



Choices For Change

Courageous Decisions That
Continue to Change Lives
By Andrea Eygenraam & Friends

CHOICES FOR CHANGE

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Continue to Change Lives

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to express my immense gratitude to every single author in this book for coming along on this journey and sharing so bravely and vulnerably all you have. Your words have impacted me deeply, and your patience with this process hasn't gone unnoticed. I am so honoured to help you share these words with the world. You are amazing and the reason this book is in existence. Never stop writing!

A special shout out to Liz, whose enthusiasm kept me keeping on, and helped guide the direction of this book with extra pieces we discussed and challenging me to step up to be the person this world needs me to be. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to you for sharing this journey and our publishing dreams.

Again, to the universe, who continues to challenge me with each book, and this one was no exception, although maybe the most intense this time. Always ensuring I have material and experience to write from for the book topics I choose, I have once again been humbled, broken down, built up and rose up again through the process of publishing this book. Each one continues to be one of the biggest learning experiences I embark on and while I'm grateful for the lessons, I'll request again, a little gentler next time, okay?

And to you reading this. Know that you, too, are worthy of sharing your words. Tap into your heart and listen to what it has to say. You'd be surprised at the answers when you can get quiet enough. And if you need help, try our free fall process with guided meditation to help you get out of your own way. It's worked for so many, and can work for you too, even if you think you're "not an author."

Gratitude

We are so grateful to everyone who supported our launch and helped make Choices for Change a #3 best selling book! We charted in the top 20 in our four main categories and have stayed in the top 100 books in New Age Spirituality and Self Help for over a month since the release! We hit in the top 50 New Releases and had such an amazing time celebrating with everyone. Thank you so much for your support

Your reviews have been so heartfelt and touching and we love to hear them. We are grateful this book has had such a profound impact on so many and hope you will find the courage in these pages to make your Choice for Change. We would love to hear from you.

Two Post-Publishing Post Scripts noted in this book
As of July 26, 2020 Jen, has arrived in Scotland!

Also, we are saddened to share that Madam from the Animal Companions chapter fell ill and is no longer with us. Our hearts go out to Christina and her family

Preface

This book has been through such an interesting journey from its inception to publication. When I announced the collaboration and started collecting pieces to be included, I had no idea we would be facing our biggest Choice for Change as a collective humanity in over a century.

The Coronavirus, Covid-19, has certainly impacted the journey of this book, but I'm delighted we persevered to get this to you, and in your hands. It has certainly changed the landscape of publishing, writing, and simply living, in ways we have only begun to imagine. We are grateful this book found its way to you, and hope it can help you, the way it has helped so many of the authors you will soon read.

I hope it can inspire you, the reader, as we move forward into a new world and ways of doing things. I hope you choose love, and connection, and fill yourself with joy and gratitude each and every single day. I hope that the stories of bravery, joy and inspiration, can help you to make your Choices for Change.

Know that each and every one of us, the Authors, are sending you our love, so you may have the courage for the choices you need to make. Remember, you are only one decision away from a completely different life.

Let's keep this journey going!

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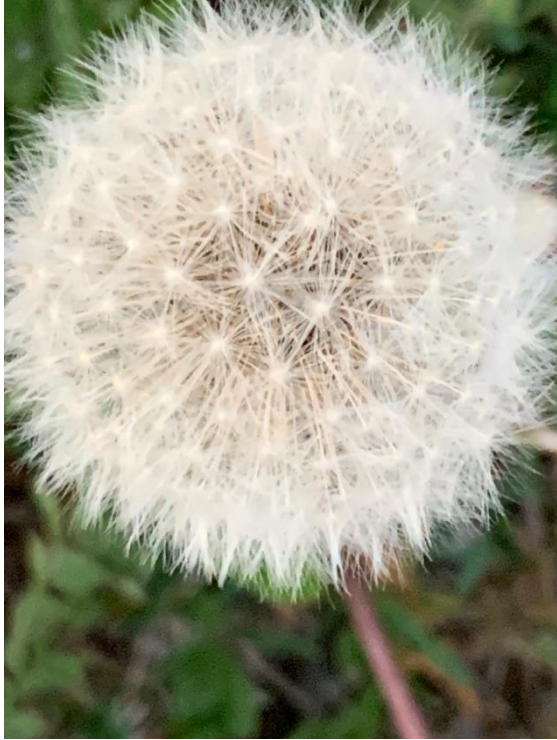
Change cannot happen when I am standing still.

Just like my GPS does not give up on me when I turn left instead of right, the Universe (God) does not punish me when I could have made a better choice. There instantly is a recalibration. A new direction is provided

However, just like my GPS requires my vehicle to be in gear and moving to be able to guide me to my destination, so the Universe (God) needs me to put one foot in front of the other to achieve a fulfilled life.

Change cannot happen when I am standing still

~Norm Eygenraam~



Dandelion Fluff

Somehow, to me it was magical. Its soft wisps swayed carefree with the cool spring breeze. I watched in awe as its delicate petals struggled for freedom with each gust yet clung desperately to its deeply rooted core. I wondered how something so fragile could have such strength and determination. Its stem was thicker than needed, I thought. Yet, I knew it to be hollow, with no substance or purpose but to support her beauty and delicacy. Once gone, it would simply cease to exist.

I found her hard to resist, and so, I broke her stem, plucked her from her resting place and held her momentarily in my hand, each finger curled tightly around the flimsy green hose. I held her up to marvel at her intricacy. How could something so simple be so complex? Each petal a wispy tendril clinging to a seed, soon to breed one more. A pest they called it. It was a weed, something we could surely do without and I knew how desperately and relentlessly they struggled to eliminate her.

In that moment, I did not see what they saw. I recognized her beauty. She was a spring snowflake, unique in her own configuration and blessed with an innate determination to proliferate and share her beauty again and again. While others complained and could not see the beauty before them, I smiled. They may protest and call her a weed, but I understood that one day soon, the field would be transformed into a sunny yellow, blessed with the fruits of her offspring. I too, was blessed, knowing that the transformation would begin with me.

I closed my eyes and blew.

~Kim McCutcheon~

Tree of Life

The trees teach us impermanence
Springing forth life after the winter slumber
Creating colourful blossoms where it once was bare
Bringing people out of hibernation to remember
There is life to celebrate as our world pops alive once more
Daffodils, Tulips, Crocuses usher in the new season
Letting their sweet scent fill our noses and our hearts
Lilacs, Magnolias, and Roses, keep the seasons rolling
Reminding us no flower lasts forever
We must appreciate each blossom as it appears
And let it go as it moves on
With faith we know it will appear
In another year

The lush green canopies of summer
With leaves in full splendour
Provide some much needed shade
From the hot sun above
All too often it seems this passes quickly
As we see the first hints of colour frosting the tips of the trees
It reminds us time marches on and we must enjoy each moment as it
comes
No season is forever, but each owns its own magic

The trees don their coats of many colours
The splash of watercolour appears
As the last fireworks explode on the branches
The trees put on their spectacular show
So we can hold the colour in our hearts
Until the flowers cycle around once more

As the last leaf falls to the ground
And the first snowflake twinkles its way to earth
Wrapping the world in a cosy blanket of white
Tucking us in for a season of slumber
Giving rest to the weary
Forcing us to slow down, take pause

Evergreens remind us of hope
For everything will come alive again
Nothing is forever
We can embrace the changes
Enjoy the beauty that each change of season offers
Hold the memories close to our hearts
Knowing, even though it may come
In a different form that what we are familiar with
Everything will cycle around again

~Andrea Eygenraam~



Ripple Effect

Everything we do has a ripple effect much farther than we can see. When we send out love to the world, love is returned in ways we may not even expect.

When we move forward with awareness to make a difference in our small corner of the world, the impact we have will be more than we can dream.

For anyone who thinks they are only one person and can't make a difference, please think again.

Kindness you extend ripples out and brightens the day of so many more than you can fathom.

Love is our strongest power as human beings. The world needs more love right now.

The more we focus on the negative, the more it perpetuates. If you truly want change in the world, promote love, not the anti this or anti that.

Mother Theresa said she wouldn't attend an anti-war rally, but if you had a peace march she'd be the first one there.

Let's follow that example and share our love, patience, acceptance and kindness with all who we cross paths with, today and every day. Our planet deserves our love every day. That extends to all beings on this planet, all of them, not just the ones we deem "worthy"

What vibration is your ripple sending out today? Please let it be kind, and full of action and love.

Life's a Beach

Sometimes, it seems that the Universe is conspiring to give you exactly what you want, but don't believe is possible.

A dream I had long held was to live in a small town by the beach. But property prices were going through the roof. Sale of my house in the suburbs would not allow me to buy the equivalent in any but the remotest towns, a long way from any beach. And, as is so for small towns everywhere, jobs are like priceless jewels.

So, I was stuck, living in the suburbs, at a job that was making me miserable. I kept asking the Universe for guidance and getting the same reply, "Wait."

The day our boss showed up and told us he had sold the business is etched in my memory. Initially, there was panic, then relief with the discovery that the new owners were great people. They came with a vision for the future which meant we all could keep our jobs.

And just like that, I was happy at work again, as the threatening behavior from the previous owner disappeared.

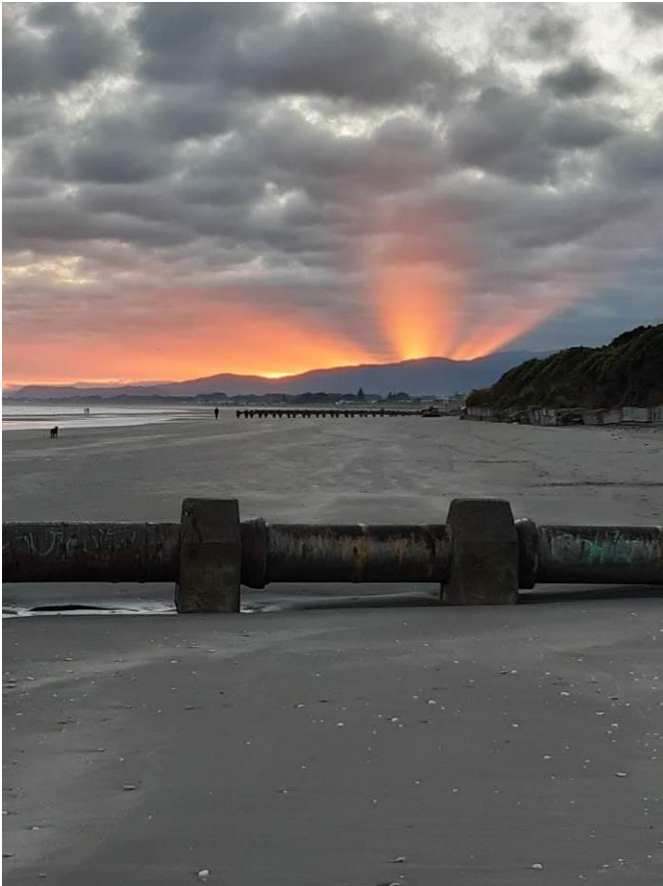
But the new owners had a shock in store for us. They waited three months before dropping the bombshell. Due to them having leased a property in a nearby township before purchasing us, they were closing our branch down.

Then came the words that made the impossible seem possible. "If you want to join us, you've got a job at the new branch."

OMG. The town where the new branch was located is a slice of beachside paradise, but there is never work available there.

I was looking at some big choices. What did I want? I could stay in my house in the suburbs and try to find a new job nearby. I could stay and commute an hour each way to the new branch or, I could follow my dream and move there.

Money for such a move looked like a challenge, for all of five minutes, until I realized that I could live happily in a smaller place. Well, the choice was obvious, glaringly so. I packed up my belongings and shifted to a little cottage 750 meters from the beach. As I walk the dogs along the beach in the mornings, I often sigh with contentment. Not once have I regretted making the choice to move.



~Liz Homes~

Make Every Day Count: Musings of a Cancer Patient

Cancer is scary. There's no "ifs, ands or buts" about it. Many of us have known someone who either has or has had cancer. Maybe you lost a friend or loved one to it? Perhaps some of you are like me, and living with it yourselves. I can picture you all reading this. You're nodding, aren't you?

Receiving a cancer diagnosis was the scariest thing that ever happened to me. Five years ago, I was informed that I had breast cancer. So, I had surgery. I won't get too caught up in details here, but will tell you that in 2018, I received the horrifying news that it had returned. Metastatic breast cancer in my liver, spinal column, and some spots on my lungs. I was whisked into chemotherapy mere days after my diagnosis.

I remember being terrified that day. Not knowing how it would make me feel, or what it would do to me. But if I wanted to live more than a short while, I had no choice. I had support of family and loved ones. And, trust me, that helps.

After awhile I became used to going for my infusions. I had a PICC line inserted into my arm in order to receive my treatments without having to be poked all the time. I hate needles! And because I live in a smaller city that also has a chemo department in its hospital, I could take my treatments near home, in a smaller, more relaxed environment than at the huge, bustling Regional Cancer Centre where my oncologist is located.

In time, I got to know my chemo nurses and even some of the other patients as we progressed through our treatment plans. I have always been an outgoing, upbeat sort, so it was easy for me to talk to them. I also enjoy making people smile, so I used my sense of humour to lighten the mood and make others feel better. I've never been a broody, negative person, and I try not to let this horrible disease get the better of me, either physically or mentally.

I've been told, and truly believe, that attitude is everything when fighting cancer. I believe my positive attitude and my great network of family and friends cheering me on, is what keeps me going. I love to share this powerful energy with the other cancer patients. If I can help them through their day, or even the few hours they are in the chemo chair, then I am happy.

I have donated items to the department and brought presents to the patients and nurses. I even gave my favourite set of scrubs (I used to be a dental assistant) to one of the nurses, and yesterday she gave me a gift too.

These little things are important in all our lives, but I think they are especially important when you are fighting something as life-changing as cancer. So yesterday I left the hospital feeling very blessed and grateful.

If you are a cancer patient, I send you my love and positive, healing thoughts. Don't give up. Every day is a gift, so keep smiling and live your best lives. You've got this!

~Jen McNaughton~

Changes

Watching the sunset reminds me that beauty and light fades.
That even something so stunning has its purpose
and its course to run,
it's all divinely operated.
I am but an observer as it unfolds
and I can choose to embrace it and see the majestic nature in front of
me knowing that it will return...
or I can choose to only see the darkness at the end.



It's Your Label

People are neutral. Money is neutral. Events are neutral. Objects are neutral.

It's our labels, experiences, baggage, that makes them otherwise.

Not everyone likes me. I may remind them of their annoying aunt Helen who always did that one thing they hated and avoided.

While others love me. I may remind them of their delightful aunt Helen who always did that one thing they loved and embraced.

I'm the same person.

Money is energy. We can use it for "good" or we can use it for "evil". But money itself isn't doing anything except being the vehicle with which we can do other things.

Some people look at a tragic situation and see loss, while others see opportunity for change and growth. New beginnings, space for new things.

If someone you love gives you a beautiful gift, and then hurts you, you may not see the gift as beautiful as you once did. Wedding rings mean much more while you are married than after you are divorced.

The point is, whenever we come to a situation, an interaction or new thing, we bring with us all our previous experiences, feelings, beliefs, values and we evaluate whatever it is, based on that.

In Gabby Bernstein's book, Judgement Detox, one of the steps to releasing judgement is to "see someone for the first time". That is, to be in THIS moment with current facts presented and evaluate what's in front of you, not behind you.

In any moment we can choose if we will be a prisoner of the past or pioneer of the future, or...be right here and now in this moment. This moment is truly all we have. Let's choose to make the most of it and change old worn out dances of our past. Choose your perspective. Change your life.

~Andrea Eygenraam~

Perspective

We choose what we focus on. What we give our energy and focus to will expand.

What are you focusing on?

It is easy to get consumed by fear, especially if you have a habit of consuming the news. They feed us what they want us to see, feel, think, do.

When you look for the good news stories, you will find more. There will be an abundance and your faith in humanity will never be stronger.

If you make a habit of starting your day with gratitude, you prime your brain to find more things to be grateful for. I often will challenge myself to write multiple pages, until I almost “exhaust” my gratitude because then my mind is flooded with the awesomeness and simplicity of life.

On days when it’s particularly tough, or I’m angry or things have happened to “derail” my day, I make an effort to try to do MORE gratitude to realign with the good feelings that I want. It stops the snowball of just being one of those days and submitting to a less than stellar day. Even if just for a few hours, choosing to try to feel better is always worth it.

When we can develop a habit of choosing how we want to feel or setting the intention to feel good and have things go easier, life can be calmer and we can feel empowered.

That doesn’t mean that things won’t go wrong, but our come back rate will be quicker and we will be able to see the lessons easier. Life doesn’t happen to us, it happens for us, as they say. There is always something small to be grateful for, and always a small lesson in a challenge.

Sometimes these are easier to find than others, but it's always worth it to look when you can. Sometimes that's after a few breaths and distance from the situation, but with more practice, it becomes easier...promise.

It is easier to keep the momentum going than having to start back up again. That should not discourage you from starting, but it's merely to say, it does get easier as you go.

I know for me the downward spiral happens so much faster and almost subconsciously, rather than the upward spiral. Looking for gratitude and joy doesn't come second nature to me most days, yet. On those days I need to be gentle with myself, be kind and take it easy. Beating myself up for not finding gratitude easier is counterproductive! Sometimes, I just need to show myself love and rest, and know tomorrow is a new day.

Take it easy on yourself. Start small and simple and build on it. One step at a time and it will become a habit. You will not go blind looking on the bright side of things.

Choose to improve your perspective.

You deserve all the rewards.

Covid Creativity

The Before and After

Choices for Change is likely the hardest book I've published, been a part of, or written for. I first thought of the idea in 2018 with the working title "Second Chances, Choices and Change" – as I was getting back together with an abusive ex-partner. The "second chances" obviously was testament to that, and as noticed by the changed title, that didn't end as hoped or expected.

I went ahead to publish a different collaboration book in 2019, Motivation, Momentum and Manifesting, which had quite a bit of success, although also had its own tumultuous journey with situations the authors went through, things I was challenged with, personality conflicts as well as personal challenges, including the ending of the previously mentioned relationship.

As MMM was being published, the idea came back and I put out the title "Second Chances, Choices and Change" to the authors I know and many were excited. It did not feel like the right time though, so it was shelved again.

With 2020 starting, I felt like NOW was the time. I announced it in December 2019, and had excited authors on board.

Here in North America, no one was taking the coronavirus very seriously as it was "happening overseas"

I released timelines for the book, excited to have a big launch party May 11th, a date that felt just right, finally!

Authors were enthusiastically submitting pieces, obviously pouring their heart and souls into this project. Such vulnerable writing I was receiving!

I promised myself I wouldn't fully read anything until I had received all the pieces I was expecting. Then I could snuggle up and focus on them all and then write my pieces for contribution.

And then things got locked down here.

The panic and fear that swallowed so many of us like a tsunami, drowned me. I managed to read the pieces from the authors and I cried and got to know so many of them so much better.

And then fog set in. I could barely function day to day. Some days were awesome and I rocked it. Other days it was all I could do to stay alive. So many feelings from hope to hopeless, anger, sadness, overwhelm, love, pride.

The biggest thing to note with change, is it looks very much like the grieving process, and like the grieving process, often doesn't make much sense.

And this pandemic, collective trauma, fear, uncertainty and ultimately the emphasis on the truly brave heroes in all this – hospital workers and staff, grocery store workers, pharmacists, bus and delivery drivers, and all other workers deemed “essential services” that put themselves at risk to help keep society going – this global event has certainly caused all of us to go through a collective grieving process, whether directly losing someone close to us, or grieving what life was before and the changes thrust upon us all. Grieving a world that wasn't working anyway, and trying to adjust to life working from home, or not at all, with kids not in school. SO MANY CHANGES. Changes to the way we shop, socialize, pay and receive necessities, even receiving books due to delivery delays and finding new ways to interact with them.

This will certainly mark a before and after.

As happens with so many changes.

And we have a choice. Are we going to step up to a new opportunity? Are we going to try to go back to a normal that wasn't working and heading for collapse anyway? Are we going to cling to old familiar habits and patterns? Or are we going to take this once in a lifetime* opportunity, reinvent ourselves, follow our passions, connect to our dreams and authentically build a new more sustainable life that makes us excited to get up every morning! What is the secret inside your heart that you've always wanted to shout from the rooftop? What would you do if you were guaranteed not to fail?

Today you have a choice to change. What will you do?

~Andrea Eygenraam~

Overnight It All Changed

Dreams so lofty, goals so big, hope abundant

And almost overnight, it all changed

We woke up in a dystopian novel
People dropping dead all around us
Suspicious of who is Typhoid Mary
Anger at those who defy the rules
Virus travelling from one to the next
Exponentially infecting and taking hostages
Healthy people stricken with fear
Others disbelieving it was so bad

Until shock

When someone famous or someone they know falls ill
Experience is the worst teacher, and always the hardest lessons to swallow

But humans tend to only learn the hard way
Until it hits home and becomes a catastrophe
Surreal environments, empty shelves, carts loaded full
Angry mobs, panicked and afraid
Inner wounded children crying for safety
Not knowing what's going on and fear coming out sideways
Compassion as hard to come by as toilet paper

And almost overnight, it all changed

Caremongering groups pop up
People coming together to help as one
People listening and staying indoors
Connecting on computers with caring
Adjusting and adapting
Reluctantly at first
But then there was calm
People realized we can weather it together

We share the same fears
We share the same hopes
We all want to return to normal
But life will never be the same again

Looking at a grocery list from last month
The woman who held that had no idea
So much would have been different on that list
If she had known
She had started to prepare
People thought she lost her mind
But intuitively she knew, there wasn't much time
Never though, would she have realized it would come to this

And here we are

Waiting for that day again

That almost overnight, it all will change once again

~Andrea Eygenraam~

Dark Times Lit the Creative Fires

It's funny how you can be just ticking along, thinking you're living your life, when something happens and a proverbial wrench gets thrown into the mix. You may be put at risk because you're a front-line health care worker in an ER or ICU department. Or you may lose your job or have to take a medical leave of absence from it because you are considered a high-risk individual for whatever health reasons you may have.

Coronavirus, or Covid-19 as we also know it, is no joke. In fact, it's scary as ____ (fill in the blank). I am a cancer patient, and so am considered high risk, due to my Chemotherapy treatments. As the news and health risks of Covid became more and more clear at the end of February and into March, I became concerned about how at-risk I was.

I was working in a big box retail establishment as a cashier, talking to vast numbers of people every day, and having to handle cash and surfaces that could have unknown germs on them. As the public knowledge increased, our store started taking more and more precautions, right around the same time people were stockpiling toilet paper, hand sanitizers and other cleaning and disinfecting supplies.

But one day, a member of our staff showed up to work, complaining of a fever, and clearly showing symptoms that were flu-like. I was sitting on the opposite side of the lunchroom table from him. I asked him why he would even come to work, feeling like that, when the health officials were already warning about the symptoms, and telling people not to leave their homes if they were feeling ill.

Another co-worker also chimed in on the conversation. She informed the young man, in no uncertain terms, that he could literally kill me if he had Coronavirus and I caught the infection. He ended up being sent home by store management a short while later.

After the lunchroom incident, I asked one of the managers what their thoughts were on the situation, as it applied to my health and safety. I was given a private audience with our HR manager and we decided together that it would be prudent for me to take medical leave of absence. The date was March 13th. Friday the 13th... I have been self-isolated since that day.

If you have read my story *Caledonia Is Calling*, you will know by now that I had planned to return to Scotland, the country of my birth. But thanks to Covid and its wrench, I am still here in Canada - for now. Borders were closed, flights were cancelled, and airlines had no idea when international flights would resume again.

So, what was I supposed to do, as I watched my previously-booked travel date come and go? And see my next choice, based on my airline's booking schedule, get cancelled too? It was nail-bitingly tense for a while. Now I've surrendered and just settled into the waiting game.

I quite enjoyed relaxing for the first little while. It was nice not having to get up too early, the "crack of stupid", as I humourously refer to it. If I didn't want to wear a bra or fuss with my hair because I wasn't leaving the house, so be it! I did some binge watching of TV shows, as I'm sure many folks did. I watched the online news stories and social media hype and theories about the virus, its origin and severity. It seemed like we were living in a sci fi thriller novel for a long time.

But after a while, I needed a break from the scary news and dullness of scrolling annoying social media conspiracy theory stories. What to do?

I decided to continue my "going home to Scotland" preparations. Taking care of some important paperwork, sorting through my personal belongings, deciding what to take or give to my family members to keep for me, and picking out trinkets to give to my friends as mementos. I tried a little creative indoor photography, as the early spring weather was inclement.

And then I was invited to write a story for this book. I had received an invitation to write in the past, for another project, but declined, due to my other commitments. But when this opportunity arose, I thought, “Why not? I’m not doing anything else right now...”

So, I started writing. And that led to conversations with Andrea, which somehow led to me starting a brand new website and blog! Me, a blogger? I never would have guessed...

Then it was like someone flicked on a light switch. I was writing, more and more. I used to write (mostly bad poetry) in my teens and early twenties. And now, I was writing again. I discovered, almost to my own surprise, that I enjoyed it! With Andrea’s help, I was building a website. I started reading and taking free online courses and webinars on writing, creative photography ideas, and I continued my education on aromatherapy and creating natural skin products. I had already started making essential oil blends for myself because of my cancer. One of my friends at work inspired me to do so a couple of years ago, when she made me a blend for my cancer. Now, during lockdown, I decided I could do it as a business venture.

Coronavirus has certainly made a huge impact on humanity. It made us feel like we were living in a horror movie. Everyone was terrified, unsure which way to turn, and then they were looking for someone to blame. They did foolish things, like hoarding toilet paper.

But as time passed, we started reaching out to one another. We developed an appreciation for things and people we normally took for granted. We cheered, clapped and made pretty signs to show our appreciation to front line workers. We connected online and called our elderly neighbors to make sure they were alright and ask if they needed supplies. Restaurants donated meals and people made homemade masks. The outpouring of love and generosity is something our busy, sometimes self-centered world needed. Sometimes it takes a terrible event to humble us and teach us how to be human again.

While the world was shutting itself down and many of us were getting used to self-isolating, this nasty virus was inadvertently creating a monster. Me. The more creative, even more entrepreneurial-minded version of myself. Gears started turning, steps have been taken, and plans made for the not-too-distant future when I can put it all together.

Even though I already had the mindset that life is a gift, I developed an even stronger appreciation for little things like being able to go to work and seeing my colleagues, spending time with family and friends, and going shopping.

I can only hope that we all come out of this pandemic with a greater appreciation for things like hugs from friends, children playing in the park and family picnics. Because if I've learned anything from this, it is that we need each other to survive. We need to take better care of ourselves and each other. So, let's do it! This is my challenge to anyone reading this. Be strong, be brave, and please be kind to one another. Thank you!

Publishing Post Script 7/26/20 Jen has arrived in Scotland!

~Jen McNaughton~

Pandemic Hope

She sat up straight and thought she could hear the walls closing in around her. Every creak and moan from the cracked plaster walls seemed to soak up more of her oxygen and she struggled to remain calm. “Inhale slowly,” she coached herself to calm down. “Don’t let them win!”

The headlines were endless, relentlessly pelting her like sheets of rain on the too-thick lenses of her reading glasses that she struggled to straighten. She had read all of them at first, searching for some explanation, some logic to the surrounding insanity. She was desperate to find an end to the unexpected and unwelcomed surreal reality she now called home.

Each article contradicted its predecessor, none bringing any solace or fragment of hope amid the turmoil. “The world had gone mad”, she thought simply. There was no other plausible explanation. She had watched for decades as society had increasingly turned inward, struggling to find any significance in those around them. Being dispensable had become common place. No one was special any longer and few seemed to matter at all.

She remembered a time when people would celebrate, when holidays and special occasions were eagerly anticipated and planned. Shoppers would spend hours choosing the perfect greeting card – understanding that its message would often be far more important than the gift itself.

She remembered when there would be surprise parties just to bring a smile to someone’s face and when buying a present was done without any expectation. She remembered what it was like to feel gratitude, rather than guilt or indebtedness when receiving a gift.

She remembered a time when society was more concerned about celebrating than offending one another and when people were kind - just because.

She remembered when human touch was valued more than electronic messages and when people were not “too busy” to talk. She remembered when people came first and work last. Weekends were for refueling and re-energizing; not simply getting caught up on work.

Mostly, she remembered love, and that it had existed. She remembered that it was possible to feel joy in putting others first. She remembered the smile on the old lady’s face the day she gave her a cozy new blanket to shield her from the cold on the street she called home.

In that moment, she forgot that the world had now become a different place. In that moment of love, she remembered that inside all of us is that place of calm serenity where love and caring still exist. In that moment, when the world stopped, she remembered. In remembering, she began to believe again. It was in THAT moment that she sat up straight and rediscovered her memory of humanity and her faith in its restoration. Surely, they too could remember and learn to love again.

~Kim McCutcheon~

Loving Ourselves

Nothing Is as Important as You

I believed that I was a failure if I chose to give up. I stayed in the wrong relationships too many times, and for much too long. I thought if I chose to end the relationship, I was a failure. I was always one to leave one relationship, and jump right into the next. It helped to numb the hurt of not having been their first choice, and hoping to be for another.

This time it was different. Same but different. Different in my heart. This time I made the decision to let the relationship and him go. I was letting go this time to jump into a relationship I hadn't been in before; nor chose to be in before. I was jumping in with my eyes squeezed shut, and my breath held tight. I chose...to be in a relationship...with me.

Letting go of him meant I was finally choosing me. Choosing to love me more. To love me again. Love me first. This time I told myself the truth. I didn't give up on the relationship. I stopped lying to myself, and when I did, I realized the truth...I gave up on me. I gave so much of myself to the relationship, I ended up losing myself. I was lost.

No more...and never again! Looking back, I feel those feelings of how hard it was for me to choose to let the relationship go. There was no way I could have made it easier for myself. My heart pushed me through the hard thoughts and emotions and fear of not knowing what was on the other side. Truth: I knew what was on the other side. It would be just me. Just me. Alone.

Why was I always scared to be alone? Two decades later, I clearly see I should have been more scared of staying in those relationships. The fear of staying with them and losing them was familiar to me though. Familiar to me meant I was safe because I knew what to expect. Even if what I expected wasn't what I wanted or deserved. Oh, I believed this lie for so so long.

My heart was fed up. It was screaming at me, telling me, I should be scared of losing myself. But, being alone was unfamiliar. It terrified me. Truth: I wouldn't be alone. I never would have been. I never will be. I would just be...on...my...own. This time I heard, and actually listened to my heart. I chose to let go and be on my own.

Being on my own, spending time with myself, I am learning about who I am. I have been able to forgive myself for some of the choices I made before; and I continue to. I have been practicing letting go of who I used to be. I am learning about who I am today, and every day, and in every choice I make.

I found someone new. I fell in love. Deep love. The truest love. I found the best relationship and I never want to lose it. This woman I found is awesome, loveable, hardworking, caring, energetic, loyal, kind, thoughtful, positive, determined, open, hopeful, strong, resilient, inspiring, smart and determined, and so much more.

Hmmm....determined showed up twice there. Haha. I am determined. I AM THIS WOMAN. I will never give up on me, end the relationship with me, or lose me, ever again.

It took half my life to learn the difference between giving up and letting go, being alone and on my own. Looking forward with my eyes wide open, a steady sureness in my breath and a strong hold on my heart, I choose to love. I will love big and continue to share my heart. But I will never, ever, let it go.

Loving ME xox



~Christina Marie Hollis~

Unthinkable Gift

What's your "unthinkable"? Loss of a loved one, your business failing, the husband leaving you, the house burning down... We all have those things that are always present at the back of our mind, those things we'd rather not think about. To me, that unthinkable was me becoming "REALLY fat".

You might think that getting fat is hardly a tragedy, but allow me to give you more context: I grew up with narcissistic parents who ridiculed me for my chubbiness as a kid, and seemed ashamed of me. They harped on my eating habits, even though it was them who bought and served that food to me! To a young girl, it was devastating. Sure enough, I developed bulimia and anorexia in my teens.

I often romanticized the 100lb (45kg) spot on the scale, fueling my body with Diet Coke, steamed broccoli, and occasional Mars bar if I was planning to engage in a strenuous activity. It seemed to my parents that I finally had my life all together, and I was finally successful at something. They didn't know about my daily fantasies about jumping off a tall building.

As I struggled with self-hatred and having no sense of control over anything in my life, I continued with patterns of bingeing, purging, starving myself and over exercising well into my 30s. With so little self-compassion in my heart, I would whisper to my boyfriend, later husband, to shoot me if I ever got as fat as that woman walking across the street. I simply wanted not to live if I ever got so disfigured, undisciplined, and gross...

Eventually, it felt life was teaching me that I had no control over anything, and my body followed. I watched with horror as my weight climbed up and up and up... It seemed that it didn't matter what I ate or how much I moved, my weight was climbing up.

On the morning of my 44th birthday, the scale told me I was over 200 lbs (90kgs). After seeing that number, I was waiting for the ground to open and swallow me whole. I waited for the lightning strike and a heart attack and blinding panic and a gun to my head.

And NOTHING happened... Instead, I felt light and free and so, so alive! Even though the scale showed me that I was this unthinkable, unworthy cow (an expression one of my parents liked to refer to me by), I felt more love for myself than I ever have before. I felt the warmth and light radiate in my chest, and I knew so deeply that my worth, knowledge, experience and my value did not magically disappear because I breached the “unthinkable”. I felt free.

I felt free because I lost all of my pretenses that I was somebody less than who I truly was, just because of a number. There was no way to camouflage me, and there was no point. There was no denying me, because I was who I was, the way I was at this point in time. Me, fully and completely, unapologetically, me in all of my rounded glory.

I could never imagine that meeting myself in my true, raw expression would be so liberating! Almost instantly I started having more energy to do stuff, to create, to be present for people and for myself. More joy and self-appreciation for the miracle that my imperfect human body is, because it has served me remarkably well through the years, especially considering how much abuse and hatred I directed at it. My small, annoying aches and pains went away, my self-judgement quieted down, and suddenly, I could see the beauty and the light in my face.

Looking back, I have faced many “unthinkables”: worst kinds of betrayals, starting from zero more than once or twice in my life, a heart-breaking miscarriage, my marriage so nearly imploding, estrangement from my parents, dark, dark depressions... We all have gone through similar experiences. Even though it feels super shitty while you’re neck deep, once you realize you’ve pulled through on the other side, it feels truly miraculous.

Often those are our rebirths... Huge growth opportunities that give us a chance to rebuild ourselves stronger and better, to edit out what doesn’t serve: the shame, self-doubt and self-loathing. To prune out relationships that do not serve and support us, so our new growth can be more vigorous and healthier than before. Do it, and then show others how to do it. That’s how we heal the world.

~Seva-Ram Spronk~

We Are All Doing Our Best

You know, maybe I'll regret sharing this, but I really feel like speaking up about a very tough topic... Shame. And choosing our perspective.

How many stopped reading there? It's okay, I don't blame you, but it's something we can't run and hide from, or pretend doesn't exist. I don't want anyone to feel alone in their journey. I know that can be a scary place sometimes.

As someone who works every day to overcome binge eating disorder, to love myself enough to choose life and healthy eating and exercise, and not give in to self-destructive, harming choices that leave me sick; as someone who walked away from the dark alleys of hard drug addiction with crystal meth, and others over a decade ago; as someone who has walked away from situations of domestic violence and sexual abuse; as someone who has watched far too many close to her die and lost even more that were so very special; as someone who has come through cervical cancer and healing other health situations.... to be living a childhood dream life of an international best-selling author, published 10x, helping others not feel alone and helping them find hope to keep going, leaping so far out of my comfort zone and to go to Manhattan to meet one of my mentors, to have had the opportunity to meet so many that have inspired me, and coached so many to live their dreams and find fulfillment....

I still struggle with shame, and not feeling worthy, when I let those thoughts gain more momentum than they deserve. When I forget all that has brought me here to this moment. Never have I felt a victim or wanting pity. That's not what this is about.

This is about awareness, inclusivity, love, compassion and realizing everyone has a story and everyone is important, and let's all just be a little more gentle with judgements these days.

Cause. We. All. Have. Something. We. Have. Gone. Through.

I was at the dentist recently, and while most of the people there are great, I had one person helping me that decided it was appropriate to discuss how "obvious it was I didn't care for my teeth" up to her standard and scold me for this. I don't know her story or the kind of day she was having, I just know how it made me feel. And I wasn't feeling strong enough to not take it personally, or be able to distance myself from what was triggered in me. I explained due to depression and anxiety, I was doing my best. It continued and I held back tears. The hygienist who did my cleaning after, GOT IT. She reassured me that during tough times, our best is good enough and she was grateful I was caring for myself enough to come in and get the cleaning, and try to take care of things.

I made some unhealthy food and stress tolerance choices after, due to feeling a lower coping ability with events at the dentist and otherwise, and I'm feeling very sick mentally and physically now as I write this. And I feel shame that it's my fault, when I know I need to be more gentle and forgiving of myself, I am doing my best.

So, I am doing my best self-care today, and rebuilding all I can. Every day isn't perfect, but every day has potential for hope. I choose not to do more damage as I rebuild the scope of my complete health. It has been a journey, and if I try to fix everything at once I feel overwhelmed and sit and cry. I take things one step at a time. One healthy meal, one set of pills, one walk with my dog. I do what I can.

Some days, your best is achieving your entire to do list, some days it's getting out of bed. I'm proud of anyone, myself included, who keeps trying one more day, one more moment, one more breath. Keep going.

And make sure you take time to look back and reflect on all the amazing things you've conquered. Make sure you honour the amazing human you are and that you've chosen to keep walking, and creating, and loving and being you.

~Andrea Eygenraam~

The Sign

When you are feeling stuck, do you start looking for signs of what to do next? I certainly do. And sometimes the signs are there and very clear.

Maybe I was going through a mid-life crisis or perhaps I wanted out from what had turned into non-productive Monday evenings.

As a committee member of the local dog training club, I would turn up every week, ready to assist. But it became obvious that my help was only desired for doing the accounts and being there to meet and greet newcomers. The instructors were entrenched in their roles and not likely to have me assist in running any of the classes.

Frankly, I was bored because I had nothing to do most nights. I did honour the time and effort the other club members were willing to put in without recompense. They were good people doing a good job, but they really did not need me.

That's when I saw the sign. It was a billboard outside a big hall on the road corner leading to my home.

I was scared to investigate further. It was one of my more foolish ideas. Was it going to turn out that Google was my friend or enemy? All the details were there on the web. Nervously, I typed out an email. Of course, they told me I was welcome. Gulp.

Here I was, an overweight woman of 50 plus, considering signing up for Karate classes. That seemed a bit extreme as an excuse to leave the dog club. I must have lost my mind. Or had I? The karate club had only just put the sign up. Perhaps it was the Universe responding to a deeply hidden desire of mine.

I was petrified that first night of training and exhausted by the end of the class. I asked myself repeatedly if I really wanted to do this. But I persevered.

To begin with, I went to Karate once a week, on Mondays, then progressed to twice a week. I lost weight, got fit and learned to move with power.

I even managed to move up through the lower grades, to blue belt, level 4/10.

Finally, an aging body and a new puppy put an end to my wild dream of being a Kung Fu master, but I have never regretted following that sign.



~Liz Homes~

Misfit Artist

It had to mean something.



The building was a warm, buttercream yellow. Its surrounding structures were far more subdued in shades of white, brown, blue, and beige. That should have been the first sign that I was on the right track. Yellow was, after all, a sunny, happy colour. It could only envelope warmth and just the thought of it made me smile. This was where I could belong.

As I approached with tentative steps, the bright red door, wrinkles of paint lifting and peeling with age, beckoned, and dared me to enter. Red? Against the contrast of its yellow body, it had to be significant, right? It was important. This step had taken me a long time.

Listening first to my father lecture about how it was a waste of time and money, then later to my family tell me how selfish it would be to spend money on such trivial things. Trivial? Was I trivial? Hell, no! I needed this as much as I needed love, oxygen, food, and a solid roof over my head. How dare I decide to do something for myself? How dare I NOT?

Determined, I pulled open the red door. It was heavy and moaned with the aches and pains of age (or sang with praise for my decision). I stepped inside.

The long staircase squeaked with each step and I cringed as the red door slammed shut with finality behind me. The decision had been made. It was too late to turn back now. I needed to finish the climb. He was waiting at the summit behind the coolness of the bright blue door.

For a moment I hesitated. The door was slightly ajar but not enough for me to see inside. I tapped on the door then tentatively pushed it open to peer inside. His voice was far more energetic and cheerful than I had imagined. It welcomed me and made stepping past the barrier less intimidating.

Once inside, the room opened to a sea of colour. Windows across two walls were open wide to the swaying multitudes of greens on the rustling treetops outside. The intoxicating scent of fried onions wafted in from the pub below. I inhaled deeply, in part for the deliciousness, but more to calm my nerves. He wheeled his chair over to face me and smiled broadly, as grateful to see me as I was to see him.

This moment was far more important to me than either of us realized. He was the artist I never had the chance to become. He was the talent that I never had the opportunity to foster. He was my hope for renewal, for refueling my passion for creativity and, more importantly, for rediscovering the spark for life I had lost long ago. Brush in hand, we began the journey. Somber hues of beige, black, grey, and sepia were less than cheerful. Magically, with each brush stroke, my heart lightened a little, my eyes twinkled a bit more, and there was a little less heaviness in my heart.

We worked both together and apart. He made sure I was at ease, comforted by his confidence in me until I gradually grew more of my own. His pride was silent, yet I never doubted it was unfaltering and ever enduring. His patience was endless, his teasing endearing. He taught me to create again, learning the technical skills of an artist week after week. He taught me to believe in myself and trust the process of creation. Perhaps this is the job of any great teacher.

Most importantly though, he taught me that my eyes were not those of a misfit, but of an artist. Here, in the warmth of the sunny yellow building, behind that important red door, I was recreating myself, in a kaleidoscope of colour, seeing the world again, as if for the very first time.

~Kim McCutcheon~

Play the Piano

The moment my son showed any interest in playing the piano at the age of eight, he was enrolled in lessons.

There have been numerous studies showing benefits of learning to play an instrument during childhood, and there is NO WAY that I would deny my child all those benefits!

Other than the cold, hard science on the benefits, there was a deeper reason why I was so eager to send my kid to piano; as a little girl, I always wanted to play the instrument. To my childhood mind and ears, everything about the piano was beautiful and miraculous. The range of sounds, the poise and grace one exuded while sitting in front of the keys, all the beautiful melodies that came out of that elegant, wooden box. My heart filled with longing every time I saw one, and I wanted my fingers to stroke the keys so, so much...

Growing up in communist Poland, my mother had no time or energy for poise and grace. She wrangled me and my sister entirely on her own, working full time, making ends meet by some sort of a mind-boggling, communist alchemy. Being a single mother behind the “iron curtain” of the communist block was no laughing matter; divorced women were ostracized, and their children often treated like inferior beings.

Oh, but to play the piano! It would be like being a princess!!! It would be like being one of those refined, elegant gentry, the ones you could only see on TV! My mother huffed at me when I pleaded with her to sign me up for lessons, there was no way we could afford it, there was no way we could even fit a piano in our apartment, even if, by some sort of a miracle we could get one... And where would she find the time to drag me to lessons? NO WAY!

As I got older, I convinced myself that piano was cheesy. All those lyrical, melodramatic compositions, ridiculous Chopin, beloved amongst my fellow Poles... Heavy metal captured and ruled my heart until my mid-30s, when I stopped listening to mainstream music completely.

As my kid happily skipped and bobbed to his piano lessons, really enjoying the plinky-plunky sounds he was making, I felt sorry for the little girl whose dream of playing the piano never came true. And then it hit me!

The flash of realization that NOW I WAS AN ADULT AND I COULD DO WHATEVER I WANTED TO DO hit me like a kick to the head. Instantaneously, I realized that I really could do whatever I wanted to do, as long as I gave myself permission. That very afternoon I enrolled with my kid's piano teacher.

Many times, I wanted to quit, as learning to play the piano at the ripe age of forty-four often felt like performing a lobotomy on myself. I often wondered why I was so determined to keep up with my childhood dream, even though often, I did not enjoy it.

Finally, I figured it out; playing the piano went hand in hand with the permission to do other things that I was not encouraged to do as a kid. I did not have to subscribe to the same paradigms and ways of thinking that my mother did. I could reject all expectations and limitations, just like I rejected the notion of there being NO WAY for me to play the piano. As I kept playing, I kept discarding the layers of beliefs that I put on myself as a reaction to my environment. As an adult, I knew that now I was only limited by myself, there was nothing I could blame on my mother, or on communist Poland!

As I play, I can sense my inner child giggling. The little girl covers her ears and laughs, because there is so much freedom in having the courage to pursue something that I'm really bad at! I am certain I will never master the piano in my lifetime, but having the ability to lose myself in the act of playing is transcendent of any mastery!

Pushing Potential to Resiliency

Potential, a word that drove me to where I am today and continuously moves me forward. Being passed over for promotion multiple times with the encouragement “keep trying, you have the potential”, actually became discouraging.

A valued mentor and friend, reminded me that it’s up to me to act on my potential and rise to it, push the boundaries and break through the limitations that I have set for myself.

Yes, I was getting in my own way.

Having always wanted to do something meaningful in my life, I sent the thought out to the universe of, “What is it that gives me the feeling of utmost joy, fulfillment and true happiness within my heart?”. I knew within myself the answer to this is when I am facilitating healing with others. It was time to visit the option of going back to school and researching massage therapy as a professional career, like I wanted to upon graduating high school. My mind exploded with the vastness of what I could do with a massage therapy career.

The choice to go back to school at the age of 40 something (never reveal a lady’s age), with a stay at home partner and two children still in school, was a mixed ball of emotions. Preparing for my journey to go back to school, there were a lot of deadlines that came quickly to be able to enroll into massage therapy school for the entry date that I intuitively chose.

I rode the wave of excitement to sustain motivation and would dismiss any negative self-talk that arose. School was 17 months straight of living and breathing a life of massage education, with minimal time for self-care, family and friends.

It truly is a blessing that everyone important to me understood that this choice was important to me, as well as the future and care of my family. I had an enormous support team behind me, even friends on social media from the days of my youth. My appreciation and gratitude are abundant to everyone for their support.

My mom and dad even showed up energetically for support. The receptionist that was covering maternity leave, worked with my mom many years ago. Little quirky things that I would hear or see, reminded me of my dad. It was very much a comfort to know that in spirit, they were encouraging me, like an enormous, warm heartfelt hug. Despite the challenges I faced, my enormous support team lifted me up and saw me through to the end, and continue to encourage me throughout my career.

The biggest challenge I faced was a huge self-discovery. During the Oral - Practical Exams, I knew exactly what I needed to do and say. In my mind, I was talking loudly, meanwhile sometimes the examiner had difficulty hearing me, and I lost marks due to misinterpreted or missed key words. In my solar plexus I could feel a tightness, my chest was heavy, and sometimes my throat was experiencing a burning sensation. I was confident in my knowledge, why was I performing this way and feeling like this during these types of exams? I couldn't explain it, I chalked it up to nervousness.

In my final term of school, I had a very in-depth conversation with my sister about what was happening during these exams. What an awakening! Upon graduating high school, I had a phone conversation with one of my grandmothers, where she congratulated me on being accepted to an accounting program and revealed that she had heard about my interest in massage therapy.

She said to me, "Why would you steer away from what you know you excel at? It's the backbone of business. You can do many things with accounting as a career. Massage therapy is a difficult profession. You need to build your own clientele, do everything yourself and this will take away time that you can spend with family and friends. It's a tough business".

I left that phone conversation in tears. My mom came to my room to find out what happened, and I couldn't hear her or even speak, I was crying that hard. Discussing this with my sister, I realized that I was physically experiencing what I had after the phone conversation with grandma, during the Oral - Practical exams.

Next question was why? Furthering the conversation, it was discovered that I had put the story in my head that I wasn't good enough to be a massage therapist. Which really isn't what my grandmother wasn't saying at all. Grandma was explaining that it was a challenging career and she had already witnessed how successful I was in business education and would like to see my growth and expand my potential in business.

I had made up my own story and was sabotaging myself on something that was totally untrue. Amazing how things turned around and marks improved for those exams. The subconscious is a powerful tool, be attentive to yourself and within yourself, use the power to drive you.

During my time in school, relationship issues became too much and my partner and I agreed to separate. Then during midterm exams in term 4, I was quarantined from the school due to an issue within my home, and once the home was treated, I was able to return back to school.

Even with all these challenges, I still graduated with my class and am very grateful for my classmates' support in catching up on materials and helping me understand its content. Returning to school is a choice that I will always be happy with, in reflection of my life.

~Nadine Wagner~



Killbear Provincial Park, ON
Credit: Sara McCullough

I Choose to Challenge My Comfort Zone

Anytime I realize I'm letting fear control my life a bit too much, I know I need to do something to shake it up.

In 2010, I went by myself on a nine-hour car ride to Northern Ontario, to go on a train trip, four hours into the bush without cell phone signal, to hike twenty stories up a canyon in the middle of nowhere. This is the same area the Group of 7 painted many of their paintings. People thought I was crazy. I had a huge sense of accomplishment, and it still stands out in my mind as something I am proud of myself for.

Last year I made a spur of the moment decision to attend my mentor, Marie Forleo's, book launch in New York City. I hadn't even been out of the province in four years, and hadn't been to the States in maybe ten! I had no idea how I would afford it, where I would stay, or what the trip would look like. It changed many times between booking it in June and going in September. I sprained the ankle of my driving foot, the week before I was set to do the nine-hour drive. I pressed on anyway. It challenged me emotionally all the way there, but it was one of the best trips of my life. I learned so much and grew so much as a person. I look forward to going back when life has settled into what it will be in the future.

I make conscious choices to seek out adventures and opportunities that make me a bit scared and excited and I work to be fully present, in the moment to enjoy all I can.

I've had a falconry experience and held a Harris hawk and flew and recalled him. He was 0.8lbs and I wouldn't have even known he was on my arm without looking at him. It was exhilarating.

In February, I was able to go see a play in Toronto on my own because it was one I wanted to see. I booked the tickets the morning of, saved a bunch of money and got quite excited. I cried all the way through and I'm so proud to be Canadian. And, I'm grateful I could go before the theaters were shut down!

I went to a comeback concert from Garth Brooks by myself in the city I grew up in and felt so empowered navigating my way there, making seat friends, singing and dancing and having so much fun on my own. I wasn't going to miss it, simply because others weren't interested to go with me!

I signed up for Toastmasters and started doing speeches and building my confidence, making new friends and sharing topics that mattered to me. I joined improv and developed a different set of skills to think on my feet, be flexible, learn to laugh at myself and communicate and really connect with others. I spoke on stages to hundreds of people, sharing my story to help people feel they weren't alone and that someone understood.

Through building that confidence I signed up to be a Zumba instructor, which was a ten-year dream of mine! What an exhausting, yet fulfilling day! I am so proud of my accomplishment. I've become a certified reiki practitioner and life and business coach. I've helped people write and publish their books. I've reached health goals and worked to overcome fears, doubts, insecurities, mental health issues.

Because I made the Choice to Change.

I don't say all this to brag or show off. I say this to show that it's all possible. Little steps at a time. Build on small successes, and the momentum will carry you bigger to your dreams.

I refuse to settle into a comfortable life and will continue to challenge myself and build my confidence so I can overcome the limits my mind tries to give me. I choose change to enrich my life and give it meaning and purpose. I choose to challenge myself so I don't let the dark doubts win and defeat me.

~Andrea Eygenraam~

Triathlete

October 24 2019 7.15pm. “I’ve had this crazy idea and I need you to talk me out of it,” I announced to Liz, my flatmate. “Depends what it is,” she replied. “Tell me about it.”

“I’m thinking about doing the Kapiti Women’s Triathlon.”
“Why do you want to do it? What’s your reason? What is your why?”

The questions came thick and fast. Most of them, I didn’t really have an answer to. But as the discussion continued, a plan formed, the idea was deemed incredibly sensible, very achievable given that I had four months to prepare, and a good goal to aim for. Liz thought she might even do the duathlon. Swimming just wasn’t her forte.

2019 had been an incredibly tough year and it was only through determination, an inner strength and a will to survive, that meant in October, I was actually still alive. A series of major events in my life over the course of about a year, led me down the dark hole of a very deep depression. I had times in my life previously, where I needed something like St John’s Wort to help me through, but this was worse than anything I had experienced.

This time I battled suicidal thoughts. I even had a plan on how I was going to do it. And it scared me. Several times a week, I thought about sending a text to a friend “I’m not going to bother you anymore. In fact, I’m not going to bother anyone anymore. See you in the next life.” I even typed it out on more than one occasion, but never hit the send button. One morning at around 3.30am, I told a friend in the United States I was having thoughts about putting my thick down coat on, and walking into the sea and sending the text. Jason’s response shocked and stunned me. “Call me. NOW.” I was in so deep I hadn’t even realized it was a red flag.

Three months later, I went for a walk to the beach with a 60% intention of not coming back. The pain in my heart was so great, that it was overwhelming. As I walked along, edging closer and closer to the water, I felt a presence around me. Not just one, but two. I looked around, but there was only me on the beach.

I looked down and saw two of my spirit guides. These particular entities are dogs. One is my beloved cocker spaniel Phoebe, the other a total goofball of a hound, called Spike. He's usually a very light, playful energy, but tonight he and Phoebe nudged me, ran around my legs and led me away from the water. I pulled out my phone and rang my friend Phaedra.

Liz, Jason and Phaedra became my rocks that I could cling to in those swirling moments of madness where I felt I really couldn't cope. I also received counselling through the local women's center where I connected with an amazing counsellor. Then I saw the SIGN.

In November I commenced training for the triathlon. I started going to Aqua Fit classes in the hope that would build my upper body strength, which I would need for the ocean swim. In a very short space of time, I noticed a difference in my ability to lift heavy objects. Things I previously would struggle to move, I now shifted with relative ease. I knew I had to be able to swim the equivalent distance of 16 laps of the pool.

I still struggle with this now because with the sea, you have a lot more buoyancy due to the saltwater and when you swim with the tide and drift, it's not as hard as a pool swim.

I had to overcome my fear of swimming in the ocean. I hadn't been in the water beyond being up to my knees, since I had seen "Jaws" as an impressionable teenager. I also had a phobia about being out of my depth and not being able to see the bottom. In the area where I live, ocean visibility is measured in centimeters rather than meters.

During the dark times of depression, riding had become one of my happy places and I could easily ride 20km. But for the triathlon I found new places to go riding; ones that would push my endurance. I didn't need distance, but I needed more speed and ease riding up hills. Queen Elizabeth Park down the road fitted the bill nicely. Some of the hills are steep enough that even fit, seasoned riders would have to get off and walk. It was also relatively exposed, which increased my ability to tackle headwinds.

It became obvious fairly early on, that I was going to need new shoes for the run. It also became apparent, that I am not a runner. Liz suggested that I walk the run as there are athletes out there whose pace is almost as fast as top runners. When I walk, I am capable of a very quick pace.

Now I just had to put it all together. I started attending the Saturday morning triathlon clinics where we were taught about transitioning between the disciplines. We also received coaching on our riding techniques and trained to swim in the ocean; learning how to use the tides, drift, and wind all to our advantage. I also learned about elastic shoelaces. Have you tried tying shoelaces when your fingers are cold, your body is wet, and it all feels like a bit of a mission? Elastic laces changed my thinking, and my practice transition times dropped by almost 30 seconds.

There were times when I felt I could do it easily; others where it seemed almost impossible. Several times I thought about switching to doing the duathlon rather than the triathlon, or even switching to the half distance, but that felt like I was cheating myself.

The first ocean swim practice was simply terrifying. The waves were crashing over my head, and I was constantly being swept off my feet. The second ocean swim practice five days before the race, had me fighting a major panic attack. The sea was calm and I found myself swimming out to the buoy, only to find myself out of my depth. Even though I knew I was safe because there were lifeguards and other swimmers around, I still felt very alone.

The day before the race, I was a nervous wreck. It wasn't the actual race that terrified me but rather, the knowing I was about to do something I had never done before. I had never competed in any sporting event, and my attempts at entering talent quests had met with complete failure. Family and some friends had very little belief that I would actually attempt a triathlon, let alone complete it. What were they going to think of me? How would they react to me afterwards? My mother had been very skeptical, and a cousin had said she expected it of my brother, but certainly not me, not in a million years.

However, I knew, that for every detractor, I had ten more supporters, and I went into the race knowing I had a massive team behind me, cheering me on. My primary goal was to complete the race, my secondary goal to complete it in under two hours.

As I crossed the finish line, my arms were up in the air in triumph and tears were pouring down my face. I had done it. I had pushed myself out of my comfort zone and into new territory and it felt amazing. My joy turned to elation when I found that not only had I completed it in under two hours, I had also completed it in less than ninety minutes. My official time is 1 hour, 29 minutes, 39 seconds. Okay, so I only had 21 seconds to spare, but I did it!

Looking back, it's not surprising that I decided to do the triathlon. It became something I knew I had to do, but didn't know why. It wasn't until two weeks before the event that the reasoning became clear. It was part of the healing process. It was a rite of passage. It was all about stepping up into becoming the woman I truly am, and not the one who had conformed for all those years. It was a choice to challenge my comfort zones and the expectations others had of me, and show them I was capable of so much more than they believed.



~Charley Marsh~

Little Steps at a Time

Build on small successes, and the momentum will carry you bigger to your dreams.

I'm not a patient person in general, and prefer to go all in. But I know if I take on too many things at once, the balls I'm juggling will not be able to maintain and stay in the air as easily as if I add one at a time, until I feel the rhythm, then the next, and the next.

The most well-known theory is that it takes 21 days to make or break a habit. That means if you are able to be consistent with something for three weeks, you will likely be able to continue it, since you have made it a habit of doing it.

Obviously, some things will feel easier than others. Drinking a glass of lemon water when you wake up, will likely be an easier habit than going on a 5km run at 5am if you haven't even been walking or if you enjoy sleeping in.

I get enthusiastic and make a check list to do many new things to turn my life around, but some days get pretty overwhelming. I am happier and feel more stable with routines, but I need to take them one step at a time for lasting results.

Often, I start with my health as it is a cornerstone of life. I have learned the hard way that unless you have your health, nothing else really matters. Health has many facets though. Mental, emotional, spiritual and of course, physical. I am not a doctor and only write from my own experience. You should always ask your professional health expert for personalized advice.

I need to ensure I have good mental health support so I feel motivated to do the physical activities required. This is a bit of a chicken and egg thing though, because the physical activity increases my positive mental health as well.

Through this quarantine, I haven't been able to do Zumba every day like I had been doing before. A few days ago, I chose to do a HIIT workout, which I'd never tried before and was curious. Boy was I sore! But my body and mind felt SO GOOD having challenged myself to move!

Writing is so therapeutic and it is the first thing my head convinces me isn't necessary, to sabotage my stability and success. When I choose to start writing, to "turn the tap on" as I say, my heart feels lifted, my brain calmer, and I feel like me again. The worlds flow and don't want to stop!

One of the toughest things of this pandemic has been not getting out to see people. I didn't realize how much my spirit relied on that. Many people have tried to work around it with online events, and while we adjust and work to save lives, it certainly helps. I had a friend drop off some groceries a couple of days ago because I am more susceptible and need to avoid stores if I can. That bit of face to face contact really turned my day around and helped my mental health, from 2m away

There are two ways change happens, many of my mentors say.

- 1- By a catastrophic or significant event (like a pandemic, earthquake, war)
- 2- With repetition

I don't know about you, but I'd rather change by repetition and feel more in control of directing how I want the change to happen! But we always have a choice to change, or stay the same. Not choosing is still a choice.

~Andrea Eygenraam~

Trusting Our Path



Changes

The clouds gusted slowly through the sky,
Blowing everything around it with reckless abandon.
Pizza boxes tossed into the air,
Random papers fluttering in their small tornadoes,
Through back alleys where only some dare to play,
Falling into the dark shadows of the stairwells and dumpsters.
Out on the street, the newspaper stands rattle around,
While nearby the waves crash on the shore.

Nothing is safe from the clouds that deceptively look so peaceful,
As they gust slowly through the sky,
Up above the world in slow motion they make their changes.

Down here on the ground those changes almost seem accelerated,
Pushing through faster than sometimes is comfortable,
But sometimes that's what we need.

Comfortable is nice and change is scary.
But it's only when the pain of staying the same,
Becomes greater than the pain of change,
That we change.

Sometimes by then, that change is at such a painful place,
We are down on our knees, begging to be relieved of that burden.
When all it would have taken, was to recognize and surrender sooner.

But we struggle. By our nature we struggle for control.
Stubborn we think we can do it better.
And for those moments we delude ourselves and win.

Until life crashes down around us.
Forced to our roots we surrender,
And remember faith and love and hope.

Looking up at the clouds gusting in the sky,
I accept their changes,
Knowing it's inevitable and not on my terms anyway.

And for that I am grateful.
And with hope I turn over my will,
And ask for guidance

Moving up, Moving on, Moving in

They say there are five big life stresses and I think I've tackled them all head on.

Some people have criticized me for moving as often as I have. Some moves have been out of my control (landlords selling houses, unsafe living conditions, etc.). Others have been because I have refused to stay where I was, just because I was "comfortable".

Don't let the fear of spreading your wings keep you from flying. The world is meant to be experienced. Three times I have moved to a town, not knowing anyone or even much about it. One place I had never even been there until I decided to move there and it's where my life had the biggest growth and I connected to myself and those around me quickest. I met people aligned with the life I wanted to build, and still hold them close to my heart.

A few months ago, I decided to move back to the city after having been a self-declared country girl. I needed that quiet country time at a slower pace to connect back to me. Now, I was ready to accelerate my life and I knew it was time to move. Not to mention, another winter in the snow belt wasn't on my list of favorite things.

I found an amazing apartment that was all I'd hoped for. Much like previous, I started meeting people quickly, connecting and expanding. Until it all stopped.

I've been reflecting on my move. With the upheaval of 2020, I certainly would have felt safer in the country, more spread out, less panic. But I would have missed the huge outpouring of caring, togetherness while separate, the rich humanity.

Each move I've done has had its lessons. I have been grateful for every place I have chosen to reside. Sometimes it's taken some distance to realize the purpose. But I truly have faith that things have worked out how they were meant to. Even the "bad" choices, even the "bad" changes, have led to clarity, growth, new connections, and showing me what I don't want or won't tolerate, ultimately proving to me what is really important.

To try and hold ourselves to 100% perfection is unrealistic in any aspect of our lives. We do what we can when we can. And we be gentle with ourselves. We give ourselves love and kindness as a gift, and acknowledge how far we've come and how strong we truly are.

I have a choice to look at “failed” attempts and mistakes as wasted time.

Or I can be grateful for this moment and choose to focus on our safe warm home, two pets who are happy, comfortable, content and snoring, a dry place to be with an abundance of nutritious food and conveniences, electricity, running water, items to sort through and prioritize, so many comforts.

Right here in this moment, I choose to accept all the changes that led me here, both the tough and delightful, because right now I am okay and grateful my experiences can help others.

~Andrea Eygenraam~

Transformation

Once upon a time there was a little girl. When she was born, she was beautiful and adored. She was the first born and many hopes and dreams were laid upon her. As she grew, she tried her best to always be a good girl. She learned to do everything to please others. She would study people's facial expressions, or tones of their voices to guide her. She followed all of the rules. She wanted everyone to like her, she wanted to be accepted.

For you see, when she expressed the things from her heart, she detected that most people weren't sure how to respond. This would make her feel rejected. They would say things like, "You're too excitable." and, "You're too sensitive." or, "You're too outspoken."

So, she learned to keep all of those things to herself, she suppressed her very essence. She worked even harder at pleasing others and fitting in. She even learned to wear different hats for different people, which really didn't work because then she became a very unhappy girl.

Many years went by, and the girl made the difficult decision to choose to express her truth, her heart of hearts. The decision was difficult because she had spent decades trapped in that pattern. Some of those around her had grown used to the way she had been through all of these years, and that made it all the more difficult.

She knew herself better now and understood that she was wired differently than most other people. She understood now that her emotions were all magnified in comparison to others, she realized that working hard at fitting in was making her sick.

She was so very exhausted from squelching herself. She constantly felt spilt in two and it was getting more difficult to adjust her way of expressing herself. She knew it was time to choose one way of existing.

She thought, I am different, I see things differently than most, I know that, but I like her, I want to feel confident in being her. But will others like her? She understood that it didn't matter if others liked her and rejected her, and she understood that she would learn how to be good with that. What mattered most was that she loved and accepted herself first.

She thought it made more sense to be true to herself than to try to fit in, yet still be rejected. She was a very sensitive girl who took things hard. Those who truly loved and accepted her understood that and celebrated her.

She made the choice to begin to accept herself wholeheartedly. At first, she found it difficult to reveal her core self because she was feeling rejected and she wasn't used to existing authentically. It took much time for her to let go of who she thought she was supposed to be to fit in. She began to love herself.

She gradually gained the courage and strength to come in to her own. She had experienced a lot in her life, she thought it only fair to be the girl that God had intended her to be. She began to peel the layers one by one, being sure to keep the good stuff that made her sing inside. And let that other stuff float away like little bits of tattered paper down a flowing stream.

Then the most amazing thing happened! When she made the choice to be herself, she started attracting others who were just like her, others who saw life the way she did, and they didn't reject her or abandon her; they accepted her and celebrated her. More great things kept coming her way.

She began purposely making herself vulnerable and exposing the knowing she felt inside. She was being urged to share her knowing so that others like her could share too. She had been stuffing what she believed to be her weaknesses, when all along they had been her strengths.

She wanted to make a difference in the world; she had the intention to help other people who may be keeping their knowing buried, to express and share theirs too. And she lived not “happily ever after”, but in her authentic truth, because she made mistakes and she experienced ups and downs, and she knew that that was what life was meant to be. She lived by her own terms, and she owned it. She was content that she had made the choice to “come out” to show up for her life raw and real. The End.

Higher consciousness is there for the taking, if we continue to operate below the wire we will not grow and expand as we are intended to.

~Cindy Bourgaize~



Killbear Provincial Park, ON
Credit: Sara McCullough

The Razor's Edge

I was happy being a girl, except for when I'd sit my youthful (and tiny) behind on the bathroom counter and watch my father blanket his acne-cratered face with shaving cream, then dredge trails through its canyons and crevices with a straight-edged razor. The ripping whiskers would make me cringe and yet simultaneously tingle with jealousy, such fun! Why did such pleasure belong only to men? I never understood, and found it most unfair.

My father could also pee standing up I heard, though I'd never seen it done, and didn't care to. What on earth was that about? What a wondrous idea to be able to have target practice with each washroom visit – or better yet, to be able to draw yellow pictures in the snow! How fun! Girls may be special, but they sure could not do that!

Mom used to wrap her silky blonde hair in hot pink sponge rollers every morning at 9:15AM. They would stay that way all day and then I would watch as she unwrapped each one; her hair holding the shape of each curler as if it had been frozen in place. She would tease each strand and brush it out. Afterwards, she would apply not one, but two coats of blush pink lipstick while I sat and wondered, "What's the point?".

I despised the monotony of this daily routine. She did all of this just to get ready for his return when he would remove his derby and expect dinner to be on the table promptly at 6. I thought she had some kind of amnesia. Did she not remember doing the exact same thing only the day before? I knew I wanted much more from the gift of life they had given me.

Later, as I grew, I watched my mother's entire world reach its finality the day my father left. For her, it was the day the music died. Had she never read Maya Angelou? Did she not understand her power? Was she incapable of closing the door to the outside and opening her inner world? Did she even have one?

For me, life is far more than making the perfect Waldorf salad. It is not meant to be a series of endless days of February blahs. It is about creating destiny and setting a path. It is about seeing the world and luxuriating on an exotic beach where the sun kisses your face. It is about the moon reflecting the twinkle in your eyes that was always there but hidden behind shades that you could not quite figure out how to take off.

I respect my father by stepping forth as HIS daughter, not envious but wiser. I honour my mother as HER daughter, not judgemental but empowered. I will thrive as THEIR daughter, determined to stand tall, making my own tracks without a razor to leave behind a gory trail of blood, forever scaring the witnesses.

~Kim McCutcheon~

A Matter of Life and Death

While I was standing, crying in the church, at my grandfather's funeral, I made a life-changing decision. Honestly, I doubt Granddad would have understood my plan, and he certainly would not have taken it on board in his own life. Even so, I think he would have given me his blessing.

I have always been an animal lover but the change I wanted to make was going to meet with resistance and I had been too cowardly to fight for it. At Granddad's funeral I found the strength to honour my own beliefs about the divinity of life. While I was aware that I still needed to feed my body, I was ready to stop eating flesh.

Just a few weeks earlier, I had made the heart-breaking decision to put my elderly horse, Ben, to sleep. The awful logistics of disposing of such a large animal meant that I was unable to give him a dignified burial. Instead, I sent him off to the local Master of the Hunt.

I had loved Ben dearly. As I cried for Granddad, I cried for my old horse too. I also wondered if other animals, the ones I would never have the chance to meet, were just as loveable. All those animals, pigs, cattle, sheep, chickens and fish that were slaughtered and eaten were, surely, worthy of a better destiny than the meat-works.

I looked around at the flowers and the people crowded into the church, and wished everyone could live their full term of life then have that life celebrated like Granddad did.

Yes, I was young and idealistic that day I decided it was worth changing my life, so I could save these beautiful souls from a fear-filled death. I even hoped I could lead others to making the change away from eating meat.

Reality hit home quickly enough. Even though I was committed to my decision, and got nutritional advice from someone who had been meat free for some time, no one seemed to believe I would stick it out.

My resolve was questioned all the time. Some people asked from a caring place, concerned that I would lack vitamins and minerals in my diet. Others simply could not comprehend even a day without meat.

I look back on that day, where Granddad and Ben became twin symbols of love in my heart, with peace. Did I save the lives of any animals by my choice? I have no way of knowing. Do I regret my choice even if I did not lead the world to become vegetarian? Absolutely not.

Almost 40 years later, I see many people making the same choice that I did. I hope it is easier for them now, and that their decision is respected more widely.

How Did I Get Here?

Have you ever had a moment where you were either doing something or thinking something, and a memory stops you dead in your tracks? You have just finished explaining something and realize how differently you used to think. “How did I get from that way of thinking to this way?”

Life is about change. We know that, and embrace change willingly or not so much. We know that change is inevitable. Many of these changes are so subtle or gradual that we barely notice.

As we trace the path of where we started, to the realization of where we are right now, there is the exclamation of “Wow, how did that happen? How could things change so much?”

Sometimes, a change occurs over a generation or more and then sometimes, with the snap of a finger.

One of those epiphany moments for me, was the point of realization that my faith was now something of my heart rather than my head. In that “light bulb” moment, the most intense feeling of peace settled through me that I had ever experienced. In the quiet of that moment, God said to me “Peace and faith of the heart go together ... now you get it ...”

That moment, that feeling, triggered an intense time of reflection on my part to try to determine “How did I get here?”

That question was actually a reflection of my nature. I have always been a “figure it out type of person”. Once I figure something out, I start to tweak it so that I can improve things. The other part of trying to figure out this shift, was a way of saying to myself, “If I figure it out, I can repeat the process and make it better. I would even have a process that I could share with others. That is a good thing isn’t it?”

I had heard of a faith of the heart before. I thought I had it, but deep down, I wasn’t 100% sure; there always was a little voice questioning. The best way to deal with that one, was to ignore it.

Now that I had truly experienced that feeling, I realized that I had never felt or experienced a faith of my heart before. It instantly became clear to me that any descriptions which I had heard previously, were sadly off the mark.

So now the question became, “What had I done to get this, and why now?”

Was my desire to always figure out the “how”, the block that simply prevented me from saying “yes” and allowing? But what was it that I had actually said “yes” to now? Until that moment, my faith had revolved around a lot more questions than answers. Things did not add up in what I had been taught, and I wanted it to make sense. As a result, I never truly felt at peace.

When I was prepared to let go of all of the old ways of doing things and beliefs and confess that there a better way, I was saying “yes” and letting go. I was saying “yes” to the possibility of change.

Saying yes to the possibility of change, was saying yes to getting out of my own way. It was only when I truly said yes to the possibility of change, that I said yes to God working through me and for me.

For God to work through me and for me, I had to be connected to him on a daily basis. A prayer or a meditation once in a while will create answers once in a while. Prayer and meditation became my lifeline to God.

Prayer is asking and meditation is listening. As in any relationship, listening is vital to understanding. As I began to understand the importance of quiet time, I began to appreciate that I could only hear God in the quiet. There is so much noise and chaos in our world, in our lives, in our minds that it is often difficult for God to get a word in.

As I began to understand the real impact of the free will I have been created with, I began to understand that God will not force anything on me, even if it is the better way.

Once I stopped trying to figure it out and just focus on simply being of service, all the different points started lining up with divine alignment. I began to realize that it was my ego pushing hard with reasons to figure it out. In a subtle way, this was closing the door of possibilities.

At this point, a lot of books, videos, workshops, articles, etc. came across my radar. All had little nuggets of enlightenment. There rarely was a day that did not have at least one “aha” moment.

I did not realize until later that all those little “nuggets of enlightenment” were actually little nudges toward the new path, the new direction, the higher path. Because I had made the choice to get out of the way and I had invited spirit to lead the way, I never questioned “How can I use this?”

It all starts with saying yes to the possibility of change and then getting out of the way.

~Norm Eygenraam~

Magic Lands

I sat quietly and let my mind wander to that other place; the one where magic really existed, the place I originally came from. My ability to remember home was fading and I was scared that I would lose it completely. The gate to the magic realm I called home was barred to me, but I still could look and admire that world's beauty from afar.

When the tears threatened to drown me in my current life, I could take a peek through the thorny hedge that separated me from home. Leaving had been a choice, one I did not often regret, even though I had to live with the consequences. But that did little to console me on the days when my new life was on the brink of destruction.

As I sat, this time, filling my heart with the magic, I made another choice, one that filled me with glee. I would not try, any longer, to sneak glances of what was forbidden, and feel hopeless and helpless. For, today, I could see beyond the scene in front of me, to what it meant.

Perhaps I would be bad at it. Perhaps I was breaking the rules. And, perhaps, this was my life purpose.

I would not return again to my magical home.

With words and pictures, I am bringing my version of home here to me.

Caledonia is Calling

I often wondered, if I were to write a book or short story, where I'd start. Well I guess the best place to start is the beginning.

My beginning started in Scotland. Which is also where I want it to end. My plan, in a nutshell. My "Choice for Change".



The Beginning

I came to Canada in 1980 with my parents and brother. My aunt (mom's sister) had moved here in the 70's and loved it so much she convinced my mom that we would have a better life here. More opportunities for my brother and I.

After 40 years here, I'm not sure whether or not that is the case. We lived in Windsor for a year, before settling in London, Ontario. My parents worked, but we were never well off. My brother and I went through school. Average lower middle-income family. Day to day life just ticked along.

But somewhere along that road of living life, growing up, working mundane jobs, having relationships, pets and hobbies, I developed an ache in my heart. An ache that whispered to my soul. It whispered the word "Scotland".

And that whisper, over the years, grew louder. And louder still. And yet life continued to tick along.

The Middle

That dreaded word *Cancer* reared its ugly head. In 1990, my beloved Nana was stricken. She lost a breast and lymph nodes. She refused

further treatment and soldiered on. Then in 1993, after feeling too ill to be the guest of honour at a Burn's Supper (for Robert Burns Day, a Scottish tradition), she was diagnosed with lung cancer and lost a lung. But it was too late. She did not heal properly, and it was discovered that she had aggressive large cell cancer. She passed a few months later.

Then, in February 2007 my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. She also lost a breast. She underwent both chemotherapy and radiation, and is still alive today.

And finally, it was my turn. In 2015, I was diagnosed with the HER2 type of breast cancer. And I was terrified! Two months after receiving the shocking news, I was under the knife. I recovered quickly, and became accustomed to the "new me".

But I wasn't convinced that traditional chemotherapy was the correct course of action, and my many questions were left unanswered. So I refused it.

After my surgery, I began to see things in a new light. I started to notice the little miracles. It was like my soul cracked open. Small everyday things became more enjoyable. The warmth of the sun, music, being able to spend time with loved ones.

I realized that each day is a blessing not to be taken for granted. I wanted to live the rest of my life to the fullest.

And life clicked along some more. Until a very scary day in April 2018. I was at work, when I felt some awful pains in my gut. They became so bad; I was doubled over in pain. It was the first day that I actually went home early from work.

My boyfriend suggested that I go to a walk-in clinic. However, they had no diagnostic equipment, and the doctor told me to go to the emergency room. There I had an ultrasound, and after that, I was told that they were going to do a CT scan. That's when I knew something was terribly wrong.

When the doctor returned later and told my boyfriend that he may want to sit down, I braced myself for the bad news.

And bad news indeed! My cancer had spread. Metastatic breast cancer was found in my lungs, liver and on my spine. This time, I had no choice but to start chemo. My oncologist gave me a rather grim prognosis otherwise.

And so, a few days after my 49th birthday, so scared I was actually crying, I entered the chemo room at the cancer clinic. My days were officially numbered.

My Last Chapter

Do you remember what I said about each day being a gift, about living life to the fullest?

As I got used to the routine of chemotherapy, diagnostic tests and follow up appointments with doctors, the ache in my heart returned. I knew I had to find a way to go back and see my beautiful Scotland.

I just had to figure out how to go about it. I didn't know how long I had, or when my health would decline. I wasn't even sure whether I'd reach my 50th birthday.

And then I received the most amazing surprise! Last February, my wonderful aunt Marg sent me a text message with an image of two airplane tickets. To Scotland.

She had been in contact with a cousin back home and together, they had planned a 2 week visit for her and myself. And even more exciting, we were to leave on May 5th, my 50th birthday!

So, we went, and had a lovely time with friends and family. We visited our home town. Let me tell you how that felt!

As a passenger, driving down the main street and recognizing buildings and street names I hadn't seen for 40 years, was overwhelming! I didn't expect the sudden and powerful emotional energy that hit me that day. Yes, I cried!

I was home, but only for a fraction of time before I would have to leave again. And I didn't want to leave. Ever.

I felt the same emotions a few days later, when I met my best friend, whom I'd known since preschool, for lunch. As soon as I spotted her,

my eyes filled with tears of joy. I know that a lot of people in the shopping mall that day must have wondered about the two crying women at the foot of the escalators!

And so, the two weeks of holidays were coming to an end. I was most melancholy the last few days. I really felt at home, almost as if I had never left my beloved country. But I had to get back on that plane.

And after returning to Canada, my boyfriend and my job, I was terribly downcast for months. Everything felt mundane compared to the magic and majesty of Scotland.

So, I imagine you have an idea by now, how this story will end.

After months of feeling out of sorts, playing scenarios over and over in my mind, and many covert conversations with friends and allies, I made the decision to return and live the rest of my days in Scotland.

It is by far the bravest and scariest decision I have made in my life. Some people close to me are afraid for my well being, but as a British citizen, I have the rights to employment and health care while there.

I want to work at my passion, which is of course, photography. I want to explore my beloved homeland and enjoy what is left of my healthy life.

And somehow, if by being brave and living this dream, I inspire others to see life as the precious gift it is, and live their best lives, then I am both humbled and honoured.

Because, to quote a movie (Last Holiday), "It's not how you start that matters, but how you finish".

(Check out Dark Times Lit the Creative Fires
earlier in the book for the follow up story)

~Jen McNaughton~

True Story

The story I knew I was meant to tell, was not the one I had written on the paper in front of me.

If they wanted THAT story told, then they could tell it themselves. The words written on the paper were another story. One written without their permission. In fact, it was almost without my own permission. It was sacred, it was scared, it was defiant and screamed of loneliness. It was a snippet of my spirit.

I know I could tell that old story if it was demanded, but I would now always preface it with “This is the story I was taught, not the one that is my truth.”

Persecute me, but my voice will remain silent no longer.
Blessed be.

~Liz Homes~

Waking Up

Sunday May 1, 2016

It was a typical autumnal day. A cool, crisp morning stretching into a gloriously fine, warm day. The sun peeked through the curtains and cast a bright line of sunlight down the middle of the bed. I woke up stretching languidly and realized there was a smile on my face and a contentment in my heart I hadn't felt in an incredibly long time.

The bed clothes on my side of the bed were rumped, the other side barely touched. But there was nothing unusual in that. His sleeping habits had become such that, if my husband spent more than two hours in bed during the night, it was nothing short of a miracle.

As I lay in bed ruminating on my new-found peacefulness and deep-seated happiness, I realized that I had slowly, but surely, been dying inside and there was only one thing I wanted more than anything in the world. I wanted out of my 30-year marriage. That certainty would start deep in my core and grow to permeate my entire being. Convincing hubby was going to be the hard part. He had no idea this was coming.

I realized the tiredness I had been experiencing for years had gone. That feeling of dragging myself through my life, trying to hold it all together, do everything, being everything to everyone else, had dissipated. The constant pull of two people saying I didn't spend enough time with them, suddenly did not matter. The resentment both projected when I didn't spend time with them because I put the other as priority, became laughable.

My self-worth had suddenly been catapulted into the stratosphere and I no longer cared what anyone else thought of me. It also occurred to me that the constant chasing of that new job or project, the online career, diving into practically every self-help book and program, were all symptoms of a lack of belief in my own worth.

I had blamed everything on external factors, but in reality, the problems, and therefore the solutions, were all inside me. I had thought things like “If I can create a business online and work from home, then things will be better.” The harder I tried to improve my external world, the unhappier and more exhausted I became.

I had also fallen into the trap of doing almost everything at home. It didn't help that I didn't recognize the symptoms of depression in someone else, or perhaps even want to listen, when he tried to tell me he wasn't very happy. By this point, he hadn't worked for over five years, and initially he had taken care of things at home.

I would come home to a cooked meal, the house vacuumed and tidied. At the end, I would come home to “Oh, I don't feel like eating much tonight,” or “I just want soup for dinner,” which after a full day at work, is not what I wanted to hear. More and more of the housework fell back onto my shoulders.

To put some context around the change in me, I need to take you back to a low point in my life. Five years prior we had gone from both working with a good income coming into the house, to having a double income mortgage and neither of us working. The unemployment benefit didn't even come close to paying half of our mortgage repayments, let alone the entire amount.

We rapidly got behind, and began getting threatening letters from the bank. We received financial assistance from my brother to bring the arrears up to date, but nevertheless, still had to forfeit my favourite car – a 3-year-old Mazda 6 station wagon, and sell what had been my dream home. We walked out with just \$8,000 left.

All the stress of our financial situation, a further deterioration in my already unbalanced marriage (which I refused to acknowledge), combined with what was to become a stressful job, as well as being out of the house from 7am until 7pm each day, took its toll. I stopped looking after my appearance. I began wearing loose fitting trousers and shirts, a polar fleece jacket, trainers instead of proper shoes, and ceased wearing makeup.

I turned to alcohol and rapidly began consuming a bottle of wine each night. My skin suffered and I ended up at the dermatologist being diagnosed with multiple conditions – five on my face alone and a prescription for a \$95 cream in a 20gram tube that was so restricted, even the pharmacy could only order it in when it was prescribed.

I had also become unable to make simple decisions on my own. Part of this arose from an incident where I bought a case for my network marketing business and had been criticized for making a purchase without checking in with him first as we were supposed to be partners in the business. I gradually got to the point where I felt if I didn't consult, the consequences would be too uncomfortable to endure.

I became so used to certain behaviors, that events which would upset others, were just normal for me. It is only with hindsight that I can see that I should not have allowed situations like that to arise. I had simply fallen into a co-dependent state where I would justify every action, every reason given for his not wanting to do something, even if it mattered to me. I didn't confront him and repressed my emotions and my own needs. I became numb.

As I searched for solutions to my worries and our financial woes, I stumbled across an energy healing modality called Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) or Tapping as it is more commonly known. I signed up for a course called "Seven Weeks to Financial Success and Personal Fulfilment". I thought it was going to be the magic bullet we needed. I had hoped it was going to show me how to increase my income, teach me to start an online business or some such thing.

What I actually got was seven weeks of diving into beliefs around money, stories and events that shaped our relationship with money and a whole lot of releasing of emotion around money. Do I regret the course? Not for a single minute. It started me on a wonderful healing journey and the beginning of some incredible friendships.

The women I met in this course introduced me to more women, and I learned about other energy modalities such as Theta Healing. In early 2016, I began listening to seven different theta meditations at night. Those meditations were to make a huge difference and contribute massively to my awakening. The subjects included self-worth, health, wealth and love.

I also took up cycling again; something I had loved doing right up until my early twenties, when I stopped because hubby couldn't cycle due to a physical condition with his hip. I thrilled to the sound of the tires scrunching over the gravel, the feel of the wind on my skin, the sun on my face. Every turn of the pedal, I was right there in the moment. Nothing mattered. I felt an aliveness I hadn't felt in years.

All of those things literally woke me up to the fact I had not been happy with my life. Monday saw me leap out of bed with an energy that had been missing, and because it was the one day per fortnight where I actually drove into town rather than catch the train, I decided I was going to wear my knee-high boots, a flowing skirt, a snug fitting wrap top, jewelry and make up. I looked in the mirror and liked what I saw.

The only comment I got was when I was walking to the car. "Are you sure you can drive in those?" I was flabbergasted and his inquiry left me speechless. The reaction when I got to work was quite different. Without exception, all my colleagues, both men and women complimented me on the new look and voiced their approval. Not that I needed it, but it was far cry from the reaction earlier in the morning.

I began to cycle every weekend. I loved being out in the fresh air, riding beside the river down to the beach and sitting on the sand talking with a trusted friend. Over the coming weeks, three people became my rocks, my confidantes, the ones who let me cry on their shoulders when I needed to, the ones who pushed me, challenged me, made me see the imbalances and inequities that had crept in, that only now was I ready to face.

Their constant demanding questions, suggestions that I didn't want to leave my marriage and that I wasn't ready to change, made that certainty of wanting out grow stronger. Sometimes their questions would make me really angry.

How dare they suggest I wasn't strong enough to leave? How dare they insinuate I really didn't want to change my life? What gave them the right to dictate to me how I should live my life? The outcome of this was that I began to live. I began to feel. Things that had been squashed down inside came bubbling to the surface.

I had been diagnosed with depression at least twice in my life and given medication. All this did was numb everything, and even without the drugs, that was how I began to live my life. Emotions were too hard to handle, so I stopped feeling. It was safer that way. Grief, excitement, passion for anything, laughter, all became alien. I was sleepwalking my way through life. Sure, sometimes they would bubble up only to be stuffed down again. Quickly.

I also took to heart other's comments about me. Especially around my body. I was encouraged to cover up and wear clothing that hid perceived faults. I bought a sleeveless dress for a summer wedding, and was told I needed to buy a jacket to cover my upper arms and tummy. I guess it's not surprising I had taken to wearing elasticated trousers with no shape to them, and loose, ill-fitting jackets. And if you're wearing baggy clothes, then there's no need to wear nice shoes either.

I had no idea how our marriage was going to end but the Universe stepped in and gave me a hand. I had trouble voicing my desire to exit our marriage and his bewilderment and shock didn't make it any easier. It was really hard to explain to someone why I wanted out when I couldn't even explain it to myself.

All I knew was I had this feeling deep in my core that I wanted out. Each day, that feeling just got stronger and stronger. He did ask if there was someone else, and I could answer truthfully that was no-one.

He asked my mother if I had lost my mind, and perhaps I had. Yet I had a certainty that I had never felt before. A knowing of what I truly wanted, and nothing was going to dissuade me from it.

When he saw just how determined and certain I was, he gave in. Even though he didn't understand what or why it was happening, he agreed to our separation. He moved out on July 3rd thereby making my first day of independence Fourth of July.

~Charley Marsh~

Catalyst

How did you find this? I've lived here for 48 years and I didn't
know this was here
Show me again

You don't know me
I don't know this me

My heart slipped your words away from my mind
Wait, bring them back
Ssshhh, watch
 where they lead
 what they'll find
 how to want

Definition- a **catalyst** is a substance that speeds up a chemical reaction, but is not consumed by the reaction; hence a **catalyst** can be recovered chemically unchanged at the end of the reaction it has been used to speed up or catalyze.... A **catalyst** works by providing a different route....

This wasn't you and me
Words, movement, your eyes
You stayed yourself
I found this possibility I want

~Sara McCullough~

Healing the Patterns

Living with my mother wasn't easy. Living without her wasn't easy either.

My mother was, in every way, abusive to me. I coped the only ways I knew how, which often involved food, self-injury or running away.

When she died, my father and I bought a boat and we named it freedom. It was very poignant, or was it?

I hadn't wanted to feel the pain of losing her. It was very complicated grief because people would say, "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry to hear about your mother!" and I was in shock, hurting, not processing the grief, and bluntly, I would reply, "Why? I'm not." This was received with more than a few strange looks.

My mother was VERY against the internet, so of course, one of the first things my father and I did, was get the internet. Really, him and I were sort of lost in this new world. We didn't have her controlling – or trying to control – our every move. We had to get to know each other again. We had both picked up unhealthy coping just to survive everyday life. This coping wasn't suitable for normal life in society, but it was all we'd known. It was rocky between us to say the least, but we tried.

I ran off with distractions of boys which were previously off limits. I started going to raves and doing drugs. He had met someone that was occupying his time, and we grew apart. But neither of us healed what we were taught for years.

I found someone to pick up where my mom left off with the abuse. I did more drugs to numb the feelings. I became sexually experimental and couldn't figure out why certain things made me so uncomfortable.

After getting clean and facing some of my feelings – although I did find other addictions – it came crashing down that I had suppressed some of the unthinkable abuse from my mother, ten years after she passed. Near as I can figure it happened from the age of 3-13 but some things are still fuzzy.

I could very easily, and justifiably, choose to identify as a victim and surrender my power. But I don't want to give up that control. She's not worth it. This year marks 20 years that she's been gone. She was in my life until I was 18.

Her death truly marks a before and after in my life.

Because I chose to avoid the pain and not heal it, I attracted a toxic partner a year after she died. We were together for eight years. I thought I'd learned the lesson.

Four years later, I was with another abusive partner and we broke up and got back together more times than I could count. More toxic interactions with others followed.

These lessons were coming up, screaming for me to heal past hurts and issues and I just kept running to avoid them, but I couldn't outrun them. I didn't love myself enough and kept getting involved with people who didn't respect or love me either.

My food addiction at this point, had also skyrocketed and I wasn't addressing the health issues that were becoming more serious.

In 2016, I published my first solo book and felt like I finally had my feet under me. In 2017 I was speaking on stages and living the life I had been dreaming of.

I met a man who I thought was wonderful. I had people who knew me, warn me, that every time I built momentum and success, I would let a guy distract me. This was different, I said. Things moved quickly. Patterns were repeating even though I wasn't consciously aware – although in hindsight, I did consciously ignore many flags and doubted myself.

I ended up with a concussion in October 2017. The metaphysical meaning of this, is meant to shake up your thinking, to look at the reality, not an illusion, see things more clearly. I didn't.

We moved in together. The fighting escalated. Dark thoughts of dying returned. I'd lock myself away in fear. He'd scream and threaten. I'd react. I hated how I acted. It wasn't who I wanted to be. I kept trying to leave and he'd pull out all the stops and convince me to stay. We'd fight around his boys, something I'd promised myself I'd never do. He got violent. Pushing me on the stairs one time, my dog attacked him.

I created an elaborate plan to leave him safely while he was away. I had quite a bit of support. Once I was alone in the middle of nowhere in my trailer, he was the only one that spoke to me when I was scared. It was easy for him to convince me back. I have made many choices that have given me hard lessons. I didn't want to fail again and I missed his boys so much.

We moved back in together. Him and I were only back together a month when I got another concussion. I ignored all signs. One night, his temper was particularly fierce and I went to the bedroom crying with my dog and locked the door. He was screaming and angry and broke the door down, smashing into my dog. I went into full blown PTSD trauma and decided to leave.

I gave him a letter and he pleaded with me to stay. I stood by my decision. He is registered with two domestic violence shelters in different towns we lived. It was a very messy ending and I have been working to heal everything and to finally stop the cycle of abuse after more than 20 years.

I am choosing to love myself more.

I am choosing to focus on the respect and love I deserve.

I am choosing to not be a victim and take back my power.

I am choosing to treat myself how I deserve to be treated.

I am choosing to heal and own my part in all that's happened.

I am accepting that some days this will all be much easier than others.

What Was and What Was Not

I think you should come back.

Those were the words that changed my future, and although I could sense the weight behind this invitation, I felt I was being coerced into something I didn't fully want at this moment... Or maybe not at all...

There I was, a 35-year old mother of an 11-month old boy, so invested in herself being a victim of circumstances. Me, desperately wanting to get better, so desperately wanting to be the best mother I could be to that little boy... The Universe seemed to have a sick sense of humor, I thought... Just when I was coming up for air, the "powers that be" dunked my head back under, plunging me deeper, to struggle in the muck. Postpartum depression is not for lightweights.

So now he's coming back, because I asked him to. My husband, who screwed around on me with someone I thought was a friend. Half of the year, me totally blinded by my own inadequacy and the darkness of the depression, while he and her sexting and screwing in her house, in motels, and even in my own home while I was away with my baby. My intuition was screaming at me the entire time that things were off, but at that point I didn't trust that voice. Finally, I had my proof, and I asked him to leave so that I could think. And now he's coming back.

I didn't know what I wanted. I felt hurt, betrayed. My whole world came crashing down, a rug pulled out from underneath my feet, all the clichés rung so true! My husband, who I thought was my rock for the last 12 years, was now a stranger. I thought I didn't know him anymore, that I never knew him at all. The man who I married and loved so much would never hurt me like that! Of course, he claimed he wanted to be with me and our boy, he was invested in making it work, no matter what. Of course, there was no more contact with that back stabbing bitch, he swore again and again.

He was my crutch so often, but now I sure as hell didn't want him around. I needed to give myself a chance to reacquaint myself with myself and see what was possible in my life.

He is coming back now... Way too soon, but I felt I had no choice. I felt that when I brought a life into this world, my life was not my own anymore. Now I was responsible for three. There was me, my toddler, and the brand new seed in my womb.

When he came back, I told him. He loved the idea of bringing another life into existence, and it really cemented his will to put us back together after his betrayal, to repent, to make amends. He was all about redemption. Me? The thought of aborting swirled through my head for a few days, I didn't have to tell him anything, I could separate from him, divorce him, start from the beginning, like so many brave women that I knew.

Except that I wasn't brave. I couldn't fathom the thought of going grocery shopping alone with a toddler in tow. I barely had energy to get myself and the babe for a stroll to the park for 30 minutes, how could I take care of a small child full time? I was terrified...

Just as I loved my first child the moment the pregnancy test stick showed me a positive result, I started loving the second one when my body started changing with the second pregnancy. The tenderness of painful breasts, mixed with the uncomfortable circumstances of the genesis of this baby. I felt like my hands were tied, like I was shoved by life into a version of normalcy to an outside observer.

With my mind's eye I kept seeing a precious little girl, and my body responded with an internal sensation of squeezing... Maybe I was doomed like my mother and both my grandmothers, to end up divorced with small kids, always struggling... I couldn't conceive that there was healing possible after this betrayal, and every moment of our cohabitation felt like a balancing act. And I wanted him to suffer as much as I did!

In the meantime, I was looking at my little boy, my heart overflowing, and I kept feeling my broken heart weeping love into my womb... If that new baby could be half as perfect as the one who is already here, I would be happy...

He came back, we made an appointment for couple's counselling. We were trying to make it work, although I highly doubted a positive outcome. I didn't want to be with him, I didn't want to be without him, and there were no satisfactory options in between. But I needed to pull my shit together, now that I had CHILDREN to look after!

A few weeks after getting my positive home pregnancy test result, I made an appointment with the doctor. I was in no rush to get poked and prodded, just to confirm what I already knew, I was clearly pregnant, although my early discomfort subsided a bit. When my doctor called me back to inform me that there were no detectable pregnancy hormones in my blood sample, I was floored. But I was not convinced, I thought it was a lab mistake. Few days later, I started to bleed.

The blood felt like fire as it was leaving my body. The deep regret and guilt: I did it. It was my fault for making the idea of that baby feel so unwelcome. It was all my fault, because I wanted to get rid of it. It was my fault, because I didn't believe we could make it through this crisis with its father. It was my fault, because I didn't want the extra work. Stop this!

I thought that my body failed me again. And again, when we tried for another baby, and again. We gave up, and got a dog instead...

Five years after the miscarriage, still plagued by the depression, I noticed I wasn't thinking about that baby daily anymore; I only had occasional pangs of guilt. Five years after the miscarriage, I still was not convinced that I could patch things up with my husband, and my emotional situation resembled a teeter-totter. To the outside eye, we looked like a normal family, with an extremely invested, hands-on father and husband. I was such a lucky woman to have such a great man.

Another five years passed, during which I experienced a total paradigm shift, a spiritual awakening, and healing on many deep levels. I wanted to believe that I forgave him, but when I checked with my heart, it didn't ring true. The issue of his betrayal felt like an infected, never-healing, deep cyst: always a tenderness around it, sometimes erupting with puss-like foul anger and sticky resentment, sometimes almost completely drying up looking almost normal, to become agitated and inflamed again. I could not figure out why I couldn't forgive him, but I wanted to, so so much. He paid his penance a hundred times over in those 10 years.

One summer night, after an intense day at a self-development seminar and much introspection and crying for both of us, I realized that I forgave him.

I forgave him when I understood how cut off from me, misunderstood and rejected he felt before he started cheating on me. Just as I couldn't find myself in my new role as a mother (which was a huge factor in my postpartum depression), he could not find his new identity as a father. We felt too vulnerable and too proud in front of each other to show our true feelings. We did not want to freak each other out by our respective weaknesses, doubts, and fears. Each one of us wanted to protect the other one, which left us with a total disconnect, emotional and physical isolation. We could barely relate to one another at that time. 10 years later, I could finally understand.

Healing followed shortly after. The old wound healed when I realized that I blamed his infidelity for our inability to get pregnant again. Because I didn't feel safe and secure in our future together, my body did not allow us to get pregnant. My subconscious mind felt that it was unsafe to bring a new life into an uncertain future, so there was no fruit of our efforts, and a little dog instead of a baby.

Eleven years since the miscarriage, I still thank that baby who never was. A little fetus in my womb that made me say "I think you should come back". Without her, I would never have had the courage it took to embark on such a long, gutting journey to healing. But it was worth it: not only did my marriage survive and is better than I've ever imagined possible, but I also found myself, my soul, and my peace.



Lake of the Bays, ON
Credit: Sara McCullough

The Serenity of Letting Go

When I let go of the rope I felt free
I didn't realize I had been confined by my own controlling
I'd been holding it frantically, panicked
Everything needed to be perfectly orchestrated, just so
I couldn't see that by trying to control
It meant I actually had no control at all

Grant me the serenity
Thinking it all squarely rested on my shoulders
Was so heavy and kept me weighed down
I couldn't move, didn't dare to breathe

Accept the things I can't change
Letting go of my ego's need to think I must do it all
Realizing many things I really had no control over and couldn't
change
I can't make people do or be how I want

Courage to change the things I can
I can only control me, my reactions, my perceptions, my thoughts
I can start my day over as many times as I need to
I do not need to stay in situations that make me sick

Wisdom to know the difference
I need to be gentle with myself
Let go of the rope and be okay with not holding on so tight
Lead with love, faith, acceptance
Force will get me nowhere
Leaning into surrender, accepting what is
Making steps toward where I want to be
No matter how small they may be sometimes

Serenity Acceptance Courage Wisdom

~Andrea Eygenraam~

My Daughter's Middle Name is Epiphany

When God chose to meet me, I wasn't in the best space in my life at all. I wasn't pure; I wasn't pious. I wasn't even praying or meditating when my epiphanies happened. In fact, I was young and somewhat naïve, a bit of a party girl. I wasn't someone you'd peg for a direct meeting with the big G, but you know what they say: God often works in mysterious ways.

Personally, I've had a few Earth shattering, life-changing epiphanies in my life. The incidences I'm sharing here, are tied to my daughter, my firstborn, whose middle name is Epiphany. Much of the motivation I got to change my life when I really needed it the most, relates to her and the meetings God arranged with me through her, from the moment of conception, when I felt her soul scan mine, to the moment I realized that I was destroying my life and setting her up for failure, to the moment I realized that she had her own life to live and I had to trust that she could take care of herself.

The first epiphany I had, the one related to my daughter's conception, came on a hot summer afternoon. My then, boyfriend and I, were spending the afternoon doing what a lot of young lovers do. At the moment of my highest pleasure, time seemed to slow and my attention shifted from my earth-based body to my spirit being. It seemed as if I was conscious of my life being examined by an entity—or entities—to figure out if I was a good match.

Many women experience a brief encounter with the Divine at the point of conception. Some women remember this experience, the feeling that their Souls—their lives—are being examined by another Soul to see if they will be a good fit, if their destinies would be served by one another, their Karmas furthered or fulfilled. In my case, my daughter chose me and I chose her.

Men might refer to Ayahuasca ceremonies or DMT trips when trying to make sense of my experience at the moment my daughter was conceived. Monks might meet God deep in meditation. Yogis might breathe themselves into this space.

As far out as it might seem, it was like I beamed out of my body at that precise moment and met up with God and my daughter's spirit on a totally different plane.

I must have passed that test, and her soul was planted into my womb. She was born with a head full of hair and a beautiful, serene disposition. There was a full moon partially eclipsed on the night she was born. The Haley-Bopp comet was passing the earth close enough to be seen with the naked eye.

When I was a new mother, I wanted to always give my daughter the best. Right from the start, I knew I didn't want my place in her life to be a sorrow-filled hole where a mother figure should have been or to be some weak, pitiful person who couldn't find the strength or courage to live her best life.

I thought of my daughter's life as an opportunity to see how applying all of the loving philosophies that I believed in would influence a person's growth and personality. To me, raising her was an experiment in love and nurturing.

At the beginning, I tried to hold myself to some pretty high standards. I knew that I how I treated her, and the world I showed her, would be a huge part of the person she would become. Raising her to fulfill every nook and cranny of her potential, while teaching her to be kind and compassionate was my job and my mission.

But as a single mom, I also had a day job. And school. And, if I wanted to keep a roof over our heads, I needed to work (my butt off) to get us out of poverty and into a comfortable space where she could thrive.

Even though part of me knew that my habits, like smoking and drinking, weren't serving us at all, I continued partying just as the parents I had seen when I was growing up. I knew I had a pretty bad drinking problem when my daughter was young and even before then; though before I had her, my drinking problem and lifestyle choices didn't matter so much to me.

My confidence was ultra-low in my teens and early twenties, and I would often drink and use drugs as a form of entertainment and escape from my full life and responsibilities—to just feel good and relaxed for a moment. Even though I didn't party at our home, I often went out drinking and partying with my friends after my daughter was born.

Then one night when my little girl was under the age of two, I was sitting in the corner of a friend's living room, drunk and stoned, unable to move. My life force was only present in my thoughts, in my spirit; my body was outside of my control—movement was temporarily suspended, anyhow. I was 25 or 26, a single parent, mother to a child who I had fought bitterly to carry and keep—one who I understood had chosen me to be her mother.

Again, time slowed. Again, I felt the presence of something more than myself. This presence was there with me, examining my life.

I was Mommy to a precious little girl with a smile that could light up a room. She was the joy in my life—my simple reason to live—yet there I sat in the corner at a party, wasted and wasting the opportunity that the Universe had given me to be the best mother I could be—the mother my daughter deserved. Things had to change—I had to change—so that she could have a mother who would nurture, support, and care for her.

Giving my daughter life had been probably the most important thing I had done up until that moment, and I couldn't allow my bad habits, addictions, and low self-esteem to screw things up for her. It was time for me to change. God had called me directly that night and I needed to answer the phone.

Over 20 years later, I can still remember the gist of the conversation God had with me that night. “Is this what you want for your daughter? Is this the example you want to be? Is this who you want her to become? What if something happens to her and you need to get up and drive to the hospital or something? Would you be able to go to her? Doesn't she deserve better than this? Don't YOU want to be better than this?”

That night I had an epiphany that led me to shift my life. My priority was my daughter and raising her, not partying and perhaps drowning in my own vomit or killing myself while driving while intoxicated. That was the last night that I took whatever drink or drug someone handed me. I had better things to do than slowly kill myself by making one bad choice after another. I had a beautiful child to raise.

I honestly can't say I never got high after that moment, or that I never touched another drop. I spent more than a couple of nights after that fateful evening feeling tipsy or stoned, but something inside of me changed that night. I kept the promise I made to God to get better, to be more of the person I wanted to be for my daughter and the person I needed to be for myself. She needed to learn strength and self-reliance from me, not how to drown her sorrows and avoid her feelings.

I might not have been the perfect mother when she was growing up; I was a real person with real emotions and struggles, and I showed her that.

People learn by seeing real people struggle and overcome their challenges, not by seeing perfect people with perfect lives who never make mistakes and never grow.

Through the years, we went through life. She went to school; I worked on bettering myself so that she could have all the things I had wanted as a child. She was a good student—a good kid, really. I never really had to worry about her following in my party driven, drinking and drugging footsteps.

As a matter of fact, I kind of cut myself off from a lot of social interaction when I was raising her. I didn't want to be in the party scene any more. I wanted to be home with my daughter. That was most important to me.

There were a few years when I studied full-time, aside from working full-time. So, while she didn't have a mom who was spending her evenings in the bars, she did have a mom who was spending her evenings on the internet, studying for classes and being distracted by conversations online.

Education was important to me; it was one of the ways I could see us getting out of poverty and moving up in the world. My focus for my daughter wasn't on being cute or pretty, but more about being intelligent and confident. I didn't want her to have to rely on a man for her well-being and security. I wanted her to be independent and to get a good job, perhaps as a doctor or even a computer programmer. Like many other mothers around the world, I wanted to see my daughter in a lab coat or in an office with a view, doing something she loved, and maybe even saving humanity.

We ended up making a huge leap when my daughter was in second grade. My now husband, invited us to move to Austria to live with him. It was a hard move for my daughter, who I enrolled in the local, German speaking school down the street from our new apartment, despite the fact that she didn't know German. Both of us had to start out as mere infants with the language, and we had to adjust to life in a foreign country.

Even though my daughter had such a handicap with the language, she ended up doing quite well in school. The teachers saw that she was intelligent and they pressed for her to go to college prep school. Of course, I thought that was a great idea. I still had dreams of her being a doctor or scientist—someone who changed the world for the better.

She was more into HTML and Pokemon than biology and anatomy, though, and she had trouble keeping up, not only because of the language barrier, but also because I hadn't been social and outgoing during her childhood, so she wasn't very social or outgoing.

During that time, I also brought two more children into the world. My singular focus on raising my daughter to the best of my abilities shifted, to raising her and her two brothers. When puberty hit for her, I was also dealing with a newborn and a teething two-year-old. Needless to say, I didn't feel like I was helping her live her best life. I was exhausted and overwhelmed. We had more clashes during these years. Life wasn't all peachy keen.

Another epiphany came to me though, when we were in the depths of one of our now common battles of the will. Again, I felt as if my spirit was met by a higher power, one that encouraged me to take a step back and realize that her pulling away from me was necessary for her growth.

Seeing potential timelines of the future, I was keenly aware of the fact that, if she and I stayed too close, she might not find her own way in life. Her rebellion and need to figure things out for herself, were necessary for her growth as a human. If I tried to stop her from making her own way in life, I'd actually be hurting her, not helping her.

So, I had to be fine with it. I had to let go and trust that she was capable of creating a fabulous life for herself. She'd had loving support, and maybe a bit too much coddling, up to that point. Now it was time for her to spread her wings and prove to the world what she was capable of.

Nowadays, my daughter is in college. She wears a lab coat—not as a doctor, but as a chemist. Sometimes I look back at her life and wish I had done some things differently. I know, however, that she's a great person—smart and witty—and that she has a good head on her shoulders. Perhaps I wasn't the best mom in the whole world, but she turned out okay in the long run.

Had I not had those brief encounters with God, when it felt like my daughter was scanning my soul, or when I was really in a bad place later on, her life might have turned out much differently. She probably wouldn't be the person she is today, and I likely wouldn't even be around anymore. Her life, her influence on my life, saved me from myself. God showed itself to me and worked through her to make me a better person. The epiphanies that I experienced, starting with the one that she was named after, changed my life for the better.

People who have epiphanies don't leave the experience unchanged. Meeting God isn't something to take lightly; it's not something commonplace or boring. Epiphanies are meant to make the person who experiences one better, and create a better world, one touched soul at a time.

Questions and Scattered Nuts

When it was over, I took a breath

I looked around, wondering if it was really over or if something
would sneak up and blindside me

Look what you're manifesting
This could have been over much sooner if I didn't derail myself so
often

The universe has been delivering so fast lately, I have to watch all
my thoughts
Choices, are they the right ones?
Is anything truly over when we think it's over?
So many questions, so much uncertainty
Needing more faith and trust
And less doubt

But hurt and pain create doubt and mistrust
And the more I focus on that, the more I'll create

I want to create good, be in alignment
Receive all the signs and check points to confirm I'm on the right
path
The butterflies and hummingbirds, the hawks and centipedes
The animals shed their feathers for the angels to help

Watching the squirrel bury his nut he almost sacrificed his life for
Knowing there's no way he'll remember where he put it
He didn't even leave a marker

How often do we - I - do things in futile efforts, trying to get ahead
but just scattering my nuts everywhere
Leaving small traces all over, but not making a significant difference
Wanting to plan ahead, make changes

But still ending up in the same place

When it is all over, will I look back and wonder what I did with my life?

Will I have made a difference at all

Or just buried nuts everywhere, hoping to sustain myself for the winter

And instead planted trees for future generations to have shade
While sacrificing self care now in this moment

Priorities, refocus, transformation
And ceasing running crazy in traffic

Self preservation and giving back
Balancing, so when it's all over

I have been content, and didn't just wait my whole life for happiness

~Andrea Eygenraam~

Choose Life

Sitting, contemplating
My existence
Doubt creeping in
My faith, present
In the stillness
I seek reassurance

One lone leaf
Beckons in a hush of breeze
Hesitantly I reach for it
A message?
My eyes pour over it's
Simplicity

I spot its message
My chest wells
A tiny heart
At the base of its stem
You are loved
All is well

~Cindy Bourgaize~

Going to “*That*” Place

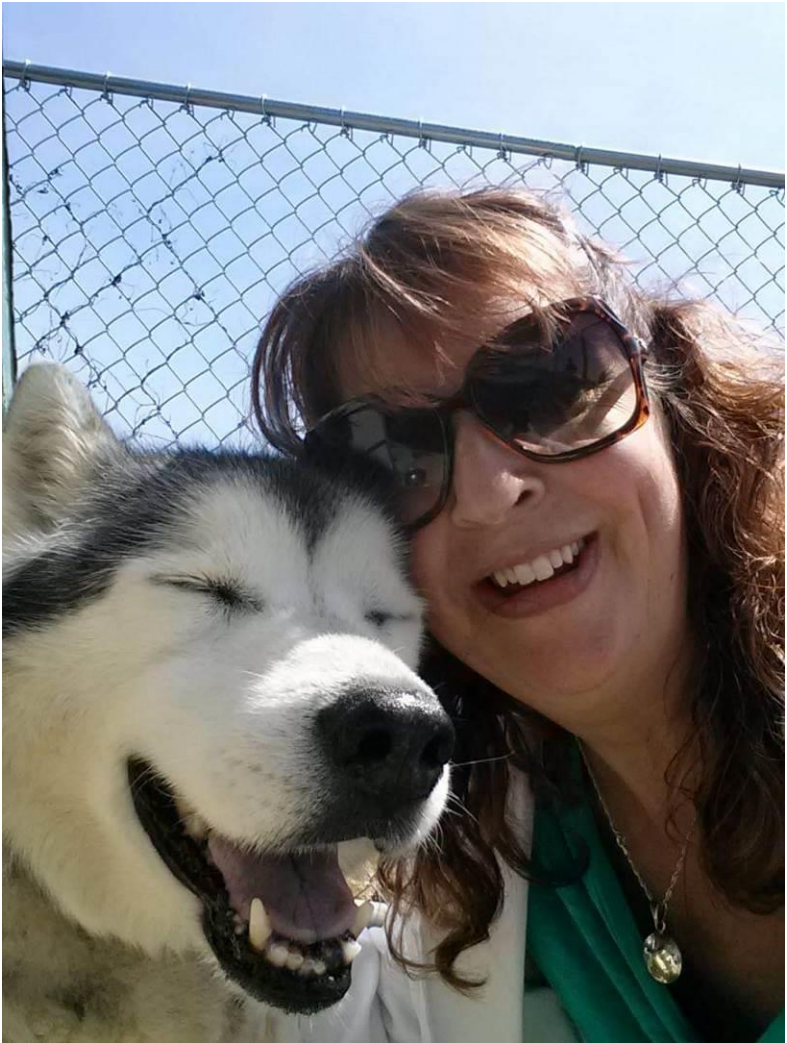
I sat quietly and let my mind wander to a place that I had longed to be for a long time. This is a place that is free of limitations and restrictions. A place that is free of judgements and filled with unlimited inspiration.

All the weight that I feel every day is totally gone. I am so much lighter since all of my burdens are gone.

This place has no lights but yet it is so bright. There is no darkness. With all this light I feel so safe and protected. I can see where I am guided to go. With all of my built-in protection gone, all that I have to do is think of my “problem” and an answer appears.

Being in control is always so limiting. By letting go, it feels as if I have finally gotten out of my own way. I can see clearly now. All of the fears of making a bad choice are gone and with that there are no limits. There are no limits in “that” place.

**Our
Animal
Companions**



Aurora

I have had pets all my life. Our family grew up with animals. A cat, a dog, budgie, fish, even a guinea pig. I was taught to love and respect animals. And I always did. My pets are precious to me.

But none changed my life, more than my beloved Alaskan malamute rescue, Aurora. We're not sure even to this day, whether she was a purebred or not. But the rescue group that my friend had introduced me to (the Alaskan Malamute H.E.L.P. League), stated that if it looked like a Mal, they would accept it into their fold.

She had been picked up from running the streets of Woodstock, Ontario and taken to a kill shelter. She was 1 day away from being put down, when she was whisked off to me at my boarding kennel. She was a skinny little runt, weighing less than 50 pounds.

But she had a heart of a champion. She had the spirit of the wolf in her. Despite having a serious heart murmur, she started to thrive. She pulled me on a dog sled, along with my other Malamute, Hudson. She even competed in weight pull competitions, and won the championship the year I retired her, beating out dogs twice her weight, and making me so very proud to be the person who adopted her!

She taught me how to be strong. She taught me how to find the spirit of the wolf in me, and she taught me that a pack of two can be a perfect fit.

Aurora passed at the ripe age of 15, which is considered ancient for this breed. She had a tumor on her leg which was inoperable due to her age. The vet ended her suffering in the comfort of our home. Her legacy and lessons will live on forever in my heart and soul.

~Jen McNaughton~



The Missing Piece

I don't believe in love at first sight. I do believe in lust at first sight though... I do believe in lust at first sniff! You know, when someone's body smells so good, their natural smell whips up an avalanche of chemical frenzy in your brain that just makes you go nuts... But I digress...

I experienced love at first sight, but only once. I saw her, and I knew she was the one. The look of determination and defiance on her face. Her crazy eyebrows and sharp whiskers framing her nose and mouth, giving her the unruly, no-nonsense appearance. I knew we needed to be together. I knew she was my missing piece.

When you're a woman with her biological clock raging, but the physical body not willing to manifest a baby, you feel incomplete, or at least that's how I felt. Your brain tells you that your wholeness does not come from outside of you, but somehow it does not feel that way. The void that cannot be filled by anything else, but the small, delicate body of a baby. Warm, soft flesh, pulsing with life, and an invisible cord of love energy connecting the two of you. This little body is a bit different; it also has a tail. It's covered with hair, both coarse and smooth. She makes a lot of noise, snapping at anything around with that mouth full of sharp pearly whites. That little bitch.

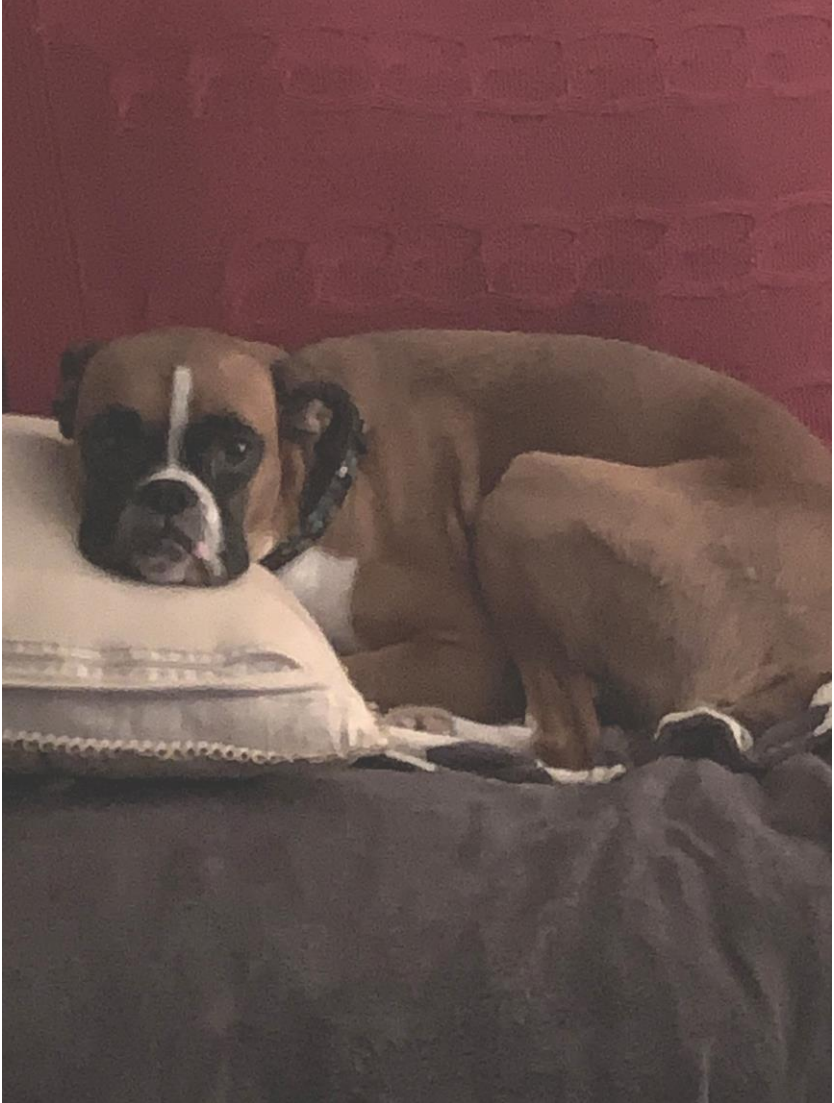
That little bitch stole my heart when I saw her picture, a completely random Facebook picture from a dog rescue. There she was, she was my missing piece, and I was not even looking for her! Within 24 hours we had her in our home, and our baby moon started on a high note! The teddy bear which accompanied her into our home was disemboweled within hours!

I don't know if I could describe what that dog means to me, and what gifts she gave me. How did she manage to fill that gaping baby-free hole in my heart, I don't know.

How is it possible for a dog to fill a heart with a golden balm of healing and comfort? How does she know when I need comfort, she can sense it from two storeys away?

Some people believe that dogs are angels, some call them a man's best friend. I call Rosie my daughter, and I am at peace.

~Seva-Ram Spronk~



Gracie

I feel full of gratitude for a little furry friend. A smaller than expected female, who came into my life as a willing companion for my elderly and sickly male fur friend. She stood by dutifully as he slipped away, and then later, stood by as mother passed away.

Always by my side, she was an angel in a dog's disguise, bringing me joy, strength, and comfort when she knew I needed it most. She never expected anything in return, just gave selflessly far more than I could have asked, or even anticipated.

She always held on to hope though; hope for food, hope for a walk, and hope for love. It is my duty to repay her, to ensure all her hopes are fulfilled and never let her down because, well, she has never let me down.

She has always had my back, has been by my side with her head on my lap whenever I felt alone; paw on my shoulder when I needed a friend. She gave me strength and love beyond what any human is capable of.

She too, has given me hope – hope that there are people out there who can love the way she can; freely and generously. She knows this is her route to happiness, so why can't it be ours? She knew I could form this bond at a time when I thought I had nothing left.

The wisdom of a dog is underrated, and in comparison, the wisdom of humanity is overstated.

~Kim McCutcheon~



Ch Jaffa Knight of Miyana ADX JD CGC

It was love at first sight, but that is a bit unfair. Who does not fall in love with cute puppies? After all, babies, puppies and kittens are all cute. Nature made them so, to enhance their chances of survival.

But this puppy was more than adorable. He had been chosen for me by the breeder. His mother had shown a lot of attributes that I wanted for my next dog. Along with good looks, there was the potential for a sweet nature and a really strong desire to work. I had not been planning on adding a puppy to my family at the time, but the breeder said this was the only litter she was having from the bitch. It was a case of take one now, or miss out.

So, I took this delightful, pedigree, Australian Kelpie boy named Jaffa, home.

Previously I had dabbled in various dog sports. Jaffa taught me to lift my game. He was eager to learn, whether it was for the breed ring, obedience trials or agility events. He turned out to be too lithe to suit the pedigree breed standard, but he was well enough built to gain his Champion title. Neither of us greatly enjoyed obedience, although learning the retrieve and scent were fun. It was clear he was best working away from me, rather than right at my side.

The best place for both of us to find maximum pleasure, was charging around an Agility ring. I needed to increase my fitness to be in the best place to direct him, and I was forced to learn advanced techniques to offer him the cleanest route through the course.

My goals soared from hoping to get to Intermediate, to wanting to place in Senior. Unfortunately, before we could win a Senior round, an injury to his hind leg slowed Jaffa down. It was the only thing that could.

But that did not stop his life from being exciting. He met up with a couple of pretty Kelpie girls and sired 18 puppies between them. One of the puppies came home to harass him.

He hiked the hills around my home and played with the kids at the local park. He was a ball-catching fiend. He had more friends than I did, and he introduced me to a lot of other dogs and their owners.

Age has now slowed him right down; he can only go for quiet walks on the beach. But the light in his eyes is still bright. When he had the chance to revisit one of the places where he had once been a star, the delight in him was palpable.

His glory days are long over, but the love I have for my Jaffa dude is as strong as ever.



~Liz Homes~

How I Brought Kwan Home – Blittie’s Tale

My gorgeous boyfriend, the German Shepherd, Matrix, was going to the doctor.

I could have told him, I did tell him, that he was healthy. It was me who had the heart palpitations, but that was because he is so handsome.

Oh, by the way, I’m Blittie. I am an Australian Kelpie. I live with my human mum and my biological dad. Dad is a bit grumpy and does not approve of me playing with Matrix.

But, back to the story. My mum and Matrix’s mum had both decided that we should all go to see this doctor. He does this thing called Neuro Integration and it is supposed to help with the body-brain connections.

I had a premonition that this would not go well.

We all piled into Matrix’s car. He had more room in the back for just him than Dad and I in our car. Off we went to see this doctor. The trip was cool because I was with Matrix and Dad couldn’t say anything. The only thing marring the adventure, was my anxiety about this doctor human.

So, we arrived at this house. It was not a proper clinic with nurses who fed you treats. A bad sign, if you ask me. Matrix leapt out of the car, eager to go and see what was going on. He was gone for ages and I was getting really worried. Then he came back and Dad went out.

I asked Matrix what the session had been like. He told me the doctor had kept touching his head and that now he wanted just to go to sleep. I demanded more details. I had to know! But he lay down and ignored me! This was totally unlike my ever-alert boyfriend. Something was wrong. I sat and watched him. I was so frightened by his response.



Dad came back. He was a bit livelier than Matrix but not much. He too, just wanted to sleep.

Then it was my turn. I was in a panic. I wanted to run around and play, not go into a coma-like state.

I saw the doctor. He had a nice, calm voice. He was a stranger though, with really long hair and big hands.

I couldn't, I just could not allow him to put those hands on my body. Mum tried to calm me down but he kept reaching out to touch me. He was terrifying. I told him to stop or I would bite him! I've never, ever bitten anyone.

Finally, he left me alone. I felt bad because Mum was upset, but that did not compare to the fear the doctor put into me. I'd had to protect myself from him and the sleepiness he caused.

Because I was so freaked out, we escaped from the doctor sooner than Mum or Matrix's mum had planned on.

Matrix's mum had an idea. They would use the time to visit Kitten Inn. This is a lovely place where the people take in kittens and pregnant cats, make sure they are well, get them fixed so there are no more babies, and find forever homes for them.

Mum said she was not going to get a kitten.

Of course not. I totally agreed with Mum. Kittens are silly creatures, who climb up the net curtains and try to climb up on innocent dogs. A kitten was a really dumb idea.

Mum disappeared with Matrix's mum into the shelter. Mum must have used her brain because she did not come back out with a kitten. But her chatter was full of a Mumma cat who just looked sooooo sweet.

I listened, and realized that this was all my doing. Because I chose not to allow that doctor to do his stuff to me, Mum had gone to Kitten Inn and fallen in love.

Three weeks later, that Mumma cat, now called Kwan came to live with Dad and me.



Rebel's Arrival

The first tickle of desire made itself felt on a wintery evening. What better time to peruse the web looking at cute puppies? Being the proud owner of two beautiful Australian Kelpies, this was the breed I searched for.

And, on a Pets for sale market website, there she was. A sweet looking girl, aged six months. Oh wow! Still young enough to mould into what I wanted, but past the evil, messy, baby puppy stage. She would be perfect.

Except, common sense leapt into my sappy brain. Did I really want a third dog? In the middle of winter, at that. The two I had generated enough mud. A youngster would easily double that.

But she was so cute. Oh dear, I was smitten.

Knowing I was making a big decision, truly based on an impulse rather than research, I asked my friends. They all agreed she was absolutely gorgeous. Not all, thought getting her was a good idea though.

They kindly rolled out the list of cons: A third dog was going to stretch my budget. Did I really want to be tied down for the next fifteen years? Long trips like they were taking, were not going to be viable. And the most ego bruising one, how was thirteen-year-old Jaffa, my senior dog, going to cope?

The pros were more nebulous. A friend for my other dog, Blittie. Someone new to train in dog sports.

I even asked my dogs what they thought. Jaffa was adamant, he would be hurt if I tried bringing another male into his house. I took that as meaning he would be happy with a girl. Blittle didn't mind. I ignored the common sense arguments and sent an email to the seller.

There was no reply and, the next day, the ad had been taken down as well. That puppy was not meant for me.

Although I was disappointed, I was also relieved. In truth, I was not ready to expand my household.

The stark reality was that another dog would have strained my resources. Several of my friends also seemed relieved.

One friend even went as far as to suggest a crystal to ease my cravings for puppy love. I followed her suggestion and bought a Mookaite pendant. I did notice that this was a form of jasper from Australia. Was it soothing my desire for a four-legged Australian? I liked that idea.

While I regularly returned to that website over the next few months, the desire for a puppy grew sluggish. Jaffa's health was declining. He needed my care. Strange things were happening at work which demanded my attention. And, there was a constant niggle in the back of my mind. Maybe I was not supposed to get another puppy.

Work took me to a new town. More months passed in the sorting of my house. A puppy was the last thing on my mind. Yes, I enjoyed looking at all the cute photos and I regularly sent them to my flatmate. She always responded with a vehement "No." I never argued.

Common sense still ruled. Every day with Jaffa was a gift. I wanted to focus on him. I could wait until he passed before deciding. He had his fourteenth birthday and looked frail. Once again, I broached the idea of a puppy with him. Once again, his reply was, "Please don't get a boy to replace me."

And I honoured that. Although it had been a female pup that had led me to actively enquiring, it was the cocky assurance of the males that made them such amazing working dogs.

Amazingly, with a new diet and medications, Jaffa's health rallied. He regained his zest for life, albeit at a slower pace.

Yet more changes were afoot in my life. What looked like a spur of the moment decision to buy a new car, was really months of frustration with the old one.

Interestingly, the car I wanted (another story) would be a perfect fit for my three-bay dog crate. Yes, the crate that had only held two dogs in it for at least five years. I did not even check if the two single crates would fit.

Monday, at work, a colleague showed me a video of Malamute puppies. They were gorgeous even though I had no interest in the breed. Alas, pangs of desire ran shafts into my heart. I had to go back and check the website.

And there she was, named Rosie, just thirteen weeks old. A lovely, lively looking Kelpie, big ears all askew. All previous doubts and considerations fled.

I immediately emailed the link to my flatmate.

Instead of the usual NO, she came back with “How serious are you?” The doubts tried to return, but they did not stand a chance. I sent off an email.

This time I did get a response, “Sorry, but Rosie had already found her forever home.”

Yes, I was disappointed. But something inside of me had changed. Even if Rosie wasn’t the one for me, I wanted a puppy and I was ready to do the work I needed to get one. The District Council checked my property and assured me that, unless the puppy upset the neighbourhood, there would be no problem with me having a third dog.

My flatmate and I discussed the idea of a puppy. She had changed her earlier stance of, no, two is enough to, actually it could be kind of cool as long as the new one didn’t eat all her shoes.

I could not make that promise!

Still, she was open to the idea. In her experience, girl dogs had been nicer and easier to handle. So, with her stated desire and Jaffa’s often repeated reaction, I agreed.

Except there was not one single female Kelpie for sale. All the ones that had been up on the website had been sold.

Disgruntled, but not heartbroken, I did what I do every day. I took Jaffa and Blittie for a walk. As we meandered slowly along, Jaffa setting the pace, I let my thoughts wander their own paths. Maybe I was not supposed to get a puppy. Maybe I was supposed to wait. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

I told Jaffa and Blittie about there being no puppies available. I asked for their opinions. Blittie answered first. She was wistful; a little sister would have been great fun.

Jaffa's response was a complete surprise, along the lines of, "I'm old. I don't need another female in my pack. I don't want to have to look after her."

Yep, he's a bit of a chauvinist.

But his answer led me to ask a far more daring question, "What about a boy?"

He was slow to respond this time, but finally came back with, "I suppose I could start training my successor."

At the time, there were rumors that Queen Elizabeth was grooming Charles so she could step down. Jaffa's answer sounded very like that.

So, with the long-awaited approval of the patriarch of my family, I returned to the market website. Yay, there were a couple of sellers who each had a couple of boys left. Both were within a reasonable travelling distance so I would be able to collect the puppy rather than have him shipped.

Both my flatmate and I agreed on the same seller. I made contact and organized to go north to meet the puppies. We also agreed we would know which, of the two, was the right one as soon as we got there. Three days later we drove for eight hours to collect and bring the new puppy home. It had been eighteen months since I saw that first advertisement, but I finally had my dream come true.

And, why did he get the name, Rebel? Was he naughty on the trip home? No. he was calm and quiet. The day we went to get him, my nephew's wife, Rebecca, fell down some stairs and hit her head. Sadly, she passed away. Rebel's name is in honour of her spirit.

~Liz Homes~

I Can See Clearly Now

**What do you need to look at from a different perspective?
Where could you act with more love and compassion?
Do you need to forgive today?
How can you be more gentle with yourself?**

I see clearly with more than my eyes
Today when my physical vision was blurry
The vision in my heart became clear
Letting go of blind rage
I was truly able to see what mattered
What was really important
And it was right in front of me all along
Having more patience than I often deserve
Hopeful and filled with love and compassion
And forgiveness
Holding no expectations of perfection
Just love and pure joy over the simple things
The essence of the little things are the big things
And I'm humbled by the lessons I'm taught
I bring my human failings to the light
And I see clearly with love and compassion
My vision is set right again
Realigning with what my heart says
I am forgiven, and I forgive myself
I open my eyes, my heart
The blurriness is removed
I am calm and I embrace peace
And the warm furry hugs
That were right in front of me all along



The Girl Who Made Me Say Yes

It was a Saturday afternoon. “I’ll be right back,” I said to my husband as I got out of the car. I grabbed the box of goodies from the back seat and headed up the driveway of my client’s home. She had given me instructions to come around the back, rather than use the front door, as had been my custom.

Trepidation grew as I noticed how well fenced the property was. It had all the hallmarks of being a dog-friendly property. I was not comfortable around dogs, and in fact, preferred to keep my distance.

I made my way into the kitchen where I found Kim. “Do you have a dog?” I asked nervously. “Of course I do,” she replied in a bright, sunshiny voice. “I’ve got Phoebe.” She directed my gaze into the lounge where I saw the smiling face of a honey coloured English Cocker Spaniel. “Can I bring my husband in?” I asked. “His grandmother had a cocker spaniel called Phoebe and I know he’d love to meet her.”

“Of course!” Kim replied, and so I went back out to the car and proceeded to cajole him into coming inside.

Once we were both seated, Kim let Phoebe into the kitchen. She bounded over to me and said hi before trotting over to my husband, where she proceeded to put her front paws on his chest, look deeply into his eyes and say, “Hello old friend, how have you been?” Kim saw this and asked if we wanted her.

Until now, whenever we had been offered a fur baby, we had always replied with a swift “No”. But not this time. We were both left floundering for words.

It turned out that Kim needed to rehome Phoebe, but didn’t want her to go just anywhere. A change in circumstances meant Phoebe wasn’t getting the love and attention she needed. The demands of being a new solo parent with another on the way, having a dog and working full time was too much. Something had to give.

The first two weeks were a nightmare. I had had no experience of being a dog owner. I felt guilty going to work and leaving her home on her own, and when I got home, I lavished her with attention, took her for long walks, and tried to be firm but fair. I thought we had agreed some boundaries, one of which would be no dogs on the bed.

Three sleepless nights, and my husband suggested letting her sleep on the bed with us “just this once.” I knew it wouldn’t be just once, but I too was tired from lack of sleep. Phoebe was a very demanding dog and needed a lot of reassurance that things were okay. Discussions with work colleagues assured me, that even though she was being left alone for long periods, when we were home, she was the center of our world and she was better off with us, rather than being pushed aside while Kim looked after her young son.

The bond that grew between her and I was obvious to everyone. And they marveled at the change in me. I was certainly not expecting a dog to become the love of my life. A woman who supposedly hated dogs, adored this one and she taught me that dogs weren’t to be feared. I developed confidence around them and when I met a woman who was to become my best friend and her two Australian Kelpies, I couldn’t wait to be friends with them.

Not only did I change, but Phoebe did too. She went from being extremely hyperactive and more than a handful, to being calm and sedate. Yes, she still did everything with enthusiasm, but the urgency and intensity vanished. She knew how to read people, could work a room, and make every single person fall in love with her regardless of whether they liked dogs or not. It was just her nature.

I still smile when I remember that day, when, full of trepidation, I knocked on Kim’s back door.

~Charley Marsh~

The Gift

As I gazed out over the Pacific Ocean on the Costa Rican coast, I was so at peace, feeling the warmth of the water as I waded and reveled in the splash of the waves, “my cup runneth over”!

A split second, I spotted a stingray leap out of the ocean and dive back into it. I saw the curvature of its unique shape. My whole being understood that it was a Gift for me. I instantly felt my heart surge and a huge swell of gratitude followed.

Being who I am, I just had to seek out the symbolism of the stingray and this is what I found:

- you must not let drama/distractions sway you from your journey**
- have faith in your abilities and follow your inner guidance**
- very sensitive to energy and very clairsentient**
- * spirit-animals.com**

These are just a few of the sentences that spoke to me in the article. The timing was impeccable and I am so very grateful.

When we step back from the hustle and bustle of our lives to just be, it's easier for The Universe to gain our attention, though I do deeply believe that God is always talking to us, we as a society have made our lives so busy that it's next to impossible to reach us.

When the Universe beckons, know it and take heed.

~Cindy Bourgaize~

Who is the Teacher?

I have heard the phrase “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear”. I have also learned to appreciate the alternative ... “When the teacher is ready, the student will appear”. As with most of these nuggets of wisdom, there is not a true appreciation until later when something happens to create a personal connection.

When I made the decision to get my first horse, Rocky, I was past 60. I knew that there were a lot of things which I had to learn. Quite frankly, the reality of that was intimidating and frightening! I knew that if I fell off, I was not going to bounce back like I may have 40 years ago.

To hear the instructor at an equine first aid course I went to, open with “This is not about IF your horse gets hurt, this is about WHEN he gets hurt,” was very disconcerting. I did not want Rocky to ever be suffering for my lack of knowledge or experience. I was determined to read every article I could and attend every potential workshop, I would engage every single teacher I could lay my eyes and ears on!

One thing which I quickly learned to have an understanding and appreciation for, was that horses are not nearly as clumsy as they were depicted. They do however, have a real knack for exposing an owner without common sense.

A whole world of possibilities opened up when I made the following mental shift ... I needed to see beyond Rocky as just an animal that was my possession, for my pleasure. When I saw Rocky as a thinking and spiritual being who is my partner on my journey, there was literally a whole new world of opportunities. There could be so many lessons, so many adventures, so much joy!

It was not just a shift in thinking, it was an opening of my mind that really created possibilities. When the mind is closed, there can be no teacher ... or student. When the mind becomes open to the reality of each living being joined in one mind, there really are no limits.

This opening of the mind became the cornerstone of an amazing partnership in our shared journey. Rocky opened my mind to the teacher / student possibilities. It started innocently enough with little incidents that would make me raise an eye brow or say “that was kind of cool”

On one such occasion I was tending to Rocky in his paddock when suddenly I “felt” him say “Look out!” I stood up in time to realize a jealous paddock mate of Rocky’s was positioning himself to kick me. Rocky responds to hugs of gratitude the same way that a person does.

I saw myself as Rocky’s provider and protector, but that incident made me wonder if he was also a protector for me. With my eyes starting to open this way, I could see Rocky as the teacher who had been brought into my life. These lessons have value far beyond the walls of the barn.

The starting point to learning, is to truly listen. I have learned that when I am truly listening, I am also prepared to learn. When I come to Rocky, I have to leave the noise and the clutter behind. It has almost become similar to doing a meditation. I can not hear what God is telling me, unless I separate myself from the noise. The same goes for my time with Rocky. For starters, my cell phone stays in the truck. If I forget, Rocky will bump my pocket to remind me, “This is *our* time”.

Obviously Rocky can not communicate with words, so my listening needs to be intentional on a very different level. When I am driving to the barn, I prepare for that time so that he has my undivided attention. This way I can be in tune with what is on his mind and needs to be done. I have come to the conclusion that he understands every word I say, but there have been more then a few times when I have concluded that he knew before I told him.

On one occasion when I was feeling mentally blocked in what I had to create, it was suggested to me to spend time with Rocky and he would inspire me. I was open to that possibility, so with pen and paper in hand I sat down in the corner of his stall. Rocky walked over to me, towering over me with this very puzzled look. “What the hell are you doing?” I could feel him say.



“I have to create this piece and I am having a mental block, so I am hoping you will give me some inspiration” was my response. “Oh, ok” and then he simply stood there and looked at me. “You can go over there and eat your hay, the words will still come to me” With that, Rocky moved over to the opposite corner, started munching on his hay and I started writing and writing and writing. About half hour later I had what I needed, and Rocky received a few extra chunks of carrot as a thank you.

On another occasion, Rocky and I were signed up for a learning clinic, but because he had some foot issues he could not participate. When Rocky realized we were just going to be spectators, he was the most upset I have ever seen him. He was beyond frustrated, and I knew I had to come up with something quick to try and settle him down and salvage the day. It became a day when I was the teacher, but first, I had to be the student. Only by very carefully listening first, did I understand.

Rocky also knew that I was listening and that I cared. When I understood, I could explain what was needed for him to heal. Patience is not something I am good at, but through sharing that day, I feel that he saw the benefit of being patient as well. We could truly learn together.

In our daily lives, we never know if we will be a teacher or a student. As Rocky and I walked around, a little girl was curious why Rocky was not participating. As I began to explain Rocky’s foot issues, he held up his bad leg to show the girl. Rocky seems to truly be in his element when he can interact with children. It was a joy to behold.

For good communication to happen, there needs to be trust and respect. I have gained Rocky's respect by giving him choices. When Rocky does not want to do something, I have learned to recognize that he is trying to tell me something. I need to be present in the moment and listen. Because of the respect we have, I know that he is not just pushing buttons to see what he can get away with.

I will be eternally grateful for the relationship I have with Rocky and for all that he has taught me. There were two things that were necessary for that relationship to have a possibility. I had to say "yes" to the possibilities other than my limiting beliefs that were robbing me of potential. I also had to simply get out of my own way, my own desire to be in control. My relationship with Rocky has given me the opportunity to grow into a better person, a person better equipped to serve.

Big hug to Rocky!



~Norm Eygenraam~



Enjoy the Ride

Madam came into my life 16 years ago. As a 23-year-old, single mom with a young child, working full-time, going to university, and trying to figure out my life and my son's, taking on any more responsibilities was something I was not looking for, or wanting at all.

Someone I knew, just happened to mention that a friend of theirs had puppies they were selling. Honestly, my only intention was just for something to do on an early Saturday morning, and to go for a drive and take a look at the puppies. There were so many of them.

When I walked in, I was swarmed by cuteness. I sat on the ground with my legs crossed, and they all piled on top of me, vying for my attention and affection. The happiness they created was instantaneous.

Off to the side, I noticed there was one pup not following the crowd. She steered clear of all the commotion. She gave me that side eye look. She walked in a circle, paused, then would look at me again. She repeated this a few times more before finally doing her poop. Hahaha. I gently cleared the precious pups off me, and went over to her.

When I sat down again, she lightly tiptoed over my legs, and when she found just the right spot, curled herself into a little ball right in between the crescent of my legs. There was no thinking, questioning, planning, second guessing, wavering or doubt. I knew she was coming home with me, and that she would forever be mine.

Life has a way of knowing what we need, even before we do, and presents opportunities to us all the time to choose from. Looking back, I realize Madam was one of them.

Madam has been such a special force of love; a calming presence when needed. Her and I have really stuck together through a heck of a lot, and have always taken care of each other. She has remained a faithful constant companion.



Publishing Post Script: Sadly, after we published Choices for Change, Madam became more ill and has since crossed the rainbow bridge. We are grateful we had the opportunity to honour her in this book while she was still with us. Our hearts go out to Christina and her family for their loss. Madam will always be remembered with so much love.

Madam has taught me some pretty important, and valuable life lessons. Every day she shows me how to go with the flow, and to focus on, and fully enjoy what's happening right now. When tough times present themselves, she always does the best she can to cope, and asks for extra love to help her through it. Resting, giving and receiving love as often as possible, is a must. She's an example that we should choose to do that all the same.

Now that Madam is much older, these days she's not getting around as well as she used to. My son and I know what's eventually to come, as what seems sooner rather than later. It's difficult to imagine life without her. On her not so good days, when thoughts like this can creep in, I stop myself, and instead choose to show her how much I appreciate having her with me, right now, in this moment.

When I think about all the opportunities life has given me, even the ones disguised as burdens, I realize I couldn't control how they present themselves to me or when. Also, none of them were a part of any plans I had for myself at the time. All I had control over is whether or not I chose to grab hold of the opportunity, or let it pass me by.

One of my favorite sayings is a line from the movie *Along Came Polly*. "It's not about what happened in the past, or what you think might happen in the future. It's about the ride, for Christ's sakes. There is no point in going through all this crap, if you are not going to enjoy the ride. And you know what...when you least expect it, something great might come along. Something better than you even planned for".

Madam was in no way planned, and came along when I least expected. She is, and forever will be, one of the many best choices I made when I allowed myself to loosen the grip of how I thought things should be, grab a hold of the opportunity to love and be loved, and accept the vulnerability that comes along with doing so.

~Christina Marie Hollis~



Lessons in Living

Some of my darkest days have had him by my side to help pull me through. We've worked extensively on training, and he adores learning new things. I can speak to him like a friend, and I estimate he knows close to 300 words.

I think he knows me better than I know myself.

He's there to wake me from PTSD nightmares, or paw at me if my blood sugar gets too high. He licks my hands better, Reiki style, when they're too sore from writing too much. He has protected me from danger many times, and I have comforted him and protected him through moments of illness and fear. He's super eager to go on car rides, just to be by my side, since he sleeps most of the time anyway!

Heck, he even has his own book, **10 Lessons About Life & Living – or 70 in Dog**, sharing life lessons and how he learned them, in his own voice, and he embodies being a Rockstar like a diva when he's asked. More than anything, he just wants to see me happy, to be silly, have fun, maybe have a Taylor Swift dance party together. Oh, and snacks, he's always up for snacks.



He tries so hard to make friends with other dogs and cats, even if they clearly want no part in it. He feels his love can turn their opinion around. When he loves, he loves with all of his being, tail wags, smiles, body wiggles, bright eyes.

As I type this, he knows I'm writing about him, and wags his tail with a big smile whenever I look at him. He has a way of cheering anyone up, and has his own fan club of people who want to hear Koda stories, because it's the light in a tougher day. We high five and celebrate anything we can, just because we can.

There is truly so much I can learn from his outlook on life.

Koda has his own health challenges with colitis and thyroid issues, as well as a terror of fireworks, thunderstorms, cars backfiring and any other loud sudden noises – he’ll shake violently and needs anxiety meds, as well as protective cuddles. He can’t eat regular kibble, at all, or his colitis flares up. So, I homemade him pots of food, taking into account all his allergies and sensitivities.

He is THE definition of a high maintenance dog. Most wouldn’t have patience to do all I do to take care of him. But with all he does for me, there’s not a doubt in my mind to do it for him. I may drag my feet more making things some days, but he always has patience, and is just as excited for his food, whenever he gets it.

Throughout my life, I have been involved with various guys who have had kids. I’ve loved the kids immensely, and been heartbroken when they’ve left my life. I’ve had kids living with my partner and myself full time, and I’ve been in that mom role. I take care of them with motherly love, even though they “aren’t my own” because that’s what kids deserve. That’s what you do.

It’s been suggested lately, that I don’t understand being a parent, because I don’t have kids of my own. Through my experiences with “step kids” and Koda, I can assure you nothing can be further from the truth. Koda is of higher intelligence and the similarities between him and a young child are many, especially with personality and stubbornness at times. For people who know Koda, this is quite evident and has been pointed out to me, without me saying anything. I would protect Koda with my life, and I have. In dog park incidents, I have put my safety aside to ensure he’s okay. I make sure he has food before I do in times of tighter budgets.

I understand what is involved with taking care of a child, and I understand all I do to take care of Koda.

I want to raise awareness, (and give support to pet parents) that next time you may think of passing judgement on someone who is “just a pet parent” or worse “only a pet owner”, please reconsider.

I can’t have kids of my own, and Koda has saved my life numerous times over. I consider him my kid; I consider myself a doggy mom.

Everyone has different stories and experiences when it comes to children, and we truly need to move forward with compassion for as many of them as we can.

I am immensely grateful to have Koda in my life, and I treasure every moment with him.

*Koda has heard this story and high fived his approval :)



~Andrea Eygenraam (& Koda)~

Going Deeper

Bucket List

Not only was Bucket List a great movie, but the concept helps propel people forward in their life as well. It has been proven that people gain a sense of accomplishment and pride when they check things off a list. It has a very powerful mental association towards motivation and increasing self-esteem. Even when it's something very small, it's worth putting it on your daily, or weekly list to gain this motivation.

So, what happens when your list contains larger items, like a list of things you want to do before you die? On the surface it might seem like a morbid thought, but bear with me here. Like your small daily lists of future accomplishments to take care of, making a list of more meaningful life things can help fulfill a bigger sense of purpose, than say, picking up milk on the way home.

Thinking of items for your bucket list, you'll need to take a step back and really look at what's most important to your life. It will give your priorities a shake. For myself, I value my writing time, and I say it is a priority. Yet, I don't make time for it daily. When I say, I don't have enough time, what I'm really saying is, it's not a priority.

So, let's look at that in relation to the bucket list. We can work away at our 9-5 job all day, factor in the commute and it leads to feeling drained and tired in the evening. We "don't have time" for the gym, or household chores, let alone a bucket list. But let's reframe that.

There's an interesting concept I heard about changing your phrasing to change your mind. Instead of "I have to vacuum", reframe it to "I get to vacuum" because I have a wonderful home to take care of. "I get to do the dishes" because I've been fortunate to enjoy a good meal; you get the idea.

So with the bucket list, you can get more excited about making time for items when you say "I get to work on my book that I want to get published and share with others" or "I'm alive and free and I get to go ziplining across the Gorge this summer".

We don't have to settle! Life is a wonderful opportunity to do things we enjoy. This will give us more energy for the things that are necessary to have the resources to do those bucket list things. Maybe you are fortunate enough that your things that are necessary are actually things that you love. They say that if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life. Maybe that's your main bucket list item. Let me know what's on your list! I'd love to get some ideas for mine

**What do you GET
to do today?**

Words Have Power

What stories do we tell ourselves? Do we repeat that we aren't deserving, we aren't worthy, not good enough, or do we believe in ourselves and repeat supportive encouraging words of love and hope?

Words have power

What we feed our subconscious it believes. If we tell ourselves we aren't good enough, not deserving, not worthy...that is the reality we will create. As an example, if we say "I always end up dating the same people who hurt me or use me" then we will.

Until we change the stories we tell ourselves, the stories we experience won't change.

I grew up with a very abusive mother and I listened to those old tapes (yes, I'm dating myself!) of messages from my mother even after she died. It was no surprise then, looking back, that I met a man who continued that behaviour towards me. That was what I was telling myself I deserved and that was what I expected, so that was what I attracted and created.

Because words have power.

In that relationship I got into using hard drugs because it was easier than feeling and experiencing the repeated stories and pain of my reality. I also didn't want to deal with grief of loss or disappointment in myself for not following my dreams. I've seen many people in my life who haven't addressed their stories, stay in them over decades and multiple relationships – myself included. I escaped with drugs because I wasn't ready to face things and take charge of the words I was telling myself. I didn't know any better.

Until I did.

In 2005 I nearly died of a drug overdose, having a heart attack, kidney failure, brain damage and being unable to walk. That was after ending up in the hospital for mental health a few months prior. But none of that was enough to stop me, and it still took me two

years, and going back to college for package engineering and getting my dream job, before I got clean.

Thirteen years ago, I found 12 step meetings that changed my life. I was able to start telling myself new words and stories, of worthiness, and deserving to live. Writing books was another dream I had, this one since I was three years old and during my using, I had walked away from the very thing that healed me – words!

Because words have power.

Fortunately, over a decade ago, I was introduced to a writing group at a treatment center in Hamilton. Joining and helping to facilitate this group was so special and rewarding. I got a front row seat to watch women develop self-esteem and confidence, healing through their words, and realized the same was happening to me! In 2012, we collected many of the writing pieces and made it into a book. We had a full book launch and people were actually asking for my autograph! It was surreal. It was the first time I got to see my words in print, and it was life changing.

Because words have power.

As often happens when things are going really well, but the positive loving stories, words and messages haven't been fully integrated yet, I indulged in self-sabotage, overwhelm and feeling not worthy of the success. I had the opportunity to pitch agents and publishers, and since words have such power, when the words of just one person weren't as supportive as I had hoped, I felt crushed. I stopped writing for more than three months. It started me down a spiral because I turned my back on the most healing outlet for me. I created chaos in my life for the next three years with poor choices, and letting others affect me way too much – listening to their words, their messages.

After ending up in the hospital for a second time, this time clean, I hit another bottom. I didn't think it could get much worse. However, while sitting in the cold sterile room, I realized I had this little light burning in me. A small candle of courage and strength, that was burning bright just for me. I could tap into that place inside that no one could touch, and it gave me strength to make it through the next year that was one of my darkest yet. I tried giving up several times,

but the light kept bringing me back, showing me there was more I had to do yet. I wrote some dark poems during that time, but it helped me get through, and helped me heal.

Because words have power.

In 2016, I invested in a self-help program while I uprooted my life yet again, to another new city, my 25th place I lived in 35 years. It was actually what I needed to rewrite my messages. I worked on myself, my beliefs and the stories I told myself. I wrote myself a new life script. One that was affirming and empowering and helped me feel worthy of all my dreams.

Three months later, I published my first solo book, and now I have ten books that I've been directly involved with, and many more on the way.

Because words certainly have power!

I followed my own passion to start a communications company to help others heal through the power of their words. I have been running workshops to help others heal, and I started my coaching business to help people find their inspiration and live their passion, and often that involves publishing books. 81% of people want to publish a book, but only 3% actually do. I help people find their voice and realize that what they say has value. Because for years I believed that what I had to say was worthless, useless and didn't matter. Until I knew better.

Because words have power.

Now I have an entire box filled with little papers. On those papers are testimonials, kind words, synchronistic experiences. I wrote them all down, because when I'm in a dark spot and can't see my way out on my own, I look at the words of people I've helped. Words I treasure and help me heal. Words that have feelings and power so intense they've caused a huge ripple effect, much larger than my own life.

Words have power.

We all end up in dark spots, no matter how positive, grounded and spiritual you may be, we all have our moments. Unfortunately, many don't talk about it, so when those moments happen, we feel alone. When we share our authentic truth, we help ourselves heal as well as others. We give others permission to hurt and to heal. To not feel alone.

The writing groups I run have a wonderful magic. We use the words of meditation to get grounded. We use the words we write to tap into deep healing that we often don't expect. We use the words of sharing to connect with others and form magical bonds with strangers we just met.

Words have power.

When I need to realign my thinking when it's gotten off track, I write a gratitude list. You bet my subconscious fights it and comes up with all sorts of counter points as I start. But I persevere. I keep writing and, in the end, I feel grounded and have hope. What we tell ourselves creates our reality.

Because words have power.

Have you ever heard of the Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon or Frequency Illusion? It's where you talk to someone about something, and suddenly see or hear it everywhere, repeatedly. Or you think of someone and they call. Or if you buy a blue Toyota and suddenly feel like everyone is driving a blue Toyota. This phenomenon can work for good or bad. We condition ourselves a certain way, to look for the good, or look for the bad in life, and create a life that reflects that. That feels like an oversimplification, but the old phrase from Henry Ford of whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right, certainly rings true.

Words have power.

When I make sure I'm focusing on the good messages and gratitude, there is a lot more to be grateful for and good comes abundantly into my life. Now that's not to say that crappy things don't happen, they do, all the time! But my perspective and how I respond to them is different. I'm able to respond instead of reacting and making the situation worse.

There are times it feels like a snowball of things not going how I'd hoped, but I need to stop, breathe and adjust my expectations, otherwise the words and messages playing in my head will get out of control fast.

It's much easier for us to find familiar struggle, than to find the courage to change our stories. Often when we do start to succeed, we notice people around us change. They try to knock us down; they use words to get us back to where they've always known us to be. This often isn't intentional, but happens subconsciously to keep us comfortable and safe, maintain the status quo. Because if we are changing and growing, it can shine a light on what they wish they were accomplishing but have let fear take over and paralyze them. It's called tall poppy syndrome. I heard there's two ways to ensure you have the tallest building in town, keep building yours taller or knock down all the taller ones. I'd rather keep building mine taller!

When I published my first book, the one from my dog's perspective, I really experienced this for the first time. In about a month I had a dozen people lose their temper and say nasty untrue things to me or about me. It made me question myself and who I was. I am not out to hurt others, but that's what seemed to happen.

Words have power.

I chose not to respond because my words have power too and I'm in charge of whether I respond or react to my environment. I wanted to be able to look at myself in the mirror. When I choose kindness and love, I start a ripple that creates a life I want to live. It opened doors for me to meet many more amazing people that came into my life and I express gratitude for them often...

Because words have power.

I was speaking on a topic near and dear to me, depression and suicide prevention. This has been something I have sat side by side with all my life, and I do all I can to bring awareness and remind people they aren't alone. It wasn't a topic many people in the room had experience with, and I wanted to give them a solution to help someone if they needed to. I created these little kindness cards that I now share wherever I go. On one side it shares a powerful

encouraging message and on the other a reminder to reach out for help and a way to get more cards if you want to join the movement. Simple words have helped more people than I know. People were asking for them to hand out at schools during exams, to give struggling friends, to leave random places so people who need them can find them. They have been sent to seven countries worldwide and thousands have been dispersed, because you never know when a small phrase on a card can save someone's life.

Because words have power.

So how can we all change our stories?

We change the words we say to ourselves.

I still have enough days I want to throw in the towel, my old stories come back and they are quite loud. But I have a tool box I can use to help those words have less power. And that allows me to give power to the words I choose, to create the life of my dreams.

I let go of self-sabotaging messages created from living through years of abuse. I no longer let them indulge in self-fulfilling prophecies. The new messages I humbly affirm to myself are that I am thirteen years clean. I am building a heart centered business as a spiritual entrepreneur. I am an international best-selling author living my dreams and helping people be empowered to live theirs. I am living an unlimited future where I love my potential.

What stories are you telling yourself? Where do you want to be?

Words have power.

Love yourself today. You matter. I matter. Every voice is important. Thank you for letting me share mine.

My Challenge to You

What do you want to do before you die?

Have you accomplished all you've wanted to do? If not, why not?

It's really not as morbid as it seems

It's actually a challenge to live the best life you can, and really make every day count

So often we aren't living our dreams because we are living our fears. We get caught up in all the what ifs and why nots and can'ts, that we forget life can actually be spectacular if you let it.

Frequently underneath fear are many secondary reasons that hold us back or contribute to the fear.

Maybe we feel insecure. On his hierarchy of needs, Abraham Maslow lists security as our number two need above food, water and shelter. For something so important, fear would seem natural if our security was threatened.

Sometimes it's uncertainty that trips us up. If we aren't much of a risk taker or we avoid situations when we aren't sure what they are or what the outcome will be, uncertainty can be paralyzing. These people, like myself, tend to be control freaks, or "planners" as we prefer to be called.

Maybe it's doubt and worry that cause your anxiety, which leads to fear. Like the saying goes, "Worry is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do but doesn't get you anywhere."

We cannot predict the future. Even the best psychics I know will tell you that what they see is only one possible future, and all it takes is us to use our free will and choose differently, and that future is altered.

Think about that. One choice can change everything.

For some that's enough to trigger fear right there. But what if you shifted and realized that if things aren't going how you like, or you are unhappy with your life, often all it takes is one choice to create change.

There are many things we can do to overcome fear and make the most of our lives. Often people will do meditation to help them tap into their intuition, which acts like a compass to steer the direction of our lives if we feel off course. Meditation also helps us be more present in our lives to help us enjoy it to a richer level.

Sometimes making the most of our lives is being of service to others, like doing random acts of kindness: holding the door, buying someone a coffee, or letting someone in line in front of us. We never know how far reaching these simple acts can be.

I heard a story of a man who waited at a coffee shop with a sunflower he bought for his new date, but she never showed up. Also, in that coffee shop was an elderly lady who was sitting all alone and looked like she'd been crying. The man decided to give the flower to her, so it didn't go to waste. The elderly woman had lost her husband that morning and he had always bought her sunflowers. The two shared a wonderful moment, and all because the man reached out to try and improve a crappy situation. Both lives were significantly changed.

Having goals is something I personally recommend and help people with all the time. However, goals must be balanced with spontaneity. This allows us to make the most out of all the opportunities that come our way—really saying yes to life.

What did you want to be as a kid?

Where along the way did you lose that magic?

Where would you travel first if I gave you a free plane ticket to anywhere?

Would you write a book?

Would you love deeper?

Would you face your fears and make each day count?

What do you want to do before you die?

It's really not as morbid as it seems.

It's actually a challenge to live the best life you can and really make every day count.

Grab a blank sheet of paper. This is for you to make your own dream board or bucket list.

Look at all the possibilities that blank sheet of paper provides!

Toss your fears aside and let yourself dream
Find the magic back from when you were a kid

There are some things you don't realize are on your bucket list, until you do them and overcome a fear. A number of years ago, I was helping my dad up at a trade show north of North Bay, Ontario and we had greenhouse structures to set up. I had always had a terrible fear of heights and I would black out if I went two rungs up a ladder. My dad couldn't put the structures up alone though, so I needed to help. Slowly I faced my fear, one rung at a time.

First, I overcame the 12' ladder, then I touched the top rung of the 18' ladder. Finally, I went up in the 156' Hydro One boom truck. It was terrifying...but exhilarating! I had a huge sense of accomplishment that I still carry with me to this day.

What will make you feel exhilarated? What fear can you challenge?
Write it down! Your page is waiting!

There will also be some things that in your wildest dreams you may never think you'll accomplish, although you secretly want to. When you put them on your dream board bucket list, you never know what the universe will conspire to make happen.

On mine, I have my writing dreams, trips, ziplining, seeing the Northern Lights, even meeting Marie Forleo and Kris Carr! I never know what life has in store.

My godmother started chemo the Friday before Thanksgiving, yet she is thankful for wigs and procedures. She's taking trips and retired in her favourite place, Prince Edward Island. She's making every day count.

Do you remember Gord Downie from the Tragically Hip? Here was a man diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and he set out on a nationwide concert tour, taking on raising awareness for indigenous issues, and released a solo album-all while his brain attacked him more every day. He kept pushing on making the most of every day, until his final breath.

What have you been waiting for tomorrow to do?
Don't wait for a diagnosis. Start living today.

Knock Knock...
Answer it...
It's your life waiting.

Opportunity for Change

We are given a great opportunity right now to create a new world, and unfortunately, as things start to open up, I see people "going back to normal". NORMAL WASN'T WORKING. It wasn't working two years ago when I first shared this publicly and it wasn't working the last 50. It will not work moving forward.

We cannot carry on as if these last few months have not changed us, willingly or been thrust upon us. I know so many people acknowledging how they've changed, and many others who have changed without realizing it.

We have a chance to fix things, to become aware, to make a change and save this world in the many ways it's gone astray. I am feeling more empowered than ever that each and every single person can make a difference in so many ways.

There ARE solutions. You don't need to feel helpless.

Together we can create change. If those in power won't do it, we the people can. Please, join with me and let's be the change this world needs together.

We deserve a better life, and so does the world around us
Our planet needs us. It needs the dramatics and separation to end and us to remember our true nature of connection, cooperation and most importantly LOVE.

Somewhere along the way so many have forgotten to love each other. No one truly knows what they are doing on the journey of life. We try things, we succeed or we learn lessons but we always grow. If we are truly living, we will make mistakes as we stretch our comfort zone. If we stay stagnant trying to avoid challenges, the time still passes but without the rich adventure of living, you merely exist. But we all do the best we know how, until we know better, then we do better.

I'm easily overwhelmed these days being a bridge between the average person and doing lightwork. There is A LOT of bad going on in the world, because that is what we are fed, to perpetuate more fear and negativity and to encourage us to let go of our control and surrender our power.

But I know there's A LOT more good happening, we just don't have to shout so loud to get it done. The problem with that is, we are too busy doing our heart work raising the vibration and embracing love for the planet and all the people on it, that we don't have time to engage in the outdated political systems that currently control society.

My eyes are a lot more open to the world this time around. So, who will I vote for?

I'm voting for helping our planet. For spreading as much love as I can. I'm voting to end the fear that controls all parties and people. A big change needs to happen. Soon. I don't know what that looks like or how that's going to happen. But if we don't start paying attention to the things that really matter, I do know we will be forfeiting our opportunity to do anything about what will be thrust upon us.

Love your neighbor, the stranger on the street, the homeless person that is invisible to so many, the elderly senior who hasn't had company in a week, the teenager on the verge of suicide, even your enemy. And especially each and every political leader we entrust with our future, regardless of which party colour they wear. Lead with your heart and hopefully they will too.

A Self Exploration Challenge

Start with a grounding meditation to get out of your own way, and center yourself in this moment

In your journal, free write your answers, that is, write the first thing that comes to mind, and keep writing on that question until you feel the words are done. You can always add more later if more comes up, but do this exercise with what comes up first, do not overthink.

✚ If you feel your thoughts take control, move to the next question and keep the flow going from your heart, not your head. Breathe through any resistance and note it for the exercise after the questions. Write whatever you can, as you can, and revisit it as often as you need or want to.

- who am I?
- who do I want to be?
- who do I need to become to get there?
- what do I need to change in my life?
- where do I need to believe in myself more?
- what are my values?
- what does integrity mean to me?
- how am I living my values and integrity daily?
- how am I letting fear control me?
- how am I bringing love and joy into my life daily?
- what am I grateful for?
- what am I proud to have accomplished?
- how can I honour myself?

- what clutter can I remove from my life physically, emotionally and spiritually?
- how would these changes make me feel?
- how do I want to feel in my life daily?
- who am I?
- who do I want to be?
- who do I need to become to get there?
- what step could I take today to move toward a life I love?

write down any additional thoughts that come up, and sit and reflect for at least 10 minutes on what you wrote and how it makes you feel.

📌 If there are any questions or thoughts that you feel resistant or blocked against, breathe into that space, and gently ask yourself to explore deeper and write about the resistance. The key is to be gentle and not judge the resistance. It has an important message for you. Be grateful for what it's trying to draw your attention to, and be curious to explore further.

❤️ thank yourself for your bravery and courage to move through this exercise. Be sure to do something kind for yourself to honour your work and willingness to go deeper.

A meditation to close out this practice that might be helpful and honouring can be chosen and found at <https://soundcloud.com/andrea-eygenraam>

**THE
CHOICE
TO
CHANGE
STARTS
WITH
YOU**

It's Time to Choose Change Normal Wasn't Working

There are many things I believe wholeheartedly in, that if expressed openly, fully, and with the total extent of my passion, I would be written off as a crazy conspiracy theorist. I meditated and reflected on whether I wanted to write an “activist piece” in this book, or leave well enough alone, and as I was organizing the final pieces, I was pulled to start writing.

Over the time of publishing this book, major changes have started in our world. I had no idea when I teased the title “Choices for Change” that it would become such a relevant and necessary book. I have expressed my awe and humility to a number of people around this idea. Never would I have dreamt, when I put the call out for pieces, that I would get the type of pieces that have filled this book. It is far beyond the scope of what I could have hoped for; it is so much bigger, more raw, vulnerable, and real. We need that more than ever in our world today.

So, I'm going out on a limb, and I'm touching on the controversial, the not so mainstream, and I want to challenge you to open your mind a bit more, and just entertain some ideas, and form your own opinions. Not the opinions I discuss, or the mainstream media, or Joe next door, or Sally from accounting. You.

You and your heart are needed more than ever in this world. Change starts with you. It's Your Choice for Change.

Social Injustice, Homelessness, Food Instability and Self-Sufficiency, Environmental Conditions, Animal Welfare, Health Inequality and Growing Medical Conditions. These aren't conspiracy theories. Normal wasn't working. We need to educate ourselves for change. True, authentic, long lasting change.

The last week has been an explosive time because the reality of injustices to People of Colour are coming to the forefront. This has gone on for hundreds if not thousands of years, but because of other shifts in the world, we are finally at a point we are addressing it now. I know this has been a very volatile and painful topic for so many, as has been evident from the protests and movements and comments in abundance.

I am not interested in throwing my hat in this ring, because I don't feel it's my place, but I do want to listen, respect, and love. I hope that we can find a world united as humans, where race doesn't need to be a division. I'm very aware of its prevalence now, and the injustices, fear, murders, need to stop. We can only find peace when we shift the narrative to compassion and respect.

There needs to be equal access for basic human needs for everyone on this planet. That includes health care, education, food, safety, security, community, respect, and most importantly love. This isn't a socialist idea; this is a human decency idea. The inequality in our entire planet needs to stop. Humans deserve to live a life of love and abundance, and we more than have the means to do this in our world today.

I also feel this is a place to address respect for the homeless population. As someone who has been housing compromised a few times in my life, my heart goes out to the people on the streets. Some have intense mental health issues, co-occurring with addictions and other issues. They face judgement and shame and people forget they are humans too. There is a plethora of reasons someone could end up on the street and without a home.

We need to dig into our compassion at these times, because truly we do not know if that could be us one day. Don't wait to find out. Share resources and do what you can now, because no one deserves to live in those conditions. I am extremely grateful for all I've been blessed with and my heart goes out to people who struggle. There are many places trying to help and do what they can with very limited ways to go about that. Humans need our help, now more than ever.

The Covid crisis we touched on earlier in this book, and its impact on society as a whole, cannot be ignored either. It shut the world down, and the effects were profound. So many human beings died, many, most, unnecessarily. Trauma has touched nearly everyone's lives in one way or another, including those afraid to go outside or be around people now. Not being able to properly grieve for loved ones has a devastating lifelong impact on everyone affected.

Financial industries have either boomed or busted, and many were left in the dust. Governments injected funding to try and salvage countries, and people's lives. Millions of jobs were lost, while others were lifted to pedestals and touted as heroes as they performed both lifesaving, and community saving tasks.

My other job, as a Marketing Manager, is for a company who was deemed an essential service, for part of our work. We could keep manufacturing greenhouses and agricultural buildings, as being part of the food supply chain, we needed to help people continue to grow food. The movement to become self-sufficient through all this, growing your own food, learning things our grandparents and great grandparents knew and we took for granted, has gained tremendous momentum. I've even tried to change my black thumb, green, and it's mostly working...

Food security for everyone is a human right, not a privilege. This mentality needs to shift. Throughout the pandemic people helped each other, gave away food and supplies to those in need, got supplies for the vulnerable and compromised. Please, don't forget these compassionate acts just because things are "going back to normal". This momentum needs to continue. Humanity deserves our compassion.

While we were in lockdown, the earth healed. Animals came back into canals and waterways, into cities, the ozone started repairing, the air became clear. Endangered sea turtles laid their eggs on deserted beaches that they had been avoiding. It has been a truly beautiful thing.

We MUST keep that going. Too many have longed to “return to normal” but NORMAL WASN’T WORKING. The environmental goals of 2030 and 2050 were shown, that in 3 months of lockdown, could be reached much quicker than originally thought. We cannot wait 10, 20, 30 years to “fix” things. We have already started, please, let’s all do our part to continue this momentum. It’s obviously not too late, yet.

Education is so important. And small steps. That plastic bag you choose not to use today, leaves a ripple effect for tomorrow. No action is too small. Because every action has a consequence. Do you want your footprint and legacy to be filled with small positive actions, or more steps to continue the harm to the planet?

When I learned that you could “buy” a nice day for your wedding or other special event for \$100,000, I was shocked and scared. So many don’t realize that geo-engineering is a real thing. Weather Modification, Chemtrails, Cloud Seeding, is all written off as conspiracy theory.

What isn’t conspiracy theory is that one in every two people will get cancer in their lifetimes. That is from the air we breathe, food we eat, information we consume. That is a terrifying concept that needs to be taken seriously. They do weather modification to help shift patterns in things, to create nice days where we feel productive, because who doesn’t love a blue-sky sunny day? But what are we breathing in to make that possible?

Please learn, and research. I cannot look at a plane flying through the sky leaving trails behind without thinking of the report that was brought to the UN and silenced. Please learn and research.

When Liz submitted her piece about “It’s a Matter of Life and Death”, I initially told her it may be too strongly worded, and that while I wholeheartedly support the message, maybe we can find a gentler way to get our point across about how critical it is to stop killing animals and keeping them in totally inhumane conditions and giving them the worst life possible.

Then covid happened, and the wet markets in China were brought to the forefront. Whether they were the cause or not, the fact they exist, as well as many other atrocities toward animals, needs to change. I struggle trying to eat meat as I'm an empath and an animal communicator. I'm not the only one, and thankfully there has been a shift to a healthier, more sustainable way of life. It is critical we continue on that path.

There are many facts that support a plant-based diet as well *see mention of one in two people will get cancer in their lifetime* Please, do your research. Please educate yourself.

The general population is not in the physical health and shape we deserve. We eat food like substances, we are more sedentary and we consume fear.

We deserve healthcare that isn't driven by dollars and the pharmaceutical industry, we deserve really simple, clean vaccines to protect our health, we deserve to have access to healthy food not modified with chemicals and pesticides to grow "en-masse"

Take charge of your health and do your research for what's best for you. Please choose a healthier way to live. Please educate yourself on the reality of all the issues, not just what you're fed by "normal news" and scare tactics.

I care about you reader. If you've made it this far, I know you have something in you pulling you to make big changes in your life. Please don't ignore that pull. You deserve to live a long healthy happy life. It all starts with your Choices for Change.

"By embracing faith, instead of fear, we become an example of the love and strength needed to help change the world. Peace was never won with violence and faith has never been met with darkness. Let us become the deliverers of hope through our intention to make the world a better place, one moment and one action at a time." – Louise Hay

All the Amazing Authors



Christina Marie Hollis was born, raised and lives in Hamilton, Ontario Canada. She is blessed in love with her son Cyrus and dog Madam. She often finds herself cooking up a storm in the kitchen, listening to music on full blast, dancing anywhere and everywhere, and laughing it up with her undeniably caring family and friends. Christina Marie is a beautiful soul that is on a journey towards learning to accept what is, and allowing and creating what could be.

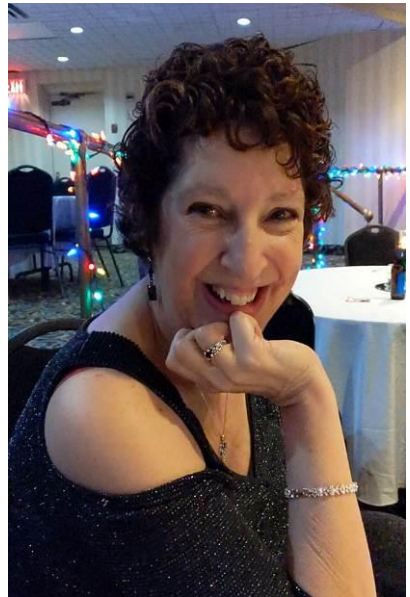
Cindy Bourgaize is an Author and Holistic Health Advisor. She has been passionate about writing from early on. Much of her writing is non-fiction and feels drawn to writing poetry. She is currently working on her first fiction novel. Cindy was born amidst the grandeur of the ocean and mountains in the picturesque town of Gaspé, Quebec; her first love. She currently resides in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada.





Charley Marsh is a skilled accountant by day and in her free time, trains in several disciplines: public speaker, triathlete, skin care consultant, quiz participant, and energy healer. She is constantly grateful she lives near the beach on the Kapiti Coast of New Zealand.

Jennifer McNaughton is a proudly Scottish Canadian woman who has had her share of life's trials and tribulations. Diagnosed with breast cancer at age 48, she is now fighting for her life every day. Jennifer is a photographer and entrepreneur. A nature and animal lover, her story is about how cancer gave her the courage to follow her dream and pursue happiness. It's not how you start, but how you finish that matters (quote from the movie Last Holiday). She is now living in Scotland and has followed her dream (check out her story for details!)
JenMcNaughton.uk





Kelly Hudson lives in Toronto, Ontario with her partner. She transforms and thrives while managing the office of an Ag company wearing many hats and assisting executives. Kelly loves driving with the windows rolled down in the sunshine, with the music cranked up. She enjoys puns, reading, and deep conversations that inspire and challenge thinking out of the box. She has a huge

heart and inspires others with her courage and perseverance and lives by the phrase all I can do is all I can do and all I can do is enough.

Kim McCutcheon has an undergraduate degree from the University of Toronto in English and Psychology. Kim grew up in Montreal, Quebec and currently lives in Acton, Ontario with her daughter Victoria and faithful canine companion, Gracie. She has had short stories published in several anthologies and a New York literary magazine and is currently working on completing her first novel.



Kim has sat on the board of directors for the Writer's Community of Durham region for a several years and is presently working on her certification to facilitate writer's groups and develop her craft. Kim is an oil painter and currently works in sales to support her creative aspirations. She is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such an inspirational project with such an amazing group of writers.



Liz Homes lives in Paraparaumu, New Zealand and has been putting pen to paper for over 40 years. She never tires of it. She has completed several writing courses, mainly studying fiction. She has had success in the Rotorua Daily Post short story competition and in Hubbard's 40th anniversary booklet "Kiwi Gemlets". She also writes blogs for two websites. Currently she is writing a new novel with a working title of "Rubbish Dump Hero". All she will say about it is that there is magic involved.

Her fantasy novel *Dragon Charm* is available on Kindle:
<https://tinyurl.com/v9joeef>

Nadine Wagner is an R.M.T. and R.R.Pr. in Guelph, Ontario. Interest in healing really sparked when she first received a Therapeutic Touch session from her sister, in which Nadine felt like she was levitating and went on to learn about this healing technique. This furthered her interest in energy and natural healing modalities and she pursued training in Reiki and Reflexology, and massage therapy. Her focus is on helping clients to learn that they are investing in their well-being with each massage therapy session and she does her best to give them home care practices that are easy to fit into their lifestyle.





Norm Eygenraam runs a small manufacturing business in Palmerston, Ontario with seven amazing employees. The spiritual path he has been on recently continues to be full of twists, turns and surprises. He is grateful for the opportunity to be part of this book to explore the impact of that journey and reach new heights of adventure and service. One of those surprises has been acquiring his first horse, Rocky. This powerful and soul connecting bond has been the inspiration for a book they are working on to share their partnership and journey.

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Sara McCullough owns a financial planning business in Kitchener, Ontario where she is the mom to three amazing kids. Since moving outside her comfort zone three years ago, she's learned new skills, resurrected forgotten ones and starting singing out loud. She enjoys being involved in her church, staying up late with friends, and has recently acknowledged her love of writing.

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Seva-Ram Spronk was born and raised in Poland, experiencing both the communist and post-communist reality of that country. After emigrating to Canada in her late teens, she embraced experiences: living in a large city, numerous jobs in the service industry, partying, getting her BA from York University, and a career in the health and wellness industry. After enduring several years of

postpartum depression, she found Kundalini Yoga, which has changed her life. She now lives with her husband and son in Kitchener, Ontario, where she teaches yoga and meditation, offers life coaching services to women, and facilitates gong sound baths. For more info please check: srkkundaliniyoga.org and sevaramcoaching.com

Sue Ellis-Saller is a tarot card slinging energy wielding, marketing agent who helps people stand out of the crowd and live bold lives. When Sue isn't studying cards, social media trends, or mysticism, she's laughing with her children, stretching, exploring the world with her husband, or trying to train her pups! Read more about Sue's life and business <http://sueellissaller.com>



You Matter
You are Important
Your Voice Matters
Your Story Is Important
You Deserve to Share Your Heart
What You Have to Say Matters
Your Story Will Help People
You Make a Difference in this World
Just Be Authentically You!

Why Bother? Because someone out there has a
wound the exact shape of your words – Sean
Thomas Dougherty



Andrea Eygenraam is an international best-selling author and certified writing and transition coach. Helping people with Branding and Marketing Consultation, she helps people make their statement to the world. She creates inspirational products and has been facilitating writing and personal development workshops for the last decade. Choices for Change is the third collaboration book she has organized, and 10th book she is published in. She will be releasing online courses later this year in writing, publishing and marketing. Her motivational speaking events help people navigate change in a healthy way to live their dreams. Andrea has been writing for the last 35 years and has a passion to help others through her words. She does improv and is a certified Zumba instructor. Living in Kitchener, Ontario with her Border Collie and crazy tabby cat, she loves to do anything that stretches her creativity and challenges her comfort zone. Check out more at MyInspiredCommunications.com

