physical skills, to develop a more sophisticated vocabulary, to sharpen their analytical thinking, and to increase non-cognitive strengths like patience, empathy, and self-control. This isn't necessarily the fun stuff of childhood – I mean, my son would *way* rather play with Legos and watch Star Wars than work on anything that is hard for him – but this deliberate practice is culturally prescribed to children nonetheless.

And why is it prescribed? Because human are goal-directed, developing organisms. Evolving is what we do as a species. But as we get older the curve of development isn't quite so steep or so visceral. We don't have new teeth popping in or limbs lengthening. There are fewer milestones that we need to reach in order to progress

forward, like learning a new skill or becoming competent in a certain area so that we can move to the next grade or get the next job. We establish a baseline level of competence. So, we forget that we're still in a constant process of developing and becoming.

Somewhere in our mid-20s we decide that we've paid our dues, we've done the hard work, and now it's time to coast. Rather than striving toward excellence in whatever domain our talents and gifts lie, we complacently kick back as if our development is done. We have other responsibilities now, but for the most part, we're done growing.

Or so we think.

Two psychological researchers, Carol Ryff and Burton Singer, think differently. According to Ryff and Singer (2002), personal growth is a key component of psychological well-being. But, they've found that after the age of 25 people's self-reported personal growth steadily declines. This does not bode well for our sense of happiness and well-being being in adulthood.

So, what about you? Are you developing, or surrendering to decay?

Right now, in two minutes or less, jot down five ways that you've challenged how you think about yourself and the world, changed a habit, traveled somewhere you've never been, learned a new skill, or pushed the edges of your abilities or your life this year.

And, if you can't think of five things... Let's get you unstuck.

Citations:

Ryff, C., & Singer, B. (2002). From social structure to biology. *Handbook of positive psychology*, 63-73.

Alexandra (Sasha) Heinz
slheinz@mac.com

Dr. Sasha Heinz, developmental psychologist and coach, helps women get unstuck and make transformational change. She received a BA from Harvard University, a Master in Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Columbia University. She has twice returned to UPenn as faculty in the Master of Applied Positive Psychology program. In addition to her coaching practice, Dr. Heinz serves on the board of The Heinz Endowments and Fred Rogers Company in Pittsburgh, PA.

Your Self-Talk—Is it Destroying You?

by Susan Wagner

So many of us struggle with nasty, negative thoughts, or what some might call "self-talk." We beat ourselves up because we didn't cook the dinner just right, or we forgot to pick up the dry cleaning on the way home, or we missed the grapes on the shopping list; the list can go on and on. We put so much pressure on ourselves to be SUPER-WOMAN, SUPER-MOM, and SUPER-WIFE, super this and super that.

Think about this...for every ONE negative statement, it takes EIGHT positive statements to make up for just that one negative thought.

WHY DO WE ALLOW OUR SELF TALK TO BE SO NEGATIVE?

Were we spoken to in a negative manner as a child? Were our educators addressing us in a negative tone during our most sensitive development phase? Were we bullied by a classmate or relative?

Many of us also have deep-seated beliefs that are working against us. We may believe we don't deserve happiness or positive things in our lives. But that is a lie...a lie most of us have told ourselves our entire life. "This is the best it is going to get." "I will never be able to lose the weight before the summer." "I will never be able to finish my degree now since I have kids."

This type of negative self-talk must change. Unfortunately, you are your own worst enemy, but you should be your own BEST FRIEND! Be your own CHEERLEADER!

Would you want your daughter to see you having these conversations with yourself? What kind of message is that sending to her?

Love yourself for who you are, not who everyone else thinks you should be. We have one chance at this life, so be happy and get out there and live it to the fullest.

What would happen if you stood in front of the mirror and told yourself...I LOVE YOU!

I bet doing this every day would kick the negative self-talk to the curb once and for all.

Try it...I DARE YOU!

Susan Wagner is a Certified Professional Life Coach to women and the LGBTQ community. She is passionate about helping her clients reach their potential in their personal and professional life by believing in themselves and going after their dreams. She shows her clients step by step how to lay out their plan and execute it. Her focus with the LGBTQ community is to parents and friends to better support them through Listening and educating themselves.

Susan's motto? "You can either make excuses, or you can make progress."

Susan has been spotlighted on local T.V. stations, speaking engagements and workshops throughout her community.

When she is not coaching, writing, appearing on T.V. you will find her doing Pilates, Yoga and hanging out with her Jack Russel Hunter. Susan enjoys traveling to see her son in Miami and shopping and spending time with her daughter, family, and friends.

Head to Susan's website www.susanmwagner.com and check out her coaching packages and workshops.

Connect with her on Facebook *Your Life Your Vision Life Coaching by Susan*

Instagram @susanreddingtonwagner

Life Takes Time to Become

by Mara Wai

•

I have heard it said the other day that it's in the life moments that bring you to your knees where Grace can be found, and that if you're lucky enough, you might have one such moment in your life. My moment happened this month 25 years ago, July 29, 1992 when I received the middle of the night phone call that my brother had been killed.

In an instant my life changed. I was struck by a tidal wave of emotions of such intensity and visceral impact that I hadn't experienced before and haven't experienced since. I was flooded and overwhelmed by the rising and falling emotional tides: from heaving sadness to doubling-over despair, to frozen- numb shock, to core-deep of emptiness. Grief filled all parts of my body, especially my lungs, my belly, my breath, my skin. I broke out and couldn't breathe, move or sleep. I reeked of grief for months following. I wondered if part of me had actually died, and part was somehow here on earth subsisting. I felt that I was in a liminal space between being who I was prior to then—a 22 year old young woman not very conscious about her thoughts, emotions, choices and behaviors—to the more intentional and directed woman I was becoming.

A life takes time to become.

SriMati

In my early months of grieving, my mind wasn't functioning in it's "normal" automatic, habitual ways. This is where, in retrospect, I can see the first signs of Grace working on me.

I absolutely could not tolerate anything that was not of the utmost importance for my survival. My body led the way, viscerally sensing and shaping my first steps on a life path

that felt more true. My body knew what I needed to heal, my mind could not resist.

- Because of the heavy, despairing feeling I felt in my lungs I could no longer continue with my pack-a-day cigarette habit. I quit, cold turkey.
- I ended a 4-year relationship which until then, I silently, unhappily remained in because I didn't think anyone could ever love me as much.
- I moved out of the apartment I shared with my (ex) boyfriend and moved in with a work colleague and friend who exuded the absolute opposite energy as mine: enthusiastic, bubbly, and spontaneous. Her energy worked on me from the outside in, clearing away and transmuting the stagnant, heaviness that slowly continued to dissolve.
- I started eating whatever the fuck I wanted. I no longer had time or any energy for food fixations and restrictions.
- Somehow, without knowing what the hell it was or why I was going, I ended up in a yoga class. My body soaked in the soothing, immediate impact of breathing deeply and wanted more.
- That yoga class became the first step in a life-long path beginning with immersive study and practice, and eventually training to teach yoga in the wisdom tradition of the [Himalayan Institute](http://www.himalayaninstitute.com).
- A cousin informed my mother and I about a woman who "channeled" other beings. I booked a session with her and experienced a recognition—a profound, immediate knowing—of who I am and who I was meant to be. The recognition was beyond words and immediately familiar. I instantly went from questioning if I wanted to live to feeling led in a life direction and its momentum, the details of which were still uncertain and unfolding.

Of course much more unfolded in my life in the past 25 years than I can write about here. I began meditating and now teach meditation. I began coaching and now coach others to follow their leadings. And as I sit here now writing, recalling the anniversary of this pivotal life moment, I'm remembering how Grace arose from my darkest life experience and pointed me in a direction and on a path.

I'm reminded that Grace is available in letting go, not knowing, and following my leadings.

I'm reminded to trust my leadings.

I'm reminded that I don't need to know in advance where I'm going, I just need to follow what feels more true.

I'm reminded that one step on a path of truth always leads to another. The path unfolds in moments.

•

Mara Wai, M.Ed. is a body-mind and intuition coach who supports clients to access their personal intuitive messages to feel better in their bodies and follow their leadings to discern their truest life path Mara also teaches Mindfulness-based Stress Management for the Penn Program for Mindfulness. To learn more about Mara and her work visit <http://www.marawai.com>.



Feeling Confident About Dating is a Skill

by Lindsey Christine

When I work with women who are dating, one of the most common things they desire is to feel confident.

*I want the confidence to be 100% me.
I want the confidence to actually ask this guy out.
I want the confidence to keep dating because I know I'll find The One.*

We all walk around thinking that once we have confidence, we'll be able to finally date the way that we want to.

Here's what's wrong with this logic...

Confidence comes from what you think about yourself RIGHT NOW, and choosing thoughts you believe that empower you to create confidence is a skill.

Most of our beliefs about ourselves are recycled from a young age, or a past relationship and we don't actually realize how much self-doubt and anxiety they're causing us.

Confidence is something you can only have if you haven't been divorced.

I'm scared to date so there's no way I can be confident.

My ex told me I wasn't pretty, so who am I to be confident?

Confidence comes from deliberately changing the thoughts you choose about yourself.

As I'm sure you're aware of, your brain doesn't produce confidence naturally. It actually drives you towards fear, worry, and doubt as a survival technique.

You have to train your brain to naturally produce confidence.

Just like anything else in your life, this means you need to practice and be willing to be bad at it at first.

You aren't just going to snap awake and be confident one day (girl, don't we wish though?).

In order to be confident, you have to practice believing in your worth and all that makes you amazing.

What makes you amazing?

What makes you worthy of confidence?

What's keeping you from embracing that confidence right now?

Feeling confident about dating is a skill, my love. All you have to do is practice.

Lindsey Christine is a Certified Life & Weight Coach and the Founder of Dating After Divorce. She is passionate about growth, fulfillment, second-chances, and fiercely believes in the power of self-love. You can find her on a typical day cooking, dancing, spending time with loved ones, reading and snuggling up with her partner in the nook of her home in San Francisco, California.

Do the Work

by Lindsey Christine

There were demons that I didn't want to face after my divorce.

I'd lost track of myself and my passions.

I was living my life for what I thought I should do instead of what I wanted.

I'd cheated as a way to give my ex-husband a reason to leave me instead of owning how I felt and having an adult conversation about how I didn't want to be married to him anymore.

I felt Unfixable, Broken, Damaged, and by far the worst: Unworthy.

I started writing as a way to process my emotions and thoughts. I filled journal after journal with all the shit I'd bottled up for 5 years, hoping that somewhere in the pages I'd find the forgiveness, clarity, and perspective I needed in order to move forward.

I stepped foot in my first dance class in 6 years.

I started getting bi-weekly manicures and pedicures simply because they made me feel pretty.

I collected self-help novels and scribbled in them as if it was my job.

I started cooking again.

I roamed the streets of Argentina eating so many empanadas that my clothes stopped fitting.

I strolled the canals of Amsterdam, popping into café after café, sipping coffee through the sunsets.

I went to therapy twice a week, every week, for six months.

I grieved.

And cried.

And laughed so hard my ribs almost caved.

I reconnected with myself.

I stopped putting my relationship with myself on the back burner.

I started doing things I wanted to, simply because I wanted to.

I stopped scolding myself for spending money on things that genuinely made me happy.

I started investing in me.

Today, I wake up and ask myself every morning, "How are you feeling today?"

I take the time to nurture my own heart.

I dance, and cook, and write, and read, and travel, and love harder than I've ever loved before.

I do the work.

Not because I feel like I should, but because I want to.

Lindsey Christine is a Certified Life & Weight Coach and the Founder of Dating After Divorce. She is passionate about growth, fulfillment, second-chances, and fiercely believes in the power of self-love. You can find her on a typical day cooking, dancing, spending time with loved ones, reading and snuggling up with her partner in the nook of her home in San Francisco, California.

I am Not Welcome

by Heather LeRoss

I am not welcome here. I am not invited.

This door is always closed, my constant reminder,

I am not joy, I am not love and I am not safety

On the other side of this door, I am his reminder

Of pain, loss, heartbreak, and fear

I am a reminder of all that's ugly in his world

This door protects him; his room a shield from what lays out here

Chaos, unknown, conflict

This door protects me

From rejection, pain and fear

The other doors in this house are open—WIDE

Welcoming me in with smiles, love and warmth

I walk in this house – my house – and when this door is holding him safe, I am a stranger

I do not belong.

My house is not a comfort, it is suffocating

I want to run, carry my boys and escape this door

Behind this door is the son that is not mine, the boy I can't love

He's the stranger in my house, living behind this door, in his safe place

He's the child I did not carry and the boy I cannot reach

To him, I'm the woman who is not his mom, not even a friend

I'm the symbol of everything he's lost

To him, I am the woman who came after his joy

But this door has hinges, it can open

Maybe all I need to do is knock.

Heather

hkotoole@hotmail.com

Heather LeRoss is the mom and step-mom to three smelly, but sweet boys. She spends her days looking for the glasses on her head, trying to decipher her mom's texts, and wondering, "What's that smell?" She's a lover of fine boxed wine and chocolate. Follow the funny and heart feels on her Facebook page, [fb.com/tipsytiaras](https://www.facebook.com/tipsytiaras) and her blog www.tipsytiaras.com.

What I Learned on My Solo-Trip to New York, When I Faced a Tough Life Choice

by Christel Van Gelder

"I think it's good for a person to spend time alone. It gives them an opportunity to discover who they are and to figure out why they are always alone."

— [Amy Sedaris](#)

When we face a difficult life-altering change, making a decision often seems impossible. We overthink, we ask advice. But in the end, the only one who can cut through the BS is you. And no one else can decide for you.

Often we're so confused and stuck in a vicious circle of scary thoughts and we can't seem to reach a solution. That's when we really need to get out of our own way.

Once I had to decide to stay or go and leave my marriage of 21 years. The choice felt daunting and impossible. It took me over a year to make my choice and even though it was hell, I still couldn't decide.

My body and soul knew what to do before my mind caught up. Fear made my brain hold on to what it knew for so long. I went around in circles, worrying about the unknown future, pondering endless options, only to take

no action and to stay in the status quo of what I deep down knew no longer worked.

After a year of fierce arguments, withdrawals, blaming, after leaving and coming back—both of us—after crying rivers of tears and sleepless nights wandering around the house, after going through the motions like an extra in the *Walking Dead*—but without the biting—I decided I needed to be alone.

To be alone with me. With as little interaction with my “normal” world as possible. To give me a chance of breaking through my paralysis.

So I decided to get away from it all. Far, far away.

On a whim I decided New York would be the place.

Far away, that was obvious, but alone in a city where millions of people roam each day? Good question.

Yet it turned out the best place for me to be alone. To be anonymous. To disappear in the mass.

It also turned out to be the place where I faced my worst enemy: myself. The good thing? I couldn't escape my enemy. I was with her day and night. On my own. So I could no longer run. Run from my mind, my body, my soul.

Many coincidences happened during that New-York-Week.

I felt the energy of the city that somehow vibrates. A creative, inspiring, even comforting enveloping warmth. Which I know is a weird way to describe New York. Yet that's how it felt to me.

That week on my own in that massive, crowded city, I came closer to myself, to my desires. Closer to my final

decision.

And even though I did not leave when I came home, I did gather all the knowledge, the courage and learned about the cravings of my soul, so that two months later I finally did leave and I started over.

Here are some of the lessons I learned by getting out of my own way and by being alone with myself in a place I didn't know.

1. As I didn't know the place, every day was a journey, discovering new things, venturing into unknown territory. Discovering the city was a metaphor for discovering my true self and what I wanted from life. And that's exactly what I needed. To get in touch with the forgotten streets of my soul.

2. I was alone, so I didn't need to compromise on this journey. I only had to deal with myself and what I wanted or didn't want to do, see.

3. I started new rituals. Little things which I treasured, such as finding the perfect place to have coffee. These new rituals brought me closer to myself. And if I chose the wrong place to have coffee, so what. A lesson learned for the next day.

4. I didn't know a living soul. In a way, I became invisible in this huge mass of people, which ironically made me all the more visible to myself. Every emotion was larger and clearer than ever. Right in my face. Which means I had to feel them, go through them, go deep. And going deep is cleansing and clarifying.

5. I saw see things with different eyes. Eyes that knew they were safe. That were allowed to see whatever they wished to see. And slowly that veil that I had pulled over my eyes began to lift.

6. I had deep conversations with myself. I journaled. I read. I cried. I rested. There was no one to interrupt me or judge me. Except me. But by then I had started to accept myself and what was happening to my marriage, to my life, to me, in a totally different way.

7. Talking about self-acceptance, I slowly started to realize I wasn't doing this because I was selfish. I was doing this so my soul could survive. And for me that was more important than the survival of my social status.

8. What was unconscious became slowly conscious. All of a sudden I knew what was the right thing to do. Even though I didn't know how when. But my decision was made. The actual execution of that decision would come later.

9. Now was also the time for caring for myself and my decision. I held my decision as if it was a newborn baby that needed to be held and cuddled and loved.

10. I felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I felt lighter and stronger. Ready to take on the world. Fully at peace with myself. Sure again of who I was and what I wanted.

10. And as my choice became crystal clear, my action plan started to come together step by step. And I felt that the time to take that final step was coming nearer with every minute that passed.

So if you're facing a tough decision, a decision between staying or leaving, whether it's a relationship, a job, a career, a lifestyle, a place you live, maybe a time out will help. A time to be alone with yourself. With your demons. A time out to reconnect with who you are and what you want for yourself. Not for others.

You'll be amazed at the insights you'll get. At the things

you learn about life, about yourself, about your situation.

You'll come away from your time away with much more clarity. Much more conviction and decisiveness. And it will show in your spirit.

And you can be damn sure that you'll make the right choice, even after all the doubting and the worrying and the making up all sorts of doom scenarios. That, I can guarantee you!

I'm a Martha Beck Certified Life Coach. Mentor. Teacher. Life Designer. Start Over & Toxic Relationships Coach. Self-Care Advocate. Passionate about helping people believe in themselves. I help them start over in their relationship(s), career, lifestyle. I help them make choices and guide them through life transitions so they can create a new life. I'm invested in helping people who're dealing with manipulative and/or emotionally abusive relationships and narcissists to trust their inner voice so they can break through self-doubt, indecision and fear paralysis.

I was born and raised in Antwerp, Belgium, but have lived in Algarve, Portugal for the last 28 years. I offer my services in English, Dutch/Flemish and Portuguese.

Christel Van Gelder
christel@3chlifecoaching.com



Don't Forget Your Underwear

by B. Love Smith

•

Have you ever been stressed, but didn't realize it until you did something totally out of character for you? No? Well I have. My stress was manifested in the form of uncharacteristic forgetfulness on three very memorable (and now I realize stressful) occasions in my life.

Memorable Occasion #1 occurred on the first day I returned to work after giving birth to my second (and last) child. The day had really gone without a hitch. The night before, the clothes were laid out for my first grader, the baby and myself. The bottles were made and the diaper bag packed. First day back, my husband dropped off our first grader at school, I dropped off the baby with the sitter and arrived at work on time and ready for what was waiting after eight weeks maternity leave. The work day ended without incident and we all were back home, dinner eaten, homework complete and prepped for the next day except for my nightly shower. I stepped into the hot shower ready to unwind and relax...until I made contact with the washcloth to my chest only to discover that I was still wearing my bra! Yes, I had removed all my clothes except my bra. Momentarily I thought about leaving it on and getting a head start on laundry for the week. :) But at that moment I realized that even though it appeared the transition back to work with a new baby was going smoothly, it was only smooth on the surface. I can see now, deep down, I was a hamster on a wheel wearing a bra in the shower...

Memorable Occasion #2 occurred on a weekday morning when I had a very important meeting at work for which I could NOT be late. I even swapped kiddie drop off duties with my husband...I dropped our oldest off at school and he dropped the baby off at the sitter's since she was further away. I got dressed in my black business "meeting"

suit with my nice blouse, cute pumps and was perfectly accessorized. I dropped my daughter off at school with a quick smile as I was anxious to get this meeting over. I settled in for the 30-45 minute commute to work hoping there would be no traffic problems. As I merged onto the interstate, I reached to adjust my seatbelt, so as not to wrinkle my "meeting" suit, when I realized I wasn't wearing a bra! Yep, me and that darn bra again...fully dressed this time and no bra. What to do? Do I continue on to work and be on time for the meeting or do I take the next exit, go back home for my bra and be late for the meeting for which I CAN'T be late? (Insert Final Jeopardy music here) Who was I kidding?! I had birthed two babies and I was no shrinking violet...I'll take "bra" for \$1,000, Alex. Turns out I could be late for that meeting after all...

Memorable Occasion #3 occurred on a beautiful spring Sunday morning. I had gotten the girls and I ready for church and we were heading downstairs to the garage, when I decided I'd just take the underwear I'd changed out of and drop it in the basement with the other dirty laundry on my way out. Easy. No. While maneuvering down the steps with my dirty underwear in hand, a 7-year old and not quite two year old with a sippy cup, my purse, a small diaper bag, my Bible and trying to lock the door at the top of the steps without falling, I quickly shoved my panties into my skirt pocket until I got down the steps to put them with the other dirty laundry. House secure and everyone loaded in the car, off we went. We arrived at church and parked. I reached to release my seat belt. Wait, what is this bulge I feel in my pocket? My dirty panties! No problem, I'll just stuff them between the seat and center console until we get back home. Whew! That could've been embarrassing, I'm glad I felt them in my pocket before going into church...panties and praise are two Ps that don't belong together. :) Fast forward later that week, I'm in the kitchen preparing dinner when my husband comes in and asks in a not so pleasant tone if I had anything to tell him. I turned to respond to his

annoyance and saw that he was holding the panties I'd left wedged between the seat and console in my car, the only thing, I'd forgotten I left them there. So I asked, "Whose panties are those?!!" He responds, "I don't know! You tell me!" Then it clicked...oohhh, I remember. Well what had happened was....LOLOLOLOL!!! He wasn't smiling. Yep, I had some splainin' to do. But it all ended well. Today we've been married over 33 years and the girls are now 31 and 24.

Yes, life can be stressful and stress is manifested in many different forms and ways, some more serious than others. But, it is okay. You can get through whatever it is. Slow down. Breathe. Be present in the moment, the moments pass quickly. It's fine to be less than perfect. We can be late for the meeting. We can do most things we think are unacceptable. Just know, despite the stress we feel, the thing to remember is that life will and does go on. But most importantly, DON'T FORGET YOUR UNDERWEAR...

•

B. Love Smith is an aspiring writer based in Pleasant Grove, Alabama. Since retiring from corporate America with over 30 years of service, when she's not writing, she's usually reading, playing Scrabble against the computer, watching crime solving TV shows, shopping, or spending time with family and friends.

smittysgirl57@gmail.com



Redolence

by Missy Bird

•

My family has a smell. Each player in my brief but colorful history has an essence, a tang, a fragrance, a stench. Their smells play over me like a breeze, I breathe in the smell and exhale my own to combine their rich deep bouquet with the fragrance of my own story.

My grandma and grandpa's smell is like rich, worn out leather car interior made too hot by the sun mixed with Ice Blue Aqua Velva and Windsong. It smells of old fashioned lemon drops and witch hazel. Cheese sandwiches and Triscuit crackers. Peanut butter, banana, and raisin sandwiches on toasted Jack Sprat bread. Of buttermilk with ice cubes and apricot jam over vanilla ice cream. The aroma of oatmeal with almonds and brown sugar mixed in. It is the smell of tables set perfectly no matter the meal and chats in the formal living room about how life is going and your latest adventures. It is the smell of wood shavings and motor oil, baby powder and dove soap. My grandma and grandpa smell of love and comfort and soft hands and cashmere. They smell of songs to wake you up in the morning and put you to sleep at night. "Up, up in the sky where the little birds fly. Down, down in their nests where the little birds rest. With a wing on the left and a wing on the right, we'll let the dear birdies rest all the long night. With a wing on the left and a wing on the right, we'll let the dear birdies rest all the long night."

My aunt and uncle's smell is red wine and books. Thick juicy steaks on the BBQ and glorious Junior League salads to bring out the flavor of every healthy ingredient. It smells of Chanel No. 5 and Obsession. Of typewriter ink, correction fluid, and onion paper. It smells of thick oily furniture polish and dirt from the indoor planter built into the top of the stairs. It smells of marigolds and fresh cut grass. Dusty hiding places in nooks and crannies of

the rooms with the doors shut, rooms that you sneak into when you know you shouldn't. It smells of secrets and stories untold. It smells of a musty old dress up box that holds the blue tulle dress covered with rhinestones that your Auntie wore to some fancy dance that you convinced yourself was her prom. It smells of black and white photos of their wedding that you insist on looking at every time you are there seeking out traces of your mother who was only 7 or 8 at the time. It smells of money, politics, tennis sweat, and chlorine from the country club pool. It smells of Christmas and Thanksgiving, Easter and birthdays. They smell of comfort and safety, soft voices and encouraging words.

My cousin's smell of experience, they are all so much older than me. They smell of wealth and status, prestige and adventure. Kim smells of rebellion and hard alcohol, beer and punk rock, sex and desirability. Tanya smells of brains and intelligence, nature and comfort, hard work and money. Chris smells like arrogance and cunning, red wine and rich expensive food, fancy cars and golf. They smell like kindness and wishes for me to find safety. They smell of confusion and uncertainty. They are too old to get too close; old enough to know that we are troubled...they can smell it.

The family I grew up with smells like fear and lies. Tresor, Lancome lipstick, and hidden secrets. It smells of Dawn dish soap and dust from the vacuum. My family reeks with secrecy and bruises that must be covered with makeup and long sleeved shirts. Decaying flowers and insidious depression. My family smells like cigarette smoke and boxed wine, macaroni and cheese from a box and pancakes for dinner. My family smells like hangovers made better with Oreo cookies dipped in cheap tomato soup, tiptoes and whispers lest we disturb the beast in the kitchen. If I inhale even now I smell the Pledge furniture spray mixed with the smell of the first snow and I know that it won't be long before the sadness seeps into the walls of the house, grabbing onto the inhabitants of our

castle with its dark, shadowy claw. The vapors of our pungent dysfunction emanate from our bodies, making us the topic of town gossip that reaches back to us through friends that are no longer allowed to hang out. No amount of Love's Baby Soft can mask the tang of madness that coats my very being, leaving me ashamed and embarrassed to be anywhere near my perfectly wonderful extended family or the few friends who pretend to understand. My family smells like juxtaposition, like a farce, like a gigantic secret filled with rotten green oozing slime. We smell like stale whiskey breath, hidden vodka conspiracies. The smell of broken hair brushes on my small little bottom, the plastic shattering and ripping the hair caught in the brush until I can smell my own skin fibers in the air.

My family smells like love and tight but tenuous connection. My husband smells like sex and power, joy and uncertainty. My children smell like innocence and fire. Small bouquets of snowbells and daisies, roses and lilies. I breathe in their scent and smell home, I breathe out and pray that they smell comfort and love. My family smells like chocolate and cold pizza, home cooked biscuits from scratch, roasted asparagus, and freckled chicken. We smell like just woke up family snuggles and warm sunshine on our faces while we hike on fairy islands. We smell like bananas and apples, carrots and celery, vinyl records and antique books. We smell like adventure and love, hugs and high fives. We smell like everything my parents and sisters are not. We smell more like my grandparents, auntie, uncle and cousins. Warm, open, soft, comfort, connected. We smell like the fragrance of possibility.

As a writer, professor and fiery public speaker, Dr. Melissa Bird creates the genesis for a new brand of leadership.

Her words awaken revolutionaries, trailblazers and powerful innovators in the quest for justice.

When she's not building her public speaking Empire, she can be found reading trashy novels, drinking fine whiskey, playing mom to three delicious humans, and loving her punk rock scientist James Thomas Kelly.

Connect with Missy at birdgirlindustries.com and on Twitter and Instagram @birdgirl1001

I'll Rise up a Thousand Times

by Cathyann Greenidge-Ellison

I remember the first time I listened to Andra Day's song, "I'll Rise Up". I was staying with my friend Tara because my work assignment was closer to her home. She showed me the video and it just wowed me. She is a very gracious host.

As I watched the [video on Youtube](#) it brought tears to my eyes. It tells the story of a woman who takes care of her husband who requires her assistance to bathe him, dress him, place him in his wheelchair and even feed him. The storyline of the video starts with him using his communication device to ask her out on a date. She gets him ready and then gets herself ready so they could go out and enjoy their date.

The reason I cry every time I watch this video, and even now as I write this, is because I have been on the receiving end of needing my husband to assist me after my miscarriage in October of 2016. It was my most devastating one yet. This one laid me flat, literally. It was 12 weeks and we thought, yes we made it to the end of the first trimester so we are good. But, sadly, no, because as I stood in the kitchen preparing our lunch at the stove, my water broke and the onslaught began.

As I sat on the toilet, I was bracing for all to be released from my body. It came fast and heavy. The next thing I remember is being shaken by my husband as I lay on the bathroom floor which felt nice and cool because my

body was hot. He sat me up and told me I had a seizure, this was new for me. I was not able to do anything on my own for the next 7 days. My husband helped me to the bathroom and prepared all my food and herbal blends with my directions to build my blood and body back up after all that blood loss.

As I write this, I continue to do the work and follow my own F.L.O.W. Process while learning my body in my forties. I am adding to the work I did in my 20's and 30's that led to me giving birth to my daughter after being told that having a child was not a part of my future.

Now in my 40's, my hormonal interactions are different and my body feels completely different. For me, I have to go even deeper beyond what I have already been doing, we never stop learning, right?

I am also focusing on the spiritual aspect of miscarriages and reading, "[Spirit Babies: How To Communicate With The Child You Are Meant To Have](#)" by [Walter Makichen](#), has been very helpful.

I love my husband and we both knew, when we met, that were the one the other prayed for. He has my back so I know that I can RISE UP A THOUSAND TIMES.

I had been through some relationships that were holistically unhealthy for me so I got tired and in September, 2007, I went on a year of consecration so I could focus on me and what I needed. It was during this time that I prayed for my future husband who I planned to have children with. We are working on it. We do not know the outcome but we are stepping out in faith knowing that it will work out the way it shall and our life will be a testimony that will help others.

I invite you to [watch the video](#) and listen to the words to give you encouragement to keep rising in the midst of it all. Also check out the Spirit Babies book which also covers topics on secondary infertility and adoption. In the chapter focused on adoption he mentions that there are times the spirit baby uses the body of one woman to deliver them so they can live out their life with another family. That helped me understand some things and answered some questions I had.

My husband and I are forever grateful in the midst of it all.

•

Cathyann Greenidge-Ellison is an Occupational Therapist and Fertility Health & Wellness Coach, an author and the creator of the F.L.O.W. Process which she uses with her clients and in her Fertility F.L.O.W. Coach Certificate Program. This process helps women to holistically prepare for pregnancy. She initially used this process after she was told by a doctor in 1998 that children would not be a part of her future because of PCOS. Cathyann now lives in Toccoa, Georgia with her husband and daughter. Meet Cathyann at: cathyannellison.com and check out her free class, [Get Ready for Baby Now](#).



DIG DEEP is a class for people who want to:

- Stop procrastinating and start writing.
- Write more clearly, effectively, and powerfully.
- Have more fun with writing and enjoy the process.
- Learn how to get published on blogs and websites.
- Set small, sane, realistic writing goals—and achieve them.

Sign up anytime. Watch the videos from anywhere in the world. Participate from home. No deadlines. Go at your own pace.

Sign up [here](#) for instant access to the DIG DEEP classroom.

We'll see you inside!



THANK YOU to...



[Blueline](#) for making this digital magazine look amazing.

Ashley Wilhite for being the greatest project manager on planet earth.

D'Arcy Benincosa for the photographs of the two of us.

And most of all, to the AMAZING students in our [DIG DEEP](#) writing class. Every single piece in this magazine was contributed by a DIG DEEP student. We're so proud of you for writing, writing, writing—and putting your work into the world—even though life has a thousand different distractions and plenty of reasons to give up. We can't wait to see what you create in 2018 and in the years ahead.

Susan & Alex

Stop Waiting. Start Writing.

For many of us, there's a little voice inside that says: "I want to write a book." "I miss writing poetry." "It would be fun to start a blog or a podcast." "I used to do all kinds of creative projects when I was younger—why did I stop?"

But somehow, writing always gets de-prioritized.

There's work, laundry, errands, meals, all the demands of daily life. Somehow, writing (and other creative pursuits) always get pushed out of the way.

If you're ready to stop that pattern, please **join us for a free 60-minute class called [STOP WAITING. START WRITING.](#)**

In this class, we will share:

- How to set small, sane, realistic writing goals that you can actually achieve. (Tiny goals rock—and tiny projects can have a big impact on people's lives!)

- How to make writing more fun—enjoyable, energizing, like a mini vacation—rather than feeling like another stressful to-do on your list.
- How to determine when a piece of writing is "done" and "good enough to be shared," so you don't fiddle with it for 5,000 hours and stall forever.
- Inspiring true stories about kids, teens, and grown-ups who decided to start writing—and did it. These stories will help you burn through your excuses and realize, "It's time to do this, for real."

This class is totally free. Bring yourself. Encourage your friends to show up, too.

See you there!