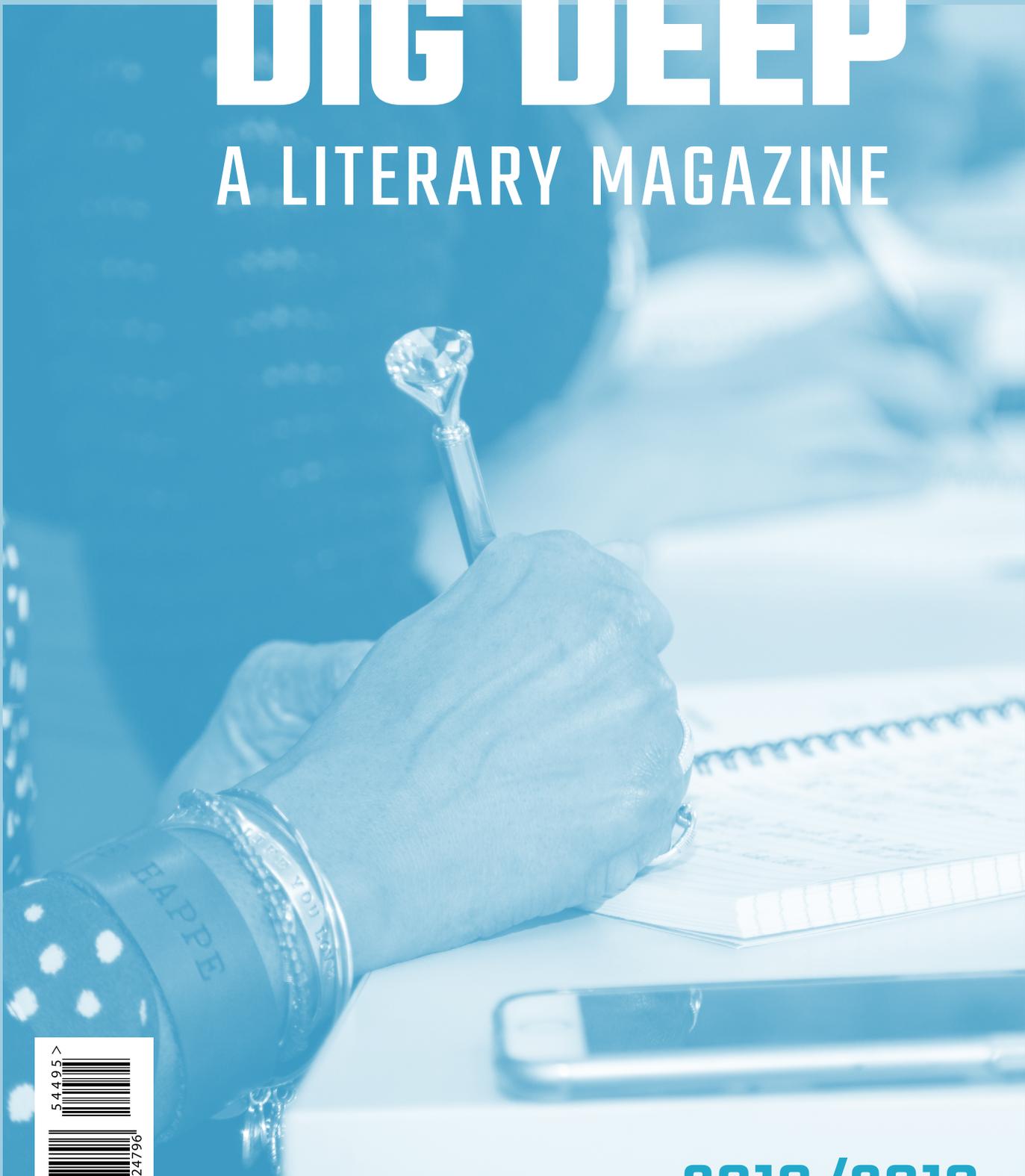


VOL. 2

DIG DEEP

A LITERARY MAGAZINE



2018/2019

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The legendary actress and writer Carrie Fischer once said:

“Take your broken heart, make it into art.”

For so many of us, 2018 was a year filled with grief, shock, and shattered hearts.

Here in the United States, we watched in horror as immigrant parents—desperately seeking a better life—were torn away from their children at the border. We weathered one of the most devastating hurricane seasons in history, with ten major storms and a total of \$33.3 billion in damage. Every morning, we braced ourselves for the latest onslaught of terrible news: school shootings, wild fires consuming acres of land and hundreds of homes, scandal after scandal in Washington D.C.

And of course, on top of everything erupting in the news, we’ve all had our own personal challenges too. Break ups. Divorce. Custody battles. Unemployment. Debt. Cancer. Mental health challenges. Often, especially for women, the simple act of walking down the street to buy groceries can be an exhausting pilgrimage, one that’s fraught with lewd catcalls and unease.

It’s hard to be a human being in this world.

So, what do we “do” with all of this pain—with all of this suffering, disappointment, and injustice?

Essentially, we have two options. We can contract. We can curl into a tight ball, close our eyes, hide from the world, and numb out with alcohol, drugs, food, Netflix, or mindless, never-ending scrolling through social media accounts. Or we can do the opposite. We can expand. We can write, paint, sing, host podcasts, launch companies, speak up, run for office, stand onstage behind podiums, and stand up for our beliefs. We can take our broken hearts and make works of art.

To all of our students from the *Dig Deep* writing course, we’re so proud of your work throughout 2018. You’ve all “dug deep” inside of yourself, and you’ve taken your ideas, your life experiences, your hard-won lessons, and in many instances, the pieces of your broken hearts...and you’ve made so much art. You’ve written essays, stories, poems, books, and more. Many of you have taken such brave steps throughout the last year—sharing your writing publicly for the first time ever, submitting book proposals to agents and publishers, carving out time to write even when life is suffocatingly busy, and more. Every time you decide, “Today, I’m going to



make something”...that is an act of devotion and courage. We see you—and we want to celebrate you. We created this *Dig Deep Magazine* to shine a spotlight on your work.

This magazine is filled with all kinds of writing—many styles, many topics, many messages—from our students. This magazine is completely free and we encourage you to share it far and wide. Send it out in your newsletter. Put a link on your blog. Email it to your colleagues. Or print one copy, seal it in a binder, and share it with someone you love.

We hope this magazine circulates to many, many, many readers around the world, and we hope it inspires people to expand more, write

more, speak up more, share more, click “send” and “submit” and “publish” more.

If you’ve been part of the *Dig Deep* writing class, thank you for writing.

If you discovered this magazine through some other channel, thank you for reading.

Let’s make 2019 the best and bravest year of our lives.

With love,

Susan Hyatt and Alexandra Franzen
Editors / *Dig Deep Magazine*
Creators / *Dig Deep* writing course
January 31, 2019

THIS IS ME!

By: Susan Wagner

I am joyful

I am creative

I am here to learn

I am here to listen

I am here to love

I am enough

I am gratitude

I am a positive thinker

I am a mother

I am a sister

I am a friend

I am forgiving

I am forgiving

I am independent

I am emotion

I am drifting

I am a survivor

I AM A WARRIOR



BREAKING OUT OF THE BOX

By: Becky Drinnen

8 | I spent 37 years of my life living in a box. A box of someone else's design. A box that fit me about as well as an uncomfortable pair of shoes. I changed boxes a few times, hoping that a new box would fit a little better. I tried to fit in those boxes. And really, it was like that outfit that looks okay when viewed from a distance, but it made me uncomfortable all day. I knew for a lot of years that I needed to break out of that box, but there were some padlocks holding that box closed, and I needed to be willing to open those locks.

The first lock was a steady paycheck. I've had one of those since the day after I graduated from high school. Thanks to a great benefit package, I was guaranteed an income even if I got sick and was unable to work. There

was a whole lot of security wrapped up in that knowledge. And it was one heavy duty padlock keeping me in that corporate box.

A built in set of friends was another lock. I worked for a family owned company where outside-of-work friendships were encouraged. And most of my friendships are work related; friendships I treasure.

And the strongest padlock of all: company-sponsored health insurance. This particular padlock was even harder to unlock than giving up a steady paycheck. It's a scary environment out there out there for people who don't have employer-sponsored health care these days. Even though I'm healthy, the fear of not being able to afford health care kept me tied to that

corporate job for years longer than I should have been there.

Even after working with a coach, a financial planner, and creating budgets and contingency budgets, I was still afraid to open those padlocks and step out of the box into the unknown. I was looking for new padlocks that I didn't even know existed. I was listening too much to all of the data and the advice that said you'll have a more comfortable retirement if you maximize your earnings and keep working as long as possible. I turned this in to a fear of spending my retirement years living in a van down by the river.



Fortunately, I overcame that fear, took the leap, and broke out of that corporate box. In the end, though, it wasn't all of the budgeting and planning and contingency plans that helped me walk in to my boss's office and say goodbye to my job. ⁹

Here's what gave me the strength to unlock all of those padlocks and leave my job: I looked forward ten years and imagined what I would miss out on if I fit in all of the dreams I had for my life in the time that was left after I gave my best hours to a job. THAT made a difference and in the end, that's what gave me the courage to leave the security of the corporate box.

Remember that huge padlock on the corporate box called company-sponsored health care? I almost wanted to jump back in the corporate box when I learned that my county would not have any plans on the ACA exchange in 2018. But I didn't. And, I've learned with creativity and research, there are affordable options that will cover my health insurance needs.

It's now been over a year since I said goodbye to that corporate box, and the only thing I would change is to leave my corporate job sooner. Freedom from corporate work has given me the space to spend time on activities that have enriched my life in ways I could have never anticipated.

I am working again — part time and in a role that is fulfilling in ways I have never experienced before. As

a civilian employee of my small town's police department, I spend my working hours as part of the department's Addict Assistance Team, reaching out to people in our community who struggle with addiction. I've been inspired by people who are working hard to rebuild their lives after losing everything because of their addiction. I've cried when someone our team has gotten to know loses their battle and their life. I've gotten angry when I hear someone say that someone overdosing should be allowed to die rather than using Narcan to save their life. I am incredibly grateful that I have the opportunity to do this work.

Because my job is part time, I've also had wonderful opportunities beyond my work that have enriched my life. Travel with friends. Time to explore. Time with family. Time to be in nature. Time to volunteer. My husband and I purchased a lot at a private campground on the other side of the state. We love this new opportunity for a second home base in an area we absolutely love. We can spend lots of time enjoying our new place because I am no longer working full time.

The biggest lesson I've learned is that that corporate box I stayed trapped in for so long was a box of my own making. Those locks? They were all in my imagination. Don't make my mistake. If you're feeling that tug to make a major change in your life, don't let fear keep you trapped in a box of your own imagination. The biggest anecdote to fear is facing down those fears and making the changes that will bring fulfillment and happiness.



Vows to Gordon

By: Kelly Anne Berger

Gordon, I knew it was you from the very beginning.

Thank you for choosing me as your life partner.

Never did I ever imagine a love like we have.

You broke this heart of mine wide open.

I love you for somehow always knowing what to say to make me smile when I start getting a little too hot headed. And, thank you for being my level-headed voice of reason.

I love you for how much you care so deeply about us.

When I am with you time stops. Whether we are living out of a suitcase in France or you are eating a crepe in total bliss or cuddling in bed with you -- time warping every morning. In those moments, time stops and all there is- is you and me. You make me feel perfect in every way and like the most important person in the world- your booga.

I promise to wake up every single morning and let my first words be: I love you, I love you, I love you.

I promise to get to know you better every day, every year, every decade.

I promise to do my best to become a better partner, lover, friend and dreamer.

I promise to never stop paying attention to you and to us.

I promise to choose you, Gordon, again and again without pause, without doubt forever and ever.

I promise to love you forever and ever until we take our last breath.

I take you Gordon as my husband.

When I am not marrying the man of my dreams or hiking the Grand Canyon on our Mini-Moon... I am working 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 smokescreens & small talk. The skills I teach help to engage clients, save relationships, and build careers. It's all about being brave and getting real. Find me at kellymelsted.com



ME TOO

By: Nicky West

I want to live in a world where women feel safe, to
be who we are without shame or disgrace.
To reclaim past suffering as power and strength.
To laugh in a cacophony in circles, in tents,
wherever we gather to nourish our roots, to be seen
& heard our thirst quenched with fruits:

The fruits of our ancestors seeds as they marched.
The flowers from centuries of broken hearts.
The tears that have watered those seeds to grow into
choices, opportunities, the privilege to show their
suffering wasn't in vain, it's part of our DNA our
pain, as we speak we release old stories of shame.

As women we value and honour our essence, we're
creators, nourishers and fierce protectors.
We wake up to our worth, we wake up to this re-
birth, reclaiming our right to stand tall on this earth.
Reclaiming our space for stories we share.
Reclaiming our voice to be equal, to be heard.
To be equal, to be heard.

Nicky West is an actor, writer, facilitator and yoga teacher. She's worked extensively in Europe and Australia and has a passion for social justice, storytelling and the healing benefits of creativity.

THE PRICE OF NOT SHOWING UP AUTHENTICALLY

By: Amy Matthews

Many women in business feel the pressure to act like men, communicate like men and even dress like men. Though more prevalent in traditionally male dominated industries – like finance and venture capital – there are women in every industry that feel this pressure. At some level, whether conscious of it or not, women believe if they want to get ahead, they need to look and act a certain way.

I am not saying the pressure isn't real – don't get me wrong. The problem is, by buying into it, we accommodate and wear masks. We can lose touch with who we really are because we believe our authentic self isn't ok or enough.

Here's something that happened recently.

I was meeting with a male friend of mine in San Francisco at the Four Seasons. There was an institutional investor conference going on at the hotel so the lobby was crowded. An attractive woman, in her early 30's, walked past us. My very observant and astute friend said, "she looks a lot older

than she is wearing that". She was in a tweed suit – imagine Chanel like. I noticed that the suit was wearing her rather than the other way around. She looked like a mannequin – awkward and lifeless. Instantly, I said:

She's wearing what she thinks she's supposed to wear. Not what she wants to wear.

Why?

To Not Stand Out.

To Not Rock the Boat.

For Fear She Won't be Taken Seriously.

To Fit In with the Ol' Boys Club.

I don't know if you can relate but I can. I remember the navy blue, double breasted, wool suit I wore in my 20's! At the time, with my short bob, I thought I had it going on. Through experience and time, I've learned – in business and in life:

**Show Up Authentically.
Be Comfortable in Your Own Skin.
Communicate Confidently and Clearly.
Wear What Makes You Feel Good and Right for the Situation.**

Unless we start changing our behavior, nothing will change. We can't expect men to change, old structures to change or the old boy network to change. Women need to courageously lead the change. If we want things to be different, whether at work or at home, we've gotta show up authentically, in our power, in our brilliance and grace. And ask for what we want and need.

Once we fully step up and show up to ourselves, men will take our lead.

There's no better version of yourself than the real YOU. Be Yourself – ALWAYS.
Realize the power you have. Claim it and embrace it – in every aspect of your life.

Btw, the word Courageous comes from the French word Coeur..which means Heart.



OCEAN

By: JoRene Byers

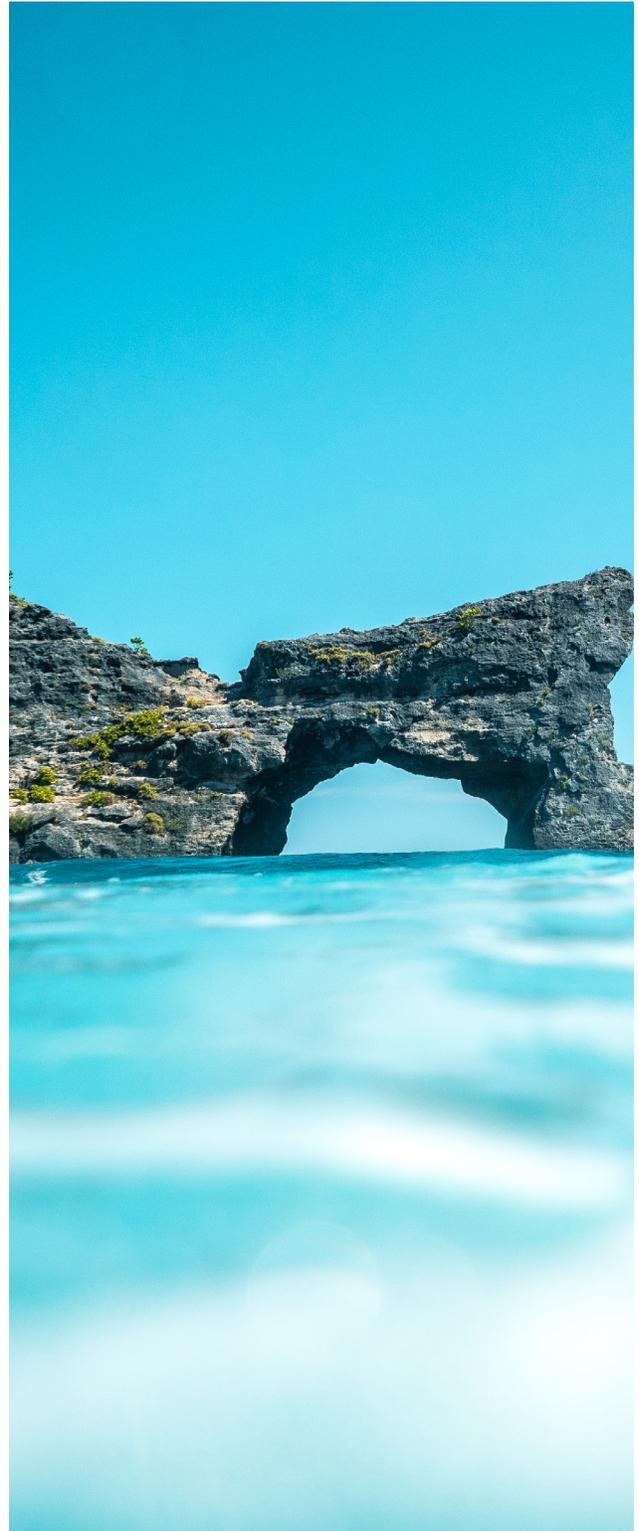
Ocean, when I dive deep
into you
then I am lost and found.

I float with the seaweed
and a myriad world
of seafish, seastars, and seafoam.

I feel the current
pulling me
and carrying me
and then
the sinking into peace.

All the waves
and storms
are quieted
in the eerie
immense
vast
ocean deep
of Silence.

JoRene Byers keeps company with the Oregon High Desert mountains and coyotes and her journal. This good happiness is shared out on the porch swing with her dear husband, dog and cat ~ and all the chickadees and jackrabbits that drop by to visit.





FROM BURNT OUT TO ON FIRE

A personal reflection by physician life coach Errin Weisman D.O.

I gave up the entire decade of my twenties to become a doctor.

It was my dream, and helping people was my purpose.

I was smart and driven and hungry. I was the go-to resident and gave 110%. I landed an offer with a family medicine practice near my husband's home farm.

It was a huge shock to me when I finally admitted to myself that I didn't love practicing medicine. How could I not love it? I had dedicated my life to becoming a doctor - and now I found that being a doctor meant living a half life.

The work was all-consuming. I would sit in my car in the parking lot crying. I would sit at my desk in my office feeling completely empty. I would sit in patient encounters' trying to do a good job but internally, I was empty. I would sit up on Sunday nights, not wanting to go to sleep because it meant I'd have to wake up and face another week.

I couldn't seem to articulate to my family and friends why I was so unhappy. At Thanksgiving, everyone wanted to talk about my hotshot medical practice. All I wanted was to hide under the table or scream, "I hate my fucking life."

I became a shell of myself. I had no connection with my kids, my

husband or my dog. Some nights I would come home late on purpose so I didn't have to face bath and bedtime. I knew there were problems to make me feel completely disconnected from my family. I felt so stuck.

One afternoon, one of my colleagues told me how much he enjoyed working with me. "I hope we can keep you at this practice for the 30+ years of your career," he said.

The idea of staying there for thirty more years -- or even three more years -- made me want to cry hysterically and throw up at the same time.

I realized that I needed help. In Indiana, if you seek support for mental illness, including depression or anxiety, it can trigger a review of your medical license. (Let's stop and absorb that for a minute: as doctors, we're constantly advocating for mental illness support for our patients. But if we seek support ourselves, we can be punished for it.)

Instead, I hired a life coach. Through our work together, I went down to three days a week at work so I could have the time and space to figure out what I wanted out my life and career. She helped me begin to imagine my ideal practice as a doctor: when I would work, when I would spend time with my family, when I would have time for myself.

Before I started working with my coach,

I had felt like I was in a dark cave all by myself, and I'd lost my way. I had no idea how to get back to the light. I'd made so many wrong turns that I couldn't even find myself. When I started working with her, I felt like she brought me a flashlight. She held my hand. And together we explored the cave. The flashlight helped me see there were beautiful jewels in the cave - beautiful moments that made my life worth living. And together, we found our way back into the light.

My life now is completely different.

I am empowered to ask for what I want at work. I asked for what I wanted at the family medicine practice; they did not agree, so I left. I found a job as an ER doctor, despite my noncompete clause, and created my own schedule as an independent contractor. And when I started feeling the Sunday dreads again, I decided to leave and find the next right thing.

I am fully present with my family and in my life. I run races with my friends. I take my three kids kayaking on my days off (instead of lying on the couch comatose from a long week at work). I'm more present with my husband. I pet my dog again.

When I was in the middle of my burnout, all I wanted was someone who understood what being a doctor means and could relate exactly on what I was going through.



So...I became that someone for my fellow doctors. I proudly announce I'm a physician life coach!

I know what it's like to take only a 4-week maternity leave so I didn't have to remediate my residency (and be told that it was my fault for poor family planning). I know what it's like for my male colleagues to expect me to buy Christmas presents for our office staff, and for patients to ask me if I'm the nurse. I understand working as hard as the male physicians and getting credit for less (and paid less as a matter of fact).

Healthcare is not healthy as a whole for female physicians who desire roles of a mom and a doctor in our country right now. It's my honor and privilege to work with fellow doctor moms to create that way - because we need to be healthy and happy within ourselves in order to change the broken system in which our profession exists.

Because I don't know about you, but I want my doctor to be happy and healthy instead of sick and exhausted.

—

Dr. Errin Weisman, D.O., is a coach and mentor for doctor moms who want to create sustainable work/life balance. You can find more about her work at <http://www.truthrxs.com>.

PILGRIMAGE

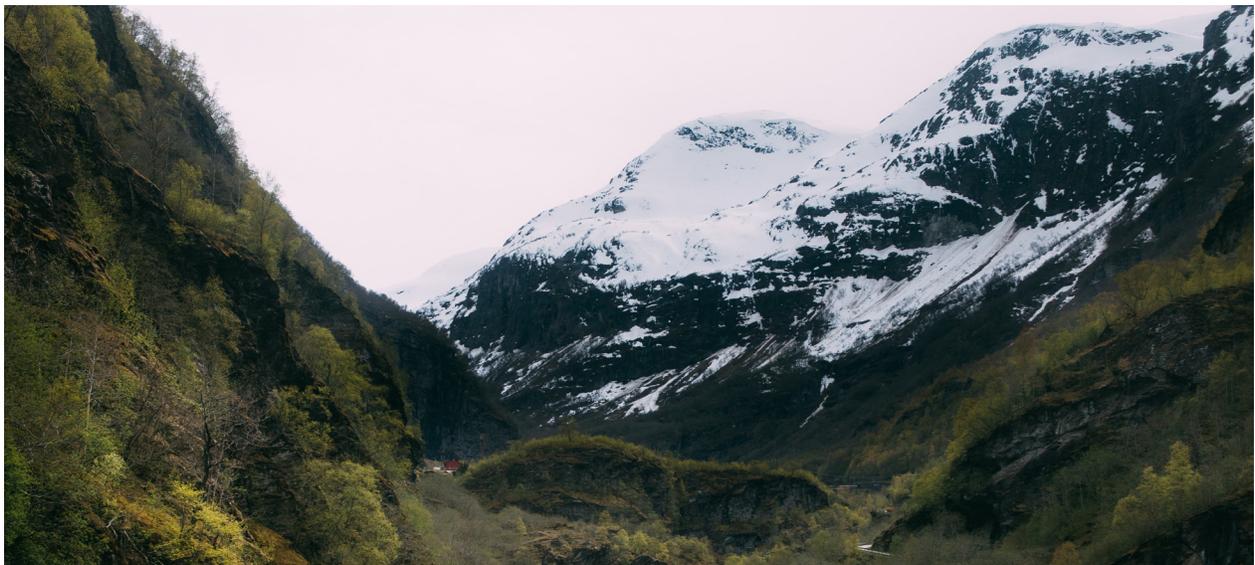
By JoRene Byers

The sun touches gently
the wide valley expanse
between our place
and the mountains.

I could
ride my horse,
travel for two days
and be at the foot of the Devis.

White snow and ice
vistas
swirling clouds
The quiet.

What is it even like
anymore
to be quiet?



CHRISTINA'S WORLD

By Sandra Wald

Christina looks still, but she is in motion, crawling across the field.
Her world is big—vast, sun-browned sprawling acres.
And also small—narrow ribbon of sky not big enough to fly
Or dream or see cloud pictures or birds in
She sees only the weeds in front of her.
The small grey house and barn are not in her line of vision.
Wisps of sweaty dark hair escape her bun as she inches forward.

Andrew Wyeth prints are on the stamps
My husband brings home and he comments on this
One, “I don’t know if I’d want that in the house, Honey.
She looks stranded.”



I romanticize the land and see Christina grounded, solid,
Sun-warmed and sweet like the grass when it was still green.
Imagine a rustle of breeze
Racing along the prairie and cooling her in the well-worn pink dress.

But, that is not true. She isn’t still. She’s trying to get away.
Maybe why we only get the back of her head—
it is possible that she is smiling, but unlikely.

Sandra Wald lives on a prairie on a farm in the middle of the country with her husband, golden retriever, flock of chickens and herd of cats. She works at a small private college and loves writing things down. www.sandrawald.com

A DNA MIRACLE

By Becky Drinnen

DNA stories are all over TV and the Internet these days. Heartwarming reunions that are possible because two people spit in a tube will tug at just about anyone's heartstrings. For people who are adopted, though, these stories are especially emotional. Thanks to the popularity of DNA testing, and the connections that many adoptees have made thanks to a relative match, more and more people who have been separated by adoption have new hope of reuniting.

My search journey did not start with a DNA test. I've been on what seems like a lifelong quest for knowledge and connection. In many ways, I was privileged to know much more than many of my fellow adoptees. At the time my adoption was finalized, Ohio law allowed me to have access to my original birth record once I was an adult. Because I had access to my original birth certificate, I was able to locate my birthmother. That initial connection didn't turn out the way I had hoped, though. My birthmother was abundantly clear about her desire for no contact. I wasn't prepared for rejection and it was many years before I came to terms with the impact that rejection had on my life.

That first contact wasn't all negative, though: I was able to make a connection with my mother's sister. Thanks to my aunt, I've had pictures and some knowledge of my

birthmother and my family since 1984. This taste of knowledge was a double-edged sword, though. I had photographic evidence of what I was missing: a mother, a brother, and two sisters. One of the comments my aunt made to me was that I reminded her a lot of one of my sisters. That was incredibly painful knowledge to absorb – a sister I shared similarities with, and she had no idea I existed.

By 2012, DNA testing was becoming affordable and adoptees were actually finding birth parents. I ordered a DNA test kit in hopes of finding my birth father. While I waited on results, I gathered all of the details I had learned about my father, and I found him using only non-identifying information, before the DNA results came back! I was ecstatic – the identity of my father is something I never imagined I would learn – I had always expected that his identity would remain hidden from me.

My father and I met in 2013 and this amazing man opened his heart to me. I also met biological siblings – two brothers and two sisters. Timing was everything, too. Three years after we first met, I sat by his hospital bed and shared what would be our last conversation. He passed away soon after that last visit.

My search journey was successful by so many standards – I had connected with extended birth family on my mother's side. I'd had at least some connection with my



birthmother. I had found and met my birthfather, four brothers and sisters, and extended family. Though I never totally lost hope, I realized it was likely that my mother would never be ready for that connection I so deeply desired. And by honoring her desire for privacy, her other children remained unaware that they had an older sister.

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As the DNA databases grew, new matches would pop up from time to time, but I never expected that a DNA match would be life changing. I was wrong. On March 15, 2018, I got an email notification of a new “close family” Ancestry DNA match. I was shocked to see that this new match was my sister, my birthmother’s youngest daughter! Before I could absorb this new development, I received a message from my sister asking if I knew how we were connected.

I was astonished and overjoyed about this new development – and I wanted to make sure I gave a lot of thought and consideration to how I responded to my sister – I was almost certain that she had no idea that she had another sister.

In addition to sharing DNA, my sister and I share curiosity and some incredible sleuthing skills – by the time I got home from work that afternoon, I had another message from my sister. Thanks to Google and some blog posts I had written, she had figured out our connection and confirmed her discovery with our mother. AND, she was thrilled to learn about me!

Thirty four years after I first learned my birthmother's name, it took a DNA test to bring us together. Soon after connecting with my sister, we arranged to meet at her home. I was greeted at the door by my mother. After so many years of hoping for this day to come, I was finally looking into the eyes of the woman who gave me life.

It's been over 6 months since that DNA match appeared and I continue to be astounded (and ecstatic) about how much our lives have changed – for the better. My siblings, my mother, and I are in contact regularly, getting to know each other better with each text message, conversation, and meeting. We share similar interests and mannerisms. In many ways, it feels like we've known each other for a lifetime, yet at the same time, there are so many lost years to make up for.

I've often described the desire for knowledge and connection to my biological roots as completing a puzzle. Since finding my birth father, I've had all of the puzzle pieces; though a few of those pieces were upside down and the puzzle remained incomplete. I knew those pieces were there and I knew what they looked like, but they weren't connected to the rest of my puzzle. DNA was truly a game changer and put the rest of the pieces of my puzzle in place.

ASK FOR IT

By Amy Matthews

As an empowerment coach and business consultant, I often have people ask me for help when they are negotiating job offers. No matter what age and how much experience, I have found a common theme. Women, no matter how confident and accomplished they are, have a tough time asking for what they want in a salary negotiation. Here are recent examples of women I have worked with:

- A 29-year old woman negotiating with a very cool, hip, fashion and lifestyle start-up
- A woman in her 40's negotiating for her dream job with an up and coming consumer products company
- A highly experienced 50+ year old woman negotiating with a management consultant firm

Each of these three women is well educated, extremely smart, articulate, professional and accomplished in their own right. Before they got a formal offer, they did their homework on salary ranges and relative comps for the position they were seeking in their respective industries. Once they had a formal offer in hand, the salary offered was lower than what their research had shown. I had a similar conversation with each woman even though their specific situation was unique to them.

“Once you have an offer in hand, undoubtedly, this is your most powerful position during the interview process. Remember, They Want You – You are the Prize. Ask for What You Want. Ask for What You Are Worth. Ask for What You Deserve. If You Don’t Ask, You Won’t Know. Now, a caveat. I’m not suggesting you take out your Wonder Woman sword and go into battle. Think of your negotiation as a conversation. Be clear in your communication, connected and cordial.”

I’ve worked in executive search with hundreds of candidates. It’s been my experience, once a man enters into salary negotiations, he has no hesitation asking for the compensation and title he wants and thinks he deserves. So why is it difficult for a woman to ask for what she wants? I think most women, while growing up, aren’t taught to embrace their self-worth, especially in a professional, career sense, like men are taught. Women feel apprehensive about negotiating because they don’t want to be seen as aggressive. Or worse, bitchy. As we all know, society and the media don’t know how to handle powerful women. Even with all the accomplished and talented women in the world today, we still have a long way to go.

Learning to negotiate and asking for what you want is a skill that any person, man, woman or child, can learn and perfect. You just need to try. It may be uncomfortable or even scary the first time you negotiate and ask for your value. If you get an answer that is less than optimal, pause. Perhaps, propose a creative solution that can work for you AND your soon to be employer. Once you understand the art of it and start getting the results you want, it will be smooth sailing ahead.



BLIND DRUNK ANGELS

By Nicky West

The wind was howling, my ears burning from the cold, I wrapped my woolly scarf and winter jacket tighter. I was walking along Westbourne Grove, a fairly busy shopping street in West London, on my way to get some food for dinner. ‘Help’ ‘Help me’ ‘Help!’ there was a man hanging trepidatiously onto a post, swinging around it, moving from the pavement into the road and back, his white hair standing upright from the wind, with a terrified look on his face.

26 | People were walking past him, these things aren’t that unusual on a London street and most people’s heads were huddled down in this weather! Feeling hungry and cold, I almost walked past too but he genuinely looked like he was in trouble, so I stopped and asked if I could help? He said ‘I’m blind and I’m drunk!’ I saw in his other hand a white stick waving around and realized that he was literally ‘blind drunk’.

I asked him where he was trying to get to, he said ‘home’, he was at the pub and drank too much. (It’s happened to the best of us!) I said ‘where do you live? Do you know where home is from here?’ He was distressed and close to tears, saying he normally knew but he’s lost all sense of direction. I could just about make this out as the rain lashed down.

A little more talking and we worked out the direction he needed to go in. He took my arm and off we went, back the way I’d just come from. He told me the street and we ducked in, he lost his keys, and found them, phew! We went downstairs opened his basement flat and were finally home, turning he grabbed my arm thanking me profusely saying ‘who are you? An angel?’ I said ‘no, just someone passing by, you were asking for help, so I stopped.’ I wished him well and carried on to the supermarket.

“...and what we might be missing are those magical moments, the ones that make us feel alive again.”

It made me think, why are we in such a rush? That whole incident probably took about 30 minutes, tops. I forgot about feeling hungry & cold when focusing on someone else’s needs. We can plan all we want, we can try and control our days, hours and minutes as though our life depended on it. Sometimes it does. Usually, though, many of us create more and more things that we think we ‘have’ to do ‘right now’ and stress ourselves out trying to accomplish them.

Why do we do that to ourselves? Are we missing the point of being alive? Are we missing those moments that make us enjoy

this human experience and enable us to respond to someone that might need help? Do we miss those moments when that little voice inside is trying to guide us in one direction, whilst we continue blindly moving in another, further away from what we truly need?

We'll never know what we're missing as we race around and do more and more stuff in the fear that we might miss out and what we might be missing are those magical moments, the ones that make us feel alive again.

Not everything is urgent, we're often going around the same wheel in the same way when there are moments during the day that we can say 'no' or we can help someone or we can stop and reconnect with ourselves.

If we don't then we can end up hurtling off in a direction that quite possibly isn't going to fulfil us, we can lose our sense of direction. And like the man who was drunk and without sight, sometimes we're forced to stop, sometimes we have no choice but to ask for help, sometimes we're in a place where we have to trust another human being (or an angel!) in order to get to where we need to go, to arrive at a destination that is both an ending and a beginning of another story, another cycle, and so it goes on.

The planet will continue to turn long after we are gone and if we're lucky what we'll remember when we die won't be how much we got done on our to do lists, it'll be the moments of connection, of inspiration & joy, of giving and receiving, it's the moments of kindness that matter, and that includes words and actions that are kind to ourselves, so let's stop beating ourselves up for what we didn't do - it likely doesn't matter at the end of the day.

Instead, if you feel disconnected or like you might be losing your way, spend a couple of minutes to re-connect. Being in nature, moving our body, breathing consciously can all work wonders or simply call a good friend, who won't judge you, be witnessed, sometimes that's all it takes to shift our states of being.

Quick Tip to Re-centre

A one minute practice that may work for you is to either stand or sit, put your right hand on heart & left hand on belly, breathe in through the nose and sigh the air out through the mouth a few times whilst feeling your feet firmly on the ground (even stomping a couple of times) and saying either out loud or to yourself 'I am here, I am safe, I am in my body - this moment matters'. That's it, repeat as often as you need to during the day and don't forget to look up.

DANCING TOWARD PLAY

By: Lesh Karan



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I think of play as a loss of self-consciousness in bed with flow, birthing a child-like joy. Such as when my 12-year-old, honey-coloured Beaglier – a King Charles Cavalier crossed with a Beagle – chases his tail.

I turn to the *Macquarie Dictionary & Thesaurus Online* to check my interpretation. I discover that for a four-letter word, play has just as many facets as a classic-cut diamond. Well, almost. The Dictionary offers 97 definitions and uses for the word. (A quick Google search also reveals over 340 idioms.)

The first definition listed is “a dramatic composition or piece or a drama”, and the second is “a dramatic performance, as on stage.”

A stage play doesn't come to mind, but Neymar Jr does. You know, the Brazilian soccer legend renowned for his 'diving' antics during the 2018 soccer world cup? Diving is the theatrical falling down and rolling around on the field *acting* as if you're grievously injured.

Even if this behaviour isn't considered outright cheating, I liken it to dirty play. Maybe I have a narrow viewpoint, though. The world at large has played along with the joke, fervently taking up the 'Neymar Challenge'. With online news headlines proclaiming “The Neymar Challenge has fans around the world dramatically falling down” and “The 'Neymar Challenge' is the latest viral sensation taking the internet by storm.”

I just don't get it. What a party pooper I am.

The third – “exercise or action by way of amusement or recreation” – and fourth – “fun, jest or trifling, as opposed to earnest” – definitions confirm my lack of inclination toward play.

It's 1975. A one-year-old baby, almost a toddler, is carefully lifted out of the car. The mother is about to place her on the fresh green grass of the front lawn. Instead of delighting in the anticipated ticklish prickle of the lush blades against her bare feet, the toddler scrunches her toes and bunches up her legs.

About 10 years later, the same mother willingly writes notes so that her precocious daughter – who at the time equates exercise with an excruciating way to lose weight – can get out physical education classes.

Having lived with the daughter for over 40 years, I am realising, rather disappointingly, the seriousness of my disposition. Reviews govern my restaurant choices. And familiarity my repeated visits to the same cafes, with the staff knowing my name and me theirs. Uncertainty sends me to Google in search for an answer, a way. Behaviours such as these allude to a fear of a life lived ‘wrong’.

Over two years ago, my five-foot-two self butted against a former model and basketballer turned author, PhD student and business owner of an online magazine – all rolled into a six-foot blonde. She was my boss. And I worked in her business for nineteen months as an Assistant Editor before she unceremoniously pushed me out. I believed it was my continual refusal to put her on a pedestal and apologise for being human. But it was my lack of play that was to blame.

I realise – always too late – that when two strong-minded personalities clash, one must concave to soften the impact. Behavioural experts recommend this concaving come in the shape of play.

In *The Relationship Cure: A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships*, John M Gottman (with Joan DeClaire) writes:

We also discovered the importance of playfulness in peoples bids [for interaction and connection]. For years I have wondered why some couples are able to make jokes and express affection for each other – even in the midst of an argument. It's an important question because our research shows that such emotional 'repair tools' lead to the development of happier, stronger relationships.

Dr Stuart Brown also concurs, stating in his book *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* that “The ability to play is critical not only to being happy, but also to sustaining social relationships and being a creative, innovative person.”

So, instead of exchanging terse emails about the restructure of my role – my boss from her office and me from my shared space less than two feet away – I needed to get up and walk over to her and say: “Hey, what’s up? Is it my turn to get you coffee or something? Let’s grab one and chat.”

I still might not have kept my job, but the departure might’ve been less sour.

Not long after my demise at the online magazine, my life took a serendipitous turn toward play. I got a job with an organization that has ‘vitality’ in its name, to which it is unabashedly true. As its digital content specialist, I can work from home, but I *choose* to turn up in the office at least twice a week. Why wouldn’t I? I laugh at least 10 times a day, hear pet names like ‘petal’ and ‘sweet cheeks’ float through the airwaves, and my mistakes are seen as part of being human – i.e. no big deal!

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Both Dr Brown and another behavioural expert, Bowen F White, a medical doctor and author of *Why Normal Isn’t Healthy*, stress the importance of selecting friends who are playful. I just happened to get lucky with my colleagues.

Work wasn’t the only ingredient to up my play stakes. Roughly a year ago, I took up dance classes. Not ballet. But dance of the street variety – Bollywood and Latin Rhythms – where improvisation and feeling the vibe of the music are keys to loosening up and playful self-expression.

Before each class begins, our Zumba instructor tells us in her thick Venezuelan accent, “I don’t expect you to be a professional dancer. I want you to just forget your problems and have fun.” And my Bollywood teacher instructs the class to “Move your hips so far right, that it’s out the window.” This proclamation is immediately followed by a giggle.

Soon, I discover I’m confident enough to take play off the dance floor and into situations I’m not naturally comfortable.

In a meeting a few months ago, a new client is describing her swanky offices in Docklands, a modern harbour development adjacent to Melbourne’s CBD. Floor-to-ceiling windows. An

indoor bridge connecting two buildings. It all sounds glamorous. And I say, “Well, welcome to our humble abode.” We all laugh, the ice broken.

When I Google the etymology of play, I find: “Old English *pleg(i)an* ‘to exercise’, *plega* ‘brisk movement’, related to Middle Dutch *pleien* ‘leap for joy, dance’.”

Maybe there’s a hint of Dutch in my bloodline.

Whether I was born with it or not, I know I can dance – not dive – my way onto the field of play. But *vital* players are necessary.

—

Lesh Karan is a former pharmacist turned writer. While she’s worn a few different work hats, including editing, food coaching and health writing, one thing has always remained consistent: harnessing words to help her process life. Website: leshkaran.com.





OTHER PEOPLE'S COOKING

By: Sandra Wald

People can be so weird and quirky when it comes to food. Maybe this is good—a sign of an affluent culture—but then this last weekend, Paul and I were sitting at the table eating shrimp scampi (his birthday meal of choice) and commenting about how geography influenced access to food, and the town on Poldark that ate so much fish (similar to Sardines). “The old folks used to always have a can of sardines on hand. I wish I liked them,” Paul said. Then, he told



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me that shrimp used to be considered food for poor people. I have not researched this, but it sounds reasonable. Shrimp, in their natural state, don't look like food for royalty.

When I was a kid, I remember a farm family that lived near us---a father, mother, and their adult sons. When, the mother had surgery and had to be in the hospital for a while, and therefore couldn't cook for a while there was serious concern among the neighbors. Plenty of women lived nearby and were willing to help out (the main gravel road was nicknamed “Widow Road”), but the issue was that these men had never, and would never eat anyone else's cooking. How does that happen? Wouldn't you have to make an extreme effort to live in such a way so as to never eat anything except what your mother had cooked?

When I was in elementary school—I don't recall which grade, I was a member of the Brownies. This was a long-sought after dream. I had looked forward to the uniform and the badges and selling the cookies. I imagined learning all kinds of skills—camping, tying important knots, surviving in the wilderness—I really only had vague ideas of what it was all about, but I had seen the uniform catalog and looked at the pictures and snippets of real Brownie Girl Scout adventures on the cookie boxes and enjoyed a temporary obsession with good deeds. After being inducted into the Brownies at a formal ceremony at Shelter Gardens, you became

“official” once you had performed a good deed. I performed several good deeds—opening doors for strangers, carrying bags for my mom’s friend—uncertain which good deed should “count” as the one that got me in.

Anyway, truth be told, our Brownie Troop didn’t do that much. I didn’t know this until later when I had something to compare it to. We did not go sailing, or go on a special trip or learn to tie knots. We did go to camp one summer, and that was awesome. We got to make our own lunch and stay in cabins and drink bug juice. There were cool crafts. There were ghost stories and singing around the campfire. My stand-out memories were of Susan, who when making the PB & J for lunch one day put an unfathomable amount of grape jelly on the sandwiches. What deprivation was she acting out there??? The other also involves food (this is a cookbook, so it’s okay)—one of the moms was horrified that we were each given an entire Hershey’s chocolate bar with which to make our s’more. I had been given whole candy bars as a treat, and was shocked that we stood to lose half of a candy bar because this mom was making a fuss. (She did lose that battle, by the way). Aside from the camping trip, the main focus of our Brownie Troop was our meetings on Tuesday afternoons after school. We had treats and sang songs, and had our “old business” and “new business.”

With the weekly meetings, it was a huge big deal when it was your turn to bring treats. This meant basically being the most

popular girl in school for about an hour. After all, you had the power of the treats—and this was an era in which kids really appreciated their junk food. The few kids in my class who brought their lunch to school held all kinds of power in the cafeteria as they unveiled special treats from home. I remember my fascination at one girl in my class, Kimberly, who brought all little cans in her lunch one day—a can of pudding, a can of fruit cocktail, a can of Vienna sausages, a can of another kind of pudding. Those of us around her at the lunch table who were eating whatever the lunch ladies served that day—spaghetti with a hot roll and butter and green beans for example, watched in awe as Kimberly opened the cans and sampled what was inside. Oh, to be able to bring cans for lunch!

Anyway, as a kid who didn’t get to bring her lunch that often and almost never had good things like Twinkies and Hostess Cupcakes to trade, being in charge of treats at a Brownie meeting gave me a similar power. For one sweet afternoon. This was also the era when most moms made the treats from scratch. It was extremely exciting when someone brought in bakery cupcakes for a school party—but most of the time, we were getting homemade food from various moms. Peanut allergies were unheard of in my elementary school. There were no rules about sugar content or healthy food, or how food had to be packed. I vaguely remember discussing cupcakes with my mom and her idea to make peanut butter cupcakes with peanut butter frosting. It probably went

something like this...

Mom: How about peanut butter cupcakes for your Brownie meeting Tuesday?

Me: Yeah, I like those. All we ever have is chocolate.

See that comment/insight I had about chocolate? It's important. When my moment of impending popularity arrived after school that Tuesday, something unexpected happened. The girls were sitting in a circle as instructed. They had already received a Styrofoam cup of orange Kool-Aid, and I had removed the lid from the big plastic container of cupcakes to reveal the exciting peanut butter flavor, and began to walk around the circle handing out cupcakes. Only, I didn't hand that many out.

I saw lots of wrinkled noses and hesitation on the faces of my fellow Brownie Troop members.

“What is that?”

“Are those chocolate? Why are they such a funny color?”

“I don't want one!” (Followed by vigorous head shaking.)

Ever the optimist, I explained, “They aren't chocolate. They're peanut butter. My mom made them and they're really good.” I may have demonstrated this by taking a big bite.

But, skeptics remained skeptics, and only about one third to half of my troop would try the peanut butter cupcakes. I wasn't offended by this, so much as shocked. Peanut butter was normal kid food in my mind, but apparently only chocolate was acceptable. Most were scared to try anything new. This is such an 80s anecdote because in 2018, bringing peanut butter anything to an elementary school function might be seen as an act of aggression at worst and an ignorant choice at best.

One of my friends with kids confessed to me recently how much she hates church potlucks and family reunion meals where you are expected to eat all of this random food that you know nothing about. She always brings macaroni and cheese and chocolate chip cookies, and that is what her family eats. Those two things. I can relate. Trying food that you can't even identify can be a little off-putting, but this is a modern thing. It used to be more common to just eat whatever there was—whether you “liked” it or not.

I remember sitting at the table in my Grandma's kitchen as a child. Her table was full of variety---always some dishes that were new to me—wax beans, cucumbers and onions, some unusual kind of meat. I might have tried some new things, but stuck with the standards I was used to. My brother, who would eat green beans (which he individually salted when he was around ten years old), would not eat wax beans, a decision made based entirely on their color. My grandpa, however, ate everything on the table—not in excess—there was just no food that he



wouldn't eat. I mentioned to my mom once when we were discussing recipes how most people eat the same things all the time—maybe two standard vegetables—corn and one other, but that Grandma made almost everything (except maybe a traditional pizza—she did make one using Bisquick once when we were visiting). Mom nodded and said, “Yes, but your grandpa ate everything.”

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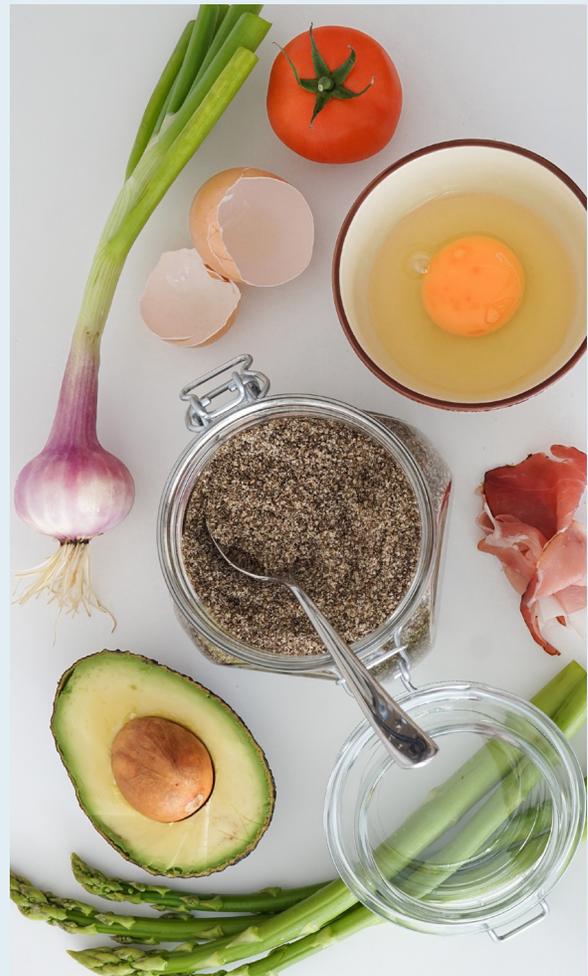
He grew up in an era when eating what was in front of you was partly etiquette and partly necessity. As a farmer, and a gardener, who did not like to rely on grocery stores, filling the table and eating a variety were tied up in both etiquette and practicality. He had been raised to understand what it cost in labor to get the food, and it would not have occurred to him to dislike a food that was served—it was all fuel—some maybe more agreeable than others.

For children in particular, I think large family reunions and church dinners are where many of our strange food memories originate. I think my friend's kids are lucky that they can always count on her mac and cheese and chocolate chip cookies being available. My stand-out memory from a family reunion meal that used to be held at a local park each June was a moment with my mom, and one of my great-aunts or possibly a third cousin—at any rate, a relative that I did not know by name, but who was quite a bit older than my mom. This lady was talking incessantly about a subject that I couldn't follow (an illness, hallucination? A hallucination that revealed an illness? Something that happened to her when she was sleepwalking...) and all the while waving around a plastic fork full of potato salad. I knew I could not interrupt this adult, but I had something very important to say, and I could not get

my mother's attention. I sighed and made an impatient noise, and at one point almost crawled on top of the picnic table just to get my face in front of hers and increase my chances of catching her eye. No luck. There was a bug on this relative's forkful of potato salad and she had to be told. It was a losing battle, though. This elderly relative stopped talking abruptly and took the large bite of potato salad, bug, and all, and at long last my mom turned to me, and said "What is it?"

A couple of decades later, I was sitting in a church service listening to a testimony from a missionary discussing the elaborate meal that was shared with him in one of the homes where he was serving. He described the table, and the love and warmth of this family, and then explained that the meal he was served was full of weevils. He was not making fun of the people that served the meal, but trying to explain Luke 10:8: "Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you." After all, it was offered in love, and he did not want to offend his new friends.

It was during that same era that I invited a couple from that church over for dinner. I was not an experienced cook—and didn't know what I didn't know. My only thought about cooking was that if I could follow a recipe, I could cook anything, and I decided to make a pretty standard meal—lasagna, salad, French bread, and brownies for dessert. I had never actually made lasagna before, and my mom never made it when I was growing up (opting instead for its less time-consuming cousin, spaghetti), maybe for that reason lasagna felt more special to me and I wanted to try it. My friends, Jeff and Mishel showed up, and they were hungry—Jeff especially. He worked in construction and really built-up an appetite. When I took lasagna out of the oven and let it cool, I was worried that something wasn't quite right. I cut it, and that is when I discovered an ominous crunch. Caught up in the "layering" process of building the dish, I neglected the fact that you are supposed to end with sauce and cheese on top—not dry



noodles. I was a new enough cook to be a little horrified by this mistake, but we just scraped the top layer of dry noodles aside and ate the other part. Jeff ate and ate—even some of the crunchy noodles, and I felt happy to have shared this meal with friends who appreciated it, even in its imperfections.

I hadn't expected it, but within a week or two, Jeff and Mishel returned my dinner invitation. We actually met up at the grocery store and shopped for our dinner in the moment. We were young, and none of us had much money or would have purchased a lot of food at one time, but I was still a little surprised at the novelty of starting the meal at the grocery store. It was something different. They selected a box of Cheerios cereal, milk, a few beautiful shiny red apples and a couple of wheels of cheese—each selection was made only after Mishel made sure I liked each item they suggested. What a simple combination—cereal, apples and cheese—it may not be what you think of when you imagine your ideal dinner, but with the combination of the company, hunger, and spontaneity, it really hit the spot.

A decade later, I had a friend who made borderline gagging noises whenever anyone mentioned a food that she did not like, and had to follow that with remarking on how “gross” the food in question was. I tried to overlook this flaw because she was a good friend in other ways, but I found this behavior perplexing. My husband, Paul, and

I ran into some confused communication when we were first married because it took me a while to learn that when he said he “didn't care for” a dish I had made or that it was just “okay” that meant that he didn't like it and he would really like to never have it again. This resulted in me making several recipes I liked (salmon quiche—yum!) because I didn't understand the “okay.” Even with the miscommunication that resulted, I am glad that he wasn't sitting at the table making gagging noises.

When I think back on the peanut butter cupcake incident now, I confess that I feel a little sorry for the Brownies and Girl Scouts of today. What kind of rules do they have to adhere to when it comes to bringing snacks at meetings? If it's anything like most schools rules on this topic, homemade food is not allowed—it has to be served from a sealed, grocery store container, and naturally no one would bring anything peanut butter, and possibly nothing related to cake either since that's not a healthy snack option. Still, I do like the saying they use for small children today—I have heard my sister-in-law quote it to my nieces who are now six, seven, and almost thirteen—you get what you get and you don't get upset. If only we had utilized that rule in Brownies when I was a kid—everyone would have gotten a peanut butter cupcake.

To that end, if you do not have a peanut allergy, and unlike the little girls in my Brownie troop, are interested in trying a

cupcake that is not the traditional chocolate variety, here is my mom's recipe for peanut butter cupcakes, followed by her recipe for peanut butter frosting. This recipe can also be made as a sheet cake if you prefer. I have never made the cupcakes myself, but I did make the recipe as a sheet cake for a friend when I was in college.

Peanut Butter Cake (or cupcakes)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup peanut butter

1/3 cup shortening

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 1/2 cups brown sugar

2 eggs

2 cups flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

3/4 cup milk

Cream the peanut butter, shortening, and vanilla. Add brown sugar, eggs and dry ingredients alternating the dry ingredients with the milk. Bake in greased and floured pan or muffin tins.

Note: I am pretty sure you could also use cooking spray such as Pam.

Bake for 20 minutes.

Frosting:

2 Tablespoons of peanut butter

2-3 Tablespoons of milk

1 1/2 cups powdered sugar

DEAR WORLD

By Nicky West

Dear world. I see you watching me as I walk by with my slight waddle on chubby legs. I see your disapproval of my body. I see how my wide hips and thick thighs and soft belly make you shake your head in disgust and disappointment. I know that you want me to take up less space in the world. Be unseen. Invisible.

I see you silently making assumptions in your head. About how I eat. About how lazy I must be. About all of the things I must not be able to do with all these stretch marks and cellulite. You are certain I must be secretly miserable. No one this fat could possibly be happy. I taste your pity.

I know that my age spots and grey hair and sagging breasts offend you. Because if you can't sexualize me, then whatever will you do with me? I'm just wasted space on the feminine canvas.

I used to let your looks and your opinions shrink me. Make my spirit small. Make me apologetic for not rising to meet your expectations. Sorry was ash in my mouth.

But over time, something shifted. There is a certain freedom that comes with 40. Permission to no longer ask for permission. To exist. To show up. To be seen.

With age, I acquired wisdom. Not from the world, for it has no wisdom for someone like

me. I started listening to truths that my body holds. The stories that sing through my blood and bones. And I heard with the primal and powerful sound of resonance, the truth my body wanted me to know.

I am beautiful. I am capable. I have a right to all the space my body and intellect and spirit require. Do you hear me, world? My body preached to me the truth that I am not here on this physical journey to please you. I am not required to give a fuck whether you approve of me or not.

I am divinely created perfect. **I AM DIVINELY CREATED PERFECT.** This gorgeous body was made to do amazing things and to feel amazing while doing them.

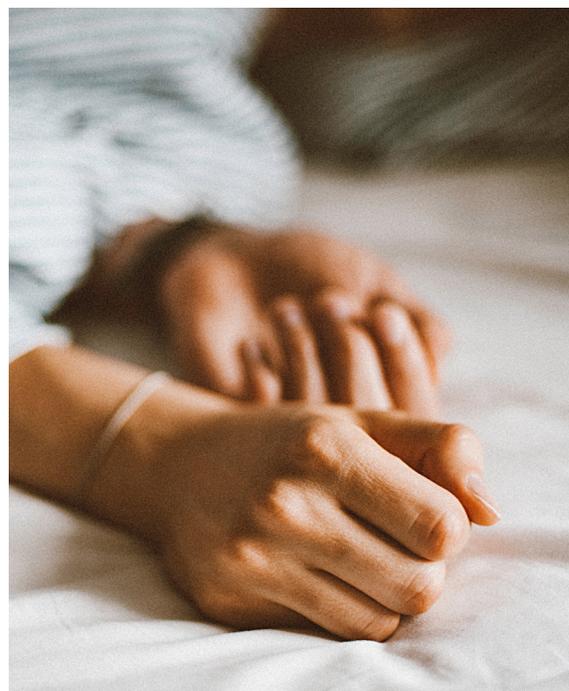
This flesh that you find too soft has rendered new life into the world with a powerful force that would knock the judgement off your face. These breasts that insult you by having the audacity to hang lower than you think they should have fed two beautiful babies. Life was brought forth here.

These chubby calves and thick thighs have trekked over mountains, climbed volcanoes, swam the oceans with sea turtles. These too round hips have danced magic to life on hot summer nights and perched in treetops to bear witness to fiery sunrises.

This flesh with its wrinkles and imperfections knows unrivaled pleasure. The kiss of the sun. The delight of a cool breeze thrilling along my skin. The rise of passion under a lover's touch.

I remind you now because you have forgotten, that I am a force of nature. Daughter of the earth. Sister to the seas. Vibrant, nurturing, powerful. All tucked beautifully into this splendid body. It is not I who offends. It is not who disappoints. Hear me now, world. You can take your notions of the perfect body, the perfect woman, the perfect expression of femininity and you can choke on it. I AM NOT ASHAMED. I AM SACRED.

—
Staci is a curvy-hipped magic mama and dancing queen living in Des Moines, Iowa. She's passionate about travel, books, tradition keeping and helping people create amazing experiences.
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AT 14 I WAS MOLESTED BY A 17-YEAR-OLD BOY AND WHY THAT MATTERS

By: CrisMarie Campbell

Currently, in the news, Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court confirmation hearing is being impacted by Professor Christine Blasey Ford's allegation that he sexually assaulted her when he was 17 years old. Someone asked, "What's the big deal about a drunken incident when he was 17 years old?"

The question stirred up thoughts of my own story, which, up until this moment, I've never shared. What follows will be graphic. You may or may not want to continue reading.

When I was 14 years old, I was molested by a 17-year-old boy. The experience forever changed my life.

Here's what happened:

It was the summer of 8th grade.

His name was Kurt.

I liked Kurt.

Kurt was 17, going into his senior year.

Kurt was big, tall, and handsome.

Kurt liked me.

I felt special.

It started so innocently. We were spending time together outside when it started to rain. It turned dark. We ran home through the golf

course and stopped under a tree to catch our breath. He leaned down to kiss me. I melted. It was my first kiss - magical and delicious. I was in love. I had my first boyfriend.

A few weeks later, we were hanging out in his parent's basement, which had been turned into a game room. We were dancing and he kissed me again. Then, he leaned back and asked me to do something for him. I didn't understand what he meant.

Without a response, he put his hands on my shoulders and pushed me to kneel in front of him. I was still confused. While I had sat through sex education recently, I had no idea what was going on. We didn't talk about anything like this in class.

That's when he pulled his penis out, which, at eye level, was huge. I had never seen one in real life. I was horrified, and tried to stand. He pressed his two hands on my shoulders and held me down. He grabbed the back of my head and shoved his penis in my mouth. I gagged. I looked up at him, confused. What was happening?! I screamed "Help!" in my head, but the words never passed my lips.

You're probably wondering why I didn't say anything. Or stand up for myself. You're probably wondering why I didn't get up and slap him in the face.

Earlier that year, I sat at the dinner table with my own father. He said something that upset me and I shouted at him to shut up. In an instant, he was up and punching me in the face. It wasn't until my sister pulled him off of me that he stopped. I lay on the floor in my own pee. In that moment, my father taught me never to aggressively set a boundary.

So, no. I didn't say anything to Kurt. I had already learned that lesson.

Kurt grabbed the back of my head with his hands and jackhammered his pelvis into my face, accelerating as he went. It was so aggressive. So violent. So invasive.

I gagged and my eyes stung with tears. I remember thinking, "This can't be happening!"

Salty liquid shot down the back of my throat and I swallowed. Then the jackhammering stopped. Kurt pulled his penis out of my mouth and released his grip on my head. I fell backwards.

I got up on wobbly legs, wiping my face and mouth. I don't remember if I said a word, but I do remember turning and running up the stairs. Past Kurt's brother, Ralph, who was calling him to dinner. I ran all the way home with tears streaming down my face.

I felt so dirty. I felt so much shame. I knew I would never tell anyone about what had happened.
Ever.

These two incidents left me with a felt sense of being an object, an object that exists only to serve men. From that point forward, sex became a one-way transaction of me servicing men. It was a pattern I would repeat for a long time.

I did not tell anyone in my family about the incident until after I was 50 years old. More than 30 years later.

This event, coupled with the previous one in my own home, forever changed me:

I lost my voice.

I lost my ability to say no.

I lost a sense of safety in my own body.

I lost the right to protect myself.

This incident didn't just affect my relationship with men. It affected my relationship with power and anyone who held it. I became invisible, existing only to serve and please others.

It has taken me decades to un-learn this lesson.

You might wonder why I chose to share my story in graphic detail. Why I chose to share it at all.

I share it because it happened to me. It is part of my story. This event dramatically impacted how I responded to men, power, and choice all throughout my life. This event took my voice away, my body away, and my sense of safety away.

By denying it, in all its graphic detail, I would be denying my own reality. I would be denying me.

No longer.

I know I'm not alone. Too many women have their own versions of this story. Too many women don't talk about their story, for fear that it would be too graphic, too difficult for others to hear. Too many women stay silent,

hoping it will all go away.

We say nothing, believing ourselves to be the problem. Believing ourselves to be the ones who are broken.

We are not broken. You are not broken. I am not broken.

We did not ask for it.

We did the best we could.

Now is the time to recover, heal, and prevent it from happening to anyone else.

If I could go back and support my younger self, I would let her know that:

- You DO have a choice.
- You are NOT an object.
- You do have a VOICE.
- You can say NO. (You can also bite the fucker's penis to make him stop.)

To all the Senators who wonder what the "big deal" is about an incident that happened more than 30 years ago, I share my story. To all the pundits who wonder if it is relevant, I share my story. To all of the women who have yet to speak out, I share my story.

It doesn't matter that he was 17. It doesn't matter that it was more than 30 years ago. It doesn't matter that he might not remember the incident.

I remember it. And I bet Dr. Christine Blasey Ford remembers it.

And that matters.

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FINDING MOVEMENT

By: Heather Borkowski

This summer there were an abundance of grey, cloudy, still days here. You know the type... those days when the air is heavy with humidity, nothing is moving, and it feels like the world is stagnant...weighing everything and everyone down. I could feel the energy creeping in to my body. Keeping me stuck, not wanting to move, my creativity seemingly non-existent. I was longing for something to shift...for the gust of wind or ray of sunshine that would stir everything up.

After days sitting with this stuckness, I headed out on a walk and set an intention to notice things that were moving. Sometimes it appears that all is still until we choose to focus on the things that aren't, even if those things are seemingly small. While walking, the wind returned and it filled my lungs with the honey-like calmness of blooming linden flowers. Their scent greeted me even before the trail exited the woods into the field where they were clustered. I watched the branches and leaves move with the wind and the bees go from flower to flower. Continuing on, I followed streams that ran strong with rainwater and noticed how much bigger the spring lambs had grown. Movement. Motion.

Even today without the wind, and a return to grey and drizzled dampness, I am reminded that all is not still. Jackdaws comment from the rooftop, snails crawl up the garden path, a neighbors roof becomes covered with tiles. Sometimes when we feel stuck it isn't about taking big leaps, but about the small shifts in perspective that help to get us moving again.

Here are some simple suggestions to get things moving again in your life if you are feeling stuck...

-**Move your body.** That's right, physical movement. Walking, dancing, running, wiggling...whatever lights you up. 10 minutes. Go!

-**Change your path.** Always drive that same way to work or walk the same route? Mix it up. Drive down a new street, reverse your walking route or try a new one.

-**Set an intention.** By setting an intention of noticing movement or growth or things that flow, either throughout the day or for a shorter period, like on a walk or commute, you open yourself up to noticing things that you would have been unaware of before, and bring concepts into physical reality.

-**Scent journey.** I love how scent allows us to travel, both through time and to other countries. The scent of lemon verbena, reminds me of warm mugs of tea in autumnal Italy, while the smell of Sweet peas take me back to my first farm internship on the Olympic Peninsula. These journeys don't have to be complicated. Some different ways you can explore scent are:
a) Make yourself a cup of herbal tea and allow yourself to breathe in the steam as it is steeping. b) Put a drop of diluted essential oil on your hands and rub them together then allow yourself to breathe in the scent for a minute or two (Rosemary EO is a favorite of mine for this). c) Go for a walk in

the woodland after the rain. Notice the smell of soil, of moist leaves.

-**Seasonal observation.** Find a tree or plant growing near your home to observe. Check in on it every few days or every week. Observe it's lifecycle. How the colour of it's leaves change. What insects are feeding on it's flowers.

-**Moon watch.** Take a few minutes to stand beneath the moon each night. Watch how it waxes and wanes. Notice how it's rising time and location in the sky shifts throughout the seasons.

-**Fire energy.** Bring a bit of warmth into your life. Think of how water responds to winter. When it is cold water is solid, frozen, immobile. Warmth causes it to melt allowing it to flow again. Our bodies are around 60% water, so having a candle glowing on your table or wrapping yourself in a cozy wool sweater may be just enough warmth to allow you to flow again too.

-**Flower Essences.** I love flower essences for the subtle energetic shifts they encourage. A few of my favorites for overcoming stuckness are Garden Pea, Sea Holly, Hazel, and Thistle.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM MY SON'S ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

By: Kelly Beischel PhD, RN, CAPP, CPPC

It was 13 years ago today that:

- My life changed irrevocably, for the better,
- Our family became an impenetrable force,
- I learned bullying paired with perfectionism can be deadly,
- I learned without a doubt that #loveconquersall
- Expressing your love daily can save a life.

It was 13 years ago today that Luke took the shotgun out of his mouth and chose life instead.

Luke,

Thank you for choosing us.

Thank you for changing us.

Thank you for loving us.

Learning, the day after the “incident”, as we call it, that Luke’s love for us and our love for him compelled him to put the gun down and call us was the most important lesson of all. That’s when #loveconquersall became my mantra.

This is **NOT** to say a person doesn’t love his family when he chooses to die by suicide. It means that his pain was so deep that he couldn’t see past it.

I learned many other important lessons from this time in our lives:

- It can be difficult for a person who has failed a test thus feels like a failure to come home and relive his failure by telling his parents he failed. The re-telling of the failing score reinforces the feeling that “I’m a failure.” Perhaps this is why college students have difficulty coming to office hours. It’s easier to pretend it didn’t happen.

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- Know your child's limits – ask him his threshold – what exam score leads him to spiral? And then monitor for scores below his threshold.
 - We all have breaking points. Some people hide their breaking points better than others. Unfortunately, when we hide our breaking points, people can't come forward to help us.
 - Things aren't always as they seem. Keeping tabs on your child's emotional states and how these manifest is clutch. They can be great actors.
 - Hug your child and ask him about his day – every day. Yes, even when it feels like you're wrapping your arms around an unwelcoming porcupine when you hug him.
 - When tragedy, even near tragedy, strikes, talk openly about your feelings – and then process, process, process.
 - Look for the lessons—ask yourself what you're supposed to learn from what life has handed you.
 - When your child talks about stressful issues, ask him what he needs. Is he asking for you to listen while he vents, or does he need help solving the issue? Being a premature e-solvulator isn't helpful to a person who just wants to be heard. Be there to listen.
 - And if two days after your son's suicide attempt, you hit a chipmunk in the road and break down crying while taking your younger son to school, pull off to the side of the road and let it flow. You'll feel better for it.

There are lessons in every situation we experience. Finding these lessons propels us forward.

Luke learned that there is always hope.

What's one lesson you can find in a trying experience? An experience that's distressing, or has you doubting yourself, or even one that's brought you to your knees?

It might be that failing something doesn't mean that you're a failure. Perhaps it means your strategy didn't work, or perhaps you need to use a new strategy. It might be that evaluations are important but eliminating the best two comments, and the two worst comments will give you a truer picture of your performance. It might be that you need to listen to your gut because it was trying to move you in the right direction, but you wouldn't listen.

Latch onto these lessons. Use them as your catalyst for moving forward.

You'll be stronger than you ever knew you could be.

NOTHING IS JUST ONE THING

By **Cindy Carpenter Slattery**

*From my book in progress: *The Hardest Time with the Simplest Things*

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“...Joy comes in the morning (Mourning)”
Psalm 30:5

My husband of 23 years passed away unexpectedly in December 2016. It was two days after Christmas while we were visiting family out of state. I have two college age sons. Enter trauma, grief, and mourning into our lives.

Grief and Mourning are places no one wants to go. Mourning is dark... dark clothes, dark room, dark energy, stuck. I was heartbroken and terrified, but did not want to mourn. I planned the funeral. I got my boys back to college. I went back to work and began the long process of cleaning up and sorting through my husband's estate. I learned many things that I had not known. It was a very painful time...at times it still is.

Toward the end of his life, my husband and I had a complicated and difficult relationship. And, over the years, we also shared many wonderful and happy times. I wanted so much to be able to celebrate his life: to laugh again, telling stories of the good times. I wanted to remember how he lived, not how he died. However, my emotions and mood were consumed by each detail of the day he died, not the joy of how he lived most of the time.

As the days moved along that first year, and as Christmas approached, I saw a flyer for a workshop on Grief and the Holidays. Honestly, I could think of nothing worse. The thought of sad people in a room made my heart ache. However, I was facing our first Christmas as a family of three, followed two days later by the first anniversary of his passing. This was actually worse than anything I thought about a two-hour Grief and the Holidays workshop.



50 | So, I signed up. I was humbled by the strength of others in the room- grieving people simply showing up. We were all scared, facing something we did not want or ask for. But, for those two hours, we faced it together and I felt less alone.

The Holidays came and went, with both tears and laughter. Including the Christmas Tree crashing down after midnight, smashing ornaments and soaking the gifts under the tree – another story. The boys returned to school and there I was, a year later, standing in the same driveway, waving as they drove away...the emptiest feeling. I spent that cold January day on the couch. Grief returned.

I signed up for another grief counseling group, hoping that there was more for me to learn. I found more people who understood what I was feeling and who were willing to hear my story. While our stories were different, we shared the weight of bereavement in common. Listening to the experiences of others, I could feel things starting to shift for me. One evening the concept of mourning came up, and this was read aloud:

“Mourning is the external expression of your grief.”

There it was...Mourning, the place I did not want to go. I could feel myself shutting down. All I could see was the dark. Mourning...was this the only way I could express my grief- the dark space? When I could hear the conversation again, it was like a doorway opened. Everything that I had thought about mourning was being challenged.

If the statement “mourning is the external expression of grief” was true, the dark is only one dimension of mourning. Attending grief counseling could be mourning. Rituals and meaningful traditions, happy memories, and conversations could now be a part of my mourning. Actively remembering how he lived, and not how he died, could feel respectful...as an act of mourning.

Mourning is a part of my life now...there is no way around this. The thought that mourning is the external expression of my grief – in any form-- gives me hope, and the chance to find joy in each day. I have to regularly remind myself of this.

I have found myself feeling lighter, out from under the weight of bereavement, only to receive an unexpected phone call from one of my sons. Instantly, I feel terrified that I am not strong enough or wise enough to handle this. All I could think is that their Dad should be on this call, too. I take a breath and say a prayer. When we finished talking, I felt the heavy mourning, the kind of mourning that can suck me down. But, while sometimes hard to find, I know that there is more than just the dark.

Mourning big enough to include celebrating and honoring my husband’s life in the light with a statue of a Blue Heron (his favorite bird) wearing Mardi Gras beads (his fun side) standing watch on my deck, feels like healing. This kind of mourning gives me permission – the possibility -- to feel happy remembering the good times of the life we shared, without the guilt that often accompanies any joy or happiness. Mourning can include joy. Mourning is not just one thing.

UNTITLED

By Danielle Whims

I’ve always resonated with the saying about “setting your soul on fire” about being in a place of constant excitement and adventure. I resonate with these words because I’m afraid of the mundane. If I stop feeling fire does that mean that I am dead?

What I learned in Hawaii is that I do not want my soul on fire, I do not want the sharp burn of adventure just to have the flame die out and be left with the feeling of starvation in my core. No. What I want is to set my soul to the ocean; I want to ebb and flow, I want to experience excitement in waves where I am tossed about in equal amounts of joy and fear. The ocean has calm, it has thrill and it has Beauty; the waters are strong and steady and in a moment unpredictable and dangerous.

I want my soul to be the ocean, where after every storm there is peace where I will come to a place of Happiness. Where I can trust nothing is mundane and I will not be left with a hunger for more because there is also beauty in Stillness.

ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE

Dig Deep: The Magazine is a collection of pieces written by amazing students from the Dig Deep writing class.

Dig Deep is an online class on how to release perfectionism, stop procrastinating, start writing, tell powerful true stories, and build confidence in your writing style and voice.

Learn more about the class: shyatt.com/dig-deep

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ABOUT SUSAN & ALEXANDRA

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They've been friends and colleagues for seven years. They hope you will write your book, your blog, your essay, your poem, your song, whatever you're yearning to create. Be brave and make it happen. You only get one life, so...

GO MAKE SOME ART.

Learn more about Susan's work: shyatt.com

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