



CURATED BY ANNA LINDER

The
BOOK
of
EMOTIONS
Or – how it feels to feel

ABIGAIL TAMSI • AIMEE DUFRESNE • AMY BARFIELD MARTIN • BRETTON KEATING
CASHA DOEMLAND • HEIDI PRAHL • KASIA LINDAHL • KRISTINA JOHNSON
LYSA BLACK • MARTIN FERDINANDS • MOUNA BOUSLOUK • PATRICIA L. ATCHISON
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ANNA LINDER, EDITOR & GRAPHIC DESIGNER

RACKEBY SKOGSRO, 531 98 LIDKÖPING, SWEDEN

ANNALINDER.COM

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -*

*And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -*

*I’ve heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.*

EMILY DICKINSON

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A heart project and the invitation

Sometimes we shut down, turn off our emotions. It might be our way to make it through. Our way to stay sane and keep some parts of ourselves safe.

Almost everybody do it, but some of us have felt the need to tune out for long periods, months or even years.

For me, it became years. The chaos around and within me was too complex to cope with. Without really noticing I pushed my feelings down and away and emotion after emotion was shut off.

And then the day came when I felt safe and secure enough to want to smile and I noticed that I lost the ability to freely feel.

HOW IT FEELS TO FEEL

This book on emotions and feelings was created as a guide to everybody and anybody who has shut down or lost their internal navigation system in life.

It opens the door to explore one emotion at a time. Using my craft – graphic art and book design, I opened the invitation to heart leaders,

highly sensitives, empaths and survivors that felt called to write and contribute their perspective on an emotion.

There are a lot of amazing books on life journeys, healing from trauma and surviving. Being a highly sensitive person and empath myself, I get deeply engaged and sometimes lost in stories. The Book of Emotions works as a guide back to self. It's not about the how and why we lose our feelings, it's a way to make it easier to relearn, re-connect and recognize our feelings.

My wish is to navigate my life with more ease through identifying these feelings and learning more from them. I must admit, I am still learning.

My hope is that this book offers you the freedom to feel and empowers you to navigate your own life with more ease, giving you greater knowledge and support on your journey.

If you want to learn more about the project and the book you will find all information on the website: [Book of Emotions](http://BookofEmotions)



ANNA LINDER is a Swedish graphic artist supporting heart leaders and soulful women to craft beautiful brands and books that align their vision and story. The Book of Emotions is her heart project. Website: annalinder.com

ANGER

Hello Anger. How Can I Help You?

AIMEE DUFRESNE

It raged like wildfire, unexpected across my chest, from right to left. A searing sensation I had not ever before experienced. As it raged to exit, it took my breath along with it.

We were filming a series of videos for my healthy eating coaching business. My hands had been plagued with an extreme case of eczema for the last month. I would wake up in the middle of the night to find myself scratching away at my skin, blood seeping out of dry, scaly and painful cracks. Trying all types of creams, lotions and products claiming to be magic potions proved ineffective. Everything from purely organic to completely synthetic and everything in between was applied to no avail.

Grateful it was contained to my hands, I made a request to the cameraman (who also happened to be my husband) to not film my hands directly and focus more on the food. After a few takes, he showed me the shots. Hands. Hands. And more hands. So many close-ups on what I had specifically asked him to avoid.

That's when it happened. As if someone had lit a match and dropped it in a trail of gasoline. It left me hunched over, gasping for air.

Tingling remained where the flames had passed through, tiny embers

still ignited. In the bathroom, I raised my shirt to reveal a bright red welt running the length of my chest.

Visits to doctors, allergists and naturopaths brought no conclusive diagnosis, nor treatment option.

No one knew how much anger I had stuffed down inside me. Not even me. So much that it had reached boiling point and was now bursting through my being.

Stuffing down my anger started innocently enough. Expressing anger as a child was overridden by my need to be liked, living up to my reputation as a 'good girl'. Good girls didn't get angry.

That need to be liked matured into an obsession as I got older.

The day after losing a great love of my life in an accident, a relative came up to me to say how they were scared they would lose their husband one day. *I can't help you with your fear*, I replied. *Not while I'm living the reality myself.*

I was angry. Very angry.

So very angry I expressed my anger at the interaction with a friend. *Give them a break. No one knows what to say, and we're all grieving in our own way.* No acknowledgment or validation of my anger. Still, it continued to simmer under the surface.

And I continued to see things through the eyes of others, completely ignoring myself, believing my views invalid and doing my best to answer questions with what whoever was asking actually wanted to hear, silencing my inner self. Until that day she screamed so loudly to be let out, it left a bright red welt across my body.

Anger had seared its way out of me. I was terrified it would overtake me.

But all Anger wanted was exactly what I wanted: Acknowledgement. Hey, I'm here, don't ignore me! I have something to say! I'm important too.

So now I give Anger the acknowledgment it wants. I know the Anger

Anger comes to remind me of my dreams and intentions when I've lost my way. Anger is a compass leading me back on my path and purpose.

isn't me, it's just a visitor that has shown up to give me a message. Rather than shoving it down, cramming up the space of my inner being, ignoring it until it shouts, or flicking it away with positive affirmations that don't feel true, I get curious. I sit down with it. *How can I help you? What do you need?* Listening intently to hear what Anger has to say.

Anger asks for different things. Sometimes it's a warm bath, a moment of silence, or a deep breath. Anger comes to remind me of my dreams and intentions when I've lost my way. Anger is a compass leading me back on my path and purpose.

My soul yearned to write, but the lifestyle I had created didn't allow me the time. Healthy eating was a big part of my life, but it was not my purpose. Writing, on the other hand, was soul-enriching. Anger came to deliver the message and reminder to get back on track.

Running a business where I was constantly in the kitchen making food was making my hands worse. A forced break from food prep and constant hand washing was in order. With more time on my hands, I finally gave myself the time and space to write.

Once I began writing, the itch in my hands began to subside. The redness calmed. The cracks healed. The dry scaly parts disappeared.

Anger's message was heard and adhered to, and thus, Anger left.

The next time Anger comes to visit you, take time to acknowledge it. Sit with it. Listen to the message it has come to bring you. Learn from it. Adjust your compass. And thank Anger as it leaves you more of who you are and closer to all you are meant to be.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*.
Website: aimeedufresne.com.





WHAT'S THE COLOR OF ANGER?

*Anger has no color, it's
translucent and feels bland.*

EMMA

*Anger is dark vibrant burgundy
or an ignoring white. It can
also be a sharp furious hard to
place yellow.*

ANNA

*Red!
Like an exploding volcano.*

KARINA

*Anger is white at the center
and intensifies through yellow,
orange ending in a red edge.*

LOTTA

*Anger is a rolled up black
tangled furry ball!*

SUSANNA

*Fiery red! Blood red.
From a deep earthen space!*

ISABELLE

*The color of anger
pulsates and changes..*

MARIA

Anger

TRACY STAMPER

Anger has been vilified, and he's rather angry about it.

The only ones who have reason to be scared of Anger are those who haven't dared to look him in the eye. Anger shows up as an ally. Only when he is ignored does he call on Rage for backup. Anger comes as a protector. He takes his job quite seriously, and won't leave until satiated.

Anger is action; energy in action on a mission. Anger arrives to tell us that something is amiss. Anger sets us on guard, activating alertness, raising hackles and preparing us to defend our sacred selves from danger. He curls his fingers into fists of force. Knuckles. Angles. Elbows. Kicks. Jabs. Sharp bursts. Action. He grips jaws into a clench, catching breath as the body prepares for fight or flight. And Anger wants to fight. Lava churns, and turns into screaming, guttural vocalizations and talk drenched in vitriol.

This is how you know that Anger has shown up for you.

To show up for Anger means to feel him. See him. Dare to look him in the eye. Honor his divine masculine warrior self.

Anger's purpose is divine protection. The words 'divine' and 'anger' aren't typically found arm-in-arm. Not seeing Anger's divine purpose is

My body's wisdom says that acknowledging and learning from Anger is the only way to authentically show up in the world with kindness for self and others.

how he was vilified in the first place. Fear puts blinders on our eyes and a spoke in the wheel of the flow of emotions. Judging Anger as bad, unwelcome or undesirable leaves Anger no choice but to get bigger and louder and call on his bodyguard Rage. The only 'bad' emotions are those that aren't acknowledged or expressed consciously. Welcoming Anger as our wise guide and teacher opens the portal to accessing so much more of our sacred selves.

Having bought into Fear's fearmongering, I used to want to reason my way out of Anger. I misunderstood and judged him, believing him to be a dangerous stranger hell-bent on doing me and / or others harm. I didn't trust him, and I didn't trust myself in his company. I wished him away when I wasn't busy denying he was there. I had swallowed Fear's lies that Anger wasn't welcome or appropriate or polite. 'Polite society' says that Anger is not acceptable, especially for girls and women. My body's wisdom says that acknowledging and learning from Anger is the only way to authentically show up in the world with kindness for self and others.

Give me the truth of kindness over the phoniness of politeness any day. Expressed Anger guides. Stuffed Anger implodes.

Body wisdom says that what is unwelcome is stifling the expression of Anger by sweeping him under the rug. There, hidden from view and denied the TLC he is begging for, he festers and becomes prey to Rage's unpredictable ways. Rage is caustic, red hot and feisty with an unforgiving smoldering that lights the rug on fire. And when those flames creeping up through the carpet are ignored? Rage burns the house down like a wild-fire that won't be contained, leaving the scene pummeled. Rage abhors being ignored. It's far better to befriend Anger as soon as he knocks on the door, before he calls for backup.

Ignoring Anger until he erupts into a destructive dance of Rage is where the problem lies.

Allowing Anger to consciously move through us is how we rise.

Give Anger space and permission to move through you. This is your relationship with Anger, no one else's. Regardless of the cause of the Anger or the reason that he showed up in the first place, he showed up solely for your benefit. Carve out time for just you and Anger. This is how to keep Anger's expression conscious and safe. Let him in. Let his heightened pulse throb down into the tips of your fingers. Feel him beat inside your ribcage. Don't keep him caged. Scream. Blow off steam. Turn on some music with a driving beat and build up heat. Kick. Punch. Yell. Dance mad. Stomp. Pound on a mattress. Grimace, growl, scowl and

*Let Anger's heightened pulse
throb down into the tips of your
fingers. Feel him beat inside your
ribcage. Don't keep him caged.*

snarl. Move the emotion's energy through you until Anger's angst begins to unfurl its fingers and release its grip. And then... then it's time to listen and learn.

When Anger arises, ask him...

Why are you here?

Why do you feel a need to protect me?

How can you serve me?

How can I serve you?

How can I safely and appropriately express you for the highest good of all?

What boundaries do I need to draw to protect myself?

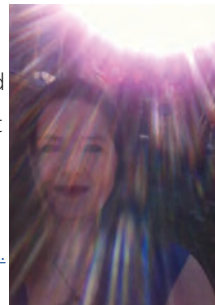
How can I bring water to the embers rather than fuel to the flame?

Anger, how can we dance our way through this together?

Here. Take my hand. Let's dance. I trust you. I will follow your lead.

Eye to eye, with palm to palm in front of your grateful heart, welcome Anger's wisdom and thank him for the sacred service and divine dance.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

How do *you* express anger? Where do *you* feel it in your body? How do you sense someone else's anger?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about anger.

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FREEDOM

Chasing Birds

BRETTON KEATING

I've been struggling to write about freedom.

Writing of it feels, in many regards, the opposite of freeing.

True freedom is something I've only caught a glimpse of a handful of times. In my experience, it sneaks up when we aren't looking. And then just as soon as we notice it there, it's gone.

Freedom comes the thousandth time we try to meditate or when we unintentionally fall in love. Out between who I think I am and whomever I think the world wants me to be, there is a momentary lightness of being. This, in essence, is freedom.

How do we find freedom, elusive bird that she is? She is found in the most contradictory of ways.

I met a man once who said to me, "You will find yourself in a box."

I found the idea interesting, from a distance. At the time, it was not immediately apparent that it was myself I was looking for. But now I believe differently; I think we're on a constant quest for our true selves here. It's a never-ending process of discovery.

When we met, I was looking for a yoga teacher. I had been practicing for over a decade, and my then-current approach to practice largely

entailed doing whatever I felt in my body on a given day. I wanted to be free to move however I wanted to, and so I bounced between teachers and styles according to my schedule and preferences. Any and everyone became a teacher for me.

This man saw through what I appeared to be chasing, to what I was truly seeking. On the outside, we appear to be seeking freedom. We reject whatever it is that feels constricting, only to then wind up more bound than ever. We're bound by our desire for freedom, which we can never, truly, be rid of, until we stop letting it run our lives and make our decisions for us. There is no freedom on the path of relentlessly chasing liberation. In the pursuit, we become bound by our perception of what freedom is and means. We choose only that which will leave us open ended, which is really no choice at all.

In yoga practice we explore the concept of binding. The physical bind appears in certain postures in the form of catching parts of the body, often with the hands. Doing so has purposes unique to each individual posture, but one thread between them is that it creates a closed circuit through which energy can move.

I've heard it said, "Allow the bind to liberate you." The paradox of this notion struck me. Binds don't always feel liberating when you're in them. In my experience, they can feel quite the opposite.

So how does liberation come from a bind, either physical or mental or otherwise? I believe it has to do with that closed circuit, and the movement of energy within. It cannot be forced. The element of surrender to whatever's happening and allowing the energy to flow is absolutely essential. And then, with surrender, eventually, an opening happens. Normally the physical body mirrors our emotional and mental state. There are no fine lines or borders when it comes to the human being. Each of us exists as one connected entity: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. When we understand this, we can experience something like a deep release in the

*We humans are incredibly complex,
so we're always finding ourselves
"stuck" in something. And then
we break free of whatever that
something was, only to find ourselves
knee-deep in something else.*

hip, and comprehend that it directly correlates to the emotional breakthrough we happen to be undergoing at the same time. We can break down crying and embrace the tears as a sign that something that needs to go is being released from our story. We are ready to move on.

And in that movement of energy, we find that eventually we stop thinking so damn much and we start to simply be. Until we think about the being and it becomes an analyzed state yet again.

The snippet of time without analysis—for me, that is freedom.

Considering binds as an external construct for creating freedom, I believe that what the man said to me is accurate. Finding ourselves equates freedom. So freedom comes in a box.

A friend of mine pointed out that for evidence of this we can turn to nature. Everything in nature is designed with precise mathematical intricacy. Within the exactness of form and structure, creation happens. We

humans, as part of that very nature, are no different. Everything, when broken down, is composed of fractals, our selves included.

I believe we turn to boxes as forms in which we can understand our true nature and our place in the world. If we see no immediate, external box, we will usually create one with our minds. We humans are incredibly complex, so we're always finding ourselves "stuck" in something. And then we break free of whatever that something was, only to find ourselves knee-deep in something else. But when we can feel free despite the something, we can live with the many something's we encounter, which ultimately equates living with our selves, in our current state or form. And in the living with ourselves, just as we are, we experience lightness of being.

The feeling of true freedom in lightness of being initially came to me the first time I fell in love.

With him, it wasn't so much a falling, as a slow and steady, internal growing. I initially resisted the relationship. I wasn't interested. I didn't want to be "tied down" by him.

But then life happened and I found myself in the relationship, and

*We do not find freedom chasing
after possibility. We find it through
commitment. Through facing
ourselves, as we are.*

when I realized I loved him, we were cycling along the boardwalk of a white-sand beach in the United States. Dusk was twinkling a blanketed arrival, with the fiery ball of a Southern sun having made her decent over the bay on the opposite shore. We were shouting all kinds of crazy-weird things, no care in mind who heard or what anyone else thought. Wrapped in the bubble of a world of our own, I couldn't feel my legs pedaling. My entire body became light. This ability to be, freely, myself, with another person, was something I knew I had experienced before, but not for many years, since childhood, most likely.

In this glimpse of time, words didn't matter, nor did his reciprocity of the notion. Sure, I wanted him to say it, because, like other people, I have attachment to the cold comfort of words. But there are infinity ways to communicate and my heart felt something deeper, and so I didn't feel the need to express any of this. I was fully comfortable in just being. For the first time, certainly in my adult life, but possibly ever.

For me, this is the essence of freedom: fully comfortable in just being. Exactly as we are, with no need to alter or change a thing.

And I would never have found this feeling without some kind of constraint or structure. Within the binds of our relationship, I found freedom.

We do not find freedom chasing after possibility. We find it through commitment. Through facing ourselves, as we are. Through making a choice, and sticking with it. Through the binds that tie us.

I used to think the color of freedom was white. A blank canvas, an empty slate of full potential.

But now I feel differently. White isn't open-ended. White carries a full body of its own.

To me, freedom is the color of the ocean. To one person, it may appear blue, to another green, or purple, or even black, but in reality it's a reflection. It's true color is clear.

Because only when we are able to look at ourselves, honestly and truly,

can we find freedom. And from there, we have the ability to endlessly create, utilizing the fractal forms that we see.

Freedom happens when you can feel free despite being stuck with yourself, in human form, and all the beautiful intricacy and messiness that entails.

Freedom is chasing after birds you know you will never catch, and being okay with that. The chase is what you're after, anyway. Not the birds.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).



Freedom

TRACY STAMPER

Freedom has wings and lands in the chest. She befriends, melts into and melds with the heart. She sprouts wings that grow the heart deeper, wider, higher.

To make room for this winged one perched in the heart space, we must expand. Expansion is a telltale sign that Freedom has arrived. Breath expands, creating more room. Like blinds on a window, our ribcage opens up to let in more sunlight and fresh air, and to give Freedom's wings space in which to unfurl.

When made visible, Freedom is a gorgeous, captivating display of streaming light, always moving. Freedom's light show radiates from the center out in rays of clear, bright white light. Sometimes, when the rays catch and reflect the light of the sun, moon and stars, they take on the yellow color of sunshine, moon rays and starlight. Freedom's light sparkles, at times with starburst glints of purple and aqua.

As Freedom's wings first begin to flutter, they can be sensed as tingles, tickles, sparkles, goosebumps, and an uplifted heart soaring. Happy dances, smiles, euphoria and jumping for joy often accompany Freedom's arrival. A sure sign that Freedom has landed is the sensation of our heart

rising. Suddenly, our breath becomes fuller than we can remember since Freedom last left the premises.

Our breath is always a potent barometer of our emotional landscape, moving in different ways when we experience different nuances of emotions. The emotion of Freedom can be sensed quite differently, depending on how she finds us. Freedom can flow towards us from upstream of the emotional river, or we can work our way towards her from downstream. When she flows towards us from upstream, all we have to do is sense the crystal clear water flowing our way. These are the times when uplifting news arrives or opportunity finds us. Imagine receiving the phone call that you got the dream job that allows you to leave a job that is soul-stifling. Imagine the moment of realizing that you are holding a winning lottery ticket that will pay off all your bank notes and still leave you with abundantly ample resources. This Freedom flowing from upstream is the happy dancing Freedom. This is the Freedom that wants to celebrate with fireworks and jumping for joy. She is action-oriented. The thrust of energy is upward. The upper lungs feel as though they have been infused with helium.

When we have to push the river from downstream in order to achieve Freedom, however, the sensation can be different. Imagine having been in a place of angst for weeks while awaiting results of a serious medical test, then receiving the phone call affirming your health. Imagine waiting days to get word that a loved one who was in a natural disaster is found safe and sound. This is Freedom that had to be fought for or earned through the effort of pushing the river from downstream. When we finally arrive into Freedom from downstream, the lower belly floods with breath which then rises up into the upper lungs. Shoulders drop at the same time that the heart lifts. A burst of relief floats up and is then sometimes released through tears trickling down. Our spirit may wish to jump up, but our body suddenly longs to sit or lie down, understanding fully for the first

*Once her wings have unfurled and
fully breathed us, she energetically
expands into invisible but felt wings
wrapping around the body in
stillness, coaxing the body into the
rhythmic pulse of life's cycle of
expansion and release.*

time how much effort has been expended only once the effort is finally over. The energetic pattern is upward, downward and radial, as breath expands 360 degrees.

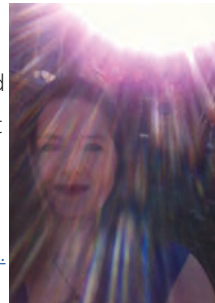
Regardless of the flavor of Freedom, and whether she arrives from upstream with glee or from downstream with relief, she resides in the heart. This is fitting, as whenever Freedom shows up, we are entering into a new relationship with Self. The wings of Freedom move from within to create more room. The movement fans us from within to open up the spaciousness of new energy. Within this open crystalline space is an invitation for a blossoming relationship with Self. There is more room for breath, and whenever our breath deepens, we create more room for inspiration. Freedom helps us breathe our way into heightened creativity. As she flows into us, breath flows through us.

The longer Freedom stays, the more relaxed her signature becomes. Once her wings have unfurled and fully breathed us, she energetically expands into invisible but felt wings wrapping around the body in still-

ness, coaxing the body into the rhythmic pulse of life's cycle of expansion and release. After the initial rush felt when Freedom first lands, her lingering presence is sensed as openness. Spaciousness. Alignment with the truth of who we are and what we want. Relaxed Freedom is sensed as a vertical alignment rooted in the secure foundation of standing in one's truth, presence and power. She takes deep, full breaths, resting in muscles and joints as a sensation of ease that can give way to play at a moment's notice. She is joyous comfort felt deep down on a cellular level. Freedom delights in seeing your vitality grow.

Freedom is sometimes an unexpected yet always welcome guest. She enjoys showing up unannounced and throwing wide open all of the windows and doors. She gives no clue as to how long she plans to stay. The only thing to do when she walks in is to celebrate her arrival, let her know how thankful you are for her presence, and deeply breathe her fresh, nourishing air.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)





WERE IN THE BODY DOES FREEDOM LIVE?

*In the belly, allowing the belly
to billow freely, without any
restrictions.*

SUSANNA

In the soul.

NIINA

*My lungs - breathing deeply.
The front of my lungs feeling
the freedom in my heart, the
back of my lungs with a
feeling like wings spreading
out on each exhale.*

JACKIE

*It lives in your chest and
you feel it in the breath.*

MAYA

*In the solar plexus, sometimes
the heart.*

KARINA

In the eyes.

ANNA

Freedom

AIMEE DUFRESNE

Freedom...

The open road before you... whether you be in your bare feet, running in sneakers, rolling along on a bike or racing in a car.

Sinking your feet in the sand as the tide nips at your toes. The blue of the ocean. The gentle roll and crash of waves washing over you.

Swinging on a hammock in a back yard, a balcony or a tropical island. Your nostrils taking in the smell of the sea or the sweetness of freshly cut grass.

Reading a good book, one where you become a part of the adventure, the vivid colors become you. The magic of the story shifts and shapes your perspective, opening up for more.

Listening to an inspiring story, in which you glimpse the hero or heroine that lies within yourself. That seed of freedom planted.

A breath of fresh air, filling your lungs, igniting your cells, enlightening your being.

Painting, sculpting, writing. Creating worlds within to be seen in the world without – for which it is without no longer.

Dancing, your body in rhythm with the beat. Feeling the movement

flush out all that is not freedom, until you are one with freedom.

Laughter with a friend. The freedom of truth told between two souls, heard, felt, and held sacred.

Silence with yourself. Being over doing. Shutting out the noise outside and hearing, perhaps for the very first time, the wise voice within.

Meditation. Mantras repeated. Making space for more. More Freedom.

Hearing the call of your heart, and heeding its desires.

Love. Love of others. And, most freeing, the love of self, no longer needing and feeding off the opinions of other people. The deep knowing you are enough. Just as you are. Right. Now.

Now. Where freedom lies yet often hides from souls who desperately seek it. A perpetual game of cat and mouse. Sucking freedom from cells when frantically they race to find it in the future, or recue and rekindle it

Love. Love of others.

*And, most freeing, the love of self,
no longer needing and feeding off
the opinions of other people.*

The deep knowing you are enough.

Just as you are.

Right.

Now.

from the past. Forever missing where freedom lies...in the colors of the rainbow, the expansive blue skies. The soft earth beneath the feet. The fresh air that fills the lungs. The fire that burns in the belly and churns out the creative work you see in the world. Outside, you are searching too far for freedom my friend. Come back, come back. It's time to come in and play.

For freedom is not a fight. Freedom is ease.

Freedom is not beyond the challenge or the struggle, freedom is within it.

Freedom surrounds you yet you still feel bound, aching to be free.

Freedom is within you, but the door is closed and you keep walking right past it.

Come back, come back, the door is open. Always.

When you tire of the struggle, the pain and anguish the world has given you, the fears it has infected you with, you will be ready to come back.

You will see the door you never saw before, slightly ajar, gently inviting you to step forth and through.

Then, and only then, will you experience the sweet taste, beautiful sounds, and the floating feeling that is freedom.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

How does freedom feel for *you*? Where do *you* feel it in your body? What color do *you* associate with freedom?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about freedom.

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SUPPORT

Support... A Hand in Need

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON

Support... the word itself has a strong, clipped edge to it. Support by way of encouragement, or someone to lean on, comes to a person in many different ways, and for almost anything pertaining to a person's life.

You see physical support everywhere. A walking stick, cane, walker, and wheelchair are all personal means of support. There is also assistance from another when a hand or arm, or physical strength is offered. One example which touched me most was at a funeral. My Dad, Mom, family, and friends stood together at the gravesite of my sister-in-law's father. Her Mom, Maria stood close to the casket as it was lowered into the ground. The mourners each took their turn and time to pass by the open gravesite and to toss handfuls of bright red rose petals inside the area. Maria was left standing on her own, her body quaking with grief, leaning to one side ready to collapse. My Dad immediately moved to her side and placed a strong palm under her elbow to support her twisted body. She leaned onto the strength of my Dad's hand with an audible sigh. The scene continues to replay in my mind as the perfect example of physical support.

If not for a strong hand to hold individuals up at times when we want to crumble, our world would indeed suffer. Maria was ready to fall down

with grief, her body losing the strength to stand upright. Similar to a barn whose luster died years ago, and a gust of wind has almost collapsed it, except for the one beam that still stands strong carrying the weight of the complete structure against it. That is what support feels like to me. It's an encompassing strength which rises from deep within when we have the courage to support ourselves. If all is lost, and that internal strength is nowhere to be found, when we feel ourselves collapsing with pain, then we can accept external support from others to help stop us from falling.

Support comes both internally and externally. The feelings I have when supported differ depending what I seek. A person can receive aid on various levels and from many different people in their lives. A child or teenager's needs may differ from the types of support that an adult seeks. It all depends on the situation and who is offering assistance.

I've been my own best friend all my life. My experiences have taught me that the biggest supporter is myself. I am not saying this is good or bad, just that it works for me. My spiritual path has led me to believe in myself. Support rises from deep within me from my spirituality as a strength. I feel like I will be okay. It will all work out. I can do this. Like the single beam holding up the collapsed barn structure, I find that beam within myself and the feeling of strength rises, supporting my intentions. My body senses this and it too provides the strength I need.

Support from another is a gift. It can be the single stimulus that moves us forward. Besides help during periods of tragedy or grief, approval can come from others in regards to an idea, event, a business proposal, team

It's an encompassing strength which rises from deep within when we have the courage to support ourselves.

comradery, donation, patronage, sponsorship, and even by way of friendship. When another offers me support in my life happenings, it gives me the confidence to move forward. I might even feel euphoric, that I can do 'it'.

No matter how support is received, it brings great light with it. I think of the help as (and forgive my clichés) 'light at the end of the tunnel', 'finding the end of the rainbow'. When support fills and surround us, it creates comfort and light in addition to strength. The struggle or burden we face diminishes, even if only for a short time. It's like falling in the deep end of the pool. You can't catch a breath or you will drown. You struggle to make your way to the top. If you can't find the internal strength, you could simply give up and let yourself go, floating amid the waters of despair. Suddenly though someone is there, hauling you out of the oxygen depleting pool, urging you to take a breath, pulling you from the depths, helping you succeed in whatever it is that you are struggling with. Supporting as needed during a particular incident.

Support is the color of light. It is also love, because behind every intention of help is the feeling of giving. One can't honestly give to someone else if there isn't some positive feeling there. Without compassion, I would find it nearly impossible to show support to someone if I didn't care in some way, no matter how large or small. When we receive aid, we feel the generous love and light it is given with. On the receiving side, it too elicits feelings of love, light and joy. Support is strength, no matter whether receiving or giving. My body always becomes stronger when I feel supported. I think I even stand taller, allowing courage to fill my posture, leaving me with a 'can do' attitude.

I can't end this passage without talking about the support that you want from others, perhaps need from others, but you aren't sure if it's right to ask for depending on the circumstance. Support for a dishonest situation leaves you feeling euphoric initially, but then disillusion seeps in because you know the encouragement shouldn't have been given in the first place.

Could the feelings that support elicits also be ego-driven? What if I came up with a really great idea? I'm feeling pretty cheeky – that this is the best thing yet! Depending on how my previous ideas have been accepted, I feel proud to share with another. An example is the idea to start a small venture. I talk about it with a partner or family member. If my idea is accepted with approval and comradery, my chest expands and I feel elated. Yes! I've got this. Ego takes off thinking of all the positive outcomes that will be generated by the idea. I just needed a bit of support to validate everything. Eventually it becomes tangible, a goal to strive for. Ego feels in this moment that she has succeeded in creating a great plan. Not all ideas are ego-centered. We could look at why we are seeking support. Is it for validation, or because we really need it to move forward.

Support encompasses so many facets of life and living. I thrive on it, I need it to bolster me, to give me courage, to prop me up in the bad times, to help me soar in the good times. Something as simple as a smile can be supportive in a time of need. My internal beam keeps my body structure strong and supported. My external support comes from loved ones, friends, acquaintances and community, and even from a stranger offering a hand when I need it. Clutching that hand, or leaning into that palm is the strongest support there is. It touches our hearts, strikes a match and allows the light to glow, giving courage and joy to all parties involved. *Support...*

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON shares a love of writing, dancing Nia (Holistic Fitness), and making doll and teddy bear creations. Her children's books, Little Blue Penguin and McKenzie's Frosty Surprise have delighted many youngsters. She blogs and thinks of new books to write while living passionately. Website: patriciaatchison.ca



Support

AMY BARFIELD MARTIN

Pain has a way of making one very uncomfortable. It often shows up in my body via an achy low back and tight hips. I hate how pain can show up out of nowhere and last for what seems forever. Sometimes a steamy hot shower or a couple of Tylenol are enough to save the day. Then there are those days where all I can do is cry for some much-needed relief.

“Seriously, stop with this already! Why can’t you leave me alone? Why must you be so needy?”

For awhile now I have been wishing my pain would magically go away. Persistent, unwavering, my body refused to give into my whiny demands. It was desperately crying out for some much-needed love and support.

“Alright! I give up! Tell me what it is you want. I can’t take this anymore.”

Gentle movement, deep breaths, chakra speak.

I manage to push myself away from my keyboard. Slip into soft yoga pants, roll out my mat, and melt onto the floor.

While on all fours, I begin to rock my hips. Moving forward, back, circling left and right, prying loose the knots that have been trying their damndest to strangle me.

Remember to breathe. *Inhale, Exhale, Release. Observe, Sense, Be.*

The pelvis and hips are the home of the second chakra, Svadhisthana, which is closely associated with one's emotions and creativity. An imbalance in this chakra may show up as a feeling of insecurity and a lack of self-confidence. Creativity is our birthright, and pain in the second chakra area may indicate we are blocking its natural flow.

I roll over onto my back and draw my knees in towards my chest, then slowly proceed to lower their weight from side to side. After a few repetitions, I return my knees to center, content to lie there in stillness. As I sink deeper into silence, anxiety soon engulfs me. Feeling overwhelmed, I roll onto my side in an attempt to distance myself from its intensity.

I find myself wanting to cocoon and longing to hide. While simultaneously aching for a reassuring hug of nurturing love and support.

"Oh God, how I hate this. Make it go away. What do you want from me!"

I want you to listen. I want you to hear what I have been trying to tell you. I want you to stop trying to silence the flow of your creativity.

All creativity begins with desire, the wanting to experience something come to fruition. At the root of it, creativity is nothing but choice. I feel our lives are greatly influenced by choice. Choices in what we want, choices in what we do, along with choosing what we believe.

A memory from when I was around 4 years old surfaces. I am desperately wanting to tell my mom something. I remember fervently patting my hand against her arm trying to get her attention. I remember her turning her head toward me and screaming "What!" I remember being so utterly shocked and horrified at her reaction.

The adult me can look back at that moment and see my mom was having a bad day. The wise grownup in me knows not to take outbursts personally. The sensitive little girl in me though hadn't yet developed this skill and her world was shattered that day.

*I draw my little one into my arms
and lie there with her. I offer my
support through attentive listening,
while she shares everything she wasn't
able to back then. Eventually, our
bodies soften and rhythmic
breathing returns. I feel a warm
golden energy flow from my heart
and into my lower back and pelvis.*

In that moment my little girl determined it wasn't safe to want for anything. She wasn't sure who she could rely upon. She felt it wasn't safe to trust she had the support of others in getting her wants and desires met.

I roll over onto my stomach and assume a protective posture.

“Wow, little one. I am so sorry. I am so, so, sorry that happened to you. Know I hear you and that you are safe. Please know that moment cannot hurt you now.”

I draw my little one into my arms and lie there with her. I offer my support through attentive listening, while she shares everything she wasn't able to back then. Eventually, our bodies soften and rhythmic breathing

returns. I feel a warm golden energy flow from my heart and into my lower back and pelvis.

Another memory from my childhood comes flowing to me. A memory where my mom is saying “*Corkers can do anything*”. I was her little Corker and she did her best to be supportive of me.

I find the contrast of these two memories interesting. “It isn’t safe to want” & “You can do anything”. It is no wonder I have many times found myself engaging in people pleasing behavior in an attempt to be receiving of their love, while at the same time doing everything I could to avoid the possibility of causing them disappointment. If by some chance a deep seated want or desire of my own did manage to make itself known, I was great at dismissing it. I would do this by telling myself it was unimportant and insignificant or what I want didn’t matter.

Though one deep desire from childhood never left me. This was the desire to have a romantic and deeply committed relationship. I am happy

I have come to realize what our dreams need most is to have our own love and support behind them. They need us choose, to commit, to believe. Without this, they can never come to be.

to say I have been married to my deeply devoted husband for almost nine years now. His unwavering love and support have greatly contributed to who I am today.

Yes, I was great at dreaming my ideal love relationship into being. I made it my life goal and I poured a countless amount of time and energy into making it happen. Sadly, though, I never gave myself full permission to dream big in other areas of my life, such as money, career, and creative endeavors. So many times I have found myself stuck, unwilling to move, fearful of making the wrong choice or some huge mistake.

Fortunately, I have come to realize what our dreams need most is to have our own love and support behind them. They need us choose, to commit, to believe. Without this, they can never come to be.

As I rise to my feet, I realize here was my opportunity to choose differently. I could choose to be fully supportive of myself by committing to getting clear on exactly what my deepest heartfelt wants and desires were in all areas of my life. I owe that much to both myself and my little girl. I could choose to believe the universe was 100 percent supportive in helping me make my dreams happen. Plus I could choose to rest in the safety of knowing its love would always be there to catch me.

So what about you? Is your body trying to tell you something that goes deeper than physical pain? I sense the pain in my back was symptomatic of my not being willing to trust that life supports me. While the pain in my hips was indicative of my unwillingness to move forward with allowing my creativity its full expression.

Are you willing to listen to your little one? Are you willing to let yourself dream? Do you believe? Are you ready to be the receiver of your own creation?

Please, please, please say “yes!” I am not saying it will always be easy. Sometimes we may need to let go and get down on our knees. Sometimes it may mean gathering the courage to rise and to greet the choice that

stands before you. It may require us to be present with any so-called messy emotions and to be willing to really listen to whatever they have to say.

Know the universe so loves and supports you, no matter what happens on any given day. Plus know it will always have your back, every step of the way.

AMY BARFIELD MARTIN is a dream seeker and truth creator, residing in the St. Louis area. She inspires others to live life on their terms through honoring and listening to the voice of body sensation, along with allowing the uncensored flow of one's true desires. Let's illuminate your heart's magic.
Website: amybarfieldmartin.com



Support

KRISTINA JOHNSON

I once read in a college psychology book that no matter what type of dysfunction or despair a child must go through in their life, if there can be found one person who can provide support, offer love and guidance, then that child will be saved. It does not take an army of teachers, therapists, neighbors or friends to cradle and embrace the wounded spirit. All it takes is one compassionate person standing by, holding the light, offering love and suggesting a different pathway to follow. In my young life, that person with the life vest was my grandmother, a woman with steel in her spine and a mountain of kindness in her overflowing heart, who through sheer determination loved the sadness out of a lost child and replaced that big gaping hole with unconditional love, support and hope for a better future. My wish for the world is that each of us, no matter our age or disposition, will find that special someone who sees your beauty and encourages you to find your way out of the darkness and into the light. Amidst the tragedy, I was blessed to have a grandmother who gave me wings, blew softly to lift me off the earth and send me on my way to pay it forward.

There are those of us who have been blessed with parents who saw our gifts and nourished our dreams, believing in the possibilities we might one

day achieve. Parents who stood by us with unconditional support, offering guidance when asked, while carrying a great big safety net when our world collapsed and came tumbling down to the ground. However, in my unofficial study of people I've encountered along the way, I find too many of them, like myself, just didn't fall into that blessed parent group. When my rock, my hero, my sole supporter passed away when I was 19 years old, I found myself floundering and in search of someone to help me bear the weight that life had settled onto my shoulders. My solution to this loss of support was to build a garden of friends, who would be there for me lending their own unique kind of support and guidance, holding me afloat when the tsunamis of life threatened the safety of my home. Quite simply, I took the time to find my tribe. Remember that your tribe does not need to be large, for as I've mentioned before, a single person can change your life, bring you comfort and ease, encouraging you to change your thoughts and inviting you to become the most true version of yourself.

Over the years, I've worked to build this community of forever friends, which oddly enough includes complete strangers whose names I do not recall, who have slipped into my life at just the right moment to deliver a message of hope and support that encouraged me to change and improve my life. Deep thoughtful messages delivered by strangers have left imprints on my soul that will last a lifetime and beyond. Many of these thoughts and ideas about life I've shared with friends or family, and sometimes other strangers, who've gratefully commented that the words I'd spoken were exactly what they needed to hear to help them heal. Somehow these shared words of comfort have taken on a life of their own and made their way out into the universe creating miracles and spreading their wisdom to those who've lost their way and are sorely in need of guidance or raising up. What a precious gift these conversations have become.

How does the dictionary define support? As a verb, it means to "bear all or part of the weight of; to hold up." As a noun, "a thing that bears the

*I was blessed to have a grandmother
who gave me wings, blew softly to lift
me off the earth and send me on my
way to pay it forward.*

weight of something or keeps it upright.” Find the people who are willing to do this for you. Finding your tribe can save your life.

My tribe is filled with remarkable big hearted women of strength and courage. Tribe members who I can call at a moments notice to bemoan the injustices of life or cry on their shoulders. Women who honor my emotions, encouraging me to let those feelings rumble like thunder and crash like lightening, reminding me that every emotion we feel has purpose, should be fully and completely felt and sat with, until it softens, quiets and eventually evaporates. These people are the rocks that ground me and the wind that lifts my wings and encourages me to fly. Without them I would be a crumpled puddle on a cold hard floor, but with their assistance, help, aid, encouragement, approval, comfort, reassurance, backing, confirmation, and solace I am able maintain my sanity and move through the dark places until I once again reach the light. They are the support beams that help me hold this house together.

For those who are currently feeling unsupported. I suggest that you consider an aquatic therapy called Watsu. This form of therapy is often

called The Water Breath Dance, for during a session the body surrenders to the rhythm of the breath as it gently moves in the water, while supported by a therapist, who holds you close to her heart. All sound disappears with the wave of the water, inviting the nervous system to quiet as well. The purpose of this therapy is to drop into the emptiness at the bottom of the breath. Doing nothing again and again, until the body, mind and spirit drift away into nothingness. The treatment allows emotions to rise up and be released. The secret to this release is the fact that the whole body is so contained, so supported by the therapist and the water, that the floater finds it safe to access every level of emotional trauma and set it free. I recently was gifted with this healing water dance by a dear member of my tribe. The beauty of this treatment is that the support felt during this session can be reimagined and relived within the body's memory when the weight of daily life threatens the safety of your own home.

Open yourself up to the possibility of receiving a rare gem of knowledge, a sacred pause where healing begins and grows through the body. The very act of being human means that rock slides of difficulties and overwhelming challenges will sometimes block our path, steal our breath or knock us to the ground, but deep within we all possess the inner

*Deep within we all possess the
inner strength required to regain
our roots and sprout our wings
to fly towards freedom.*

strength required to regain our roots and sprout our wings to fly towards freedom. It is essential to keep a life boat near your shores that will allow you to float in the healing waters whenever a storm surges. Go in search of forever friends who understand these truths. Fill your life with friends who raise you up, who sing your praises and who are willing to shoulder some of your burdens if the need arises. Tribe members who know when to ground you, when to set you free and when to remind you what it means to be unconditionally loved and supported. Seek friends and special strangers who stir sensations of comfort and ease, who warm your heart and who always give you the freedom to be your wild and crazy authentic self. Find your support beams.

KRISTINA JOHNSON is a lover of all things that inspire creativity and invite happiness. In addition to teaching Vinyasa Yoga and whirling her cares away on the dance floor, she makes time to travel the world, create art, do cartwheels in the grass and make play and laughter a priority.



WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE TO FEELING SUPPORTED?

<i>ignorance</i>	<i>free falling</i>
<i>fear</i>	<i>vulnerability</i>
<i>forsaken</i>	<i>unhelpful</i>
<i>worthlessness</i>	<i>coldly abandoned</i>
<i>defeat</i>	<i>vertigo</i>
<i>confusion</i>	<i>alone</i>
<i>loneliness</i>	<i>crash</i>
<i>capsize</i>	<i>discard</i>

*To stand alone, hoping that I
have power within myself.*

GILL



A Recipe for Support

TRACY STAMPER

Support is a beloved who believes in you, cheering you up and on when you falter.

Support is the sensation of being held in a grandmother's ample Love as she wipes away tears and fears.

Support is resting into a nest feathered just for you by someone holding the space for you when your heart feels bruised.

Support is that nudge stretching you to dream bigger, aim higher, and fly.

Support is a friend asking that magical question: *"How can I best Support you?"*

We all long for and need Support.

"I've got your back."

"We're behind you all the way."

"I'm holding you in my heart."

"We're by your side."

"I'm with you every step of the way."

A shoulder to lean on.

A hand to hold.

In good hands.

Someone to catch you if you fall.

When we have it and allow ourselves to rest into it, Support can be such an obvious, palpable, tangible entity. It can also be slippery and elusive. Since it is essential both for survival and for well-being, Support is something well worth understanding.

As a young teenager, I received a lesson about Support that continues to unfold for me now, decades later. My classmates and I participated in the much-anticipated ‘Trust Fall’ teambuilding exercise. As one who is not overly fond of heights, I was not very trusting of this impending Trust Fall.

My wobbly knees, butterfly belly and I were anxious. When it was my turn, I climbed up to the platform above the heads of my classmates whose interlocked arms formed a safety net. And I did it! I fell into the Support of my teammates. And when it my turn to Support, I interlocked arms and helped catch my peers.

As relieved as I am that the literal Trust Fall is (hopefully) a once-in-a-lifetime experience, I have since discovered that Life seems to be a series of one figurative Trust Fall after another.

After deeply struggling for a spell with having felt unsupported in one area of my life, I have been examining and untangling what Support is, where it comes from and what is required to reliably feel it. Due to its

We must choose to allow ourselves to be supported. Without our willingness, Support cannot fully and dynamically express itself.

sometimes elusive nature, I wish to understand the secret of Support so as to be able to call on it when needed.

What I discovered is that Support involves a recipe with three essential ingredients: the presence of Support, willingness and ability to be supported, and knowing where to look.

THE PRESENCE OF SUPPORT

The Supporter must show up and be present. Without my classmates standing below me with arms woven together, falling ‘timber’-style from a platform would have been mighty unwise. My classmates showed up.

A friend of mine recently lost her husband. She is surrounded by Support. Our community brainstormed as to how to best Support her: donating in her husband’s memory to a meaningful cause, meeting for coffee, treating her to a pampering day, etc. Our arms are interlocked. Her Support is present.

WILLINGNESS & ABILITY TO BE SUPPORTED

Being and feeling supported is not merely a passive experience of being surrounded by would-be Supporters. The mere presence of a safety net doesn’t automatically translate into being supported.

Our participation is key: we must choose to allow ourselves to be supported. Without our willingness, Support cannot fully and dynamically express itself. Therein lies the relational nature of Support. It involves an energy exchange between Supporter and Supported.

Imagine if I had stood on the platform and simply stood there until opting out and climbing back down the ladder. Had I not chosen to fall, I would not have had the somatic experience of landing in my peers’ Support.

The friend grieving her husband knows that her Support net is there. In order for her to actually feel supported, she can either take us up on offers or she can simply feel supported in knowing that we are here for her.

Sometimes, Support is around us and we don't have eyes to see it. If we are unable to let it in, we won't feel supported.

Seeing Support as a two-way street involving engagement on both sides of the equation allowed me to become more adept at accepting Support's invitation.

KNOWING WHERE TO LOOK FOR SUPPORT

This ingredient stumped me for years, despite its seeming obviousness.

I struggled with this in a specific area of my life in which I was deeply invested. Within a circle of peers, I hoped to see our community up the ante on Support. I was eager to discover how far we could all lift one another when Support was shared in a free-flowing exchange.

I poured myself into this equation with gusto. And I felt... frustrated. Disappointed. Unseen. Exhausted. Hurt. No matter how enthusiastically I showed up as a Supporter for the whole, I didn't feel the Support fully reciprocated.

I was looking in the wrong direction.

Plugging this into the Trust Fall scenario, I was standing on the platform looking for a community safety net. Some peers were off in a cluster of their own. Some were busy doing their individual thing wholeheartedly. Some didn't offer up their arms into a safety net. And then a small few made noise while kicking up dirt, adding confusion and drama. Although there absolutely were community members offering and receiving Support elegantly and beautifully, it became increasingly difficult to see or hear that dynamic given the dusty, limited visibility and noisy distractions.

Holding too tight to the platform, I kept seeking Support in the form

of all arms interlocked. Not seeing it, I kept spinning my wheels, trying to elicit reciprocity by pouring more of myself into a supporting role. (An often-cited definition of insanity is “*doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.*”)

Finally acknowledging that I was stuck on a platform without all the ingredients for a fully intact safety net, I climbed down.

I walked to a clearing, built another platform, and energetically called in supportive community. I asked, and I received. New faces showed up, as well as familiar faces that had also distanced themselves from the swirling dust. In this fresh air, I clearly saw Support. And my peers saw me when they stood on the platform and I interlocked arms below them.

We were on the right platform looking in the right direction.

Knowing where to look is clear and obvious in the example of the Trust Fall. Life’s lessons, however, don’t always reveal themselves in such straightforward ways. To be supported, we must get clear on where the Support is.

Understanding the interplay of these ingredients sheds light on what to tweak when not feeling supported.

Since not all directions in which we gaze are bound to provide the Support we seek, it is up to us to pursue that Support.

What if we climb onto that metaphoric platform and teammates are nowhere to be found? Support is still there. I must reframe the direction in which I’m looking.

There are times when we must look within and rely on self for Support. We become our own Supporter.

The tactile languaging of Support (shoulder to lean on, feet to stand on, etc.) reveals its physicality. Our bodies can feed us Support in those times when we stand alone. This Trust Fall involves believing that we come equipped with the tools to source our own Support. Thankfully, we do.

TO FEEL SUPPORTED:

Stand, sensing your feet. Rest into the Support of the floor beneath you. Mother Earth is always there to Support you. All you have to do is trust her Support.

Scan your body. Which muscles and joints are holding unnecessary tension? Melt shoulders. Belly. Jaw. Engage only the muscles needed to stand relaxed. Settle into the bones and muscles supporting you. Inhale gratitude for your spine's structural and energetic Support, the conduit for brain and body communication. No conscious effort is required.

Peel away layers of effort. Listen for that audible sigh telling you that you feel supported. Imprint your memory with this sensation. Allow yourself the Support.

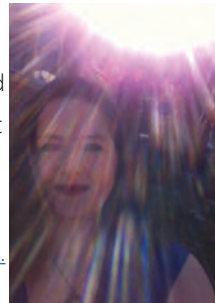
The stardust you are made of is the very essence of Support. Your cells exist to Support you. Your body is brilliantly designed to Support you. Simply by existing in your body, you are supported, just as sure as the sun shines. Trust the Support of your body and of the ones who show up wanting to Support you.


*The stardust you are made of is
the very essence of Support.
Your cells exist to Support you.*

*“You closing your eyes on a sunny day
doesn’t mean that the sun isn’t shining.
It still shines.
It’s whether or not you
will be able to embrace it and see it.
That’s really the trick.
Open your eyes....
maybe even just one eye....
maybe just squint a little bit....
and let it in.
You deserve to feel that love.
You deserve to feel that warmth.”*
~ Aziza Binti

You deserve to feel that Support.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



A person with long, dark, wavy hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a white, textured button-down shirt. A dark, semi-transparent horizontal band covers the person's face, serving as a background for the text. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light gray.

"I can show you the gleaming skin of anxiety, the perfectly-placed dimple of depression. Sometimes we smile on the outside because it's all we have."

BRETTON KEATING

Support – Comes from Within

BRETTON KEATING

I believe others can meet us only as deeply as we've met ourselves. So for many years, this meant I largely felt alone. Perhaps for this reason, support was a sentiment that, for this chapter of my life, felt nearly impossible to find.

I was living a life of falsity. I lay frozen in a river of rushing colors I refused to see. My eyes were closed wide shut. My ears blocked from the outside in.

And in the pinnacle of falsehood, the universe conspired, as it does, to set me out alone. I moved into my own place against intuitive warnings that I would not be happy doing so, and no less than a week later, felt my heart ripped out from under me and shred to pieces. I lay broken on a stone-cold floor, among cracks of black mold lining tiles bleached a starking white.

I had been living a future life, with blatant disregard for my present state of blindness. And when the fairy tale came crashing down, I had no choice but to find myself again.

In order to do so, I needed to distance myself from nearly everyone.

I remember realizing one night that many of my relationships were

one-sided. I was exhausted from crossing the river, feeling as though I was forever travelling upstream. I felt so lonely, so unsupported, so unseen. Because deep down, I wasn't supporting myself. That evening I opted for a different route. Floating the other direction, I wandered around an art store in a state of lostness.

I found myself amid the chaos of untapped potential.

As soon as I stopped seeking support outside myself, I found a deep-seated strength to support myself within.

I remember reaching a point where I was so happy being alone in my messy studio-slash-apartment, covered in paint and cooking five things at once, that I opted to spend days upon nights on my own. In the past, I had lived a neverending quest for distraction. Now, I began to recognize what I was truly seeking, and my actions started to support that internal quest.

As I grew in my relationship with myself, which, up to then, I had mostly disregarded, I gained clarity on who I am, what gives me life, and how I feel supported.

Today the level of support in my life amazes me. Yes, sometimes I experience dark moments. But I am getting better at communicating with others how they can support me both inside and out of the darkness. It's a constant practice. And in order to communicate outwardly, I need to consistently come back within, asking myself—what feels supportive in this moment? And then again, in this next one?

Perhaps the most interesting thing about support is how it changes. What feels supportive in one instance becomes a hindrance in another. It boils down not to what shape or form the support takes, but rather the feeling beneath. When somebody offers support from love, we can sense it deeply. And ultimately, this is the truest form of support available.

Sometimes we think we act from love, but really our ego holds other surface-level intentions. I want to keep you close, because I'm afraid of what may happen when you leave. She helps me because it makes her

As soon as I stopped seeking support outside myself, I found a deep-seated strength to support myself within.

look a certain way. He likes the attention he receives when he plays the role of knight in shining armor.

There's always the involvement of ego; it's impossible to live without it. But it's trying to offer support from a deeper place, regardless of what the ego wants or says or does, that's what matters. It's the showing up, fully raw and present and available to the person in front of you and their respective rawness. It's holding each other up, even when it means you may be dragged down.

My pastor spoke recently about selfless love, and how it means to give part of yourself for another's wellbeing. And how *challenging* is this, especially in the new age world of pseudo spirituality and all its emphasis on boundaries and filling your own cup first. Healthy boundaries are important, don't get me wrong, but there's a certain magic that happens when we reach over the wall to someone in need. We often have no idea the impact doing so can have on another person.

I know people who only talk to me when I'm happy. When I'm smiling, they flock.

Truth is, I've battled depression on and off throughout my life, often

hidden behind a smile. I've always felt deeply, living primarily through my emotional body, except for in the moments when I numbed myself because all the feeling became too much.

Many people often have no idea what or how much we're feeling.

I can show you the gleaming skin of anxiety, the perfectly-placed dimple of depression. Sometimes we smile on the outside because it's all we have.

Last year, I experienced perhaps my deepest bout of depression yet. I reached a point where I no longer wanted to live. I didn't actively consider suicide, yet I didn't see how I could possibly fit in the world. I wanted out.

The day my puppy and I found each other, that changed. I wanted to live again.

She was so *small* when she came to me, I could fit her in the crook of my arm. I was afraid to sleep with her in the bed because I thought I might roll over and crush her.

Her mother had rejected her on the streets of India. She came with bite marks on her head and the biggest appetite for life. She still lives this way. I've volunteered at an animal shelter, and I notice this pattern with

*She sat with me and my messiness
And in that simple gesture, she showed
me the beauty and ability of support.
To see.*

the runts of the litters. The smallest of the batch often have these feisty, unstoppable spirits. They give life their all with every ounce they've got.

And so my 2-kilo puppy supported me back to life. I had to become a fighter. People could no longer stampede over me, because now it wasn't just me, there was another creature involved, and it was the two of us together. I decided I would no longer accept the toxic situations I had lived with in the past. I would fight for a life in which she I could live, healthily, together.

It hasn't been easy. Travelling with a puppy is one of the more difficult paths I've tread. For six weeks, we lived in a seaside village on the west coast of India. I didn't know anyone; the only friend I had there left after a couple of days. Regardless, I still found the universe offers exactly the support that I need in each moment.

One night, after spending weeks trying to figure out how my puppy and I would get to the next place, which involved piles of documentation and a wild goose chase through ambiguously specific rules...not my forté, I broke down sobbing when puppy wouldn't listen to me and come inside. I had just spent an hour pulling ticks off her body, after chasing two giant spiders off the wall. All I wanted was to sleep. I was afraid to leave her outside because of leopard attacks on dogs in the neighborhood.

While screaming my head off at a scared pup who understands human emotion on a deeper level than I can comprehend, my neighbors, a Ukrainian couple, came outside, sat me down, gave me warm lemon water, and rubbed my back. I kept apologizing for the scene I had caused. Throughout my life, I have been taught to apologize for my emotional outbursts. Feeling as deeply as I do is unacceptable. Unless it's happiness, of course. Anything else best be swept away with the spiders on the wall.

After my third or fourth apology, my neighbor turned to me and said, "So, you're emotional. Many talented people are." And that was it. No trying to change me. No telling me I needed to get a handle on the highs

and lows. No sending me links to articles on emotional balance, anxiety and depression. She offered none of the responses I've been conditioned to receive. Instead, she sat with me and my messiness. And in that simple gesture, she showed me the beauty and ability of support. To see.

Love means seeing another person, as he or she really is, and then walking alongside him or her on their respective journey. It means being intuitively in tune with the level of support that person needs, moment to moment.

When we're seen, our true selves shine through. And these true selves, they can overcome anything. From spiders on the wall and a tick-covered fur ball, to the depths of depression and heartbreak.

When we support one another with love we become unstoppable.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).



SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

How does being supported feel for *you*? What makes *you* feel supported?
What words and sounds do *you* associate with support?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about support.

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*Our souls speak to us through
emotion, inviting us home.
Home to a land where you
can belong, where you are
the sovereign Monarch.*

LYSA BLACK

Learning the Language of Emotion

LYSA BLACK

Learning the language of emotion allows us to hear and learn from our own soul within. The part of us that existed before life on earth and the part of us that will go on after our physical body has died. Tuning into our feelings and interpreting the language of your soul can become the single most powerful act to return to the sovereign authority on your truth, identity and purpose. This language is intended to allow us to know our own soul. This powerful language of emotion can communicate to us the most valuable, accurate and reliable information that we need to feel guided, supported and safe in this world. If we do not know who we are, then we cannot authentically respond from our truth in the myriad of situations that arise in life.

For me, emotions are the language of the soul. A language I was never taught... a language I never heard and a language I never saw anyone else speaking when I was growing up. For me it was attention-demanding internal pain that I could not define which invited me to learn this unknown language.

I started with: *pain* which I now know means — Pay attention. Pain was the first ‘word’ I learnt within the language of emotion. This pain I

was introduced to was initially a bit like screaming, I realise now that when the strange whispers and unknown dialogue within remained unheard for too long the volume increases until by sheer force it captivated my attention! I was captivated by this new language and sought through experience to uncover the meaning behind every emotion.

Fast forward ten years and I now know that emotion is the language of the soul. While it's easy to be captivated by the voices outside of us that subtly or overtly intend to: teach, dictate and compel us to their own set of rules and instructions... Our emotions are the sacred language of our own soul, offering us guidance on the truth of who we are, what we are here to do and how we can respond to each moment living from our truth.

We have been unconsciously taught through the behaviour of everyone around us that our feelings are meant to be stopped, shut-off, disregarded, hidden or ignored. Feelings are feared in modern society. We fear being seen as vulnerable, weak or insecure if we allow ourselves to display our feelings through our face, words or body. So a necessary social facade has been erected; where we train the muscles in our faces to stay still despite the deep surging and movement of our emotions within us. Under such repressed conditions our private emotional expression can become more volatile and explosive. Many have used this experience to confirm the 'danger' of emotion and our need to 'control' and 'repress' them at any cost. We live in a society that is compulsively driven by emotion altering choices that lead to addiction: coffee, alcohol, media, food, sex and spending are all tools we have been taught to use to alter our emotional state. As Dallin H. Oakes says "You can never get enough of what you don't need."

When we do not know what we feel, why we feel it we feel compelled to control our own emotional state using any one of the many methods listed above. This means that we can end up masking our ability to

*We live in a society that is
compulsively driven by
emotion altering choices.*

actually know ourselves on a soul level. I believe every emotion carries sacred information from our soul that we can learn how to interpret for ourselves. Here are my personal interpretations for you to reflect on and consider. Please tune into yourself to perceive if these are accurate and relevant for you?

PAIN = PAY ATTENTION WITHIN

When we use our pain to tune in and listen within, we are heeding the call to listen. This allows the pain to soften and commences our inner tutoring (Awakening our *in-tuition*).

ANGER = I HAVE BEEN DISRESPECTED

Learning to interpret the message of anger from our soul supports us to comprehend the boundaries we require. The limitations of what others

can and cannot do to us. Anger guides us to the precise clarity we need to know about ourselves personally so that we can freely communicate ‘this’ is OK and ‘this’ is not to everyone we encounter. The communication of our boundaries allow us to self-honor; and the outcome of sharing these boundaries with those around us is an opening to new levels of being honoured (or removing ourselves from those who cannot honor us).

SADNESS = I HAVE LOST SOMETHING OF GREAT VALUE TO ME

Learning how to interpret the message of sadness from our soul supports us to comprehend what is of true value. We only feel genuine sadness when something that was genuinely precious to us becomes lost, taken or otherwise becomes inaccessible. Sometimes we think something is precious and it’s actually not, and vice versa... we can be careless towards people, experiences and things that we are surprised to find actually do hold tremendous value to us. Sadness is the emotion which communicates such value – although it will only be felt once an item, person or experience has gone.

Sadness can be one of the most repressed emotions because the common societal assumption is that ‘what’s gone is gone’ and we need to just ‘get over it’. Unfortunately this perspective actually causes these ‘sad’ feelings to sink deeper within us and become embedded in our experience — meaning we will actually feel increasingly more sad because we refuse to acknowledge our sadness. Eventually the feeling then becomes more pronounced and loud as it is seeking to be heard, understood and deliver its message. The actual benefit of truly acknowledging what we have lost is that we can clarify and confirm within ourselves what is actually really valuable to ourselves on a soul level. We can release the societal expectations of what we’re suppose to value and surrender the expectations of trying to live up to having or enjoying what others appear to enjoy and get into alignment with our own truth. Sadness allows us to uncover what

is truly valuable to us so that we can seek to fill our lives with everything that is of true worth.

JEALOUSY = I SEE SOMEONE GIVING THEMSELVES SOMETHING I WANT THAT I WON'T LET MYSELF HAVE YET

Learning how to interpret the message of jealousy from our soul supports us to comprehend what we truly desire. Seeing someone else experiencing something we do not have alerts us to a remembrance that we may be forgetting a sacred desire within ourselves. When desires arise in our hearts, it is not always the ideal time to bring them to life, so it's common for us to shelve these desires and wait for a more ideal time to bring them into fruition. Unfortunately in shelving some of these desires we can mistakenly forget them, and they can become forgotten. When the feeling of jealousy emerges, it is a kind and loving reminder from our soul that we have a desire that wants our attention.

GRIEF = A DEEP LOSS OF SOMETHING THAT I TRULY LOVE WHICH IS IRREPLACEABLE

Learning how to interpret the message of grief from our soul supports us to comprehend that love is eternal. We only feel grief when we have truly loved another soul. The truth about grief is that it represents the equal component of the love and devotion we felt for our beloved. The depth to which we have loved another soul marks the depth to which our grief needs to be expressed and felt.

FEAR = I AM ENCOUNTERING SOMETHING THAT IS UNKNOWN

Learning how to interpret the message of fear from our soul supports us to comprehend what we do not know. As we progress, age and expand, we always reach an element of non-knowingness that many shy away from. Fear can be so uncomfortable for some that they try to avoid it by

staying within their ‘knowingness’. The value of fear is that we can recognise that we are touching the edge of our knowingness, which means from that point onward we can encounter newness, opening and expansion that we have not previously known.

Our souls speak to us through emotion, inviting us home. Home to a land where you can belong, where you are the sovereign Monarch.

I hope that you can be willing to learn this new language and give yourself permission to tune out the voices of must, should, now, here as we learn how to turn within and listen to our own souls.

LYSA BLACK is a Heart Healer who uses her gifts to help you return to the magic of your own heart. The more we can trust ourselves the more we can trust our gifts: the gut knowing, inner wisdom or intuitive guidance we all receive. If we listen, our hearts will help us to find the clarity, calm and magical healing shifts we need.

Lysa has been coaching and teaching women to remember the magic of their own hearts for eight years now. Healing her own heart allowed her to overcome anxiety, binge eating and a series of romantic break ups. Lysa believes that we all have magical hearts that want to guide us to experience more peace, love and joy!



VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability

CASHA DOEMLAND

*“Do not equate my softness for
weakness when my heart has
always been my greatest strength.”*

I am a woman who lives a life led by her heart; a woman who loves unconditionally through and through. I believe in compassion and living life raw, honest and in the light of vulnerability. Yet, living like this often creates heartache, disappointment and sometimes an abundance pain. I have had my heart shattered and the ground beneath my feet give way. I have loved unapologetically only to be told I would never be loved in return. I have experienced the intolerable pain of losing something you hold so dear to your heart.

Through the tears and the aching, I have been told to harden my interior, to peel my heart off of my sleeve and to tuck it safely away within the

comfort of my rib cage. And each time I have the same reply for it does not matter who is on the other side of those words.

“No, thank you. I am privileged to have my heart, to love as deeply as I do and to see the beauty in the world that most tend to overlook. My heart, as fragile as it may seem because it is sewn together and bandaged up like a rag doll continues to beat vivaciously and with a ferocity so intense a great hurricane could not compete. I have lived more authentically and lush than individuals twice my age and I would not trade that for a polished heart and hubris.”

CASHA DOEMLAND LA-born, Georgia-bred and one-half of a set of identical twins, Casha spends her days writing poetry and prose and exploring the world. She’s a classic film enthusiast, runner, dog walker, and collector of quotes and tattoos.

Website: cashadoemland.com



Vulnerability

HEIDI PRAHL

I used to think vulnerability was a word that implied weakness, gullibility. It felt risky and exposed. And I didn't want to be any of those things.

This word, rather the definition of this word, holds a particularly special meaning in my life. That wasn't always the case. In fact, it wasn't even part of my vocabulary for many years, as I lived my happy go lucky life as a wife and momma to four beautiful children. When life is good, who really thinks about vulnerability

Certainly not me. Until I was forced to. Until my vulnerability was taken advantage of. My cocoon of happiness shattered, shards of broken dreams littered around me.

Just like that, being vulnerable takes on a whole new meaning. Protection, safety and emotional stability become priority one. *And vulnerability becomes a liability.*

And then life goes on, with or without you. So you stop letting yourself feel vulnerable, but at least you feel safe.

But safety can become an idol. Something you protect at all costs. Something you even end up laying your life down for.

Because the truth is that a life without risk is really no life at all. That's comfort zone, self protection, guarded living. There's no room for beauty and growth and change in a life that's sole focus is survival without pain.

I've been there. I've lived the stifled life that says it's too risky to be vulnerable, for almost a decade now. Shutting out perceived danger and threat feels like the right thing to do after you've been hurt, blindsided, devastated. But then we also shut out the possibilities of what may be when we choose to live a wide open life. Deep love, connection and even our very soul retreat to the shadows in our efforts to self protect. The truth about vulnerability is that it's one of the main ingredients to a rich and meaningful life.

Real life is bittersweet. Vulnerability opens you up to both the bitter and the sweet. It's a dance, a rhythm. You can't really enjoy one without the other.

These days I'm counting the cost of being vulnerable, susceptible, open to being hurt. I've seen both sides of this coin now - living vulnerably and living protected. And if I'm being honest, there's no comparison. The freedom of a wide open life wins every time. But I can't un-know what I already know. I can't take back the hurt. I can't un-feel the wounds. And when I start to weigh all of that it feels too risky to be vulnerable again.

But then I remember the thick blanket of dark clouds I've been living (*surviving*) under as the banner of safety. The light of this very life can't peek through this wall I've built. My heart is hidden behind a bullet proof window and there is no "break in case of emergency" clause to this glass. Sure, maybe I'm safe from perceived dangers, but I'm also blocked from truly, deeply feeling the good things in this world, or, truly, feeling anything at all sometimes (as an overly sensitive person, not feeling anything can be it's own type of prison).

There is no real way to live in this world and guard yourself from the possibility of all pain. But that illusion is sometimes enough to keep us

*Real life is bittersweet.
Vulnerability opens you up to
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stuck there. The reality is I know that I want to embrace vulnerable living again, and each day I'm fighting to inch my way back.

I'm learning that we need to redefine vulnerability, see it differently. It doesn't have to imply weakness or susceptibility. Vulnerability, at its core, is actually very beautiful. To be vulnerable means to be real and authentic. Vulnerability is the very breath in our lungs and it is what makes us human. It connects us to others and allows us to feel things deeply. Being vulnerable is the opposite of weak, in actuality, it's very brave and takes great courage and strength. It tells those around us that they matter, they're worth the risk. Vulnerability burns truth within us

and forces us out of our comfort zone and into real life. Life that is rich and crafted with meaning. Vulnerability says that we recognize that life will be messy, relationships are hard, we will have to fight the urge to run and hide and self protect, but in the end we understand that it will be worth it. That we're worth it. That the we have something to offer the world and in response, the world has something to offer us, and we don't want to miss it.

Taking the time to see vulnerability through new eyes, yields to the understanding that there is power and life and truth there. I'm choosing that life. I'm choosing freedom. And I'm realizing that *VULNERABLE* is exactly who I want to be.

HEIDI PRAHL is a Chicago based writer and photographer who appreciates and cultivates honest conversation around difficult topics.

She is a lover of Jesus, her family, beach glass, good coffee, exceptional books and is an absolute foodie at heart.

Website: heidiprahl.com



VulnerABILITY

TRACY STAMPER

VulnerABILITY is Strength not wearing its armor.

Vulnerability can show up as a state of fragility. In the beginning of my relationship with Vulnerability, Vulnerability always expressed itself solely in this way. It involved feeling unsafe. Exposed. Susceptible. At risk. Helpless. Hopeless. Small. Teary. Weak. Its shoulders were caved-in and hunched over. Vulnerability and I curled up in corners, protecting a hurting heart. Vulnerability was a bird with a wounded wing, exposed to the elements and to danger.

Back then, when Vulnerability was one-dimensional for me, it was stuck in the strict definition of woundedness. The Latin root of the word Vulnerability fits my early experiences of this emotion. This was before I discovered that Vulnerability can be a wellspring of deep strength.

The word is derived from the Latin root word ‘vulnus,’ which translates into ‘wound.’ The adjective ‘vulnerabilis’ found its way into the English language as ‘vulnerable.’ The root speaks to susceptibility to being wounded, physically and/or emotionally, whether by attack, harm, damage or criticism.

This ‘wound’ at the root of the word is merely the beginning of the

story. VulnerABILITY wishes to co-author with us a story that is so much more dynamic and empowering than the setting of the scene in the first few pages of our story. ‘Wound’ is the root, the roots of the tree in the darkness underground. This is simply the opening chapter.

Tree roots dig down into dark soil. Branches reach for sunlight. Just as trees grow and mature, this word has evolved. Until I dug down into my own roots and found a willingness to surrender into Vulnerability, my experience of this emotion remained flat and fragile.

Then, the word redefined itself for me.

Times of Vulnerability are asking us to feel to heal.

Vulnerability is an invitation into vulnerABILITY.

VulnerABILITY is the ability to remain open to growth born of fragility.

Especially when it first arrives, Vulnerability lands in my bones as fragility. Now, however, I also sense Vulnerability’s arrival as an invitation to sink into my roots, amp up my self-care, regain the security of feeling grounded, and fortify. Vulnerability can become a portal into Strength. The open space of vulnerABILITY holds vast room for transformation. When I am ready, I can step into the invitation to explore how to shift from fragile Vulnerability into the Strength of vulnerABILITY.

Several years ago, the words ‘Vulnerability in Strength ~ Strength in Vulnerability’ began dancing in my consciousness. I could sense the interplay of these energies, yet couldn’t fully grasp or articulate their relationship. This dynamic dance was always on the periphery for me, piquing curiosity.

My moment of discovery came during an apprenticeship to become a Trainer of Nia, a mind~body holistic fitness and wellness practice. Part of the process involved guest teaching training sessions and assessments with my mentor.

One of the sessions I guest taught touched on moving emotional energies through our bodies. This aspect of Nia has been so life-changing

*VulnerABILITY is the
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and life-giving for me that I experience it as nothing short of pure magic. Speaking to the power of this practice often moves me to tears of enormous gratitude. That is the case to this day, years later, and it was no different as an apprentice. I cried while speaking of my journey of reclaiming health.

When my mentor checked in with me after this session, my self-evaluation began with a critique of my delivery. I was critical of an aspect of how I presented the material. To clarify, she asked: “Is it because you started crying?”

The confidence and certainty in my immediate response to this question took me by surprise: “No! Being moved to tears while standing in my truth is when I am most in my power.”

Whoa! There it was. I hadn’t yet realized this truth until speaking it aloud to my mentor. She nodded.

I had not yet fully consciously realized the power and magnetism of seeing someone – and certainly not *being* someone – who is able and willing to fully show up within vulnerABILITY. But my words struck a chord

for me: “*Being moved to tears while standing in my truth is when I am most in my power.*” Yes.

This heart-to-heart with my mentor marked the moment that the words ‘Vulnerability in Strength ~ Strength in Vulnerability’ lit up for me: I felt these words in my body. While delivering this session, I had owned my story of traversing challenging emotional terrain of a decade plus of severe depression. Through tears, I stood in my strength and used my voice to speak my Truth. I spoke to a time of intense Vulnerability in my life, and I spoke to my healing journey. The Vulnerability of sharing such a personal journey blossomed into the vulnerABILITY of choosing to share my story from a place of healing. By remaining open to my desire to shine the light for others who may travel similar terrain while opening up about a tender time, I felt the word vulnerABILITY expand. It became multi-dimensional like a gem that reveals its many hues, depth and sparkle when viewed through different facets. That was the moment in which the meaning of the word Vulnerability completely shifted.

*I felt the word vulnerABILITY expand.
It became multi-dimensional like a
gem that reveals its many hues,
depth and sparkle when viewed
through different facets.*

When Strength arrives dressed in vulnerABILITY without armor, its power is positively electric. It is palpable. This is the Strength that doesn't wear armor. It doesn't need armor: it wields Truth. Empowerment comes through the immense courage it takes to remain open in the midst of it all. On the other side of courage, the cloak of vulnerABILITY lined in silken Strength awaits.

Wedding our words with authentic expression of vulnerABLE emotion – no holding back or making our feelings or self small – results in this magic. Showing up in this way shifts the energy in a room. When I see others do this, it reaches, teaches and moves me. And in that moment of reflection with my mentor, I was able to see and source my own power.

My power arose from what once felt wounded me in.

Honoring the root of the word, vulnerABILITY speaks to a 'wound.' What is a wound but an opening in one's protective layer of skin? In time, a cut on the skin heals by the body's miraculous ability to form a protective seal or scab. Likewise, an emotional wound asks for healing. In the initial fragility of Vulnerability, can we find a way to bravely remain open or regain openness?

As with our skin, the healing of this wound happens in natural time. There is no forcing healing. Sometimes we must first curl up and lick our wounds. Sinking into the darkness and regaining Strength is often how we find our way back into the light. Stories always begin with Chapter One.

Can we find our voice and begin to tell our story? Whether that voice moves fully and evenly into the space with clarity and density or quivers forth from wobbly knees and a butterflied belly, it fills the space with resonant Truth. This is a Strength that comes from the depths, right out of the crucible of the fire of transformation.

Often, this is Strength training in a manner we would have never asked for. It is the Strength training of a wounded healer. And those who have healed their own wounds are the ones I trust to help guide the way.

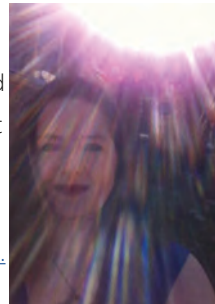
Tears that cascade down the cheeks of wounded healers are the diamonds formed by the intense pressure of having walked through the fire. Tears glisten to decorate Truth.

VulnerABILITY. 'The ability to remain open to growth born of fragility.'

VulnerABILITY transforms us by arriving with this question...

While feeling fragile, can you root down, open up and enter the portal of transformation by living and speaking your Truth?

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in Rebelle Society and Elephant Journal. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



Vulnerability

KRISTINA JOHNSON

TAO

Verse 22

*If you want to become whole,
first let yourself be broken.
If you want to become straight,
let yourself be crooked.
If you want to become full,
let yourself be empty.
If you want to be reborn,
let yourself die.
If you want to be given everything,
give everything up.*

I stand alone and vulnerable at my kitchen window staring out at the darkening sky. A winter storm is rapidly pulsing it's way towards us. Rotting leaves rustle in the rising wind scattering noisy fragments and debris into the fading light, the sounds deepening the fear already churning in

my belly. Tiny shards of frozen ice begin to pelt the window in a rhythmic pattern. The symphony of sleet sends shivers up my spine, reminding me why this specific month haunts me. This is not my story. It is the story of my grandmother, and the sadness and vulnerability she experienced every year of her life when the month of February swept in on icy wings. We all have family stories that travel through time, one generation to another. Stories that we share so that we will not be forgotten when our bodies vanish from this earth. Tales that contain lessons that must be taught to those we love so that they will learn how to dance with the dangers and survive.

Each year when the snow, ice and freezing rain of February returned to chill our bones, we would find my grandmother sitting at her kitchen table with a cup of camomile tea grasped in her pale weathered hands and a far away look on her face, quietly announcing, more to herself than the rest of us, that “February is the cruelest month.” In the beginning, I did not understand. February is a month filled with love, sweet Valentine notes, my sister’s birthday and above all else, big red boxes of delicious chocolates to give and to devour. What’s not to love? My young mind could not comprehend why she was unable to embrace the frivolity and light hearted playfulness of the shortest sweetest month of the year.

As an adult who has also suffered bone crushing loss and heartbreak, I now have a deeper understanding of the sadness that squeezed her heavy heart, but even as a small child I recognized the sadness and vulnerability that seeped into her bones each February, weakening her voice and threatening to suck the life from her spirit. Our children watch us closely, waiting to see how we decide to be in the world. They see our weakness as well as our strengths and carry forward the invisible messages we imprint on their souls. To watch my grandmother expose her raw emotions frightened me. She was the warrior that kept our family safe. I would later learn that warriors come in many shapes and sizes and the bravest of them all

In silence, we clung tightly to each other, welcoming the healing powers of connection and compassion. Exposed and hidden wounds once filled with darkness and despair were magically repaired and renewed.

wear their hearts on their sleeves and are willing to express their emotions and expose their vulnerability when necessary. This lesson, however, would take time to fully unravel.

In those early years when February arrived intent on destruction, I did not ask for answers. I merely crawled into my grandmother's welcoming lap and melted my tense body into her softness. Her warm embrace calmed my nerves, comforted my fears, a nest of safety and security in which to rest. In silence, we clung tightly to each other, welcoming the healing powers of connection and compassion. Exposed and hidden wounds once filled with darkness and despair were magically repaired and renewed. Bound together, breathing as one, we found the strength to face our fears and carry on.

When my grandmother deemed me old enough to understand why she sometimes allowed emotion to overcome her, she shared the story of how one merciless day in February death came knocking on the door of her childhood home demanding the lives of her two younger sisters,

Mamie and Ida. During the early 1900's, diphtheria epidemics ravaged the United States and physicians watched in dread, for they were helpless to combat the rapid and fatal course of this awful disease. Life taught my grandmother that unrelenting heartbreak and despair would be a part of her existence, but it had also taught her that along with suffering, there would also be survival, recovery and hope for a better tomorrow. I am reminded of a lesson taught by the Tao. "To become whole, first let yourself be broken." Falling apart and allowing ourselves to be wounded and vulnerable can actually be the very thing we need to heal and become whole once again. Though I doubt my grandmother ever read the book of Tao, I do believe she embraced and understood the importance of being broken. She was fearless in befriending her weaknesses and embracing the difficult emotions. Her willingness to expose her raw nerve endings to the world was an act of courage that I will never forget. A person who is willing to open and expose the naked vulnerability of their heart is a true warrior. Release the warriors!

She was fearless in befriending her weaknesses and embracing the difficult emotions. Her willingness to expose her raw nerve endings to the world was an act of courage.

*Be scared, but be willing to go for it.
Speak your truth with integrity and
honor your broken places. Liberate
yourself through your vulnerability.*

The author Brene Brown has much to say about vulnerability and the importance of owning our own story, but she also warns us that embracing our vulnerability can be both risky and frightening for most of us. Vulnerability, she states in her book *Daring greatly*, is “the willingness to show up and let ourselves be seen.” The problem, however, is that too many people fear being seen and fear being vulnerable. They worry that sharing their stories, revealing their mistakes, errors and imperfections to the world comes at too great a cost. Hiding and pretending to be someone they are not becomes a safer place to exist. Brown reminds her readers that, “Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of light.” If we are brave and let people see our authentic self, warts and all, we open ourselves up to possibilities, not endings.

When researching the definition of vulnerability, words like unprotected, defenseless, danger, exposed, and open to assault jumped off the page and punched me in the gut. Further descriptions included; a weakness, helpless, in a precarious position, open to criticism, being wounded

or hurt, and susceptible to emotional injury. Honestly, none of those things sound inviting and actually feel quite painful, so why in the world would someone willingly step into the space of emotional vulnerability. It sounds terrifying! Wouldn't it be better to build a giant wall of brick and mortar with barbed wire on top to keep the sadness out? Though building such a wall to surround and protect us might at first seem beneficial, the simple fact is that those walls also keep out the joy.

Tear down your walls. Be wild and free. Lean in. Show up. Boldly expose your authentic self to the waiting world. Have the courage to be imperfect and allow yourself to get a few scars. This connects you to the rest of the suffering world. It's ok to be frightened. Be scared, but be willing to go for it. Speak your truth with integrity and honor your broken places. Liberate yourself through your vulnerability.

Live with the heart of a warrior.

KRISTINA JOHNSON is a lover of all things that inspire creativity and invite happiness. In addition to teaching Vinyasa Yoga and whirling her cares away on the dance floor, she makes time to travel the world, create art, do cartwheels in the grass and make play and laughter a priority.



Vulnerability

AIMEE DUFRESNE

The flutters in your stomach...

The rush of adrenaline...

Sweat pouring...

Breath tight...

Mouth dry...

Mind blank...

Cells shaking...

Bursts of red...blue...black...

Darkness.

The darkness before the light.

Across the ocean of vulnerability lies the love, compassion, and connection I crave. I sit on the shore, shielding myself from diving in. Why is it so hard to swim across? Sisterhood sits there, patiently waiting for me to join the ranks of highly powerful, creative and conscious women.

I dip in a toe. Wading in a further, wondering how long it might take to master this ocean. The land across the water looks so inviting. So I set out to swim. But too soon I'm flailing, failing. I'm halfway there but I'm floundering. The land seems further with each stroke ahead.

Fear seizes. It chokes down my authenticity. Fear puts the mask over my face once again. It washes me back to the shore of status quo. It tells me to pretend. Act as if I'm the success I wish. *Don't show your weakness*, Fear whispers. *It's not safe. Show it and you'll never succeed*. The tidal wave spits me back to the beginning. And I stay safe on shore for a while. But it is boring. My heart longs for more. Adventure and fulfillment are across that ocean yet Fear keeps hanging on me like a heavy wet blanket. It reminds me my many mistakes. *YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT THERE*, it shouts as I tiptoe to the water again, hoping to go unseen by that which holds me. Reaching the edge, Fear shakes its head. *This is a bad idea, You'll regret it. You'll never make it across. You'll drown in vulnerability. Stay safe. For god's sakes, stay safe. On the shore. Shun vulnerability. You don't need it.*

But the shore beyond beckons. Love lies here. You are welcome here. You belong here. Its sweet voice of hope seep through the split seconds of silence between the lyrics of Fear.

I dive. Sharing myself with the sea. The darkness embraces me.

Intention kicks in. Action follows. I *will* make it.

Vulnerability cradles me. It is not the vicious enemy Fear had me believe. I float in its gentle arms.

Vulnerability cradles me. It is not the vicious enemy Fear had me believe. I float in its gentle arms.

More surprising still, I feel the arms of others in the ocean of Vulnerability. The circle of sisterhood starts here. We support one another. Those closer to shore offer assistance to those further out. Spinning, swimming, thrashing, bashing, floating, flowing. Within the uncertainty, one thing becomes clear: whatever happens, it was worth the ride.

Finally, feet meet sand.

Planted on the shore of freedom, the sweet spot I had been eyeing and envious of for so long is now mine. I shield my eyes from the beaming sun and look back across to the shore from which I started this journey. A dark mist shrouds the sands there. Fear remains, yet it can no longer steal my joy, my love, my life. I am free. At last.

Thank you, Vulnerability.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



Vulnerability

KASIA LINDAHL

*Come closer.
Show up.
Skip the masks.
They mean nothing to me.
I long to get to know the true YOU.
To SEE you.
To see your true LIGHT.
In your light I will bathe my naked face.*

Vulnerability is the courage to be authentic.

It shows up when my urge for deep connection with another human being is stronger than my fear of being judged for my flaws and shortcomings.

After years of shallow encounters and playing safe in relations I lost interest in people pleasing. More correctly I lost the energy, I got burned out, and then I simply had to find another strategy of interacting with the surrounding world.

Authenticity was the only answer. As it always is.

Authenticity is the sexiest thing in the world. Next to a plate of sautéed

*Strangely, none of this comes
naturally to most of us.
It requires courage.
And a lot of practice.
Plus being present in the moment.
Try it.*

asparagus with few drops of extra virgin olive oil and salt flakes. And my husband.

Writing this text is an exercise in vulnerability. I reach out and I hope that what I have to offer is enough. More: I do the best I can, I engage in a subject which is important to me and what happens later is not up to me anymore. How my words will be received by anybody is not my story anymore. I will survive either way. Because I showed up. I did my part.

And I will do the same tomorrow. In a grocery store, at a job interview or a dinner party.

Me. The only thing you get when you meet me, is me. To the best of my ability. And when I meet you I want you. I can help you to carry your distress for a while, I can hear your stories but I don't want you to hide behind your drama, or your masks.

Strangely, none of this comes naturally to most of us.

It requires courage.

And a lot of practice.

Plus being present in the moment.

Try it.

It is very refreshing after years of pretending to have it all covered.

After *trying* to have it all covered.

After years of chasing perfect...

Please, keep in mind: This will not save you from pain or disappointment.

It might change your relation to it though.

I came to realise that the idea of being *hurt* lies all together in my own hands. I am in charge of my own pain. In other words: you will not hurt me if I won't let you. I will learn plenty about myself and about you, but I refuse to be involved in dramas of our egos.

Thanks to this I came to understand that vulnerability is not even risky. It is necessary. It is the only way.

And when the person in front of you is not there yet?

Serve them with a good example, show them some of your most shameless moves, your truest self.

Let them see that it is totally safe. And then release them.

In worst case you are just becoming someones hilarious story at a dinner party.

KASIA LINDAHL An explorer of the human being, with all too long experience of human doing. Practising awareness and connection of the physical body and mind with help of yoga, meditation, plant based mindful cooking, writing, breathing, observing the nature, anything basically.

Website: zebrazone.se



*Love is the companion of vulnerability. It holds the
fragility and dares vulnerability to show itself.*

KIRAN



Halfway Broken Things

BRETTON KEATING

So much has broken in the six months I spent in India. I've gone through three purses, three pairs of sandals, two rings, countless clothing items, a dog leash, a puppy carry case, two pairs of glasses, a laptop charger, two phone chargers, two scooters, a couch, a coffee mug, and more that I'm forgetting at the moment. Everything that has broken has been something I needed to replace. You can only walk barefoot for so long. It's too strange to be coincidence, too striking to go unnoticed.

The last thing to break was my shattered-glass heart.

I wasn't looking to be swept off my feet. Most days it felt like I was only looking to survive.

Yet swept away I was, and in the whirlwind I forgot to lock the door behind me. I left the entire thing ajar.

Some moments the past spins circles around us. It's easy to say I should have listened, in retrospect.

He said we wrote a fairy tale, but I had to disagree. Because the thing I discovered, albeit unintentionally, when I began writing fairy stories to begin with, is how *not* to separate myself from it all. I can travel through the twisted trail of a tale, wind up back on the other side and nothing

has changed yet nothing stays the same. I can try to focus on memorizing moments, knowing that nothing wraps itself in happily-ever-after, the end. I can lose myself, in each and every particle of time, each and every story, and last but not least, in our strange little fairy tale, but then at the end of the day, what does it matter? I have no control over any of it. It's already been written.

I told him I wouldn't for a second trade my imagination land for the ability to be intimately understood. I had no idea when I said those words, how deeply they would cut, the very next day.

For me, this is the essence of vulnerability: that which we must trade for the ability to be intimately understood.

Some of us appear vulnerable on the outside, but really we're hiding. We bare our hearts on paper but it means nothing because none of it is true.

When lightning strikes sand, it sometimes causes glass to form. I first heard of this phenomenon in a movie, and never questioned it until last weekend, when I understood what I've always known: that certainly, my heart must be made of glass. So, I investigated further. Turns out, the magical illusion in *Sweet Home Alabama* does, in fact, happen, but not quite as depicted in the film. The glass stays hidden beneath the earth for centuries after the strike, until enough erosion perhaps brings it to surface, to see the light of day. And so it goes: the epitome of nature's unique strength.

That which we deem most breakable has, in fact, weathered the masses.

The sky flashes purple, but only for a second. Too quick to notice, most of the time. The aftermath lies hidden beneath layers too complex to count.

Things are replaceable, but the heart isn't. I've left halfway broken things in bins inside and in front of dozens of temporary homes.

The next time, I tell myself, will be different. I won't be so open to the heartbreak. I won't invite it in. I will stand on guard and I will watch,

*Sometimes we become so
surrendered, we allow life to
sweep us off our feet even as it
steps on our toes in the process.*

ready and waiting for the eventual dagger of a free-fall. But even as I write this, I know its untruth.

Because I believe in people too much.

Goodbyes become easier even as leaving is hard. Sometimes we become so surrendered, we allow life to sweep us off our feet even as it steps on our toes in the process. We make a game of words not realizing that words are swords. The simplest of which break hearts each and every day.

You can fall in love in four days, you know. Or even less. I've fallen in a matter of minutes.

A dear friend warned me this would happen. He told me to be careful. Because, in his words (not mine), "Your heart is too big." I don't think my heart is any bigger than anybody else's, but I do know that it lies, open and bleeding, most of the time. For others or myself or a combination, I'm not so sure.

And so my heart continues to drip dark blood on a moonlit shoreline as she dances the green-toed possibility of next-time. The next time she lands somewhere, it will be in the place where the waves come to crash. For that is the only place she has ever belonged.

The further we dive into vulnerability, the stronger we become. It's cliché because it's true. You may break my heart into a thousand pieces but one day it just may make sense and I will keep on walking the entire time regardless. Even when I find myself absolutely floored. Writing these words brings tears to my eyes because right now I'm in a space where I don't believe that they're true.

Trusting in timing sounds nice, but timing is a liar. The only truth is the moon.

So here's why I'm done being vulnerable, with people, today: plain and simple, it hurts.

But in the end, it's not like I ever had any choice.

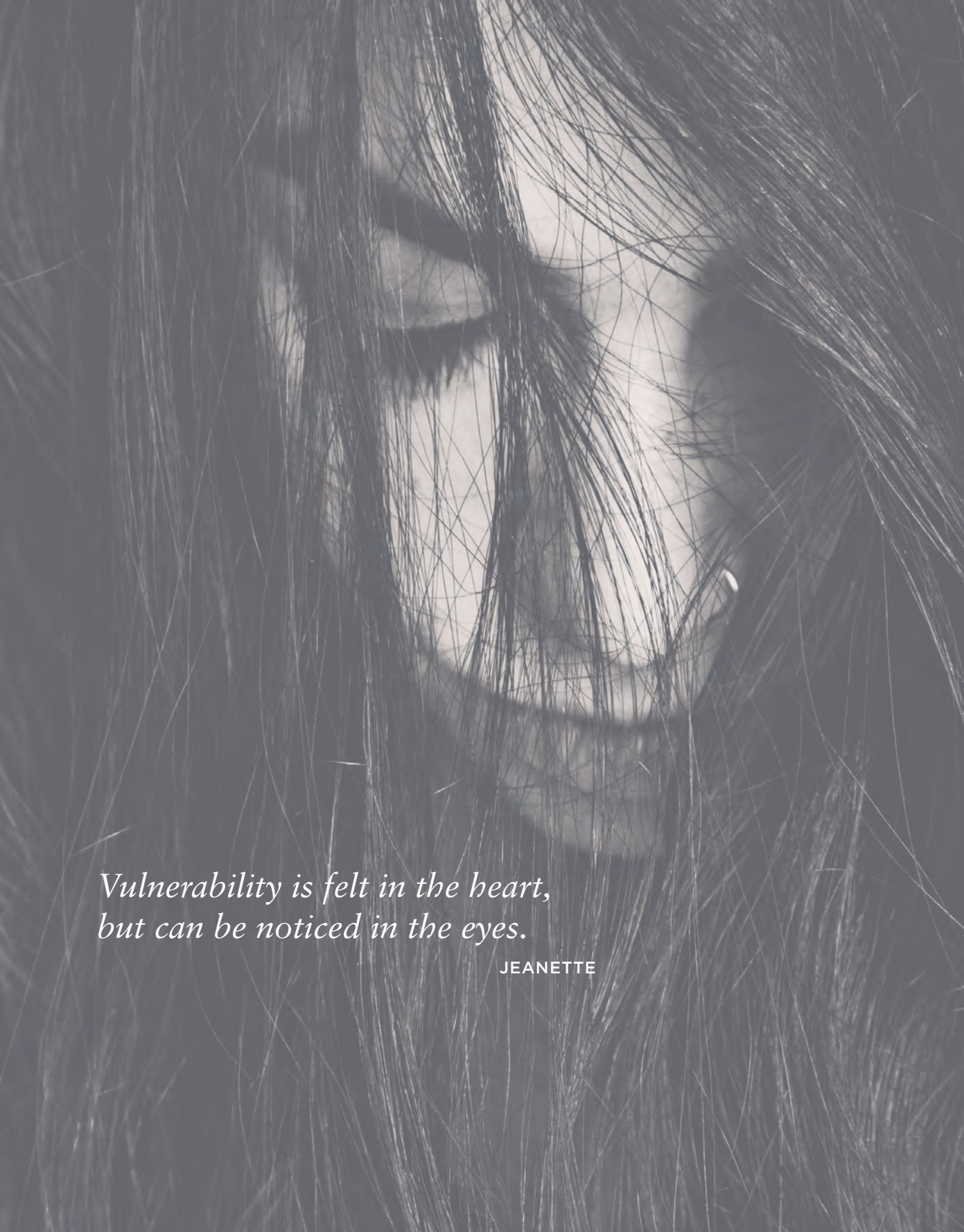
I've learned this before, but life tends to sound itself in similar notes until we start to listen. Whenever anyone is interested in the story of me, they are searching for something that I can't give. Because we all know I didn't create this story or any others. They just traveled through me.

Traveling through—what an immensely tiring way to live. But then it's the only way that makes any sense. The zipper closes shut and all the half-way broken things left behind in bins. I smile through tears and decide, yet again, that in the next place, I will be more on guard.

I let my guard down too soon, and that is always my biggest mistake.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).





*Vulnerability is felt in the heart,
but can be noticed in the eyes.*

JEANETTE

SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

How does being vulnerable feel for *you*? What makes *you* feel vulnerable? Where do *you* feel it in your body?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about vulnerability.

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TRUST



Trust lends a hand to help you up.

Trust encourages you to keep going.

*Trust takes you to places outside of
your comfort zone.*

*It extends a hand inviting you in to
places unknown.*

What is Trust?

AIMEE DUFRESNE

What is Trust?

Trust.

Pema Chodron writes about becoming comfortable with groundlessness. Accepting groundlessness.

Trust.

Leaping without knowing what lies ahead.

Trust.

My husband and I put trust to the test when we left any home base behind for a life of travel. The first night we arrived at a hotel en route and they had lost our reservations. Seeing the fear in my eyes, the man behind the counter comforted me, “It all works out in the end. Everything works out in the end.”

Trust.

Is love truly love without it?

Trust.

Trust is what lies in the groundlessness.

Trust is the blanket on a cold night. An umbrella shielding you from the pounding rain.

Trust gets you through the tough times. Trust tells you it's going to be okay.

Trust whispers comforting words in your ears when your eyes are blurry with tears.

Trust lends a hand to help you up.

Trust encourages you to keep going.

Trust takes you to places outside of your comfort zone.

It extends a hand inviting you in to places unknown.

Trust is your private benefactor, reminding you of riches to come.

Trust holds your hand as you let go, again and again.

Trust promises more, better, bolder, wiser.

Trust is there, its sweet voice tempting you to savor every moment.

But will you listen?

Will you take the hand of Trust?

Will you heed its messages to let go, to rise again, to keep going?

Will you embrace the groundlessness, believing in Trust?

How different your life would be if you did...or if you didn't.

Trust awaits your decision.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



Dear Trust

TRACY STAMPER

Dear Trust,

Thank you for those times when I thought you had failed me, for they eventually taught me that you hadn't failed me at all. Thank you for teaching me to return to the greatest teacher I have: my body.

Thank you for being there...

... when the bottom dropped out.

... when the rug was pulled out from under me.

... when I feared I would fall into the abyss.

... when I didn't know who to turn to or where to turn.

These are the times when we need to call on you.

These are the times to actively seek you out.

These are the times to flex and strengthen our Trust muscle.

These are the times to peel back the layers and dig down into the Truth of what is Trustworthy.

Truth and Trust travel hand-in-hand.

As the saying goes, the body always knows.

When you seemed to be nowhere to be found, dear Trust, I learned to root down into and through self. And there you were, right there beneath

my feet. Always. I realized that when all else failed, Mother Earth was there to catch me and hold me. Always.

From this remembering came a great sense of Trust that I can find support at any time. You taught me that you are always one sensation away: all I have to do is sense the soles of my feet to reconnect to the Truth that I can Trust the support of Earth beneath me. And when the proverbial manure hits the fan and I need the most immediate, direct reminder, I lay belly to Earth in order to ground and nourish my Body, Emotions, Mind and Spirit with this somatic knowing of Mother Earth's support. When it feels as though all else has been stripped away, this Truth I can Trust.

Thank you for being yet another reminder that all spiritual work is an inside job. Every single pondering of whether or not I can Trust so-and-so or this-and-that is simply a reflection of the Truth that my only jurisdiction is self. I can never know another as assuredly as I can know myself. That deep knowing is the root of Trust. Therefore, I can most deeply Trust myself. Thank you for this invitation to connect on ever-deepening levels to self. Trust is really not about the other. When I find myself asking who or what I can Trust, I see your mirror leading me back home.

*I can never know another as
assuredly as I can know myself.
That deep knowing is the root
of Trust.*

As our dance continues, may I become more and more highly attuned to the moment-to-moment messages that you speak to me through my body. In honor of our bodies' knowing Truth more immediately and deeply than the conscious mind, may I practice becoming ever more perceptive to reading my body's signals and Trusting my body's bone-deep knowing. Listening ever deeper to my body allows me to bypass the mental laps my mind can run in circles, and go straight to the heart of the matter of Trusting my heart's Truth. May I relax more and more fully into Trusting the Truth of my body.

Home is where my heart is and Truth is the language my heart speaks.
Home is where my feet are planted.

Home is that circle of Mama Earth I Trust to hold me in this moment.
The invitation to Trust is an invitation to return to the Truth of my body.

The Truth of my body invites me home again and again and again.
In this, I Trust.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE TO TRUST?

distrust

fear

anxiety

chaos

uncertainty

insecurity

suspicion

horror

reactivity

extreme sensitivity

critical scrutiny

panic

detached

unawareness

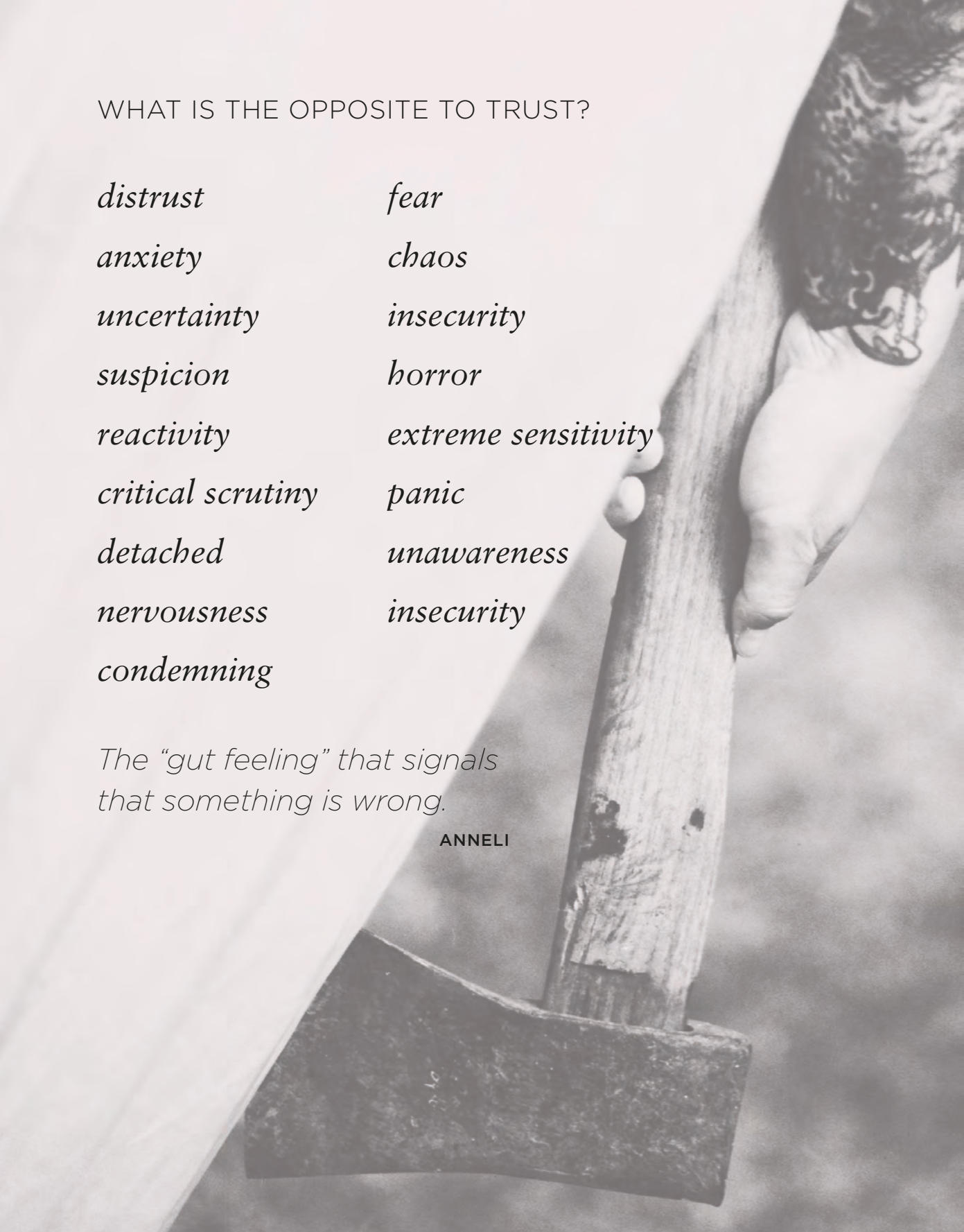
nervousness

insecurity

condemning

*The “gut feeling” that signals
that something is wrong.*

ANNELI



Voices and faces in boxes

BRETTON KEATING &

MARTIN FERDINANDS

In this piece, the two authors reflect on trust within the framework of a story. All names, characters, events and incidents are products of the authors' imaginations. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

VALERIE

The Dutch word *weltrusten*, meaning “sleep well,” albeit unintentionally, rather poetically contains the word trust sandwiched inside.

I say poetically because what better display of the ultimate level of trust than to lie asleep? Eyes closed to the universal workings filling both outside and in, so continues the intricate dance continues of what-will-come-in-the-morning-will-come.

Such was the nature of our relationship.

It's funny because he slipped me his invitation at the pinnacle of my inability to trust anyone. I had very little hope in the world, yet in the same breath, hope was all I had.

The divorce looked clean from the outside, as far as divorces go. Friends would tell me over lunches I could no longer afford on my art

teacher's salary, how they didn't understand. He hadn't cheated, what did I mean by we *fell out of love*? Didn't we know marriages don't actually require love—well, yes, surely we did know that, but what they do require is a willingness to work, and both of us were quite simply, in the full complexity of the notion, no longer willing.

I knew the marriage was over a full three months before he did. And even after he knew, and I knew that he knew, it still took us another nine to admit it out loud. Twelve months of keeping the side door shut, so as not to smell the carcass that lay rotting on the tracks we so blindly chose to live beside. The blast of the horn in the night no longer woke me with a start, as it had in nights prior. During those nights, I didn't manage to fall asleep to begin with.

So the divorce happened, and we both got through it matter-of-factly, at least by external appearances, for the sake of the children, and then a year later (so a full two from the death of the marriage), my mother sent me three plane tickets, because, as she so eloquently phrased it, children need things like the kept-up appearances of holiday.

I found myself sitting at a glass table in a seaside resort in Sint Maarten (the Dutch side, as my ex had claimed the French in the settlement papers), mulling over how Aubrey had grown less stealthy in her ability to push food around on her plate, and how little Timmy's nervous stammer only seemed to worsen despite vocal coaching, in the past two years. Two years, not one, because children, like dogs, always know from the beginning.

We finished lunch and Timmy stuttered something barely decipherable but which I understood, about going for a swim. I said I would meet him there after signing the check, and to my too-cheerful question of whether she would like to join, Aubrey only sulked before returning to the shining screen of her iPhone that my ex-husband had purchased for her, despite our former agreement that ten years was far too young

for such a thing, because, in his words, per usual left perfectly unsaid, all children of divorced parents need a cell phone.

The waitress gave me the check, and in my distracted haste, I almost missed the scribbled note, slipped inside, “Meet tonight? At the bar, 10pm. –The man in the green shirt”. I glanced up and met a soft smile, kind eyes. My heart skipping a beat, I knew, against every hesitation and reason not to, that yes, I would meet the man in the green shirt at 10pm at the resort bar.

And that was how I met Mark.

MARK

Nervous. Incredibly nervous. When she saw the note, I thought her expression confirmed what I had hoped—she would come. *But would she really? I mean, why would she?* These doubts quickly turned on myself, bringing on the usual avalanche of self-criticism.

But then there she was. And it was different. I had been travelling for quite a few months now, been away from what used to be home, and had had my times alone, in the comfort of my own solitude, and my meetings with other travellers. I enjoyed those meetings, too. In fact, I had started to take real pleasure in talking to people, getting to know them, learning from each other’s experiences—I felt much more outgoing than how I had always been at the place that used to be home. But here she was, Valerie was her name—of course, I first forgot, then got it wrong, and then had to ask (awkward!). With her, things were different from different.

Of course, the conversation that first evening was the same conversation travellers always have. Where are you from? (She’s from the Netherlands. I’m from the UK.) How long are you travelling? (A quick 10 day stay at the resort for her and her children, paid for by her mother. For me it is the weather conditions that forced me into this overly luxurious hotel—I should have been outside, surfing and teaching surfing classes,

as I have done for four months and will do for I-don't-know-how-many-more-months.) What do you do back home? (She teaches art classes. I gave up my position as an underpaid assistant professor in continental philosophy in Cambridge to find out how it feels to live outside of libraries, amongst people who don't keep up appearances.) But underneath the exchange there was a sense of comfort I have only seldom felt in my life, a sense of acceptance that I cannot give even myself. It seemed we weren't just getting to know each other; it felt like we were catching up.

We continued catching up over the next few days. The presence of her children meant the only moments we had together were the margins of the day. Early morning conversations over tea before her children came down. Perhaps a conversation by the swimming pool, if for once Aubrey left her iPhone (and thus Valerie) alone to go for a dive. And every night. Every night we would find each other again and again, as if we always had, as if we belonged.

We seemed to belong together, naturally. Our conversations grew longer and more intimate. Our silences did too. Our goodbyes before going to bed got longer too. And every time she would whisper to me that word I didn't know, it sounded like "will trust..."

Although it sounded like something good and worthwhile, and intimidating too, I never found out what "weltrusten" means while we were both in Sint Maarten.

It was the first thing I asked her about the next time we spoke, both of us diminished to a face on the screen and a voice from the speakers. Blessings of modern technology! Her explanation of the word was so striking that I could not respond of the coff. I came back to it a few days later when we were finally both online again...

Mark: Hey Valerie! Have time to talk today?

Valerie: Well, I'm in the train so I can't do a call. I can chat if you'd want to... what's up?

[13:57:13] *Mark*: Well, I really wanted to tell you that I thought your explanation of “weltrusten”, how you linked trust to sleep, was beautiful.

[13:57:42] *Valerie*: Oh thank you!

[13:58:17] *Mark*: I was also thinking how it is interesting how on the one hand sleep is one of the easiest things on earth... while also sometimes when it is hard to fall asleep, there is no way. You're just lying there, wide awake, turning left to right, right to left... you know how it goes.

[13:59:55] *Valerie*: So when you're tossing and turning... is that because of a lack of trust? Hmm... I don't think so?

[14:00:14] *Mark*: No?

[14:00:17] *Valerie*: But what's your experience of it?

[14:00:28] *Mark*: I thought your analogy actually extends that far.

[14:00:36] *Valerie*: I think you're right! Because if you're in your thoughts (unable to sleep) it shows a lack of trust in life. Trust is being in the moment.

[14:01:38] *Mark*: Yes, wow.

... But I also think it is a particular way of being in the moment. I mean, fear is also a way of being in the moment, but it has a totally different orientation. Or perhaps, rather, it is a way of not being in the moment.

[14:03:04] *Valerie*: Well there are different types of fear. There's fear in the moment like when there's actual danger. That is actually very rare. The rest of fear is probably some kind of projected future danger.

Wait... were you implying fear is the opposite of trust?

[14:05:20] *Mark*: I think that is a really good question, whether fear and trust are opposites. I think they are definitely related, but not necessarily mutually exclusive.

[14:05:36] *Valerie*: You can fear life but also trust it.

[14:06:24] *Mark*: Yes, the human heart is endlessly complicated, and trust is usually relevant exactly when there is fear.

[14:06:54] *Mark*: If there is no fear and nothing to fear, trust becomes idle...

[14:07:10] *Valerie*: Oh, interesting! Do you mean that fear heightens trust to some degree?

[14:07:34] *Mark*: Let me think how to make this thought concrete... okay, to use a mundane example, say I am back in school and have a test coming up, and I am studying for it. I may still be afraid that I won't do well, but then I can reflect back on how much I prepared. Then I will feel confident. And confidence, really, is another form of trust. In Chinese the word for confidence is *zixin*—literally, self-trust.

[14:09:51] *Valerie*: Really? That is so interesting! Because you know, in Dutch, the word is “*zelfvertrouwen*.” It is made up in exactly the same way: “*zelf*” is “self” and “*vertrouwen*” is “trust.”

[14:10:08] *Mark*: Ha! Us and words! :)

[14:10:08] *Valerie*: All about the words!

*If there is no fear and
nothing to fear,
trust becomes idle*

[14:10:30] *Mark*: Anyhow, if, on the other hand, I am totally not afraid of failing the test, then there is no reason to reflect back on how much I studied, no reason to trust in my own abilities and preparation.

[14:11:19] *Valerie*: Yes, so fear provides an opportunity to pay attention to trust.

14:11:25] *Mark*: Yes! ~~~methinks.

[14:11:38] *Valerie*: Whenever you say the word fear, I always think of falling backward into a backbend in yoga practice. There's fear in the moment, but also trusting that I'll land. It's an opportunity to overcome fear by trusting.

[14:12:50] *Valerie*: But then, without fear, is trust still there? Because without fear, you just fall back no problem... is it still trust in that case?

[14:13:26] *Mark*: What do you think?

[14:16:21] *Valerie*: I think it becomes less necessary. Perhaps people who aren't fearful just have a deeper instilled reserve of trust in themselves and the world.

[14:17:01] *Mark*: That makes sense.

[14:17:15] *Valerie*: The rest of us are still working on our trust—ha!

[14:17:24] *Mark*: Interesting, because in English, too, I think we would call those people confident.

[14:17:38] *Valerie*: Confident or naïve... or unharmed. Who knows...

[14:22:44] *Mark*: Yes, I think that is right: people who don't fear may simply have a large reserve of trust and confidence... whether that is true confidence or naïveté. But at the same time, I think what I was originally getting at is a more phenomenological perspective—that is, what it feels like, when it feels, how we trust.

And when we are stepping into new things, uncertain what they will bring, afraid, even, of what they might bring, it is right then that we actually can feel trust and feel what it means. It is right there in the contradictions of the heart.

[14:25:14] *Valerie*: The contradictions of the heart—what do you mean by that?

[14:30:51] *Mark*: Well, it'd be easiest to explain what I meant if you'll allow me to use an example that might a bit vulnerable.

[14:35:50] *Valerie*: Yes, please do give your example.

[14:36:51] *Mark*: Well, when we first decided we would meet again, we were telling each other how excited we were... but also nervous... and yet, in going ahead and doing it, there is trust... and some kind of fear (in the form of us being nervous).

[14:42:26] *Valerie*: Yes! There's much trust involved in meeting again.

Especially now that I'm having a difficult time with my children. It is easier to trust when things are going smoothly. And there's always the question of inviting in new love... is it the right time? Is it too soon? All questions you are familiar with as we've discussed them before.

But if I'm to be perfectly honest, what I'm going through now feels a bit easier because I have the prospect of us meeting again, even if it does involve the conflicting sentiments of trust and fear (for both of us).

[14:45:47] *Mark*: Thank you for saying that, in two ways actually.

[14:46:16] *Valerie*: ?

[14:46:46] *Mark*: Well, first for your honesty just now: expressing that you do have a harder time with trust in your current situation. And I appreciate that you say that—it makes me feel more trusting if anything, because of your willingness to honestly express the truth. This then also opens a new pathway for conversation: trust and honesty.

(The other one is that your situation is more bearable because at least there is me coming to look forward to.)

[14:49:13] *Valerie*: Thank you for saying that. On a different note, you took a leap of faith when you passed me that note in the hotel!

[14:50:43] *Mark*: Happy I leapt, trusted one voice in my head over another... complicated contradictions of the heart.

[14:51:08] *Valerie*: Why is your heart contradictory? I'm curious what you mean by that.

[15:31:38] *Mark*: oh... ehm...

[14:52:31] *Mark*: I mean when I said that before, I meant how we may have one or another fear... and at the same time we also have this sense of trust, that especially in that case trust is powerful (and so needed!).

[14:52:54] *Mark*: But were you asking specifically about passing you that note?

[14:53:00] *Valerie*: Yes—both.

[14:54:28] *Mark*: When I passed that note I did doubt myself and had many second, third, fourth, fifth, and even millionth thoughts running through my head (and heart, ha!). There was my usual fear of new situations, my self-doubt, feelings of unworthiness. I had met many new people during my travels... but passing that note to you, that was new. I wanted to and yet feared doing it. And yet, I couldn't help myself. There was a silent place of trust inside too. I knew I was inviting in the Unknown—such a general condition of life!! And it felt like I could trust it, as if there was a very natural movement towards growth.

[14:54:40] *Valerie*: Oh! We're approaching Leeuwarden... gotta run! Speak later!

[15:41:20] *Mark*: Oh... yes, we'll chat again later. Have a great day!

[15:42:15] *Mark*: Also... I really want to say thank you! Look forward to talking to you next time; and to seeing you next month! Time flies. But I wish it flew faster!

MARK

Time had flown during our conversation. Although there were plenty of intervals in between our messages, I had not used that time to prepare the surfing class I was to teach later that day. As I was teaching, I found myself distracted, thinking of Valerie and feeling the rush that comes with

thinking of her. It felt just like being in high school all over again. Didn't we all experience it there? That we would have a crush on some boy or girl and find ourselves unable to focus during class. The only difference was that now, I was the instructor, the center of attention—all eyes were on me.

None of those eyes seemed to notice my absent-mindedness. After class, I asked one of the students, if he had noticed anything about me. "No, you seemed as confident as ever!"

Confident as ever... What a joke! I thought... I am never confident.

Confidence, trust, love. The ideas were buzzing through my head as I went to sleep that night. At first I was kept awake by happy memories. Memories of our late-night solitary dances to the concerts of silence and rain and oceans breaking on the beach in Sint Maarten. I lay wide awake with a smile.

But then my mind started wondering. Was Valerie upset? I had admitted my original doubts around the note I passed her in the hotel. Is she disappointed in me? Is that why she never responded to my goodbye, didn't give any affection as she went offline?

I worried. I doubted. Myself. Her. What was, is, and what will be.

Then, in a moment of silence that allowed me to hear the waves again, I felt Valerie's presence, heard her whisper "Weltrusten, dear." I fell in a deep sleep.

VALERIE

Prior to our conversation, we had decided to meet again, perhaps against my better judgment but sometimes the heart knows best. But then speaking to Mark only confirmed the decision, in both mind and heart. I had never fallen for someone the way that I had with him. With others, there was attraction, and a bit of excitement, perhaps... but this felt different. It felt like a conversation with an old friend. It felt like we could talk about

any and everything. He felt like someone I could trust the bleeding bits of my heart with, and he would not only be there to listen and accept them, but would gladly care for them as his own.

In the stillness that comes with the distance between us, I found myself never once doubting his intentions. Sometimes there were entire days when he was surfing and we couldn't connect. The time difference when he was travelling didn't help. But even with silence, even in the night, I slept peacefully. I slept in a way in which I trusted not only the pending morning, but also the surrounding darkness. I trusted the unknown. Because in certain, rare moments that you know must happen by intricate design, the unknown feels known.

MARK

When I woke up, I was in a particularly philosophical mood. Instead of entrusting these words to my journal to be re-read later and deemed superficial after all, I offered them up to Valerie as an email.

Valerie, goedemorgen (that is how you say it in Dutch right?),

Woken up to trust and curiosity on my side of the ocean. I was thinking a bit more about trust and wanted to share my thoughts—I hope you don't mind a monologue from me. ;)

Remember how we related trust and confidence yesterday? I realized something about my own lack of confidence and how I've tried to compensate... often I give myself challenges—like surfing some large wave or exercising for a long stretch of time without breaking—and expect myself to meet them. I push myself hard if needed. When I accomplish a challenge like this, I feel I am worthy of my own trust. Passing my own tests makes me feel confident.

So, this morning I was going to set myself some ridiculous challenge again. (I won't even mention it. You'll just laugh at me and my macho

masochism!) But then... I realized that I am human. (Yeah, imagine, right?) We can trust in the law of gravity—except if you are Rupert Sheldrake perhaps—or the law of the excluded middle—unless you belong to the likes of Russell. It will always be true and dependable.

But with myself... I am human. I can do the best I can and then I might succeed. Or I might fail. And sometimes I can't even try the best I can. I can't trust in myself as a law, but I can trust in my own humanity; I can have confidence in my own heart, my qualities, my capacity for growth, even as I accept that I—me with my contradictory heart! —may not be predictable.

And then in that sense... you know, I think saying "I love you" is beautiful and I mean it when I say it. But perhaps what may even be more beautiful would be to say "I trust you." And, really, I do, although I cannot hold you captive in my hopes and expectations (nor in my fears and anxieties), I can see the beauty of your humanity and have confidence in who you are and will be.

I trust you.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).



MARTIN FERDINANDS climbs trees, practices yoga, meditates and writes in his journal. When he is not doing any of those, he reads and translates texts from various Asian spiritual traditions as part of his graduate studies. So far, none of his creative writing has been published, except for a Dutch piece ([found here](#)).

SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

What is trust for *you*? How does it feel for *you*? What makes *you* trust?
What colors do *you* associate with trust?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about trust.

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HOPE

The Red Ballon

AIMEE DUFRESNE

A red balloon floats down to earth
During times of your deepest despair
When grief has claimed your heart
Loss has visited your life
Isolation has enveloped your soul

The red balloon floats freely by your side
A small string hanging from it
Inviting you to take hold
With a tear-streaked face and trembling hand
You reach out, feeling the flimsiness of it between your fingers

The weight of the world feels so heavy
But the red balloon offers you weightlessness
Leaving the aching burden behind,
You feel lightness in body and mind
Gently, effortlessly, you start to rise.



Above the fields of sorrow
Past the pastures of pain
Over the mountain of melancholy
The red balloon glides you out of the darkness
Your eyes adjust to the light.

Glittering gems of joy fill the fields
Success is shooting up all around you
Leaves on the trees of ease gently sway
Laughter fills the air
Love is blooming everywhere

The vibrant colors dazzle you
Aromas so divine are inhaled
Sweet music fills your ears
You feel supported as you pass the sign
That reads: This is what will be.

Closing your eyes, soaking it in
You smile, you giggle, you laugh
But once you open your eyes again
You realize the red balloon has brought you back
To the dark place where it met you.

Fear not, it whispers in your ear
And please don't worry so
Life looks grim now, yet it is just a phase
I just showed you all the fun places you will go
...my name is Hope if you didn't already know

Hope reassures you this darkness is just a phase
Light awaits you right around the corner
Hope reminds you to hold on to it
So you can return to the place of peace you visited together
Hope plants a seed in your heart so it can grow and be with you always

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



When Hope Comes Home

TRACY STAMPER

I vividly recall the specific moment when Hope found its way back to me.

Decades ago, I spent a number of years in the trenches of severe clinical depression. Once finally diagnosed, additional years' worth of trial and error in finding the right medication followed. I felt hopeless. Whenever yet another antidepressant medication didn't work, I felt even more so.

Hope seemed to be out of reach to me at that time. It wasn't even something I could access as a vision for which to aim. Now, I have knowledge and tools to maintain and enhance mental health and well-being. At that time, however, I simply wasn't inwardly resourced enough to even know how to explore how to heal. So I was relying solely on medical intervention.

When the pharmaceutical intervention clicked, it felt like a light switch was turned on. It was sudden. Deliciously and sweetly sudden!

Today, decades later, I can still feel exactly where I was on that curve in the road in front of the Spanish style house. Open windows and sunroof brought sunrays to my skin and wind through my hair. I was driving far too fabulously fast for the first time in eons.

Within several seconds, I felt as though I was hearing a spiritual alarm clock chiming. Birdsongs landed with flutters of lightness, whimsy and joy in my heart. My heart was smiling! I was alive with feeling. This felt foreign to me after years of depression.

My God! I felt my heart!

I looked upwards at the birds. Titling my head up opened the front of my chest and my heartspace. Things had not been looking up for me for some time. Literally, I had not physically been looking up. The act of lifting my gaze shifted my posture, flooding my heart with another rush of streaming aliveness.

Next thing I knew, and much to my delight and surprise, I heard myself laughing! Laughter was a language in which I had lost fluency for a long time. The cliché absurdity of the moment elicited laughter which spilled out of me in sounds that made me laugh even deeper into my belly. The hilariousness of finding Hope against the backdrop of a soundtrack of birdsongs was so ridiculously cliché that it tickled my giggle muscles. How I laughed!

Laughter. What a welcome sign of life. The birds had awakened my heart's wings. And my sense of humor. That little flutter in my heart telling me I'm alive was back. The fluttering stretched my ribcage open from the inside out. More space opened for full, deep, nourishing, soulful breaths.

With the aid of medication, my body chemistry was shifting back into a place where I was able to experience feeling good again. After so long in the dark, this was exhilarating. The boost of medication lifted me up to a level on which I could then tap into my inner resources and a desire to help myself.

Hope had returned home to nest, feathered by birdsongs.

Ever since that cliché day, birdsongs beckon my eyes and heart upwards.

There is much wisdom in looking up. Physically looking up creates more room for our heartspace.

Laughter. What a welcome sign of life. The birds had awakened my heart's wings. And my sense of humor. That little flutter in my heart telling me I'm alive was back.

The body wisdom of connecting to sensation as a promising path back into aliveness accompanies me everywhere now. It is a given, with me at all times. At that time, however, feeling alive in my own body marked a stark contrast to where I had been.

This very moment - right here, right now - is an invitation to take your eyes up to the skies. Sense your chest expand as your heart blossoms open. Raise your gaze to create more room for breath. Breath is life. Expanding our gaze from the immediate into the distance physically opens the portal to emotionally transporting ourselves from boxed-in stuckness to expanded horizons.

"I often catch myself playing loops in my mind, some tired old story of hurt or misunderstanding. I've noticed when I am doing it the focus of my eyes is tight to my immediate vicinity, and that by simply raising my head and looking at the sky or horizon, it 'breaks' the spell of the story and returns me to the present. It's getting so much easier it's almost laughable to see what I do to myself, and fills me with joy to move on."

~ Gil Hedley, Ph.D., Founder of Integral
Anatomy Productions & Somanautics Workshops

(‘Somanaut’ is a word that Gil Hedley created “*to describe those who explore the inner space of the body, and discover there the rich terrain of themselves.*”)

From birdsongs to buttercups, heartspace to horizon, I now sense the power of the two words so often uttered to those feeling hopeless and down: “Chin up.”

Chin up, Buttercup. Lift eyes to the skies. Seek Beauty. Engage senses. Look all around. Look for the inspiration in the beauty of a buttercup. Listen for the birdsongs. Seek shapes dancing in clouds. Look up, and your precious energy will respond.

Our bodies respond because they don’t just reveal our moods; they literally help shape them. Engaging our bodies as partners in the dance of emotions is profoundly empowering.

When we’re feeling hopeless, sad, or stuck, our gaze lowers, narrows, and draws in tighter and closer. Shifting our gaze immediately shifts our physiology. Every breath we take, every move, every expression, every

*Look for the inspiration in
the beauty of a buttercup.
Listen for the birdsongs.
Seek shapes dancing in clouds.
Look up, and your precious
energy will respond.*

thought changes the physiology of the body. Our bodies hold far more power to navigate our emotional terrain than most of us realize or utilize.

When hopeless, look up. Look. See. Seek anything that returns that flutter of life to the heart. Seek something to look forward to, as looking forward engages the body in looking up. Looking up floods our senses with stimulation and life.

Hope is that sensation of ‘Chin up, Buttercup.’

Hope is the buttercup blossom.

Hope is your heartspace blossoming.

Hope is the flow of breath.

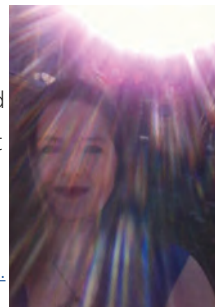
Hope is that inner spark reminding you: You can do this. Keep going.


When Hope seems out of reach, seek the horizon.

Look.

Look with your chin up, Buttercup.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



A full-page background image showing a person from behind, standing in shallow ocean water. The person is wearing a light-colored one-piece swimsuit and dark swim trunks. The water is a vibrant blue with white foam from the waves. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is serene and hopeful.

*Hope is the light
shining
through a cloud
making
the clear water
sparkle.*

ANNA

Hope floats

BRETTON KEATING

Hope floats until it drowns
Sometimes it takes just one
They tell me I did it wrong again
I messed up.
It's not right.
Better luck next time
Is it luck?
Or is it just me?

"The world is a terrible place,"
She says to me.
War
Rape
Violence
To varying degrees her
Story sounds the same
Day after day

And then she tells me
everything I'm doing wrong.

Young girls wither away
Dogs grow angry.
A frothing mouth and
Eyes too far gone to save.
“Why did you do it?”
We're obsessed with why
Without comprehending
How to listen.

We hope for the more
But the more is what
Terrifies
Destructs
Inflicts pain
And the pedestal
Of my life
My story
My worth
Being greater than yours.

More love?
Check.
More power?
Check.
More money?
Check again.

Misplaced hope carries more danger than its counter.

I sit beside the one who saves ants.
Even those who bite
Fiercely
Refusing to let go.
Vengeance perhaps,
Or unfiltered despair
As sand wears thin
One misconstrued lifeline.

Pain recycles itself in raging torrents.
And more is never enough.

Maybe living for hope is blind
Maybe living to hope is delusional
Or perhaps living with hope
is a colour we cannot (yet) see.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).





WHAT IS THE COLOR OF HOPE?

*I'm unclear as to whether
it has a color... but I DO
know it has sparkles!*

TRACY

*Hope is blue with sprinkles of
orange. Hope has no limit, trust
is the mother of hope. Faith and
hope embraces you. Is within
reach and whispers quietly to
surrender yourself.*

KIRAN

*Hope is blue, like
the sky and the sea*

MOUNA

SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

What is hope for *you*? How do *you* feel it in your body? What makes *you* hope? What sounds do *you* associate with hope?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about hope.

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H.O.P.E.

Hang On ~ Peace Emerges

Healing Our Precious Energy

Horizons Open Possibilities Endlessly

Heart Opening Portal Enlivens

Hearts Outpouring ~ Possibilities Expanding

Tracy Stamper

SHAME

Shame doesn't need to change

BRETTON KEATING

Shame is the emotion about which I do not wish to write.

I thought maybe I would skip the topic. I don't have much to say.

But then resistance may shine light on an emotion so deeply rooted that writing about it just may begin to heal something.

We are all conditioned and taught to carry shame.

I was too fat; then I was too thin.

Nobody said anything about the latter.

The other day a man approached me on a covered bridge, asking about my puppy. I've grown accustomed to attention, travelling around Asia with the small dog that rescued me from the streets of India. We're a strange anomaly, the blue-eyed American girl with her puppy on a leash.

The man told me my dog was "Slim, not like you. You're fat." His remark led to a 48-hour spiral through my insecurities, ones I thought I had overcome but it seems I really hadn't. Healing comes in circles; it's not a linear path. I awoke the next morning hating myself.

As girls growing up, we're told that we're pretty. Hardly a person out there reads the things that I write, yet I post a photo where I have a bit of a tan, and I get hundreds of 'likes'. What is it about the 'likes'? I couldn't

*Like a monster pulsing through
our veins, the black blood of
being too much and not enough
in the exact same breath
circulates, weaving its web until
we're too far gone to come
back from here.*

care less about 'likes', but then the entire concept does make me question whether anything artistic I contribute to the world has any kind of value. So I guess, yes, then, as shameful as I feel to admit it aloud, I do care.

We're even taught to carry shame around the caring.

And the caring, it doesn't just disappear. I can tear my way through the self-help section, buying into all the pseudo-spirituality there is out there, or I can just accept that I am a human being, and I care. I care when someone on a covered bridge tells me I am fat. I care when I work diligently, for weeks, obsessing over each and every word, on a two-page article that nobody reads. I care when it's been weeks and you still haven't returned my call. I care when the random stranger passing on the street tells me I'm raising my puppy entirely wrong.

I care.

Just maybe, the caring so deeply, so fully, the caring at all, is not something for which I need be ashamed.

We're taught to apologize for everything. The apologies outgrow the social subtleties of niceness. The apologies become us. Like a monster pulsing through our veins, the black blood of being too much and not enough in the exact same breath circulates, weaving its web until we're too far gone to come back from here.

We spend centuries in the unweaving.

I was a witch in a past life, I am certain.

I feel myself burnt at the stake, each and every day.

It doesn't have to be like this. We do not have to succumb to circumstance. There are people who teach love, not hate or even vague dislike. People who look at me in the skin I wear, and help me to see that it does not need to be changed. That *I*, in the deepest essence of existing, do not need to be changed. Yes, I can always work on my actions... but these

*There are people who live
by love, rather than social
subtleties and niceness.
Being nice isn't so nice when
doing so causes detriment.*

people, they recognize and understand, deeply, that actions and words and ideas are all separate from *me*, in my true form.

There are people who live by love, rather than social subtleties and niceness. Being nice isn't so nice when doing so causes detriment. When the words drip like sugar from a spoilt tongue. And there's a difference between kindness and niceness.

My hips are bruised from all the niceness, and so I think I'd rather be kind. Beginning with kindness toward myself, by acknowledging that the shame I carry is a learnt trait. It means I've paid attention, even as I daydream my way through day-to-day life. Shame is just a small piece of my story, it doesn't need to be changed, and it in no way defines who I am as a person.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).





WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE TO SHAME?

*The opposite of shame - life! Shame force
us into the corner of death.*

*The opposite, a permission, a trust to be.
At the foundation of it all - love vibrates.*

KIRAN

pride

atonement

self-worth

self-esteem

trust

life

*Shame is wordless and
exceptionally hard to
describe. The opposite
is trust, openness and
the ability to feel safe in
relationships.*

ELISABETH

Shame's Secret

TRACY STAMPER

'What is the color of Anger?'

'Where in the body does Freedom live?'

'How does Support feel for you?'

'Does Vulnerability have a companion?'

'What words, colors, sounds do you associate with Trust?'

'How do you express Hope?'

The Book of Emotions' writing prompts opened doorways. Anger dared me to dance with him. Freedom took me soaring. Support carried me down memory lane through lessons learned the hard way. Vulnerability cracked me wide open in a wondrous way. Trust received a love letter from me. Hope brought my eyes to the horizon.

'How do you experience Shame?'

Simply seeing the word Shame felt like a sucker punch. Immediately, I became aware of how I experience Shame, as the mere thought of writing on this topic elicited a visceral response of tightness in my belly and a sensation of contracting into myself.

I became smaller.

The brilliant barometer of my body reminded me that my healing journey with Shame is a work in progress.

Thankfully, I had three months to sit with this topic and find a palatable way to write about it.

Soon, there were two months left. Zero ideas.

With just over one month left, my healing journey asked me to keep the tenderness of this topic close. In so many ways and with so many topics, I am an open book when it comes to writing. I share deeply personal parts of myself on the page. Shame, however, nudged me to further empower self by holding boundaries of privacy around this topic. Empowerment is blossoming, yet not fully blossomed.

Less than one month left. The conundrum of how to write about Shame kept rattling around in my brain. Still, zero inspiration.

I was determined to wrap up this writing before my family trip to the beach so that this persistent and now annoying issue of how to write about Shame wouldn't tag along on my vacation. Writing went on the top of my list of things to do before our trip. I whittled everything off of that list... except for writing about Shame.

Shame crashed the party of our beach vacation.

Some anxiety bubbled up around the looming deadline and around the fact that I feared facing Shame. Tucked in my purse was a notebook ready to capture any inspiration that arose. All that arose was anxiety.

Then, I went underwater.

My family and I visited the magical Monterey Aquarium. The structure that houses the aquarium is built into the bay. Sometimes it was impossible to tell if the water and creatures were part of the natural world or within the walls and glass partitions of the aquarium.

Ringo Starr's lyrics were painted onto the Aquarium wall:

"I'd like to be under the sea in an octopus' garden in the shade."

I was under the sea in this mesmerizing architectural miracle where

fantasy met reality and merged into one fantastical experience. Thousands of jellyfish opening and closing so slowly, often in unison, hypnotized me. I dove into a meditative state; my heart rate and breath slowing down in resonance with the fluid slow-motion expansion and contraction of the jellyfish.

Marine life that looked like science fiction characters swam within inches of the glass I had my face pressed into. Anchovies created a light show, reflecting silver glints when one caught the light just right for a brief moment. Puffins played on the faux rocks in their area. Sea otters playfully tumbled into and around one another, putting on a water gymnastics show in the ocean that cradled the aquarium.

Amazed by the interplay of the outside world with the sea world within the aquarium, I glanced from the jetty-like rock exhibits housing the puffins to the jetties outside.

That is the exact moment when I met Shame.

My imagination saw Shame emerge from behind the jetties in the bay. She was a sea monster who looked like the most wicked of wicked witches. She lives in the sea just beyond the reach of reason.

*Shame rules through terror,
keeping humans hostage to her
by keeping us small.*

Shame revealed herself as an old, sinewy, bent and crooked sharp hag draped in tattered gray, brown and crimson robes of burlap. Her screech of a voice is known to send shivers down spines long after utterances of her ugliness have faded.

Shame rules through terror, keeping humans hostage to her by keeping us small. She squeezes us into the grip of her ten finger talons: guilt, embarrassment, fear, unworthiness, insecurity, isolation, anxiety, resignation, silence and secrecy. Though gnarled and arthritic, her finger talons manage to hold humans in her grip of fear. When wrapped around us, Shame squeezes the vibrancy of life from us.

How can she hold us with her old, fumbling and weak fingers? Through her words, which we echo: ‘*Shame on you*’ and ‘*You should be ashamed of yourself*’ are among the most damaging statements we can utter. With these words, we cast Shame’s spells on ourselves and others. These dark

*Shame is a bully.
She is a bully hiding behind a
façade.
Her magic is that she has us
under our spell.
Our magic is that she needs
us to survive.*

curses are hers, but we are the ones who perpetuate her hate. We repeat her ugly stories, damning one another into Shame's grip.

When my mind's eye dared to look her in the eye, I saw her shake. I saw weakness in her hands and heard dark curses sputtering and spewing from her foul, foaming mouth. In that moment of bravery, I was able to see straight through her.

Like the schoolyard bully... like those hiding behind bravado... like the man behind the emerald curtain of Oz... she is scared. Scaring others makes her feel powerful, and power appeals to her fear-based way of walking through the world.

Shame is a bully.

She is a bully hiding behind a façade.

Her magic is that she has us under our spell.

Our magic is that she needs us to survive.

Shame needs us to buy into her lies in order to survive. Her backbone is brittle so she usurps ours. Shame's arrival is an invitation for us to sense our spine, ground into our heels, and inhabit our backbone by standing tall.

Freeing ourselves from her spell takes climbing out onto the rocky crags overlooking the wildness of the sea where she hides behind rocks and under lies.

So we rise.

Though human knees may wobble, voices may tremble, and tears fueled by fears may pour back into the saltwater of the sea, we answer her to be free.

"No!"

'No' is all she needs to know for her false magic emerald curtain to dissolve into the sea.

"No" casts a magical spell of the freeing Truth we tell.

Our courage is her kryptonite.

Anger. Freedom. Support. Vulnerability. Trust. Hope. And Shame.

The invitation of The Book of Emotions to travel deeper into our emotional landscape emboldened me to acquaint myself with Shame. Once she appeared out of the sea, she ceased to be the larger-than-life entity that had me in her grip. Meeting her allowed me to see that she is like me: scared.

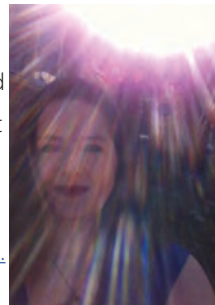
I am scared. And I am courageous. My courage is her kryptonite.

My message to Shame: *'No. This weight of Shame is not mine to carry. What happened to me is not my fault. This Shame does not belong to me. It has left me weary, and I will not carry it any longer.'*

Mother Nature knows how to recycle energy. I return Shame to the sea. I dedicate all the saltwater tears I've ever cried in Shame back to the ocean, where life begins and where the life of this shame ends.

I no longer fear the undertow.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

How do *you* experience shame? Where do *you* feel it in your body? What words, colors or sounds do *you* associate with shame?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about shame.

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*Healing is a homecoming,
and it isn't to a place
but to a person.
You.*

SKYLER MECHELLE WEINBERG

Homecoming

SKYLER MECHELLE WEINBERG

Experiencing a homecoming, when you have never known what home is or what home feels like, doesn't always feel like what you thought it would. It is a life long experience, not a singular one. A messy, raw, sticky, experience that invites you, in all that has attached to you, to be cleansed in the clarity of the redefined comfort. Of surrender.

When I used to dream of home, I would dream of walking down a cobblestone lane in the spring time. It was simple, I never tripped on the wobbly stones below my feet, and I knew exactly where I was headed. When I first began my life long dance with homecoming it didn't feel that way, and for years I wobbled over the stones as I reclaimed by understanding of what exactly I was walking towards. Where I was headed. What I wanted to be at the end of that road.

Emotional work is body work. Emotions live and breathe and begin and fall within our skin. This work is internal, not external; which is why comfort tends to feel like a destruction, as it washes away the disillusionment of abuse and manipulation and fear. Because healing is a homecoming, and it isn't to a place but to a person.

You.

As you wade into the waters, and place your hands on your precious skin. As you feel the stickiness and sores and wounds, and acknowledge them for what they feel like not what you were told they are or needed to believe they were to survive. As you meet comfort, and embrace destruction. As you rise, and as you fall. As you feel, and as you surrender...

Know you're not alone.

I believe you. I believe what you feel. I believe who you are. There is no soul better to guide your inner child in their homecoming than you.

There is no better time than when you are ready.

There is no better entanglement of grief and joy, than feeling at home in your body again.

There is no better freedom, than yours.

SKYLER MECHELLE WEINBERG After enduring over 17 years of incest, physical violence, and sex trafficking through and by her immediate family, Skyler escaped at the age of 18 and has and has since sought to redefine what it means to live life after abuse. She has built a movement that not only seeks to educate and destigmatise a very prevalent issue in our society, but refine and modify the support that is already in place.

Focusing heavily on the systemic oppression, racism, ableism, and segregation that further impacts the poor trauma after care and mental health fields globally, she has set out to break the silence and reform abuse care by believing all survivors.

Photo: Laurence Hofman

Website: skyler-mechelle.com.



PEACE

May Peace Be with You

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON

“I give you my Peace.”

“May Peace be with you.”

When I was younger and attended Catholic Mass, these statements were similar to what the Priest would say to the congregation. What followed next, was a part of the service when everyone could take a breath, smile and relax from the seriousness of the liturgy and extend wishes of peace to those around them. With firm handshakes, hugs, smiles and verbal, “Peace be with you” messages, the energy in the church became dynamic.

Those moments were always magical to me. To be able to look shyly in another’s eyes and wish them Peace. In giving the blessing, I’d be giddy with apprehension and excitement. It was like giving away a prized possession, something that was accepted and never returned. On the receiving side, my heart opened with love, buoyant on a wide wave of peaceful movement. A spontaneous freedom of pleasurable emotion had me grinning from ear to ear.

As a seasoned adult, when peace comes swirling like an early morning mist, it slides over me, caressing my skin. It’s reverent. Similar to sitting in

a quiet stone chapel with sunbeams painting stained glass-colored light across the interior surfaces.

Peace is stillness in my being, devoid of emotion. My body senses a gentle breath, separating me from the chaotic world. I sense myself slipping through an imaginary silk curtain from a breezy, noisy, entrance way into a cool, quiet space of serene puffy cushions and stark white décor.

In contemplating the emotion of peace, I realize more peaceful feelings occur when I'm in unique landscapes, and at places where I find vestiges of quiet emotion. Churches, sanctuaries, gardens, spas, monasteries, retreats, museums, libraries, really any place that gives a suggestion of "Peace" or "Quiet". These structures offer tranquility and the ease of allowing my body, mind and spirit to slip into a space of solace and stillness. They provide the bridge from external to internal awareness of peace. Once there, inside that space, the surrounding energy provides the stillness required to sense the same within my body. Eyes closing, deep breaths, anxiety disappears, calmness and tranquility take over every cell.

*Peace is stillness in my being,
devoid of emotion.
My body senses a gentle breath,
separating me from the chaotic world.*

A slight smile tugs at my lips. A sense of floating. The color of white light and brightness. Simply Peace...

I've learned from these special places of tranquillity, that to feel peace I need a sense of quiet in my mind. The ability to block out external noise and mind chatter, to breathe and imagine a peaceful space. Peace for me also comes with letting go of clenched fists, relaxing my muscles, focusing on a serene moment or place, and then going inside. Opening my chest with breath, emptying the clutter of anxiety and mixed emotions till I find that sanctuary deep within which allows me to subdue my emotions. To freely lay down and expand awareness to nothingness but a blissful, euphoric expansion of bright white light, and harmony.

While in church (those many years ago and when I visit now), it is this blessing of Peace, this clarity of stillness, a state of quiet, calm, serene emotion, which I want to wish to people. "May Peace be with you." I hope you find your unique experience to sense the emotion (and gift) of peace in your body, mind and spirit.

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON shares a love of writing, dancing Nia (Holistic Fitness), and making doll and teddy bear creations. Her children's books, Little Blue Penguin and McKenzie's Frosty Surprise have delighted many youngsters. She blogs and thinks of new books to write while living passionately.
Website: patriciaatchison.ca



Peace

ABIGAIL TAMSI

Everyone sees peace as the untarnished white dove, flying in majesty and blinding beauty. It is perfectly soaring in the sky as if no wind or rain can crash its perfect flight. It looks as if it holds a wisdom no imperfect human can ever attain.

In a world that is full of chaos and discord, in the jumble of thoughts inside my head, in the wild ocean of my heart, in the jungle of my ever-changing body, peace's elusiveness beguiles me and I am ever in search of it.

It sometimes comes in the moments when life seems to slow down before my very eyes. In that brief moment of looking in the eyes of a smiling baby. When I suddenly look up and see a beautiful clear blue sky. During a second of that happy photo snap. In the mildew and silence of dawn. At a busy intersection and I see myself above the swarm of people, apart yet connected.

Its that feeling when everything is just as its meant to be. Peace is in the here and the now, an acceptance of my moments. Easy? No. Because I am so far removed from *now*.

What if I simply looked? Amongst the chaos of what I see, what if I

simply became the witness? See the moving scenes before my very eyes like a movie screen. See myself a part of it or not. Watch all the actors in the play of life.

What if I just listened? Listened to the voices telling me what to do and not to do. What if I just allowed myself to truly hear? Hear all the lies and judgments floating all around. Decipher who's talking and who's not. And just like before, allow myself to be the listener amongst this cacophony.

What if I let myself be touched? Give my muscles a chance to be felt. Allow the air to caress my skin. What if I don't recoil from what's coming at me and let myself receive? Stand majestically as the one being brushed by my breath.

And maybe, just maybe... I'll start to experience the part of me who receives all of these moments. There's this part of me who is silently behind all that I see, hear, smell, touch, taste, think and feel in this lifetime. There's this part of me who has always been here watching the actor, hearing the listener, feeling for the human.

This is the part of me who has seen what has gone before me, who has heard the whispers of my years, who has smelled the diversities of life, who has tasted the sweetness of the earth's bounties, and who has felt both the pain and joy from other souls.

Though this part has experienced all of these, one thing I will notice is that this part is the one who has always been here, the *unchangeable* part of me. This is the part that speaks up to say "I am." Nothing more, nothing less.

In "I am," I find my peace. It's somewhat my feeling of contentment but so much more. It's finding my place in the spaces I occupy. It's taking my own seat in my life. It's resting in my being.

In "I am," I am not my past nor my future. I am not my body that I parade around. I am not the labels that the world puts on me. I am not who I strive to be or who I think I should be.

*In "I am," I find my peace.
It's finding my place in the spaces
I occupy. It's taking my own seat
in my life. It's resting in my being.*

In "I am," I am simply me. The magick of peace holds me. It's the peace that is not unattainable nor blinding. It's the peace that is grounded in me from the first ever breath that I breathed and the one that stays with me until I pass over.

It's the peace that shouts at me to bring me back to myself. It's the feeling that gives me life. It's the feeling that weaves a smile. It's the feeling that supports my every step. It's the feeling that strings me to here, connects me to every one, and roots me to every thing.

There are no reasons to peace. No roadmaps. No why's. No how's. No what if's. Peace is that strong sense that binds me to that mysterious part of me.

Peace is the Universe's cosmic joke. No matter what life presents, peace is still here because peace is my truth. Peace is my soul. Peace is my beginning. Peace is my end. Peace is my now.

Enveloped in peace's embrace, I find myself both soaring as that white dove does and courageously walking through life's muck. I am connected to myself. I am connected to my being.

In this reconnection, I find my peace, I feel my peace, I let peace lead me, I let peace keep me safe, I accept peace resonating within me, I allow peace to help me make it through.

Because peace is not out there flying in the sky. Because peace is not elusive.

Peace has always been within me. Peace resides in that throne within my heart, looking with wise eyes. Peace flows underneath my skin, beneath the rugged terrain of old age. Peace jumps in my belly, letting me feel my power beyond words or force.

And if peace has always been here, then yes, I can always feel peace again whenever I choose to. I only have to find that still point, let it expand, let it breathe me and let me feel again.

ABIGAIL TAMSI is a self-proclaimed courageous woman and soul-writer. She loves and lives courageously, always aiming to step through the barriers that stop her from living and loving fully. Her life adventures pour out in her writing, which have been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *The Urban Howl*. Website <http://www.abigailtamsi.com>



WHERE IN THE BODY DOES PEACE LIVE?

*Peace fills my chest through
breath.*

PATRICIA

*In the stomach, I would say.
Breaths needs to get down to
the belly in the right way, then
a divine calm, safe and won-
derful feeling spreads from the
belly and out through the body,
into the arms and legs. Warms
the heart and gives the soul new
power. Love it.*

LOTTA

*The breath, in and out, in and
out, again and again*

AIMEE

In the belly and heart.

ELISABETH

*In the lungs, the breathing
becomes calmer.*

JEANETTE

In my belly.

MOUNA

*A sense of ease throughout the
body. And heaviness. Heavy as
completely relaxed and with a
ease of mind.*

EVA

Lungs and heart in harmony.

MARIA

On the breath of the exhalation.

TRACY

My heart.

KATHLEEN

*It's like a line from the middle of
my forehead to my heart on the
inside of my bones.*

KIMBERLEY

In my heart, a lovely calmness.

KERSTIN

A Piece of Peace

AIMEE DUFRESNE

Tumultuous times attempt to raid our peace
Under the cacophony of fear, cutting words and incomprehensible acts
When a gaping hole of hate and blame threatens to suck you in.
An absence of compassionate sentiment brings you to your knees
When it feels as if all is lost

May I offer you a piece of peace?

The moon waxing and waning
The sun rising and setting
The wind blowing and easing
The leaves falling and blooming
The tide washing in and out
The birds singing
The stars hanging overhead, always constant yet constantly changing
The still calm on a lake
The time passing – constant, ushering in constant change

*Peace.
A kind word said,
a kind deed done.
To you, from you.*

Peace

A hug

A smile

A listening ear

Laughter

The unconditional love of a pet

The unconditional love of a person

Sinking in a warm bath, the scent of lavender tickling your nose

A kind word said, a kind deed done

To you, from you

The breath, going in and out, in and out, again and again

May you experience a piece of peace

And another

And another still

Build on it
And when all that is not peace knocks it down,
May you pick up the pieces of peace
And begin building once again.
Sharing it with those who have also been knocked down.

May you find peace within
May you see peace without
May you be peace

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*.
Website: aimeedufresne.com.



Peace

KRISTINA JOHNSON

Nobody can bring you peace but yourself.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Peace exists. Just not consistently in my day to day life. Peace is something that I actively pursue, but it often eludes me. I've begged, I've pleaded and I've prayed for that delicious peace to come and permanently settle into my crazy life, but no matter what I do to capture her, she always seems to be just beyond my grasp. I did not always feel this way about the elusive temptress peace. It has taken me years to fully understand the importance of having a life filled with peaceful moments and even more years to incorporate peace as part of my daily existence.

As a child, I was raised to believe that agitation and constant movement was the best way to travel through the world. Sitting still and doing nothing was so frowned upon that punishments would actually occur for inactivity. My nervous system reacted by igniting hyper-drive and to this day I am often unable to fully disengage from the internal vibration that fear embedded in my body so long ago. In many ways, I remain a product of my childhood but I still have not given up hope that all these damaged

places might someday be completely erased by the active pursuit of peace. With patience and persistence, damage to my nervous system is gradually healing and I am looking forward to one day discovering a lasting peace.

My father stepped out of my life when I was five years old. One day he was there full of life and laughter wrapping his strong protective arms around our bodies with his giant bear hugs, and the next day he was gone. No explanation, no visitation, just gone. It left a devastating hole in my heart and a gaping void in my life. The peace and happiness that wove a golden thread through the days of my early childhood had evaporated with such force that breathing became impossible. Grief settled into my deflated lungs with such an intensity that it would be years and years before I would ever be able to find my breath or experience a similar peace once again.

When a child loses the safety and security that is each of our birthrights or finds themselves trapped in a situation to which there is no escape, anger is the emotion that eventually must rise. When the peaceful life I cherished vanished, my anger expanded and intensified, roaring into enormous flames that charred my lungs and ravished my heart. It is impossible to be at peace when one's life is consumed with anger and hatred. It is impossible to find peace when respiration comes in small shallow breaths. A body cannot sustain its life force when fires rage inside. These were the simple truths I eventually uncovered. With determination and hope for a calmer future, I finally went in search of cool water to douse the flames. I realized that I could not expect others to change or do the work for me. Peace is an inside job. If the war torn wounds were ever to heal, I would need to discover for myself how to bring peace back into my troubled world.

Yoga became my refuge. The quiet comforted my lonely heart and the flowing movements healed my body. With radical self-care I learned to breathe once again. Authentic breaths. Deep full bodied breaths that

*When the peaceful life I cherished
vanished, my anger expanded and
intensified, roaring into enormous
flames that charred my lungs
and ravished my heart.*

filled my belly with love and light. Each cool breath dousing the flames of anger, disappointment and hatred until piece by piece my wounded spirit began to heal. Savasana became my happy place and for a brief moment several times a week, I found the peace that had been missing in my body. The sensations pulsing through my body felt so foreign, but also so delicious that I longed for more. Gradually, I spent more time away from the mat calmly sitting and breathing deeply, taking what I called mini-vacations that calmed my spirit and settled my restless nervous system. It took time and effort, but gradually I have been able to rewrite my story and smooth out the jitters that once uncontrollably danced within. Surprisingly, all it took was re-learning how to breathe.

Now, I understand that yoga might not be the path to peace for everyone, but I do believe with all my heart that each and every person who seeks peace and quiet in their life, can easily find their own little piece of Nirvana by connecting to the breath. “Doesn’t everyone breathe?” you might ask. While technically that is true, not everyone breathes as the human body intended. Upon observing a baby’s body, one notices that they breathe from the belly, not from high up in the chest as most adults do. Chest breaths constrict and limit the depth of our breathing. When

we are in danger or under stress, our bodies revert to taking shallow chest breaths. This type of breathing only serves to agitate the body, rather than calming it. Taking a long deep inhale that drops the diaphragm down into the belly allowing it to expand like a balloon, pausing to hold that breath for a moment, then slowly and carefully exhaling every ounce of that breath to the slow release of 6–8 counts, will instantly draw relaxation and peace into the body. Inhale the future. Exhale the past.

A few years ago I took a yoga class in Sao Paulo, Brazil. At the end of class the instructor took us to our mats, preparing us for Savasana. She explained that the Portuguese words for inhale and exhale were *inspirar* and *expirar*, which she said roughly translated to “in spirit” and “out spirit.” This beautiful description of what happens when we inhale and exhale has stayed with me and made my practice more meaningful. Allow your spirit to travel in and out on the river of your breath and I promise you that you will discover the peace and stillness that you long for.

KRISTINA JOHNSON is a lover of all things that inspire creativity and invite happiness. In addition to teaching Vinyasa Yoga and whirling her cares away on the dance floor, she makes time to travel the world, create art, do cartwheels in the grass and make play and laughter a priority.



I Am Peace in Prayer

TRACY STAMPER

Searching for Peace proved to be a never-ending quest.

Striving for Peace made me weary.

Fighting for Peace is oxymoronic and never made any sense to me whatsoever.

Finding Peace became an endless game of hide-and-go-seek.

Attaining and sustaining Peace always got slippery as soon as Life happened.

Peace is within me, and becomes far easier to find when I realize I don't have to search / strive / try / seek / attain / create Peace.

Peace is elusive until I stop trying to get there and remember that I Am Peace.

Only by giving up am I able to give in, look in, and settle into the Peace that I Am.

I am at Peace with the beautiful, sacred fact that I am made of an entire orchestra of Peacekeeper cells designed for balance and harmony. We all are.

I can simply be Peace when I connect to the brilliance of my body.

Bowing to my bones, sinking into the sensations of my cells and riding the rhythm of my breath, I know that I Am Peace.

The stardust that you and I are made of? It is the very essence of Peace itself.

I shift. I shed the search to attain and sustain. I learn to return to the Peacefulness of center more quickly, more effortlessly.

The miracle of the human body is designed to return to harmony. Living life in a body is an exquisite dance of moving off-center and returning to center. The more we practice this dance of re-centering, the more entrained this pattern becomes. I embody the knowledge that Peace is actually what we are made of. It is encoded into our cells, woven into our very fabric. Bodies want and work to bring us back into balance.

98.6 degrees Fahrenheit is an averaged fulcrum point of our inner climate. The human body's ability to return again and again to this balance is nothing short of miraculous. Consider how much heat we constantly create through movement. Our brilliant bodies orchestrate activation of sweat glands when our temperature rises. Our cooling system kicks in, coating the skin with moisture, cooling us down as it evaporates. When we veer from center in the other direction and become too cool, blood vessels closer to the skin constrict, drawing heat in closer to the core. When extremely cold, the muscular section of the body's orchestra picks up their instruments, eliciting the shiver response. Shivering is the muscles' contribution to heat production.

Many sections of the orchestra play in concert to restore the body's optimal temperature. This is all done automatically. We do not have to seek, strive, try or search. Our brilliant bodies organically bring us back into balance.

When tired, eyelids grow heavy, signaling sleep to restore us.

The inhalation follows the exhalation.

The heart's expansion follows its contraction.

Fluid composition expands and contracts. When hydration level is low, hormones communicate with the kidneys, asking them to retain fluid. The

*Fighting our nature by not crying
when stress tickles our tear ducts
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sensation of thirst cues us to rehydrate. When fluid level is high, the urinary tract kicks in, releasing excess fluid so as to return us to that center point of optimal hydration.

We are watery beings. Flowing water cleanses and clears by carrying away debris. Such is the mercurial nature of our emotional selves. Stagnation is not a sign of health. Change is adaptive, allowing us to clear toxic energies, refresh and renew.

When our emotional selves experience stress, bodies have the built-in healing mechanism of crying. The chemical components of tears cried during times of stress include the stress hormone ACTH. The intuitive act of crying is our body's way of literally releasing stress. Fighting our nature by not crying when stress tickles our tear ducts dams the road back to feeling Peaceful. Choking back tears locks stress into the body.

Straining to work against our nature is akin to ‘fighting for Peace:’ counterintuitive and unproductive.

When systems veer from optimal state, bodies have a vast array of healing techniques. From crying... to creating scabs... to the bones’ regenerative ability, the body’s healing capacity is vast and awesome.

The examples are endless; the dance intricate.

Surrendering to the dance frees us to embody the dance.

The dance teaches me that Peace is not a static destination. Perhaps it’s not a destination at all, but a sensation; something I feel in my body.

Like all feelings, it is fleeting.

Just as I cannot hold onto a wave, I cannot sustain a constant state of Peace. (I am open to learning otherwise. For now, with what I know in this moment, this is how I best know Peace.) Like waves, feelings have beginnings, middles and ends. Feeling Peaceful comes in waves and returns back to sea in waves. Rather than wrestling with grasping waves,

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allowing the sensation of waves to wash over and through me is how I touch Peace.

I desired control of something in this often-turbulent world. I desperately wished to reach Peace and to stay there. I wanted certainty. It took acknowledging that that option is simply not in the cards for this star-dust earth dance. Like the moon waxes and wanes, like the tide ebbs and flows, Peacefulness comes and goes. In trusting its return, I find, for this moment, the much sought-after solace of Peace.

While we may not always feel Peaceful, we are, by our essence, Peace embodied.

The fact that everywhere I look I see instructions on how to attain Peace speaks to the universality of striving for this often-elusive entity. Meditation is the practice of finding inner Peace. Self-help books outline maps to Peace. Historical figures have devoted entire lifetimes to teaching humankind to live in Peace. Religions preach and teach us to seek Peace.

Of all the prayers said in devotion across the world, Peace may very well be the most prevalent wish sent up to the heavens.

Shanti. Shalom. Salam. Shlammaa. Wo'okeyeh. Fred. Vrede. Friede. Pace. Paci. Ets'a'an Olal. He Ping. Amani. Mire. Paz. Pax. Paix. Pau. Dohiyi. Sióchain. Here. Peace.

Of the thousands of words of wisdom I have read about Peace, the ones which land closest to home are those written by Chinese philosopher and Taoism founder Lao Tzu:

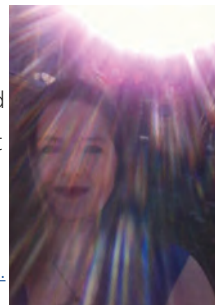
“If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,

There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.”

My own prayer now becomes...

Let there be Peace.
Let us know Peace.
Let us return
to knowing
We Are Peace.
I Am Peace in Prayer.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

How do *you* experience peace? Where do *you* feel it in your body? What colors do *you* associate with peace?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about peace.

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FEAR

From Fear to Trust

ABIGAIL TAMSI

I remember the time when fear first gripped my psyche, a grip so strong it ruled me for almost two decades.

I was in University and though I've always been one of the smart students, I suddenly came face to face with the fear of failure in a school subject that I assumed was beyond my intellectual capability.

Being a student on a financial scholarship, it had become a threat in my mind to losing a good education. Losing my education meant also losing my ticket out of my middle-class economic situation.

Fear took such a hold on me that I switched courses to take on "easier" subjects and not lose my ticket out.

When I became a mother, fear would sneak in almost consistently.

Being a working mum, I feared I wasn't spending as much time as I should be with my daughters. I feared I wasn't helping my daughters enough to help them succeed in school. Especially when they fell sick, I would really fear for their health, sometimes to the point as if I was worrying for someone on their deathbed.

Yes, I could be labelled as overreacting in all these circumstances. But that's how fear ruled me back then.

I let fear keep me safe in terms of the job opportunities I would take. I let fear of losing my romantic relationship stop me from *going* for my career. I succumbed to fear's belief that it will be too hard to do anything I really wished to. And most of all, I feared losing "love" from everyone close to me.

Fear was that tightness in my chest that saw all the negative consequences. Even if my body didn't visibly shake, I knew I was always shaking inside. Because at the forefront of my mind, fear looked like an ugly three-legged gray hairy creature I didn't want to face.

I could hear fear telling me I wasn't good enough to make it through that hard course or that I wasn't a good enough mother. Fear was always just shouting to me one side of every story, the shitty one.

I couldn't breathe until I found a way to feel safe. So there came this undeniable urge to do something, anything, to make fear leave.

I let fear make the decisions for me, which made me feel separated from my truth. I let fear rule my actions, which made me become the mother I didn't want to be.

What I realised when I looked back was that behind my fears were my most basic and core desires. By letting fear rule me, I have gone the longer route to achieving what I truly want most.

As a student, I desired to succeed and be able to make a contribution to society. As a mother, I desired nothing more but to have healthy and happy daughters.

And behind all that was this underlying desire to truly trust myself, the deep part of me who knows I am the person who could be all that and more.

Marianne Williamson's words in her book, *A Return to Love*, clearly articulate this part of me that was longing to be expressed in reality.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness

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my truth. I let fear rule my actions,
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that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?” Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

I knew this light was (and still is) within me. I was just really struggling to get her to come out.

I was snowed under the piled up memories that showed me what I want isn't possible, that made me remember when I tried to but failed, when I heard the different ways I was put down and shut down.

Uncannily, when fear became too much to bear, it also became my guide out of its misery. When it felt too much to bear on my shoulders, when I could hardly smile that my face felt rigid, when my chest started to hurt from carrying all the self-hatred, I started to get angry at why I let fear rule me this much.

I had everything anyone could want in life. I was married, had two children, a stable job, and was living a comfortable life.

But I was living at the effect of all the circumstances I let stumble through the years from one decision to another, decisions that were ruled by fear, and feeling rather empty it ached more than any fear could make me feel. It was a deep soul ache, a longing to be heard, a longing to be seen, a longing to be expressed.

That's when I started to give fear a hard look.

Even if I asked the questions, "Where was the fear coming from?," "What is right in front of me in reality?," "What are the chances that my worst fear will happen?," fear was just going to throw lots of evidences back at me.

What I needed was to let fear subside and use the energy behind my anger to take back my power.

It was Albert Einstein who said, "*We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.*"

So I threw back different kinds of evidences at fear.

I wrote down a hundred good things about me. I wrote about my innate strengths and positive traits. I wrote the good things I've done and still do on a regular basis. I wrote what I'm good at.

I showed to myself that what fear was presenting me was just one small part in the larger scheme of things. Against every rebuttal fear would throw back at me, I'd have ten that showed fear is inconsequential.

I started to let the light within me to shine. And let it shine for me first. I had to let it slowly warm up my contracted self and recognise the

inherent goodness within me. I had to make myself see and feel that I'm also enough.

I learned to give myself the kindness and compassion that I wished I were given more of. I learned to give to myself daily and let it become my innate way of supporting myself.

As I let this love from within me grow through time and perseverance, I eventually felt space grow between the ugly three-legged gray hairy creature and myself. Fear was no longer in the driver's seat, let alone inside my vehicle.

When I would start to see fear in my rear view mirror, I would take deep breaths to ground myself and take control. I wasn't scared of what fear is presenting to me anymore.

I started to understand that there must be something great around the corner that fear was trying to warn me about. It was going to be wonderful that I wouldn't want to mess it up.

After having cultivated a lot of compassion for myself, I accept now that life can be a mess and its ok if I do mess up. I wouldn't truly be living my life if I consistently hid behind my fears.

After having cultivated a lot of compassion for myself, I accept now that life can be a mess and its ok if I do mess up. I wouldn't truly be living my life if I consistently hid behind my fears.

The skills and the achievements did not matter as much as living in my truth, trusting in myself, and being alive in my body did. I welcomed the unwavering fact that love has always been available, starting from within, and I only have to open my arms to receive it. There really wasn't anything to fear at all.

ABIGAIL TAMSI is a self-proclaimed courageous woman and soul-writer. She loves and lives courageously, always aiming to step through the barriers that stop her from living and loving fully. Her life adventures pour out in her writing, which have been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *The Urban Howl*. Website <http://www.abigailtamsi.com>



Uncontrollable

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON

Fear rolls throughout my body, a prickly tumbleweed out of control. Depending on the circumstance it starts slow and gains momentum, or its blast is instantaneous, an eruption which sends me fleeing in the opposite direction. Having many upsetting, unpredictable circumstances while growing up, I've learned at an early age what fear entails in my body and to this day, it is an emotion that I tend to avoid as best I can.

Some people thrive on the fix of adrenaline that pumps through the body in a situation where fear is present. Horror movies are perfect for this response. Sitting in safety, yet allowing the body to sense fear, and letting it open to the heart-thumping, adrenaline-racing punch of emotion. Exhibitions and fairs get thrill rides filled with people bent on gripping their seats, sending screams into the air, offering the perfect way to release fear and anxiety. Both situations offer a fearful experience, but within a relative safety zone – eventually the thrill is over and it's time to go back to a safe reality of home and life.

I avoid thrill rides as much as horror movies. It's not in my system to allow fear in, to loose control of emotion and vibration. Sometimes it can't be helped, especially with dreams or nightmares. One night I awoke,

startled out of a deep sleep. My body's first reaction, with arms flying was to throw the covers off and make an instant dash out of the bedroom. The logical part of my mind became lucid enough to stop my body from fleeing, so I breathed deeply, sucking enough air in to settle my heart rate, and wiped my wet palms against the bed sheets. I lay there, my quivering limbs shaking against the mattress, waiting for calm to prevail. It's these uncontrollable, highly emotional experiences which I rebel against.

I often suffer from fearful anxiety too if I allow my imagination to delve into thoughts about different uncontrollable situations. While waiting for my spouse who's late, watching the evening news, and learning about an accident on the highway. When she was a toddler, losing sight of my child for a couple of minutes at a grocery store. Sitting in a doctor's office wondering what the test results will show. These few moments seem like hours to me, as my mind circles with 'what if' scenarios over and over again. I fall into traps of fear like a bird accidentally flying into a glass window mirage of leafy green tree limbs. Always my heart lurches, sending a shaky vibration everywhere throughout my body. My trembling hand flutters to my closed throat or open mouth. I fight to hold back tears that threaten to come streaming down my cheeks. Words often escape my erratic mind. I become mute, unable to speak, coherent thought patterns disappear. All this happens in mere seconds.

What gives me the most fear though, lies in the unknown of an uncontrollable circumstance. The truly scary moments in life that leave me shaking with horror of what is going to happen next. I think everyone has their own 'fear' button. That one incident or experience where when the button is pushed 'all hell breaks loose'. When writing this article, I delved deep within my past to remember a situation when I've been most fearful and how my body reacted.

I was thirteen-years-old when my brother (a year older) and I were visiting my biological father for the summer (my parents were divorced).

I think everyone has their own 'fear' button. That one incident or experience where when the button is pushed 'all hell breaks loose'.

As much as I loved my sibling, in my new teen year, I really didn't want much to do with him. Staying in a house with alcohol in abundance, and a blended family which we had just met, made for some interesting times. I became friends with the two girls who lived there. With little supervision, we'd go out every night and do crazy stuff. To this day I don't think I could drink lemon gin ever again. We were all the same age, but they seemed so much more mature than me, having sixteen-year-old boyfriends with cars and access to alcohol. It was a glorious time for me trying to fit in. I enjoyed the freedom and I guess we got a little wild.

During the first few weeks, I always invited my brother to come with us. Eventually though, with the excitement of new adventures, I forgot about him, taking off every night with my new pals and their boyfriends to go cruising down the highways until well after midnight. We came back to the house late one night, riding a high of excitement and freedom, from new and glorious experiences. I learned then how my world could change in an instant.

We came into the kitchen giggling, although tired and ready for bed. My brother sat at the small table, his hands wrapped around a glass of coke. My biological Dad flashed a glare over his shoulder as he leaned against the counter ready to cut a sandwich with a long pointed knife – the kind you would slice roast beef with. I knew he'd been drinking, because in a sober state he'd be sleeping or sitting alone somewhere with a smoke and coffee. He asked what we had been up to all night. The normal interrogation a parent quizzes a teen about started. Where were you? What did you do? Of course we answered with evasiveness. With increased drilling and comments, I began to sense deep animosity and undercurrents of anger flowing from him.

When I get scared I often laugh. I hate that about myself. In the worst of times when one should be absolutely still with shock, I laugh like a nervous hyena. I think it's because I don't know what else to do in the moment. I get nervous, scared, and laugh. Hearing my laughter, he turned away from the counter, knife in hand, and came toward me. Unable to leave the kitchen because of where I stood, I leaned back wishing I could disappear.

As he approached, I eyed the knife still in his hand, now pointed at my chest. He lifted it an inch away from my throat, shaking it, demanding to know why I hadn't included my brother on our nights out. Why I kept leaving him out? Was I ashamed of him?

With my fingers glued to the counter behind me, and my eyes on the knife glinting in the light, fear immobilized my limbs. I knew if I had a clear way out of the kitchen I would flee. A strange sudden reaction baffled me right then. A part of me wanted to react to the fear by pushing into that knife, to end the pain the fear inflicted so harshly. Anger, hurt, shame, fear, all these emotions bounced around the walls of the kitchen that night.

He diverted his attention away from me and circled around to each of my friends asking the same questions and brandishing the knife towards

them. Fear clawed its way down my dry throat and circled my heart with icy tendrils, making it beat erratically, threatening to explode out of my chest cavity with anxiety. My breathing couldn't catch up to my pulse and my silly misplaced laughter turned into sobs that wrenched themselves uncontrollably from the deepest darkest parts of my soul. His tirade ended with a harsh glance my way. He returned to his sandwich, slicing it with ease and then placing the knife in the kitchen sink full of dirty dishes.

This incident, similar to a tornado, circled and swirled around us all, and silenced itself just as quick as it started. Each of us were left with shattered bits to pull back together again in the wake of that angered storm. Like a town decimated, I don't believe the rebuilding in the quake of that fear remained successful for us all or not.

When I found the right moment, I fled that small enclosed kitchen space to the bedroom I shared with my brother. I stayed there for much of the duration of our stay. The summer adventures, laughter and fun didn't carry the same glow after that evening. Now, in addition to fear, claus-

*Sometimes I just stand there and
face fear. Afterward, I tend to
the shattered pieces, pulling
them together in some shape
that once resembled myself.*

trophobia is also an enemy. In a crowded room, restaurant, or theatre I always sit where I can easily escape. I never embed myself within a crowd.

And fear... I still avoid it with all my might. When I sense it coming – uncontrollable, a train ready to derail, I bolt, or step out of harm's way. Sometimes I just stand there and face it. Afterward, I tend to the shattered pieces, pulling them together in some shape that once resembled myself. In the end, fear and the emotions it evokes will ultimately help me forge ahead and create a new, different and if I am lucky, a stronger me.

Author's note: Speaking from my heart and a place of healing, the example of fear in this story is not intended to incriminate any one person. My biological father, mother and brother are all now deceased. The friends, like the summer memory, simply faded over time.

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON shares a love of writing, dancing Nia (Holistic Fitness), and making doll and teddy bear creations. Her children's books, Little Blue Penguin and McKenzie's Frosty Surprise have delighted many youngsters. She blogs and thinks of new books to write while living passionately. Website: patriciaatchison.ca



Fly or Fall

TABITHA MACGOWAN

I once believed I could fly,
 But fear nudged, *What if you fall?*
I once believed I could dream,
 But fear whispered, *What if it doesn't come true?*
I once believed I was joyful,
 But fear wondered, *What if it doesn't last?*
I once believed I was strong,
 But fear asked, *What if you break?*
I once believed I was powerful,
 But fear questioned, *What if you're weak?*
I once believed I was good,
 But fear beckoned, *What if you're not?*
I once believed I could try,
 But fear called out, *What if you fail?*

Another voice tried to get through.
 It said, *Wait. Listen.*

But fear pushed it aside, *Shhh. Stay with me. I'll keep you safe. I'll protect you.*

And I stayed.

But after a time, I felt empty in my cave with fear. It was a hollowed out hovel that held no comfort, no warmth.

Its safety was a sham. Its protection, a shackle. It owned me, and I didn't want to be owned.

I needed fresh air.

I longed for light.

I wanted to run with the breeze in my face, to feel the strength of my legs.

I wanted to sense the power in my voice as I sung my song, not caring who heard, not caring who saw.

I wanted to witness joy, not needing the rest of the world to affirm my delight.

I wanted to risk my dreams bursting into being, or even into flames, understanding that both needed oxygen and spark to ignite.

I wanted to trust that fly or fall only differed by the faith I had in the winds that lifted me.

I wanted to live a stunningly, blissfully, captivatingly, astoundingly, magically alive life.

And that's when the other voice spoke.

Do it anyway.

"But what if I fall?"

You'll learn to land. Do it anyway.

"But what if it doesn't come true?"

You'll learn to trust. Do it anyway.

*Fear's safety was a sham.
Its protection, a shackle.
It owned me, and I didn't
want to be owned.*

“But what if it doesn't last?”

You'll learn to let go. Do it anyway.

“But what if I break?”

You'll learn to mend. Do it anyway.

“But what if I'm weak?”

You'll learn to rest. Do it anyway.

“But what if I'm no good?”

You'll learn to practice. Do it anyway.

“But what if I fail?”

*You'll learn that it was only one stone on the path of your stunningly,
blissfully, captivatingly, astoundingly, magically alive life. Do it anyway.*

It continued,

I am louder in your silence than fear is in your noise.

I've got you, Love.

I've always got you.

*Unfurl your wings,
Trust the winds that lift you,
You are made of magic,
And you were meant to
Fly.*

TABITHA MACGOWAN is an author, autism parent, and advocate of acceptance, compassion, and love. She delights in life's quirks, belly laughs, smiles that light up, epiphanies, meditating, snuggling under her favorite quilt, campfires, coffee, and stargazing with her son in the early morning. Website: tmacgowan.com



Hello Fear,

*I know that every day you are here,
I can't remember the day we've met,
Was it my Birth? Was it the Death?
Fear to die, fear to live,
Fear to let go, fear to receive,
Fear to love, fear to be loved,
I see your blue when I am scared,
I feel your light when it is bright,
I feel your darkness when there is sadness,
Fear to not be seen, fear to be visible,
Wild Fear, learned Fear,
When you give me the strength to run,
When you block me so I cannot move.
Hello Fear,
I know that everyday you are here*

MOUNA BOUSLOUK is a consultant and coach. She empowers entrepreneurs in/with technology using her technical skills and her intuition. She loves writing, reading, watching flowers bloom and walking in the forest. Her motto : "All the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today" Indian Proverb. Website: mounabouslouk.com



WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF FEAR?

*bravery
trust
harmony
relief
security
perseverance
discernment
an inner calm
acceptance
reliance
denial
to feel calm and safe*

Proceed with Caution

TRACY STAMPER

I'm afraid that Fear gets a bad rap.

Fear is vilified. 'Be Fearless' is a popular slogan emblazoned on tank tops, mugs, phone covers, etc.

Do I wish to be brave? Yes.

Courageous? Absolutely.

Do I wish to be fearless? Absolutely not!

I thank Fear for being here.

Fear is biologically encoded into us for the vital sake of keeping us safe. I have a very healthy fear of heights, for example. I don't even wish to imagine not having this fear. It keeps me intact and alive.

By vilifying any emotion or judging it as negative or bad, we cut ourselves off from its essential messages. There is a reason for and much to learn from every emotion we feel. They visit us for a reason.

Our biological fear response is hardwired into us so that we can respond to threats. Fear trips the fight or flight response, ideally mobilizing protective responses to threats. If I am on a hike and see a bear, it is biologically wise for me to shift into hyper-vigilant mode. My body diverts its energy from processes that are not immediately essential, such as digestion, into

functions designed to keep me safe. If I am close to shelter and the bear is far enough away, the adrenaline pumping into my system will give me an extra boost of speediness as I run to safety. Fear is biologically designed to enhance the keenness of my response.

Taking this lens into the more commonly-experienced realm of human interactions, we can look at Fear as it is more likely to arise in our daily lives. Fear leaves calling cards alerting us to red flags inviting us to seek shelter.

Fear speaks to me through locked knees.

Fear lands with a thud in the pit of my stomach.

Fear makes me sweat.

Fear is wide-eyed. Trembling. Tension in the neck. Gripping. Soles of feet arching up and away from the earth as a clue that I don't wish to be standing where I am standing and experiencing what I am experiencing.

These are signs to proceed with caution.

Fear is an invitation to pay heed.

By vilifying any emotion or judging it as negative or bad, we cut ourselves off from its essential messages. There is a reason for and much to learn from every emotion we feel.

If a conversation with someone leaves me with locked knees, my body wants me to know that I am experiencing Fear. When I am fearful, there is always a reason. As my body's dance partner, my role is to trust the Fear and follow my body's lead into the vast wisdom held in the body.

Why am I feeling fearful? Is this something that is internally sourced, for example, an association with a past situation that actually has no present correlation? Or am I picking up information from and about this other person that is a flashing red flag?

Every red flag that we have ever looked back on and wished we had paid more attention to landed in our body~mind in an attempt to alert us that something was amiss. There was a sound reason for that flicker of Fear we felt.

Three common acronyms have helped me navigate Fear's terrain.

F.E.A.R. FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL

Is this Fear real? Asking this question allows me to work to shed Fear that does not pose a threat, or to mobilize so as to distance myself from a present threat. If a car cuts dangerously into my lane in a near miss, I feel Fear. Once that erratic driver speeds off, that threat is gone. Though I am still feeling white-knuckled and fearful, there is no evidence that I am currently in danger, so I breathe to release the fear response. The Fear was real, but no longer is. If I am walking down the street alone and notice that I am being shadowed by a stranger, Fear motivates me to make a game plan for safety. This Fear is and remains real, alerting me to proceed with caution.

F.E.A.R. FORGET EVERYTHING AND RUN

Imagine a co-worker constantly undercutting you, eliciting Fear of continued unfounded attacks, slander and loss of trust within one's professional network. Is the Fear real? If so, and if direct communication does

not shift the dynamic, sometimes the wisest choice is to extricate oneself from the situation. Seek safety. Run towards a healthier environment.

F.E.A.R. FACE EVERYTHING AND RISE

If the Fear is registering as real in my body, but is actually coming from another time and another place, this is my invitation to Rise. These are the moments of growth, inviting me to heal old wounds and strengthen through the process.

Fear allows me to become brave and courageous.

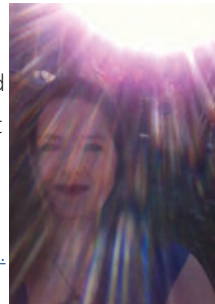
Fear shows me where to dance with my growing edge.

Fear teaches me how to honor self by keeping myself safe.

I am grateful for Fear as a guidepost.

Once I stopped fearing Fear, Fear became a trusted ally.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in Rebelle Society and Elephant Journal. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



FEAR, WE NEED TO TALK:

A Note To You From My Heart

AIMEE DUFRESNE

Fear, it's time we had a talk

You've kept me gagged and bound for far too long

Your whispers have seeped into me

And succeeded in silencing me

Fear, you talk a big game

And pretend to be my friend

This is for your own good, you say

Stay away, don't try, you'll only get broken

And it will hurt

Oh it will hurt so bad

Fear, you claim to keep me safe

And I've never thought to question you

I trusted you, even though my soul ached

Even though I felt lonely and longed to try

Fear, what about those rare occasions
When I acted out from under your interest?
Following the call deep within
You had no words for a moment, and I was free

Fear, remember when I failed?
And you couldn't help but gloat
Don't you see? I told you so
Bet you won't try that again

But here Fear, is where you are wrong
Because I realized that reaching out in spite of you

*Fear, you are no longer
in the driver's seat
I am.*

*And I am fueled with love,
compassion, patience,
Joy, enthusiasm and forgiveness*

Made me feel more alive than ever before
Even when I failed, fell and was indeed broken

Fear, you will never leave me
This I know, and it's okay
But when you grip me now
I will no longer let your talons
Pierce me, your venom seeping into my soul
Keeping me from all I long to be, to do, to have,
To experience, to express
I'm evicting you, Fear
This heart is no longer your home

Fear, from now on I'll be calling the shots
Leading and forging the way forward
Say what you will, I will hear you
But I will no longer heed to your will
Now I'll take your advice only when it is necessary
Those rare occasions when real danger actually exists

Fear, you are no longer in the driver's seat
I am.
And I am fueled with love, compassion, patience,
Joy, enthusiasm and forgiveness

Fear, I forgive you
You have done your best
You gave it your all
You never meant to hurt me

Dear Fear, take your rightful place
Get comfy in the backseat
Hold on to your hat
Know your whispers might fade out the window
As we embark on uncharted territory,
Navigating these winding roads
No longer with a yelp of dread
Now with a squeal of excitement

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

What do *you* fear? How does it feel? What words, colors and sounds do *you* associate with fear?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about fear.

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JOY

My Journey to Joy

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON

Joy hasn't been an easy emotion for me to find. Growing up I never really knew the difference between joy and happiness. To me these two emotions were simply a bundle of ecstatic feelings – neither defined individually. So when did I come to notice happy and joy shining in my life?

A few years ago, I discovered the true meaning of joy and realized it has been in me all along, even in childhood. Joy came upon me as a child in the littlest of moments like riding my new bike through sprinklers or having ten cents to go to the corner store to buy a bag of candy, even picking fresh fruit off my grandparent's trees. The best joy of all for a little kid – discovering a fat squishy salamander and hanging out with it until it was time to go in for lunch.

Joy is the feel good comfort food of emotion. It arrives and stays like a taste of simple goodness, or sticks around like a delicious five course meal. When I'm in joy, I know I'm most authentic. I'm alive and thriving with natural emotions, which I sometimes keep private, or share eagerly with others.

I found the delicious elusiveness of joy when I learned to dance again. By letting go of heavy cement feet and that thick brick inside, a big lump

that sits there in my chest full of garbage and pain. Stepping with light feet and getting rid of the heaviness throughout my body allowed oxygen bubbles of joy to come up through my being, effervescent and tickling.

I learned to dance with joy and let go when I took a Nia Dance Fitness White Belt Certification course. A good part of the training involves free dance. A chance to listen first, sensing the music, and then letting the body move without censorship or judging, removing any mind analysis of the movements. It wasn't easy for me at first. My mind wanted to control (as it always does) every movement and step my body took. At some point throughout the week long intensive, it happened! I learned to let go of my body control and like magic, I found pure joy in my movements. My body's mobility became fluid without constraints. Along with the joy of movement came much healing too.

Since then, I've taken that sense of dancing without control into moments of living my life. Abandoning how I should feel or be acting in any given moment and just letting, letting what is, be. In these moments, joy talks to me the way a toddler squats to investigate a ladybug for the first time. With curiosity and awe.

Sensing joy in my being is removing barricades, tightness and restrictions on my body movements. It involves all the senses. I had the privilege of living on an acreage in the foothills of Alberta. I discovered many moments of joy in the country. The first thing I noticed when we moved, is that when living in the city, I had rarely taken the time to notice a sunrise, or a full moon, a stormy sky or rainbows, even birds flying across the sky. With the peace and quiet of the surrounding hills, evergreens, poplar trees and stars at night, time slowed giving me a chance to notice everyday beauty and to also discover nature again.

Every morning I'd go out on the deck and let every sense have its moment of joy. Inhaling the fragrant earth and fresh air of different seasons. Letting the cool winds caress my skin till my tiny hairs stood up,

*Eventually, over the years of
feeling the emotion of joy,
I have been able to become
happy. To me that is the
biggest discovery of all.*

making me shiver. Breathing clean air for the first time in many years. Listening to the birds waking up, chirping their morning song. Watching dawn break with streaks of orange, red and yellow. Sensing my wide smile as I woke up and relished *this* day with every sensation my body could soak up. Closing my eyes and sensing the full energy every new day brought, as no two were ever the same.

Daily walks, being one with nature, and views of stunning sunsets, or stormy clouds, rainbows sometimes two across, also engaged my senses in the same way. I realized that these were the times I felt and became introduced to joy. Was I happy too? No, I can honestly say that many times happiness eluded me, while joy found its way into my body, and eventually, over the years of feeling the emotion of joy, I have been able to become happy. To me that is the biggest discovery of all.

I thank my body for learning to dance again. I thank all my senses for including me in the dance of life where I can be part of the world, en-JOY-ing the most simplest and delicious times. Joy, it makes my body hum - healing and rejoicing with light from every color of the rainbow shining just for me.

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON shares a love of writing, dancing Nia (Holistic Fitness), and making doll and teddy bear creations. Her children's books, Little Blue Penguin and McKenzie's Frosty Surprise have delighted many youngsters. She blogs and thinks of new books to write while living passionately. Website: patriciaatchison.ca



The Path Back to Joy

ABIGAIL TAMSI

You were born with joy. And it never left you.

There was that sparkle in your eyes that a hardened heart melts when it sees you.

In the midst of your cries, a nurturing soul would lovingly come to care for you.

You once played with such joy no one could shake you.

Everyone envied how you would just gracefully fall and then rise up.

Dusting off the dirt from your knees, unfazed and proceeding to let yourself feel your feet again.

There was joy in every movement, awe to every new thing you saw, freedom to move and just be.

You didn't ask for joy from anything outside of you.

Instead, you felt joy no matter what was in front of you.

And then you started to grow up and life happened.

Caught in a whirlwind of how other people treated you, what you were

asked to do, what was expected of you,

You let yourself be fooled that you can receive a greater kind of joy more than you've ever known.

And that joy... everyone says you can only receive by doing, by achieving, by working hard.

They said it was meant to bring more love, success and abundance, too.

So you said, "Why not? I deserve all of it."

You got caught in the maze that promised a bigger kind of joy in the end.

Until one day, maybe today,
you find yourself standing,
at a loss for words,
at a loss for feeling.

*You've done so much.
You've burned yourself out.
Still, you feel no awesome kind of joy.
There could even be none.*

You've done so much.
You've burned yourself out.
Still, you feel no awesome kind of joy.
There could even be none.

Instead, you hear despair in your heart,
crying like a hyena,
stabbed in the belly,
the life sucked out of you.
For all the time that you've lost.
For having been deceived.

Grief is overwhelming you like no other.
You spend days crying between the sheets.
All the time asking yourself why you let it happen.
Why you pushed yourself so much.

But what you didn't realise was that this was the greatest gift of all...
Finding out where true joy lives.
You're feeling again, instead of doing.
You're connected unlike you were before.
Though it feels tough, stand back and notice what's new within your
self.

Stand back and notice you're still here.
You're experiencing being human.
Feel yourself within your body, and breathe through the pain that's
holding you back.

Keep breathing in the moments that change from one second to the next.

Keep breathing through every tear that falls.
Find your way back,
True joy is rooting for you.
And when just a tiny bit of space opens up,
Maybe you'll start to hear
What true joy has been calling out to you ever since.

Joy says,
"I'm in the fleeting moments.
I'm right here.
I am deep within your heart.
I am even in the teardrops.

I know no conditions.
I know no reason.
I know no bounds.

I don't ask anything of you.
I am simply joy.

I live in the breath you breathe.
I'm the one who opens you up.

I don't care if it hurts.
I make you want to feel.

Feel me within your bones, within your flesh.
Let the river of your blood flow through your veins.
And move it up to your heart.

I know no conditions.

I know no reason.

I know no bounds.

I don't ask anything of you.

I am simply joy.

Find that place within yourself that is both spacious and full.

Space filled with breath,

Fullness in every cell.

And when you find that place,

Sit just right there and marvel.

Look at your hands with new eyes.

Hear the sounds rumbling inside you.

Feel the tingles running across your skin.

Smell and taste the sweetness.

You'll see

It's all alright.

I make it all worth it.

Because I am JOY...

I am that boundless and magnificent feeling of the Joy of being alive.”

ABIGAIL TAMSI is a self-proclaimed courageous woman and soul-writer. She loves and lives courageously, always aiming to step through the barriers that stop her from living and loving fully. Her life adventures pour out in her writing, which have been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *The Urban Howl*. Website <http://www.abigailtamsi.com>



The Path of Joy

AIMEE DUFRESNE

A tender smile

A hearty laugh

A knowing look

Enthusiasm, sole or shared

A kind word, an inspirational quote

Vibrant colors, a flower, the sweet scent of a rose

An unexpected compliment

An intriguing opportunity

A dream

A hope turned reality

A good book, the words of which unlock new dimensions

In your mind, open you heart and strength your soul

Opening to love, both giving and receiving

Acts of compassion

The support of friends

The safety of self and loved ones

The softness of cashmere
The scent of a lover
The embrace, skin on skin
Uncontrollable giggles with a friend

The breath

In each breath, the option
To choose to go deeper
Under the covers of pain, grief, anger, annoyance, irritation, depression,
and disappointment
Under the veil of unworthiness
Hateful actions, horrible disasters, world despair

Silently standing beside fear, pain, loss, often going unnoticed

Residing beside the struggle, yet most are blind to see
Filtering through the chaos every moment, but most don't feel it
Filling the air with reminders most miss

Joy

*Joy mingles with hope, dances with
creativity and is intimate with love
Joy pierces the darkness with its pure
light*

Joy silently takes up space, reaching out an invisible hand, inviting you to walk with it

Don't be fooled, it is not an easy path

The chaos still exists, the cacophony of fear, uncertainty remains

It is a warrior that chooses Joy

Marching into the deep forest of darkness, shielding oneself from society's collective voice of doom

Slaying the status quo

Forging a new path

Joy mingles with hope, dances with creativity and is intimate with love

Joy pierces the darkness with its pure light

Will you be brave enough to choose Joy?

Can you gather all the scraps of courage to walk this path?

Are you ready to unleash the warrior within?

Joy stands strong, and gives you a wink

You are ready

You are ready

You are ready

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When the body is bursting of joy it lives in the chest. It feels like the chest is filled to the brim with energy and with the wingbeats of thousands butterflies.

KARIN

The eyes, specifically the eye-wings — the sign of a joyfully lived life.

BRETTON

It comes through my eyes or ears and lands in my lungs that then breathe freely or excitedly.

ANNA

In the feet, the steps gets lighter and becomes jump steps even though you're older.

JEANETTE

An almost euphoric feeling in the belly.

KERSTIN

Dear Joy, Dear Friends

TRACY STAMPER

Dear Joy,

You are always welcome in my home
on the corner with the whimsical wind sculpture
and the funny little garden gnome.

Bring your polka dot party hats.
I'll provide the eats of deliciously decadent sweets
and velvety wine
coaxing us to savor your flavor
and our time.

Show up any time, unannounced.
As you know, you may find evidence of the daily grind.
But with you around,
dust bunnies become funny.
Turn on the fan... they're tumbleweed
racing at warp speed!

Dirty dishes become a sink full of wishes
as we blow dish soap bubbles
encapsulating rainbows around troubles,
while giggles swallow gaggles of chores.

Dear friends,

Joy comes with hostess gifts,
mood lifts and laughter riffs
bestowing much-needed shifts.

Just as we know
the benefits Joy will sow,
She will also just as quickly...
... go.
Unexpectedly.

It's not that Joy is fickle.
In order to maintain her youthful glow,
She must always follow that tickle
of delight when it whets her whistle.
Helium happens,
and with a wisp of the wind
and a song as she skips along,
She is on her merry way.

Trust
in her return
and the promise of another
Joy-filled day.

*It's not that Joy is fickle.
In order to maintain her youthful glow,
She must always follow that tickle
of delight when it whets her whistle.*

She's unattached
with an exuberance unmatched,
and a fierce disposition for healing play.

So, while she's here,
crack open a beer and hear
what She has to say.
EnJoy her presents.
Embody her presence,
by soaking her into all six senses.

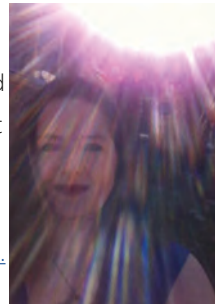
When Joy shows up at your door
you'll know her by the electric breeze

breathed through your entire core,
your spontaneous burst of a smile
flowing ear to ear
with ease.

Please

leave your door ajar.
Though unseen, She never is far.
Simply remember
to invite her in.

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SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

Does *your* joy come from the inside or the outside? Where does joy live in *your* body? What words, colors or sounds do you associate with joy?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about joy.

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GRIEF

What Path Will You Take When Grief Visits?

AIMEE DUFRESNE

World ruptured

A vital piece of soul ripped out

The ache, the burn, the betrayal

You've opened your heart only to be robbed

Anger rises to the surface, overflowing

But it is not alone

Despair bubbles up with it

Along with Denial, Confusion

And a host of emotions

To wade through at once

Support surrounds you

But there is no denying

This is a journey of one

Your journey of one

What will you do?

Will you cater to the crying inside?

Laying down your own life in surrender

Staying in the swirl of pain

Anguish crushing your dreams

Past, Present, Future

Or will you dismiss it,

Pushing it below the surface

Laying a thick layer of anger atop

Beating it when it threatens to sprout

Announcing to the world, and yourself

Nevermind, you are over it

While it simmers beneath

Patiently waiting to boil

The grass of confusion

The dirt of despair

The worms of regret

Rocks of heartache

Hot magma of anger

Will the wave of grief overwhelm you?
Or will you take the warrior's path?

The warrior's path is not easy
It requires deep digging
Beneath the pain,
Feeling the full weight and breadth
Of all that comes up along the way

The grass of confusion
The dirt of despair
The worms of regret
Rocks of heartache
Hot magma of anger

As you dig deeper,
The sweet smell of Mother Earth
Rises, intoxicating you
Encouraging, easing the way
Deeper and deeper

At the core you will discover compassion
For others yes,
But more importantly
For yourself

Your losses
Your wins
Your laughs
Your tears

*Will you let the tears flow
And then be willing to go
Into the unknown?*

Your mistakes
Your mishaps
Will all be held in Compassion
And seen as simply
Part of the experience
Rather than being judged
As good or bad
Positive or negative
Right or wrong

At the core you will also realize your strength
The strength you had all along to get there
You will encounter pure iron
Strengthened by impurities
You have earned your armor of steel

Will you let the tears flow
And then be willing to go

Into the unknown?
Knowing there is such loss
Knowing that beside that loss
Beneath that pain, the coexistence of
Compassion, love, and joy
And the steel strength you have uncovered
Will erect a new dimension to your life
Forever honoring your loved ones
Knowing this is your path
Yet you are never truly alone

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Don't Push the River

TRACY STAMPER

Four words have stayed with me since I first heard them: 'Don't Push the River.'

Though I didn't have a full sense for what these words meant when I first met them, I felt their wisdom. They took up residence within me, telling me that I had much to learn from them. As they slowly revealed themselves to me over the years, I saw so many realms to which they applied: parenting, healing... really, Life in general. Particularly poignant was how they illuminated the rocky road of grieving in a way that was deeply helpful and also required a scary surrender.

Grief's river flows as grief's river flows. Grief is a houseguest that determines when she visits, how long she stays, when she leaves, and when she returns. She unapologetically sets up camp in our home of body, emotions and mind. She stays as long as she damn well pleases, laughs when asked to leave, can't be evicted, and takes over command central of the household.

Grief adheres solely to her own agenda. Trying to force our agenda of timelines of acceptability merely amuses her. She is the river, and it is unwise (not to mention pointless) to push the river.

Pushing the river gets us precisely nowhere, other than exhausted through fruitless effort. And still, after all our efforts to push the river, the river flows as the river flows.

Grief flows as grief flows.

It would be quite convenient if grief stuck around for only as long as one's employer's bereavement leave allowed for time off. But, grief is inconvenient.

It may be far more comfortable and understandable (to those friends who don't get it) if a widowed friend would 'move on' and reenter the dating world a year or two after losing her beloved. But, grief is uncomfortable and misunderstood.

It would feel more manageable if grief stayed home and off-duty while we are at work, our friends' engagement party, happy hour or our child's school play. But, grief is unmanageable.

It would be far more palatable if grief stayed quiet and polite and wouldn't intrude on others' shaky ground which teeters on their own stuffed emotions of unresolved grief. But, grief isn't palatable. It isn't always quiet. And grief scoffs at 'polite.'

Grief is inconvenient. When fresh and raw, she runs hot crimson, pouncing on your chest first thing in the morning with the realization that searing loss was not just a nightmare, but a seemingly unbearable waking reality. Grief's graying occurs when she has stuck around for quite a spell. She is all-encompassing and zaps life of color. Longer term, she turns moods blue and paints in darker, more muted hues. Eventually, she uncurls her fingers' grip and allows Technicolor to slowly return drop by drop as grief is released drip by drip.

Grief that springs from the deepest parts of our hearts doesn't leave completely. There will be those times of aquamarine tears that flow unexpectedly, years after grief's crimson fury has melted. Even when grief checks out as a houseguest, she always leaves something behind. Those

*It would be far more palatable if grief
stayed quiet and polite and wouldn't
intrude on others' shaky ground which
teeters on their own stuffed emotions
of unresolved grief. But, grief isn't
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And grief scoffs at 'polite.'*

earrings on the bedside table are hers. She could show up unexpectedly at any time to reclaim what's hers.

She is merciless and merciful. Grief mercilessly takes one by the shoulders, shakes them, and steers them wherever she so chooses whenever she so chooses. Mercifully, she shakes us awake with her reminders of what is truly important to one's heart navigation system. She steers us straight into the heart of authenticity.

Tears are her currency, and she coaxes us to let them flow. She seeks saltwater release through our body's release valve of crying. Body wisdom knows the healing power of letting it flow. Scientists have discovered in laboratories what our bodies intuitively know: crying literally releases stress and pain. Tears cried during times of stress and pain and grief contain the stress hormone ACTH. By releasing this chemical from the body

one aquamarine tear at a time, we are actively releasing stress and pain from our bodies, emotions and minds. Saltwater cleanses the soul.

Yet, modern man seems hell-bent on pushing the river by stuffing down tears and trying to prescribe grief to artificial manmade notions of how long grief is allowed to stick around. So often, we approach grief as if we can control her. In response, she laughs and does what she does.

Grief's river flows as grief's river flows.

Don't push the river.

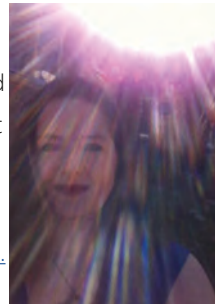
Mother Nature always wins.

Surrender to her ancient power.

Technicolor will return.

For now, all there is to do is to let her river run through and cry a river of tears.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

What is grief for *you*? How do *you* express grief? Where do *you* feel it in your body? How do you sense someone else's grief?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about grief.

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COURAGE

Heeding the Call of Courage

AIMEE DUFRESNE

One day as I was listening, courage whispered in my ear.

Gently it told me we'd be good friends for this year.

Courage, I implored, haven't we already met?

Seriously, how much more courage do I need to get?

It giggled very softly and said simply I am here.

Little did I know it would be quite a courageous year.

Every time words poured out from my heart

Courage was my muse to start.

At the point each story came to an end.

Courage squeezed my hand and said send.

When disappointment visited, and plans began to alter,

Courage wrapped its arms around me and told me not to falter.

When opportunities came that pushed me out of my zone.

Courage nodded its head and retained a reassuring tone.

Courage slipped in at the strangest times, like when I was feeling free.

It twirled me around and danced, delighting in just being me.

Courage stretched out to raise my voice.

And lift it up louder and louder.

Courage helped me make a difficult choice.

And told me it couldn't be prouder.

Courage stood by my side as my shadows I did face.

In the darkness, I could feel the light of Courage as my base.

Courage lit a torch to guide my way in deeper,

After resisting Courage for months, I realized it was a keeper.

I turned to Courage and said sorry for pushing you away.

Without you, I now realize, I could never have gotten through this day.

Nor could I have endured the losses or noticed the gains of this year.

Courage grinned widely and in a strong voice reassured, *I'm always here.*

*In the darkness, I could feel
the light of Courage as my base.
Courage lit a torch to guide
my way in deeper*

What next I anxiously asked her, what am I to see?

With a sigh she answered, Don't let fear, hate or violence overtake me.

At times when they appear, you will see we have similar features.

But don't confuse me with fear, hate or violence for we are very different creatures.

How will I tell the difference if they look like your kin?

Easy, Courage replied, look for the Light within.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



Ten Ways Courage is...

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON

Courage is strength drawn from your soul-source in the darkest of times.

Courage is stepping into that moment when life says, “I need you to be strong”.

Courage is going forward because you can no longer go back.

Courage is climbing a steep mountain trail and finding the strength to take one more step.

Courage is facing the unknown with steely determination and unwavering attention.

Courage is creating a new path where one has never travelled before.

Courage is showing up with the life force of a super hero.

Courage is believing in yourself to make a difference.

Courage is knowing you don't care what others think, you'll do it anyway.

Courage is living each day with tenacity and determination, knowing it is ENOUGH.

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON shares a love of writing, dancing Nia (Holistic Fitness), and making doll and teddy bear creations. Her children's books, Little Blue Penguin and McKenzie's Frosty Surprise have delighted many youngsters. She blogs and thinks of new books to write while living passionately. Website: patriciaatchison.ca



WHAT IS THE COLOR OF COURAGE

Courage has the color of love. Red. Courage is to dare to choose love.

SUSANNE

White! Feels pure and non reactive, thereby strong and courageous.

SUSANNA

Bright pink, cerise. A crazy color that is matched by the brave.

MARIA



The Courage to Love

ABIGAIL TAMSI

Brené Brown in her book, “The Gifts of Imperfection,” said that...

“The root of the word courage is cor—the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage had a very different definition than it does today. Courage originally meant “To speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.” Over time, this definition has changed, and, today, courage is more synonymous with being heroic.

We certainly need heroes, but I think we’ve lost touch with the idea that speaking honestly and openly about who we are, about what we’re feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the definition of courage.”

After I read this, it all started to make sense.

Although I’ve come to know courage as interchangeable with bravery, I’ve always felt that these words have a deeper meaning to them. I know that because I don’t use these words very lightly, always reserving them for some big feat. Looking back at the defining moments in life, I have been courageous during the times when I knew in my heart that I needed to do what I needed to do because I either believed in it my heart or it has been my heart’s true desire.

Indeed, its true. Courage is of the heart. I see it as more than just speaking from my heart. It's the rage of my heart. It's my heart's way of showing her to the world.

My heart cannot help but be seen, heard, and felt. No matter how many times I would try to ignore her, close her off, put walls around her, protect her, bury her deep, she will still rise up and tell me she cannot be put aside.

My heart is the seat of everything I feel, everything I have ever felt, and everything I would ever desire. She's the one that sparks the fire in my being for everything I wish to experience. She's the one that makes this soul journey all worth it.

I can't ignore her. I have to look at her straight in the eye. I have to listen to what she has to say. I have to feel her joys and her sadness. And most of all, I have to feel her rage begging to be expressed in the world.

*I had to learn to see, hear and feel
that the courage I need truly comes
from my heart.*

So no matter that the little girl in me simply wants to protect her, I had to learn to see, hear and feel that the courage I need truly comes from my heart.

And it all started with the courage to love me first.

One tiny step at a time, I opened up to looking at all the parts of me as I am now. I allowed myself to be curious where I would usually shy. I breathed deeply as I allowed myself to feel the discomfort of finding out what's underneath my motives, my actions, my patterns in life.

I got to know me like I would get to know a potential lover. I gave myself the same attention and energy I've willingly given away to others before when I thought they could fill me up.

When I started getting to know me, I started giving back to me and I started loving me.

When I started getting to know me, I started to accept what makes me unique and I started loving me.

When I started getting to know me, I recognised how much I have endured and I loved myself all the more for them.

When I started loving me, I realised I'm the only one who can truly fill me up.

But these were not easy.

As I uncovered layer upon layer of hurt, trauma, and abuse piled up by myself and by others on me, shame, distrust, resentment and anger bubbled up, too. The journey of loving myself became a battleground.

But no matter that the part of me that hurt wanted to ignore, close off, put walls around, protect, and bury all the pain back deep, I knew that I couldn't anymore. In as much as it felt like I was reliving different painful events of my past at different times all over again, I was also being asked to courageously step through.

My heart was raging to be free. I had to open my eyes and see everything in a new light. I had to re-experience the pain but I also had to rise

up above it to know what it was trying to teach me. I had to inhabit the woman, instead of the victim child.

Just letting myself feel what I'm holding within my body is a courageous act. Too many times in the past, I haven't wanted to inhabit my body. Every time I'd feel into my chest and my legs, I'd feel the punches and kicks that I endured for so long. Every time I'd touch my skin, I'd remember how repulsed I felt when someone forced himself upon me. Every time I'd take in air, I'd remember how many times I wanted to exit this life.

But as I continued to listen to what my heart was telling me, that I'm strong and the pain is not all there is to it, I let myself feel the fire that's always been the catalyst to helping me get through those past events. I learned to tap into her more and more, not just in the do-or-die moments. In as much as I was afraid to feel what's been held for so long in my body, I let my body's intelligence heal me, too. All I needed to do was keep

*Just letting myself feel
what I'm holding within
my body is a courageous act.*

breathing right down to my belly and let the process of transformation do what it needed to do.

Through my breath, I grounded courage within my body and I have not looked back ever since. Though I still have a lifetime of lessons to learn, it's this courage to love myself by not letting the past take me that will continue to move me forward.

And if I can do it, so can you. It's what your heart is asking you to. Let the love from your heart radiate out to every cell in your body. Let it spark aliveness and fire you up to inhabit your unique self.

Courage has always lived within you. It's a gift from your heart.

ABIGAIL TAMSI is a self-proclaimed courageous woman and soul-writer. She loves and lives courageously, always aiming to step through the barriers that stop her from living and loving fully. Her life adventures pour out in her writing, which have been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *The Urban Howl*. Website <http://www.abigailtamsi.com>



A letter to my soul

Sometimes the path is hard and full of stones.

Often, it hurts you and leaves you broken.

I just want to show you something you may not know you have.

When your trip into sadness makes you feel alone,

To find the way to the strength you have,

Just smile.

When your journey into darkness makes you lose your path,

To find the way to your inner resources,

Just smile.

When your travel into fear makes you feel overwhelmed,

To find the way to your peace,

Just smile.

It is not a smile of sadness,

It is not a smile of resignation,

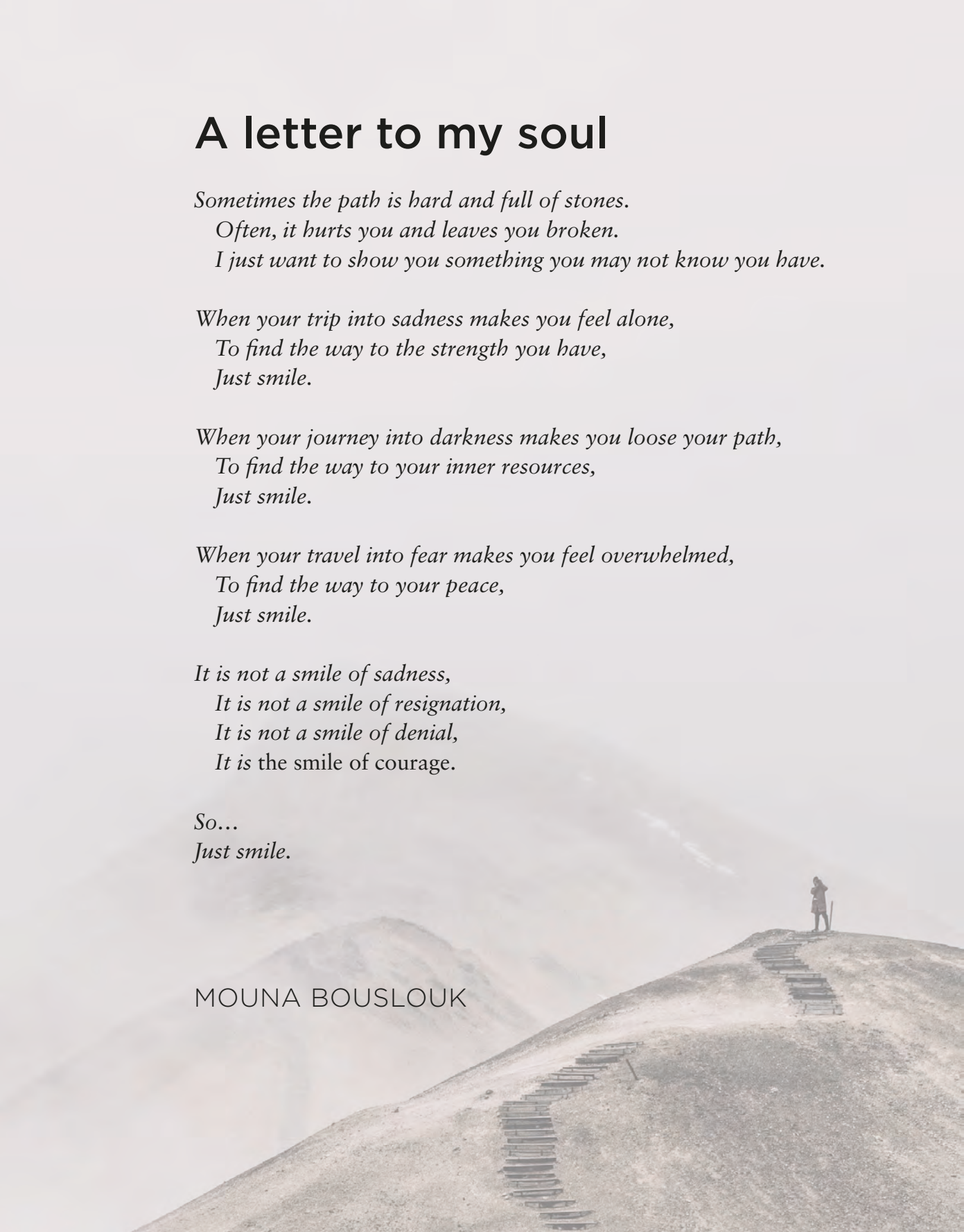
It is not a smile of denial,

It is the smile of courage.

So...

Just smile.

MOUNA BOUSLOUK



enCourage

TRACY STAMPER

Having bought into Hollywood's
bastardized version of Courage,
I didn't recognize her true spirit
until she knocked
from inside.

I answered to discover
that she is my heart,
uncovered.
She is spirit's deepest part.

A far cry from the story
in my mind's eye.
She's not mere bravado,
burly, surly and sure,
with ripped biceps
and a lion's roar.

Courage is all heart,
surely nothing less
with no need for
anything more.

Brave yet tender
far more quiet,
far stronger.

At her core
is the French word ‘cœur’

*The heart is
teacher
barometer
anchor
muse
and source
of
Courage.*

for ‘heart,’
in tribute to
the art
of living life
from, of, with and for heart.

Integrity
is Courage’s intent.
‘Integrity’ means ‘whole.’
Integrity’s sole need
is to hear and heed
the heart’s wishes.
Here’s to the Courage
to respond
to Life
wholeheartedly.

True Courage calls forth
actions, words,
stillnesses, silences
in direct translation of the heart’s desire.

The heart is
teacher
barometer
anchor
muse
and source
of
Courage.

Listening to what the heart beats for
teaches what matters
most.

How fast the heart beats is directly proportional
to how much Courage
is required.
Bodily biofeedback
anchors me in me.
My Muse of Courage
sings me along
fortifying through her song.

Knowing my heart
tells me
what is Courage-worthy.

Courage is measured
in moments
meant to shake
us awake
to rhythmic drum heartbeats.

Every time anyone has risen to
an awesome act of bravery,
they have been fueled
by fire of heart,
by purpose of passion.

“You know, sometimes all you need

*Knowing my heart
tells me
what is Courage-worthy.*

*is twenty seconds of insane courage.
Just literally twenty seconds
of just embarrassing bravery.
And I promise you,
something great will come of it.”
- Benjamin Mee’s ‘We Bought a Zoo’*

C.S. Lewis’ infamous words
ring true:
“*Courage, dear heart.*”

enCourage

by holding your heart dear.

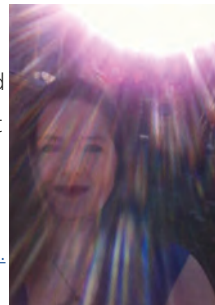
Listen to heart

to live

Life with Courage

as art.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in Rebelle Society and Elephant Journal. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



Courage

BRETTON KEATING

I don't think of courage as an emotion.

Courage seems like something that comes from within. A fire, a drive, a certain unstoppable, get-it-done force.

Emotions are something I can catch. They happen uncontrollably. I can't force them. I can't fake them. They're just there. They overcome me for an instant, and then, often just as quickly, they're gone again.

My fingers fly across the page and yet it only feels like courage when he tells me he's read it.

Because how do we be ourselves, freely open and honest, in a world that wants us to be anything but?

Everyone has lists of what they want. We draw lines and edges against anything out of place with the picture in our minds of what happiness looks like.

We focus on images and descriptions of people. We're afraid of seeing people as they actually are. We avoid eye contact because some people have the ability to see into the soul. And that is terrifying to us.

Allowing ourselves to be seen: this, to me, is courage. As is the understanding and acceptance that judgments and love can coexist. There's a

*Allowing ourselves to be seen:
this, to me, is courage*

love that runs deeper than judgment, deeper than the surface. And the truth may feel harsh, but it's in that discomfort that we grow. We become strong enough to step fully into our skin-born shoes. We grow in our ability to move forward.

“You have a say in this,” my teacher tells me. I am not a victim of whim, ceaselessly floating through circumstance. Heartache and pain do not happen to me, they happen with me. God does not stand behind me, but at my side. I am a partner in the mess. I choose how to shape the chaos. Let it burn, or be burned.

Courage is the moment of action. Courage is moving without pause. It's in stomping down the door when you hear the screams coming from inside. It's in stepping in, intervening even when it isn't happening to you, when getting involved may mean pain or even death. Because sometimes worse is the pain of living with the knowledge that you could have acted, and you did nothing. Instead, you watched it happen to somebody else, or you looked the other way. Courage is in pushing the attacker away from my frozen neck. I can still feel the place where the prongs made contact. My body will forever remain imprinted with the sensation of

crumbling to the ground. Like a rag doll, I fell. Inside the bubble where it happened, there was only my attacker, God, and me. God saved me, and God gave me the courage to wake the next morning and face a place that had suddenly turned scary. I have always lived a privileged life. My world was bright and sunny, but my eyes saw through a dark, clouded filter, after that night. And I was largely fortunate; I walked away, physically unharmed, except for the marks around my neck. I was not raped; he held a knife, but did not use it. Yet it took me years to tell people what had happened in a straightforward way. I can now say the words, “I was attacked,” and it still feels like something that didn’t happen to me, that wasn’t real, that I don’t want to own. But it also doesn’t feel like something I should push away and run from, no matter how uncomfortable it may make others, and consequently, myself, feel, that it happened and that I’m willing to talk about it. The first few people I told listened to my story before instructing me to shake it off, stand back up, turn the other way, and keep moving forward. But how do you move forward when you hold fear, not only in your heart, but in every cell of your being?

“Come on, big jump,” I say, as my puppy stands at the edge of the seat of the car, staring at the ground, refusing to move.

Each and every time I write and subsequently release my words, it feels like a cliff jump. I stand at the edge and hit send, and then proceed to forget myself on the way down. The words have lost all meaning as soon as they meet the page. It’s no longer my story; it belongs to the world now. Until someone reads it and decides to gift me with their perceptions. As soon as I hear, “I read your piece,” I feel my heart clench, braced for what comes next. My body tightens as I wait for the inevitable, “You seem honest. You seem introspective,” and a whole slew of “You seems,” when really all they see is themselves in a reflection of my empty words.

“Your drawing makes me feel sad.” And I remind myself, yet again, that I cannot control anyone else’s feelings.

“What inspired this piece?” he asked, and, caught off guard, I deflected his question as I rambled about all the other paintings I had drawn. The ones I felt more comfortable discussing. In the moment, I was too afraid to tell the truth; it was inspired by a breakup. It was inspired by the moment I stood in the middle of the road and realized that I was hurting everyone around me and no matter what I did, I was only going to hurt people. I was hurting someone I loved like a brother but not a lover, I was hurting my friends by talking about it and not doing anything, I was hurting my family by allowing them to get involved, and I was hurting myself. Someone had handed me his heart, freely, on an open palm, and I had slaughtered it. Albeit unintentionally, but nevertheless, I was horrified to realize that I am capable of that. I know it means I am capable of causing even more hurt.

It is impossible to be in relationship, to be an active participant in the world, without both experiencing and causing hurt. Courage lies in facing the hurt and letting it pass. It’s in staying open regardless. There is truth to Henry Matisse’s words, “Creativity takes courage.” Because life and

Life and art are not separate and life is, in its very essence, a creative act, life takes courage.

art are not separate and life is, in its very essence, a creative act, *life* takes courage. And I wouldn't have it any other way. A life lived with courage is expansive. Yes, it opens us to large feelings, but these feelings exist on a whole spectrum of hurt and love. And in choosing to live, unafraid of the hurt we may experience or cause or both, we live courageously facing the potential of a greater love, too. We grow in our ability to *feel*, and consequently, to love. Feeling and love live side by side and intertwined with courage. Courage creates room for love, and love guides courage into being.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).



A photograph of a lighthouse situated on a rocky cliff overlooking the ocean at dusk. The lighthouse is white with a dark top section and is illuminated. To its left is a small white building with a dark roof. The foreground is filled with dark, jagged rocks. The sky is a gradient of dark blue and grey, with a few stars visible. The ocean is dark with some whitecaps. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

*Courage creates room for love, and
love guides courage into being.*

BRETTON KEATING

SOUL PROMPT

How do you feel?

What is courage for *you*? How do *you* express courage? Where do *you* feel it in your body? What colors or sounds do *you* associate with courage?

This space is for you and your thoughts and words about courage.

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THE AUTHORS

ABIGAIL TAMSI is a self-proclaimed courageous woman and soul-writer. She loves and lives courageously, always aiming to step through the barriers that stop her from living and loving fully. Her life adventures pour out in her writing, which have been featured in Re-belle Society and The Urban Howl.

Website <http://www.abigailtamsi.com>

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.

AMY BARFIELD MARTIN is a dream seeker and truth creator, residing in the St. Louis area. She inspires others to live life on their terms through honoring and listening to the voice of body sensation, along with allowing the uncensored flow of one's true desires. Let's illuminate your heart's magic. Website: amybarfieldmartin.com

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com)..

CASHA DOEMLAND LA-born, Georgia-bred and one-half of a set of identical twins, Casha spends her days writing poetry and prose and exploring the world. She's a classic film enthusiast, runner, dog walker, and collector of quotes and tattoos.

Website: cashadoemland.com

HEIDI PRAHL is a Chicago based writer and photographer who appreciates and cultivates honest conversation around difficult topics. She is a lover of Jesus, her family, beach glass, good coffee, exceptional books and is an absolute foodie at heart. Website: heidiprahl.com

KASIA LINDAHL An explorer of the human being, with all too long experience of human doing. Practising awareness and connection of the physical body and mind with help of yoga, meditation, plant based mindful cooking, writing, breathing, observing the nature, anything basically.

Website: zebrazone.se

KRISTINA JOHNSON is a lover of all things that inspire creativity and invite happiness. In addition to teaching Vinyasa Yoga and whirling her cares away on the dance floor, she makes time to travel the world, create art, do cartwheels in the grass and make play and laughter a priority.

LYSA BLACK is a Heart Healer who uses her gifts to help you return to the magic of your own heart. The more we can trust ourselves the more we can trust our gifts: the gut knowing, inner wisdom or intuitive guidance we all receive.

Website: heartmagic.co.nz

MARTIN FERDINANDS climbs trees, practices yoga, meditates and writes in his journal. When he is not doing any of those, he reads and translates texts from various Asian spiritual traditions as part of his graduate studies. So far, none of his creative writing has been published, except for a Dutch piece ([found here](#)).

MOUNA BOUSLOUK is a consultant and coach. She empowers entrepreneurs in/with technology using her technical skills and her intuition. She loves writing, reading, watching flowers bloom and walking in the forest. Her motto : “All the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today” Indian Proverb. Website: mounabouslouk.com

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON shares a love of writing, dancing Nia (Holistic Fitness), and making doll and teddy bear creations. Her children’s books, Little Blue Penguin and McKenzie’s Frosty Surprise have delighted many youngsters. She blogs and thinks of new books to write while living passionately.

Website: patriciaatchison.ca

SKYLER MECHELLE WEINBERG After enduring over 17 years of incest, physical violence, and sex trafficking through and by her immediate family, Skyler escaped at the age of 18 and has and has since sought to redefine what it means to live life after abuse. She has built a movement that not only seeks to educate and destigmatise a

very prevalent issue in our society, but refine and modify the support that is already in place. Focusing heavily on the systemic oppression, racism, ableism, and segregation that further impacts the poor trauma after care and mental health fields globally, she has set out to break the silence and reform abuse care by believing all survivors.

Website: skyler-mechelle.com.

TABITHA MACGOWAN is an author, autism parent, and advocate of acceptance, compassion, and love. She delights in life's quirks, belly laughs, smiles that light up, epiphanies, meditating, snuggling under her favorite quilt, campfires, coffee, and stargazing with her son in the early morning.

Website: tlmacgowan.com

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in Rebelle Society and Elephant Journal. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/

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PHOTOS FROM UNSPLASH.COM

COVER

Face Girl photo by Zulmaury Saavedra on Unsplash.

FREEDOM

Leather bridle on a horse photo by Benny Jackson on Unsplash

SUPPORT

Mountain photo by Mahir Uysal on Unsplash

VULNERABILITY

Empty Nest photo by Jerry Kiesewetter on Unsplash

Woman hair over face bristol photo by Ewelina Karezona Karbowiak on Unsplash

TRUST

Hands photo by Dineslav Roydev on Unsplash

Lady with an axe photo by Benjamin Balázs on Unsplash

HOPE

A woman's white balloon photo by Hipster Mum on Unsplash

Woman at sea photo by Frank McKenna on Unsplash

SHAME

Aslan, the Asiatic lion Photo by Frida Bredesen on Unsplash

PEACE

Woman and lavender photo by Amy Treasure on Unsplash

FEAR

Moving Water and Ink photo by Adrien Ledoux on Unsplash

JOY

Soul Dancer photo by Saksham Gangwar on Unsplash

GRIEF

Peak Workshop photo by Morgan McDonald on Unsplash

COURAGE

Hveradalir photo by Alexander Milo on Unsplash

Portland, Maine photo by Mitch Mckee on Unsplash

APPENDIX

Flowers photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Thank you!

TYPOGRAPHY

The text in this book is set in Sabon a classic typeface designed by *Jan Tschichold* (1902–1974). Tschichold was a typographer, book designer and, as the son of a sign maker, also a calligrapher.

Sabon was designed in the mid 1960s and was used as a replacement for Garamond with the main purpose to work harmonious in both Monotype and Linotype casting machines.

The name Sabon is taken from *Jacques Sabon* a French 16th century typefounder.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Anna Linder is a graphic artist and book designer. She's also a writer but not quite accepting of that role yet.

Calling on women writers and fellow heart leaders, highly sensitives, empaths and survivors she created *The Book of Emotions*. She felt called to create this book as a guide to everybody and anybody who has shut down or lost their internal navigation system in life.

Anna has lived with a addiction, depression, anxiety, co-dependency, emotional and verbal abuse. She's also experienced healing, the wonders of yoga, the magic in nature and the support of deep feeling conscious women who lead with their hearts.

Anna's wish for herself and her readers is to navigate life with more ease through identifying feelings and learning more from them.

