

We Are All

MADE

OF

LOVE

*Restoring Your Faith in Humanity,
One Story at a Time*

Heart & Soul Author Collective

We Are All
Made of
Love

Restoring Your Faith in Humanity, One Story at a Time

Published by KindleDirect and in association with My Inspired Communications

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And Jen, whose heart was in this and could not see it through to completion. You will always be a best-selling author and in our hearts forever.

And most importantly, 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 a 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."

Remember, we are all connected, we are all one, no matter what goes on around us, we can come back to center and remember who we are. Restoring Your Faith in Humanity, One Story at a Time

Preface

This is the fourth collaboration book published under My Inspired Communications. This book was wanting to be published already last year when the third book came out, but the timing didn't feel right.

As more division was becoming the normal way of life in the world, I knew it was important to share this collection to help restore faith in humanity.

There IS good in the world. There ARE special people who make a difference. This book is full of powerful stories and experiences, healing and processing, and lots of imagery.

Multiple authors came together to bring you this book, and share the reminder that We Are All Made of Love. They each had their own journey of powerful lessons and healing they've overcome with this book and I am so incredibly proud of their bravery and vulnerability.

We hope you can connect to the pieces in this book, and find what you need to come back to love in your heart.

Heart & Soul Author Collective:

Abdulkarim Farah, Alice Wisniewski, Amanda Read, Darcy Patrick, Denise Beaulieu, Jenny Kuspira, Kelly Hudson, Kim Louise Morrison, Megan Sykes, Nadine Wagner, Norm Eygenraam, Ryan Westwood, Sarah Farr, Shannon MacKinnon, Stephen Van Vugt, Sue Ellis-Saller, Tammy Arbour, Andie Eygenraam

Table of Contents

Understanding Love – p.1

Ripple Effect - Andie Eygenraam
When You Love – Stephen Van Vugt
An Invitation to Love – Abdulkarim Farah
Changes - Kelly Hudson
Lightdrops – Andie Eygenraam
The Modern Quest for True/Real Love – Sue Ellis-Saller
Coming Home to Love – Andie Eygenraam
Is It a Loss? - Alice Wisniewski
Love? - Abdulkarim Farah
Santa Can You Hear Me? – Andie Eygenraam
The Beauty of Impermanence – Andie Eygenraam

Love of Family – p.17

Love Eternal - Tammy Arbour
A Woman to Admire – Nadine Wagner
Ode to My Dad - Abdulkarim Farah
All You Need is Love - Darcy Patrick
Gritty Love – Sue Ellis-Saller
My Daughter's Middle Name is Epiphany - Sue Ellis-Saller

Synchronistic Meetings – p.39

What Really Matters – Andie Eygenraam
Run, Don't Walk - Stephen Van Vugt
We Are All Made of Love – Megan Sykes
Jan the Quaker - Ryan Westwood
Music Man - Nadine Wagner
I Am A Person - Alice Wisniewski
Christmas Love – Andie Eygenraam
Random Moments – Tammy, Andie, & Shannon

The Courage to Love – p.59

Quote - Kelly Hudson
Love Yourself Like There's No Tomorrow – Kim Louise Morrison
D&J Universe – Jenny Kuspira
Love & Grief - Shannon MacKinnon
Dear Jason – Shannon MacKinnon

Garden Walk - Nadine Wagner
Patience - Jenny Kuspira
The Courage to Love - Shannon MacKinnon
Letting Go - Andie Eygenraam

p.101 - Love Beyond Sight

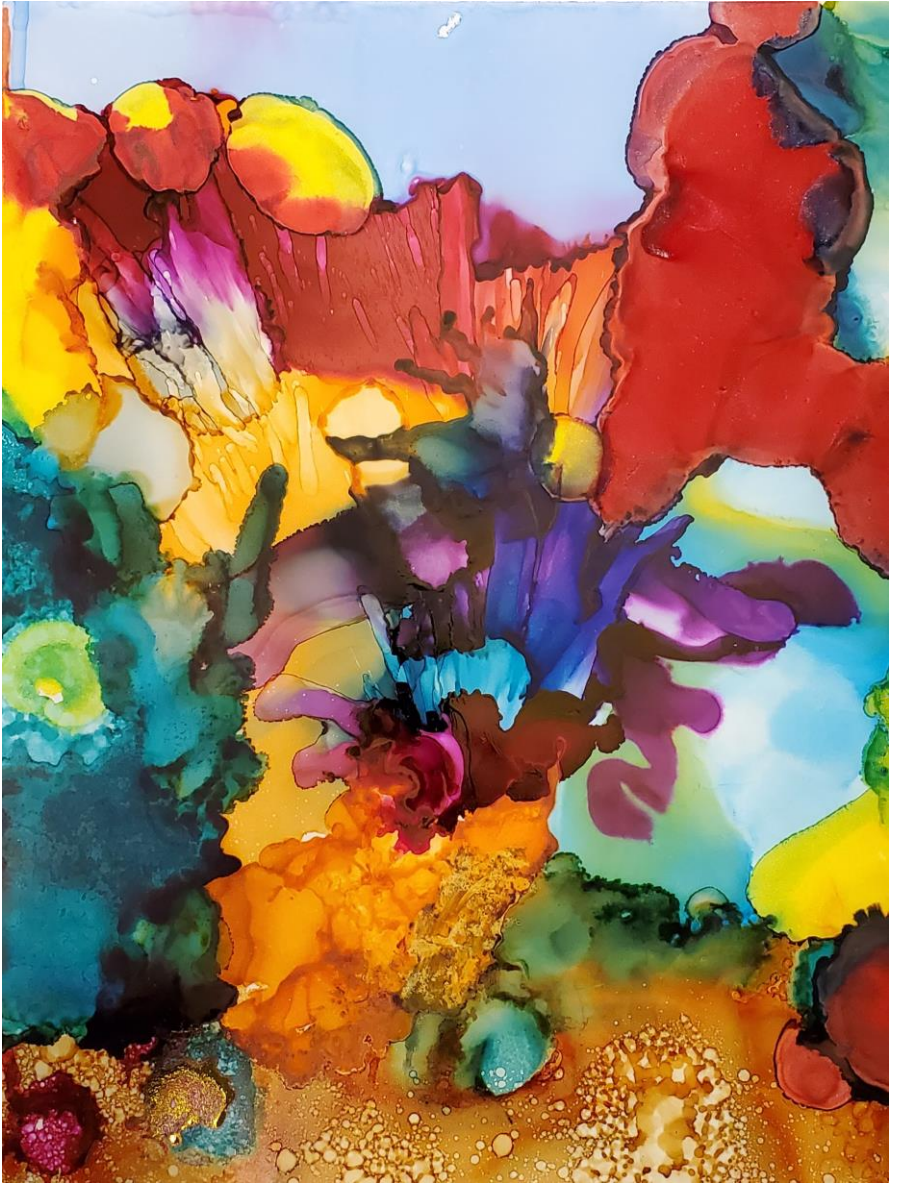
I Can See Clearly Now – Andie Eygenraam
Love is Blind - Amanda Read
Sudden Blindness – Sarah Farr
Wible the Pretty Gold Daisy - Jenny Kuspira
Calla Lily - Nadine Wagner
A Hummingbird says Thank you – Norm Eygenraam
Travel in Your Own Backyard - Amanda Read
When They Were Young – Stephen Van Vugt
Koda In Flight – Andie Eygenraam
The Four Smiles – Jenny Kuspira
Life Happens For Us – Andie Eygenraam

p. 133 - Spiritually Connected

We Are One - Denise Beaulieu
When I Open My Heart to Love - Kim Louise Morrison
Signs From All Around – Andie Eygenraam
Proof - Amanda Read
Gifts from Heaven – Tammy Arbour
Who I am Meant to Be - Andie Eygenraam
Box - Nadine Wagner
My Spiritual Diet - Norm Eygenraam
In This Moment – Andie Eygenraam
Here's to 2022! - Amanda Read
Expanding Love Meditation
Love Heals – Andie Eygenraam
Trust - Denise Beaulieu
In Another's Eyes - Andie Eygenraam
Gratitude & Love Meditation

p. 164 - Bios & Image Credits

Understanding Love



Art ©JQK Creations "Soul Seeking"

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 of

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

The 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.

When You Love

When you love peripheral vision disappears, the focus is on the one you love.

When you love like you've never been hurt and never felt tears on your face from another time when you loved.

When you love and you forgive because you love.

When you love for all the wrong reasons and realize there are no wrong reasons to love.

When you love so much that it hurts and you wonder if it is love at all, except the hurt may be letting go, because that is a part of when you love.

When you love but have to leave because love is not always enough.

When you love so there is no 'you' or 'I' but only 'us,' and our love.

When you love yourself enough to know that you are okay, that you are enough, that you are loved.

When you love against hope, against reason, against common sense, and against expectations.

When you love because loving is right and the only insanely sane thing to do in this crazy, mad world.



Art ©JQK Creations "Blessings from Above"

An Invitation to Love

When I open my heart to love; I give wonder and joy to the people, the spaces and the voyages we all travel on. When I open my heart to love; I am deepened by the vast array of love and the many expressions this brings.

Some say love a little. I love a lot. I love hard. I love unforgettably in detailed magnificence, but no I don't recall getting that love back. I am loved by an omnipresence, which made me unique in my own way. I carve signs and sign on a dotted line of your heart; with the love I portray.

My love is crazy, unforgiving and unwritten. My love is just and a cautionary tale of my life's journey. My mind is in flux but my heart is full. My love is pure. Unheard whispers in the night fog, a dewy petal dropped. It was carrying an ant in the whisk of a breeze, guiding it to where it was meant to be. The ant drowned but fear not, what a rush for all those elements to all come together, whether a little or a lot.

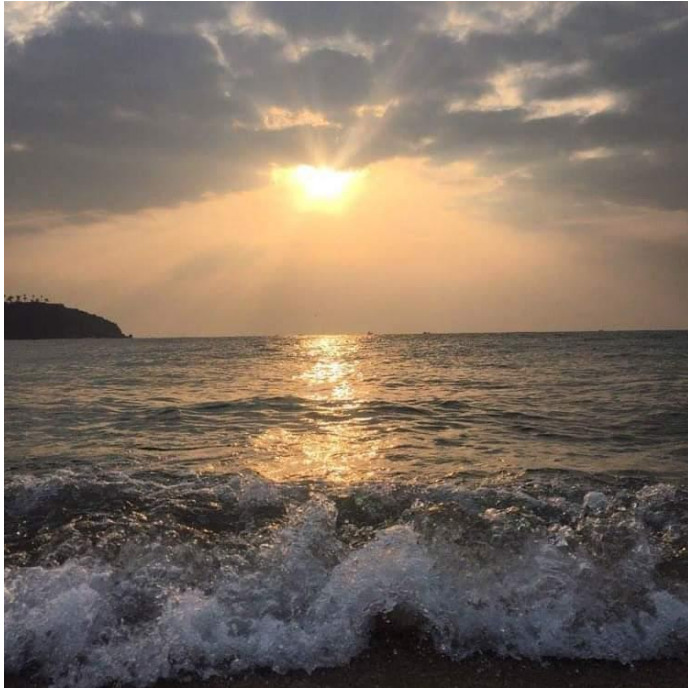
This journey is joyous. So don't be laden in your own teardrops, for your sad heart mends and the tear ducts drain, but my dear don't stay stuck in the rain. Tomorrow is a new day and yesterday has gone but faith still remains that love will be the same.

It is in my DNA coding and I have tried to change, but I reckon that I will find myself in love once again. I put a pen to paper and let this pen melt the page with my feelings, oh, so insane.

I mustered this hunger from pride, to privacy to just locking it up with a key and throwing it away, only to have my love go away, till my spirit jumps from my skin and I try to write again. Woe is me; my heart is spinning once again.

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.



Lightdrops

As the rain poured down heavy on my heart
The troubles of yesterday were washed away
A fresh start with the new day
I could release the heaviness to the rain

The full moon shone brightly through the clouds
Allowing letting go, release
Finding freedom as the weather raged

Mother nature's tears trying to cleanse the earth
To wash away the pain and darkness

Sending love to all corners of this round planet
I watched the rain pool and collect
The individual raindrops merging together
Reminders that ultimately, we are all one

The sun rose behind the clouds
Whether we saw it or not, it was there
Trusting, having faith in the light of the sun shining over the earth
And in the stars, small twinkles of light in the darkness

There is always light when we look for it
We just need to remember to look

The Modern Quest for True/Real Love

The last few decades have blown open holes in what we've defined and accepted as "love"—especially the past 10 years or so. The meaning of "love" is being redesigned in a way that is more inclusive, more a representation of what it truly is. Love is shifting and changing in the human consciousness, or so it seems—at least in the world I see.

We are discovering that what many of us knew as love—or were taught was love when we were growing up—wasn't actually anywhere near what love truly is.

Love isn't ownership. It's not singularly focused. It's not jealous or manipulative. Love doesn't keep score.

Love is not about possession; love is about mutual growth and caring. Love doesn't minimize; love cracks you wide open. And, while love accepts you for who you are, it encourages you to become better and achieve your fullest potential. Love isn't going to put up with your bullshit excuses and bad behaviour. Real love requires more from you.

Love doesn't hold back from telling you the truth or pointing out places where you can improve. Love does so with kindness and compassion though, not criticism and judgement. Love has an eye on your best self, shining through. Love wants you to live up to the potential it sees in you, whether or not you see it in yourself.

When you find true love, it might touch on all your pain points, causing them to flare brightly before they burn away. Things like jealousy, envy, and even self-depreciation will be replaced by openness, inspiration, and self-love.

You might find yourself questioning your thoughts about what love means, what it is to you... and that's a good thing, not a bad one.

That doesn't mean love should hurt though, or that you should tolerate disrespect or infidelity.

It means that you understand your partner is not the only person you should talk to or turn to for support and guidance—and your partner should be free to have other loving connections as well. You are both individual people in what should be a web of a loving, nurturing network of friends, relatives, and colleagues.

You see, love doesn't only happen between romantic partners. It happens between family members and friends. Love can happen between people and the entities/beings they share their lives with, including pets and plants. Love happens with situations, places, and dreams as well.

So back to what love is... Love is hard to define, that's for sure.

Love can be platonic. Love can be a mood or feeling. Love can be a way of being, a lifestyle choice.

Love is caring. Love is nurturing. Love is supportive.

Love doesn't have to be reciprocated, either. This is a HUGE A-HA moment for many people. It can be given without a need or expectation to be loved in return. That can be hard to fathom because we've been taught that love given should equal love received. That's simply not the case.

And it's good that it isn't, because... unconditional love.

Unconditional love is the goal many of us learned to strive for. Unconditional, when abuse is involved. Unconditional when intolerance is involved. Unconditional when bullying is involved. Unconditional enough to overlook toxicity.

We're moving into an era where unconditional love that accepts all and everything is being replaced with discernment and self-love.

And that is a big swing from one side of the spectrum to the other. Some aren't handling it well—especially those who comprehend love with old-paradigm thinking. It's not a hierarchy anymore. It's not control and ownership.

It's freedom and acceptance, for the most part. It's *mutual* respect.

The mutual part is new. Respect didn't seem to flow downward in relationships—at least from what I've seen in society.

Self-love seems kind of new, too—an offshoot of the self-help movement, tied to feminism and rejection of “societal norms in love” that were more harmful than good.

Luckily, societal norms are shifting. People are getting honest about their feelings. We are learning so much about love and about ourselves in the process. It’s beautiful to watch it unfold.

You deserve real love. Happiness. Acceptance. Understanding. Support. You deserve to be treated with respect and kindness. To me, that’s really what love is. I hope you find it often and enjoy it while it lasts.



Art ©JQK Creations “I Feel You”

Coming Home to Love

When the world feels like it's falling down around me
And I feel lost and alone, helpless losing hope,
I write

I forgot that helped heal me inside
So I can deal better with the outside
Because lately, I haven't been dealing at all

I've been escaping, distracting, sabotaging
Making it all crumble down further
But maybe all I need to do
To make sense of a senseless situation
Is just focus my thoughts and write

I help so many others write
Yet I forget to do that myself
I come home to me when I start letting the words flow
The world disappears for a little bit
But in a healthy way
It gets processed, healed

Thoughts and words align providing comfort
When the world outside is in chaos
I can calm myself inside and heal

If I'm whole, things can make sense
Then, I can help others put themselves back too
Together, we can be one
And spread love to all the corners of the world
That so badly need it right now

We are all made of love
We can come home to love
We can remember love

Is It a Loss?

I'm not sure that everyone that you lose in life is a loss. Losing a loved one is devastating but what about when the person you are losing was the source of mental pain and abuse? Is it going to be a loss?

It's such a confusing feeling standing by the bedside of your abuser giving care to them as they lay dying, suffering and vulnerable. You're still desperately trying to get their approval. You know in your heart that no apology or explanation is going to be forthcoming. You are sad and grieving what could have been, but there is no time left to change things now. There is no opportunity to make things different and it's breaking your heart.

You make yourself feel better by still making excuses for them. You try to rationalize the abuse. Maybe it was the addiction, the mental illness, the damaged person. It was the way they lived their life and you accepted all of this and loved them. You loved them for their good parts.

This person was not one hundred percent bad. There is grief and sadness for the loss of those good parts that you loved.

Maybe we can't forgive entirely and that's okay.

Now is not the time for resentments and anger.

Now is the time to open up our hearts to love.

Love that person that you are connected to in this life. There's a strength in that connection.

It's okay to be sad and grieve even if you're not sure if losing them is going to be a loss.

Love?

My love is plenty, my love is empty. I love so many but for so long I have neglected myself. Self-love and Self-discipline are one and the same. I don't want to live in regret. I have had plenty of that my whole life. I love it so much that sometimes it hurts. I love food and I also love doing nothing sometimes.

My self-regulation, though distracted sometimes, leaves me living for the moment for when I find the love that I am seeking; I also run from it at the same time. Weakness in the knees, displeased with conversation looking for that mind elevation, you know--that higher love.

Love where you count her dimples and look at the beautiful sundress impressing upon you. Hair flowing in the wind, lips glistening, being sun-kissed in the mist. The lotion on her skin, reflecting the true beauty of god's vision of the goddess she is. For goodness sake, calm down boy.

The love you have for your siblings, for you call them names and hate them sometimes. Someone else calls them a name and you are there to punch them out for they said the same.

Love is messy. Love is a message. I love the movies, for the screen paints pictures and images of a love that is not what you have. You trap yourself into a vision of the love being that, but you are not love. You are made from love and you will go back to love but have to have love in these days to come. The world is divided but you will bring them back with this sage for love.

Love for sale, don't shame them. Love for hire. That is where I work. Love on standby. I reckon this second; fear has clouded your judgement. I refrain from using words like justice for the lost. I am trapped in harnessing this morality but I love immorally. The moral of this historical aphrodisiac is that I love you.

Go forth and be of love, find your love and be from love so that you may back yourself to a corner and go back to love and your spirit may be planted so that you may be brought to life and grow back from love.

Santa Can You Hear Me?

Christmas is coming
I can hear the sleigh bells draw near
I know this Christmas will be different
Than all the other ones I've known

But the magic is still alive in my heart
The lights will soon all be lit
Creativity will come out to find new ways
To share the cheer we always hold so dear

It cannot kill the love
It cannot kill the sparkle
People are resilient and have proven they won't stay down
They need connection, they need joy

So even if it must look different for now
We will find a way
For even the Scrooge and the Grinch were transformed by
Christmas magic
So I do believe

Santa do you hear my wish?
Santa don't leave anyone behind
Bring joy to the lonely and the sad
Remind them they are loved and not forgotten

Now more than ever we need connection
We need love and we need hope
Santa can you hear me?
I believe in you and need your help

Bring food for the hungry
Clothes for the cold
Shelter for the unsafe out there on their own
Please wrap the hurting in your love

Help the unhealthy heal
Connect the families that need caring
And help the homeless have hope that someone cares
And they are not forgotten

Share peace and calm and sustenance with the animals
Scared and displaced
Give warmth to the weary
And the magic of Christmas to the Children

Help all those scared, helpless, hopeless and alone
Let them make it through the toughest season of them all
In one of the toughest years of them all
We don't need the extra layer making an already tough time
tougher

So I beg you, Santa, can you hear me?
I believe in you and need your help...
I know Christmas is coming
I can hear the sleigh bells draw near...

The Beauty of Impermanence

The beauty of impermanence is a reminder that nothing stays the same, good or bad. We never know when it may be our final moment with someone that we hold dear, or our last experience getting to enjoy that 100,000-person event, or our last first kiss with our forever person, or the first moment we hear our healthy newborn baby cry.

These are all so important to treasure. Love beyond sight embodies a feeling, the memories, the treasured moments tucked away in our DNA to warm us on the toughest days, in the hardest moments. We dare to have the courage to love and embrace the joy of synchronistic meetings. We have the love of our family, however, we define that. And we are definitely all spiritually connected and it is my opinion that we are never truly at a point of fully understanding love.

I've said goodbye to some very special beings throughout the short publishing journey of this book. While they may not be physically with me anymore for me to see them, touch them, hold them; their love is now beyond sight and I feel it in the memories in my heart and soul. I hold these special moments close when I feel sad, so I can honour the moments we did have. I can honour who they were and the love and light they brought to this world to share.

I have seen firsthand that when impermanence comes, that love and light are what continue shining long after we are gone. Our loved ones' hearts glow with it, and in that, who we are continues on.

Everything is impermanent, yet also very permanent.

While our form may change, the energy we embody always remains in one form or another. While it may be so devastating for us here in physical form to lose someone dear to us, may we find comfort in their memories, in holding their light close and continuing to share their essence with the world, and know they are never far away.

With all the special synchronicities shared in this book, I hope it helps you realize how connected we all really are, even after physical death. We are all truly made of love, and as Darcy and the Beatles shared, love is all you need.

While impermanence can be hard and painful, it also is how we learn and grow. We aren't meant to stay the same, we are meant to live experiences, meet new people, and find beauty in everyday moments. When we look for

LOVE
BEAUTY
JOY
GRATITUDE

We will find it all around us. When we embrace the fact that life, by its nature, is impermanent, we can find a bit of gentleness, grace and softness in every day, allowing people to be humanly imperfect, embracing all the flaws and humanity we GET TO experience every day, and maybe find peace in that beauty.

That certainly isn't a reason to stay in toxic or abusive situations. I am THE FIRST ONE to offer someone help out of that, because I know how hard it can be to leave, and how alone you can feel. But it, too, is meant to be impermanent. While it may seem scary, messy and overwhelming in the moment, that moment too will pass, and in hindsight, weeks or maybe years later, you will see the beautiful resilience, strength, and courage you formed inside, and gratitude for the beauty of impermanence.

If you are struggling tonight, please know you are not alone. You do not need to give up. There is always a small ember of light to be fanned and ignite the fire inside again. As long as you don't snuff it out. Reach out and let someone help you fan that ember and remember, however tough it is in this moment, it is impermanent. We can find the beauty together.

Love of
Family

Love Eternal

How do we know that love is everlasting? When we lose a loved one, we feel the loss so deep. It is so difficult, if not impossible, to truly describe to others how it actually feels.

Love is the most powerful energy in the universe and is eternal. How do I know that? Let me tell you about my daughter....

My only daughter, Alyshia, (aka.Rosie), transitioned to the other side on February 2, 2014. She was 23 years old, healthy and living her best life. She was murdered.

Devastation does not completely describe how the loss of Alyshia felt to myself and our whole family. I do not think a word exists in the English language to accurately describe it, to be honest.

While still numb and in deep grief, my first birthday without Alyshia arrived 7 weeks after she passed. I was not looking forward to celebrating or even acknowledging the day. You see, Alyshia and I always celebrated our birthdays together and she always made my birthday special, as I did for her.

I would call her a week before my actual birthday and remind her every single day to not forget until my actual birthday arrived. It would drive her crazy, but she would laugh and tell me “Mom, you should get some professional help to deal with this issue”. It was funny to us and our special little thing we did to each other every year.

Knowing that this year it was not going to happen, made me feel so very sad and reminded me of just one more thing that was taken away from me.

The morning of my birthday, I was in that foggy, just-waking-up-stage, and really did not want to face the day. Suddenly, I felt my hand being squeezed; I thought I was dreaming.

I asked my husband if I was awake and he said, 'Yes, I think so.' I did not dare move. I wanted to focus more on what was actually happening. I could hardly believe it! Then I felt another squeeze, and I knew I was awake and that what was happening, was very real.

I recognized the little hand as being the hand of my little Rosie. She was 5'2 and about 110 lbs. Her tiny hand was not letting go. It was amazing to feel her again.

I would not move and was overcome with joy, sadness, and gratitude, all at once. Rosie was making sure that I knew she would never miss my birthday....ever.

I wanted this beautiful moment to last forever as you can imagine. I laid there taking it all in as an incredible experience of feeling the eternal love that still existed between us. It was actually tangible. Wow!! How could she be doing this? I asked myself. She has not been gone very long!

'Love' was the answer I felt so clear and without question. She wanted me to know that she was still very present and aware of my life, my birthday and my desperate need to feel her and know she would never really leave me. She was just in a different dimension, but still very much alive. She was loving me still and it was, and is, the most beautiful birthday gift I have ever received to this day.

She has continued to show up over and over to me, my husband, my son and many others. We are all open to her energy and love. You see, death is a transition, not an ending. Our loved ones will remain around us and they will make themselves known if you are open to it. All you need to do is ask them and they will show you so many signs that will help you in your grief. They'll help you move towards a life of joy in spite of the loss, pain and sadness.

She has let me know that she is very much alive and very present in all of our lives. She is whole, healed, happy and surrounded by pure love. It makes me grateful, happy and proud all at the same time. I always say that her energy and presence are truly the oxygen that I need to live.

My wish is that anyone who reads this true account finds some hope, healing, clarity and connection related to the loss of a loved one who has crossed over.

You will meet again and love is eternal. Your loved ones will relentlessly try to help you because their love is what leads them. You will meet again because the gold cord of love connects us all for eternity. I hope you find some comfort in knowing this truth.



A Woman to Admire

To the air, the ground, and all around.
Speaking many words, without a sound.
Strength, endurance and determination,
Witnessed on the journey you take.
Touching lives in a moment,
Make no mistake.
Seasons are no matter, being loved by all.
Your grace and beauty are an automatic recall.
Within our hearts, you will always be thriving,
In our memories, you are alive.
Among family and friends you are ...
A WOMAN TO ADMIRE!!!

This poem is dedicated to the memory of my mother,

Norah Wagner – May 17, 1950 – July 29, 2013



Ode to My Dad

It was in March of 2021. Depression hit me quite hard and I was drowning in self-pity. It had become easier to neglect my passions and not to call anyone. I received calls and made the best of my connections. I gave love. I gave time and I remained patient. My heart was heavy. I didn't know why? I can't explain the lost connections. Fragments in detection, trying to maintain the love I have left but missing my old self in a distant recollection of who I am, and who I used to be, comparing the two.

The first call was at noon. My sister was crying for the five minutes that we were on the phone. Quickly reaching to a place of peace, as if the rest for his soul provided us peace somehow? I let my observation go. My curiosity with human emotions always set me up for tears, not for my dearly departed father at the time, but the tears for my sister. It is hard to not cry at the moment. These words I write for meaning and significance, more than for relevance.

Floods of feelings added to my sadness. I had a few calls from my uncle in Toronto who sponsored me to Canada. My ex-wife called, and another uncle, my brother, and though I tried to be there for my mother nobody answered the phone.

At this point, something different happened. There was a peace and calm that came over me between the tears and the memories that were not clear. I love my family. Through the pain and hardship of being distant, I remained relevant and persistent with the responsibilities that are bestowed upon me as the oldest of my clan.

The hardest of this for me, and the significance of this piece I write, is this: Out of 40 years, my father had only 9 years of raising me, what this did, I will share in another story.

Caught between two worlds. The words unsaid: I thank you, for you are my old man. I love you, for you raised us with love. I wish that the toxic masculinity did not get in the way. I wish that we had open communication so I could say the words I needed to say.

As men, we were both cowards in a way. I grew up in a culture of discipline and creed. I lost my way so many times, but this is still what I choose to say. I have learned things that I will implement and share with my offspring. I am grateful you met your granddaughter Asmo. Know that I hate the heaviness that I have, but I have lived with it so long that your wife and offspring will be in good hands.

Most important of all, rest knowing the magnificence of your firstborn, riddled with trauma and depression but I carry on. You did your best, and my losing you, makes me want to be a better father for my daughter. We can't get yesterday back. All we have is today. I can share all the pieces of my anger, and all the things that I wish I could change.

Regardless of all this, I remain hopeful, for I lost a portion of my life and time, but I am not lost. I have so many looking out for me. I am also looking out for so many. Thank you for your guardianship. Thank you for everything you did. Know that I will carry your name and take it to the greatest heights that I can.

“Ode to My Dad”. It is meant to be a song, a thing of beauty, but I feel so loved knowing that I have a historical presence in this life we are living. I was raised by a village; you were the head of the house. The leader of the household. Maybe I will learn Italian, to commemorate the colonizers of our country. I will take care of your youngest daughter for freedom was not given to me, but I free myself in spirit. I also free you in my caged anger and forgive you, for you did the best you could with the time we had. You also have forgiven me because expectation is a bitch but that is how we were all raised to take care of the elders one day.

I leave you with this. Believe in yourself. Believe in those around you. Be true to the creator because we are not put on this earth for nothing. There is a greater passage to the life that we want and the people we love, but I say to you this: Never expect this love back. I could still be waiting for a phone call today. Grateful I give love, and maybe it is why it is hard for me to still receive love. Much love to you all.

All You Need is Love!

I remember sitting at my dining room table with my whole family—, that meant 9 people in total! My mother, father, my six older brothers and me. We always had heated discussions at the dinner table, sometimes even ending in fistfights! At this particular dinner, my father asked a simple question to everyone at the table: “What do you think about the Beatles song “All You need is Love”? Do you believe what they are saying?”

The table erupted with conversation—well you could call it that, but it was more like a bunch of yelling and bickering. Things were said like, ‘You need food to live, you need money to live, you need a house, you need all these different things.’

I sat and listened, I was young and didn’t really take part in these heated discussions. I was the youngest of the whole family. I listened to everyone and also watched my father sit and smile at what he had created.

The discussion lasted the whole dinner without a winner. I just sat and thought to myself, yes of course love is all you need; I was young and hadn’t become hardened by the outside world like everyone else who was sitting around the table. I looked at my father, who remained silent with a smirk on his face. I thought to myself, what is his answer? What was he trying to say this evening?

Dinner ended and we all went our separate ways and I didn’t think of this dinner and the conversation until 2017, the year my father passed away.

I was sitting at his bedside, holding his hand, comforting him in his time of need. It was just the two of us sitting in the dimly lit room. I looked at him and I said, “Dad, do you believe that love is all you need?” My dad opened his eyes looked at me, smiled, laughed, and said, “What do you believe?”

I said, “Yes, all you need is love.” He smiled and said, “I knew you had the right answer; I believe it as well.” My father and I just sat there in silence holding hands with smiles on our faces.

All you need is love has resonated through my mind every day from that point forward and the impact that it had on my recovery from my struggles with depression and anxiety can never be understated.

During therapy, I learned that without love, nothing else ever fell into place, nothing else mattered. Self-love, treating yourself with love on all levels, Mind, Body & Soul, was something that I had to learn. Doing things that felt good without guilt was a struggle at times, but with hard work and dedication, I learned to enjoy life again.

I learned to be mindful in each moment of the day, to love experiences, see things I had never seen before, live in the moment and breathe deep! Breathing became a special thing, I fell in love with my breath. With the warmth that was created when I took 5 deep breaths, I felt alive and it was amazing. I started to practice yoga; I learned to love my body and my physical movements. I started to look forward to my self-care moments, and soon they just became part of my everyday life.

Meditation became my greatest self-love practice. Each morning, every afternoon and before bedtime, I meditated and felt love on a greater level than ever before. I was reaching the greatest levels of calm, and even bliss! The more I invested in myself, the more love I felt and it was amazing!

In my work as a public speaker, teacher, and peer support worker in mental health and addictions, I was meeting people, hearing their stories, and the one very important thing that was missing in all their lives was a human connection—love in its simplest form.

These people were all isolated and had feelings of being alone. They were outsiders and afraid to talk or come forward with their struggles. They had trauma that they had never recovered from. They needed to heal but had no way of doing it or the courage to start. I learned quickly just how powerful love could be as I taught my courses and spoke and worked with so many people in peer support who were struggling in the world.

When I showed them love, just listened to them talk, and said nothing, I created a safe place for them to express themselves, and things changed in them, and in me as well.

I showed them kindness, and they opened up to me. I felt valued and special; I was part of their lives, part of their recovery. They now had someone they trusted, bonded with and knew I was listening; they were being heard.

I would work hand and hand with them, helping in any way I could. Sometimes it was a long walk together outside with not a word being said, other times the conversations were deep and long, but every meeting, every session, always came from a place of love and kindness.

At the end of each day, I was filled with this amazing feeling, a warmth deep inside me, I breathed into it and made it bigger and bigger! It was love! Love for myself, for the people I was helping, love for my job. The act of showing love and kindness always comes back to you. I had faith in myself, and in what I was doing. For the first time in my life, I had a purpose, and it all went right back to love!

All you need is love! The Beatles had it right!

We are only here on this planet for such a short time. This time is a gift and many of us will never see that. We become blinded by things that just don't matter, we forget that in the end, the only thing we take with us is love!

We are all going to die one day, that is a given. So why are we not spending more time loving and creating special moments with others, showing them love and building love in ourselves at the same time? Love is free, we can create it every day and it flows from one part of us to the other! Mind, Body and Soul. It flows from us to others, it is like a wonderful stream that is running through all our lives, and it is free to give and receive!

My Father knew "All you need is love." He showed love to everyone he came in contact with throughout his life. We all benefited from having my father's unwavering love as we grew up. I am so thankful I was at that dining room table that day when my father asked that very important question! I am so thankful I got to hold his hand, sit quietly and smile as we both agreed that "All you need is love."

This is a lesson that grows bigger and bigger every day of my life, because you can never have too much love!

Gritty Love

Did you know that the Ancient Greeks had six different words for love? For example, agape meant a kind of love for everyone in the world and philia referred to deep friendship. For some reason, they don't have a word for the kind of love a mother has for her children, especially when love is the only thing she can give—and that doesn't even seem to comfort her child.

Russell A. Barkley said, “The children who need love the most will always ask for it in the most unloving ways.”

I have three children who are all very different from one another. My first was born when I was a 20-something single parent. Our bond will always be special; she helped me settle down and grow up. We had plenty of time to spend quietly together when she was a baby. I was young and my focus was pretty much exclusively on her.

She was a good baby, too—as if babies could be bad. Quiet. Ahead of the curve. She ate and slept well most nights—a parent's dream.

The baby of the bunch—my third child—was also a mellow little dude. He woke up happy and ate like a champ. He was bubbly and always smiling and he could keep himself occupied for long periods.

My middle child, though, needed much more than the other two from me. He demanded more, actually.

I distinctly remember when they put him in my arms in the hospital, freshly swaddled and dressed after he was looked over by the doctors, red as a tomato from crying. He didn't stop crying much for years. Really. Years.

And it was hard.

He didn't allow anyone else to hold him. He would scream and struggle until the person holding him gave up and gave him back to me, frustrated and exhausted from the effort.

My husband tried to step in, seeking to provide some relief and bond with his little boy. Our son flat out rejected him. When my husband tried to feed him, he spit the food out and screamed. When my husband tried to comfort him, he lashed out and made it perfectly clear that *he did NOT want to be held by him*.

I still remember the look on my hubby's face when he kind of gave up trying, when that little ten-pound boy with a will the size of the universe told that grown man, in no uncertain terms, he wasn't going to have those precious moments of snuggling and bonding with his baby son.

My husband's pride turned to dejection. He gave up and gave our son back to me, frustrated, his soul more than a little hurt from the effort.

Even when my son was in my arms, he wasn't calm and happy. He was super attached to me, but he was still in pain, screaming for hours on end. Something was hurting him, and we couldn't figure out what it was.

We tried baby massage, different types of formula, swaddling, specially made oils and potions to provide relief. Yet none came. I read articles on the internet, checked with the doctor, had tests run. Nothing helped.

I held him as hours turned into days— and days turned into nights of screaming. I held him in my arms as my daughter cried, frustrated because his crying lasted for hours on end. Frustrated because this screaming baby had stolen her mother away from her.

I held him when others gave up, feeling the sting of rejection. Grandmas. Grandpas. Aunts. Uncles. All rejected. Screaming baby passed back into my arms. Feelings hurt all around.

All I could think the whole time was that he needed me. He needed more love than a peaceful baby needed. He was in pain; he needed comfort, protection, support.

Even when he pushed *me* away, crying, screaming, desperate for relief, I held onto him. I wanted him to know that, no matter what, he was loved.

It's not that I didn't try putting him down, letting him cry it out. That just made things go up a notch. The cries turned desperate. Not only did he hurt, but his one comfort in life wasn't there.

So, I picked him back up, held him in my arms, and tried to give him all the love he needed, even if he was crying.

I wonder if the Ancient Greeks had a word for loving someone through the hardest of times—that gritty love that will NOT quit, no matter what. The love that holds a screaming baby for hours and hours, despite exhaustion, despite feeling totally inept and overwhelmed, despite everything. A mother's love.

I know a lot of people don't talk about the challenging part of motherhood, the times when mothers are a mess of self-doubt, fear, and even frustration—when their children are sick or in pain and there's nothing we can do except hold them and try to love them more. We hope that love will somehow heal whatever is ailing our children, whatever is making them cry. Sometimes it helps, and sometimes it doesn't... but a mother will still try.

My son is 14 now. Thankfully, he grew out of whatever was causing him so much pain. We made it through the hardest times together—the two of us as a team and then the rest of us, as a family.

He needed more from me, or so it seems. He needed more love, patience, and understanding than the other two. It was the one thing I could give him when I couldn't find anything to comfort him or distract him or help him sleep at night.

Even if the Greeks don't have a special word for this kind of love, it is one of the most powerful forms of love there is. It deserves its own name and it deserves to be talked about more so mothers everywhere know they aren't alone when all they can do for their child is to give it love



Art © JQK Creations "The Blue Siren"

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.

In the beginning, I tried to hold myself to some pretty high standards. I knew that 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 anymore. 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 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, even though she didn't know German. Both of us had to start 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 Pokémon 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.

Synchronistic Meetings

What Really Matters

The sunsets on experiences
Nothing lasts forever
And maybe it's not meant to
Beautiful experiences we can hold close to our heart
For as long as our brains allow
But we have photos to help make up the slack
Holding memories in our hands
Bottling moments, trying to make them last forever
But time is a funny thing
Before you know it, a year has passed, 5 years, 10 years
You look back and everything has changed
Yet it didn't feel like it as it was happening
Time thieves moments if you aren't mindful
Wasted time, wasted life
Or you can make the most of every moment
Take the photos to help them linger longer
Printed copies held in the hand
Becoming obsolete with technology
But what will happen to our memories
Will time make them obsolete
Will dementia thief them away
Concerns I cannot consume myself with
I am enjoying each moment
While it's here
Listening to the loons on the lake
The water lapping on the dock
Wind whispering its stories to the trees
Who share them with all the birds sitting on their branches
Who fly off telling the furry friends of the forest
Like a broken game of telephone
What was said no longer matters
It is only the peace in my heart that mirrors the stillness of the lake
It is here I am home
It is here I belong
It is here I am.

Run, Don't Walk

I stumbled forward, I wanted to stop. I wanted to collapse. How many steps had I already taken? Twenty kilometers worth. My Garmin sports watch would have told me how many steps I'd taken but I didn't dare glance down at it and see just how long I'd been running.

It felt like forever.

I had just over one kilometer to go. My legs felt like the standing stones at Stone Henge - weighing thousands of pounds and immovable. One kilometer was all I had left to cross the finish line and pronounce myself a half marathon runner.

I had been training for this, but it had not prepared me for my lungs, screaming for me to find more and more air. In front of me, another runner was also walking, and I felt that gave me permission to do the same. She turned and saw me and she smiled at me as we walked. I think my walking gave her permission to walk as well.

"You ready to finish this off?" she asked.

No. I thought to myself.

"Yep," I panted.

I could barely breathe. She started jogging again. I followed, picking up my pace, pleading with my legs to move, one foot in front of the other. Run, don't walk. One kilometer. It may as well have been a thousand. Watching my newfound friend running ahead kept me going. One foot in front of another.

It wasn't very long, when my legs screamed, pulled me down, wanted to give out again. Let me just pull off to the side of the road and just nap. A short nap.

Everything inside of me was telling me to stop. I slowed to a walk again. The woman in front of me glanced back to check on me, saw me slowing, saw the look of what must have been desperation on my face.

“You’ve got this! Less than a kilometer. C’mon, finish it running. Finish it with me.”

I mustered as much energy as I could possibly muster to speed up. I was moving barely faster than a walk. Around the corner was the finish line. We turned the corner away from Burlington Bay and I could see the banner marking the finish line ahead of me.

I still wanted to stop. Finish it running, she had said. Run, don’t walk, I said to myself. I kept running, watching the woman in front of me, trying to keep up with her. There were crowds on either side of the road now, holding signs and cheering, as every runner appeared on this home stretch. The other runner sped up to “finish fast.” I was already giving all that I had to give.

I saw her cross the finish line, and have the finisher’s medal draped around her neck.

I kept moving. I kept jogging. I kept running.

I was there - crossing the black timing mat, crossing under the banner that read “finish.” A finisher’s medal was draped around my neck. There, just past where the medals were being passed out, was my friend, the stranger, the other runner, who had kept me going, helped me finish that final kilometer. We gave each other a high five.

“Nice job,” she said.

“Thanks, you too,” I replied.

I never got her name, don’t recall her race bib number, and I have never seen her again. I am so grateful for her to have been able to help me run, not walk, that last kilometer of my half marathon.

We Are All Made of Love

Lately when I think of love, I think of community. The past few months have reminded me that there are people around me who are ready to step up and support me in any way they can.

Let me back up.

Recently I took on what is probably the biggest step in my business to date. I leased a farm.

I'm a professional horse trainer and breeder, and having a facility to call my own has been a dream for a long time. It affords me a level of flexibility and autonomy that I didn't have working out of someone else's place. I've been looking at farms for about 18 months, and when the right one came up, I jumped. I didn't know how I was going to make it work, but from the time I saw the ad, I knew in my gut that it was mine.

I'm someone who has struggled with a lot of imposter syndrome in my career. Even after decades of learning everything I can, there's still a part of my brain that tries to tell me that maybe I'm not quite ready. I love what I do, but do I know enough? How will my existing clients take the news? Who will send their horses to me? Is this where I find out that the people who told me to go for it, were all talk?

Apparently not.

I only told a few people I'd applied for the place. I didn't want to hear people's thoughts until the lease was signed. I was afraid of other people's opinions adding to my self-doubt.

I knew I could count on family support. My husband has always been my biggest cheerleader. He's always the first one to tell me to go for it, and we'll figure out the details later. My parents have each been supportive in their own ways. They've helped me secure financing, loaned tools, and sometimes been a sounding board when I've needed to vent my frustrations.

The rest has been more surprising. And so, so overwhelming.

I think there are many different types of love. The love I share with my family and closest friends is deep and abiding. It's steady and reliable. I count on it. The love I've felt from my community lately has been more of a surprise.

I've always felt like it's important to treat people well. To help out where I can, and to be a positive force in people's lives. It makes me feel good about myself to help. As much as I believe that we attract what we put out into the world, I've never helped people with the intention of banking some sort of cosmic payoff for later. So, if it wasn't intentional, does that make it an accident? Because that seems to be exactly what's happening right now. Oops?

My transition into this new space hasn't been without growing pains, but I've had so many people step in to show me that they've got my back. I've been overwhelmed by the love from every direction.

I expected at least some tension or awkwardness from the owners of the facility I was moving out of, even though they're long-time friends. Instead, they've been excited for me, loaned me equipment to make the move easier, and allowed me to keep coming in to teach existing clients at their facility.

People I know socially have given me things I need for the farm, simply because they weren't using them anymore. I've received water troughs for my horses, spare parts in case I need to repair my electric fence, help with cleaning and repairs, storage containers and more. Thousands of dollars of "stuff".

Existing clients have opted to move their horses to my new place and given me incredibly low prices to buy a few things from them second-hand. I've even had friends provide free legal consultation, looking over all my paperwork as I get myself established.

People I didn't even realize knew who I was, are already referring potential clients to me. I have people booking spaces months away, just to make sure they get a spot.

I honestly feel overwhelmed. Good overwhelm.

Overwhelmed with love. I feel pride, gratitude, and inspiration. All of those things mean love to me. I love people, but sometimes I get to be absolutely flooded with the realization that people love me too.

~Megan Sykes~

45

Jan The Quaker

I met her in the subway when the rain came that day
She said I'm a Quaker, Jan is my name

Jan sent me blessings of tender loving care
Silver snow white, was the colour of her hair

Dona nobis pacem,
Dona nobis pacem,

She said, I got my hand caught in an accordion door
And with my broken fingers, I went to the music store

"I asked for a bow", she said, "One I could use"
They gave her a cello, and it was her muse

Pressing those strings, it hurt like the devil
But Dona Nobis Pacem, her cello did bello

Dona nobis pacem,
Dona nobis pacem

She said, "Bless you brother" and turned round with care
I saw war is not the answer on the back of her chair

Jan left a footprint, a mark on my soul
And my only hope is that one day you'll know

Jan the Quaker, who played the cello

Music Man

Strolling across the parking lot, our ears were greeted by soft music and soothing vocals. It filled us with a sense of calm after a busy day of work and education. Outside the grocery store was a man gently strumming the strings of his guitar and singing soulfully. He greeted people passing by with a smile and a slight nod of his head, keeping the flow of music for all to hear.

As we entered the building Jamie looked up at me and asked, “Mommy, I saw someone put money in the man’s guitar case. Why do people put money there?”

I responded with a smile, “People who appreciate the sound of the musician’s music, will sometimes put money in the guitar case as a small token of a thank you for him sharing his talent.”

Jamie’s face lit up and inquired, “Do we have money to put in his guitar case?”

“Unfortunately, we do not have any coins or cash on us today,” I responded while lifting a handbasket from the stack for shopping.

“It is getting close to dinner time, mommy. Could we get him a snack? Also, it’s hot outside, could we also get him a cold drink?” Jamie was all lit up with her idea, flicking her wrists with excitement.

“What a wonderful thought sweetie!” I responded, “Anything in particular you are thinking of?”

There was a look of pondering on the young girl’s face, as she considered the question presented to her. “We need to be thoughtful of what we choose, as we do not know if he has any allergies,” I suggested.

“How about an apple ... or maybe two, different kinds, so he can choose? It’s also healthy and won’t spoil his dinner,” Jamie proposed, “Pop to drink?”

I smiled and giggled, as I listened to the suggestions of a child's mind with regards to snacks and drinks.

"Sounds like a tasty treat for a drink," I replied, "Let's keep in mind that some people have sensitivity to high amounts of sugar. What about an iced tea and a bottle of water?"

Jamie looked intrigued, "That's tasty too! Yes, let's get those!"

We continued walking through the store gathering items for dinner. Approaching the checkout area, Jamie paused at the end of an aisle. "Mommy, the music man outside has a small dog with him, could we get a little treat for his dog friend?"

I turned and looked at her little lit-up face, and said with a smile, "Another thoughtful idea, let's go see what there is to choose from." Jamie found some nice bacon-flavoured dog treats and placed them in the cart.

Continuing on to the cashier, Jamie found a bottle of iced tea and water in the cooler at the entry for the register and placed them gently on the conveyor belt. "Mommy would it be a good idea to place the music man's treats in a different bag?" the little beautiful mind inquired, as I paid for the items.

"You are full of great ideas today. Yes, we can do that."

Exiting the store, Jamie was beaming as she carried the bag of treats for the music man and his furry little friend. "Would you like to give them their bag of treats?" I inquired to Jamie, "I will be right beside you the whole time and you can hold my hand, if you feel the need to."

Jamie nodded her head and continued to smile. Pausing in front of the music man, listening to his beautiful ending to a song, Jamie and I looked at each other smiling. Applauding his talent when he finished, I knelt down beside Jamie. "Good evening," I greeted the talented musician, "We have a little something for you."

Holding out the bag towards the man, Jamie smiled one of her biggest smiles. The man crouched down to her level, “Is this for me?” he inquired.

Jamie nodded her head yes saying, “Mommy and I thought you might like a snack and cold drink on a hot day.”

Peering into the bag, the man grinned, “What a thoughtful gesture! My favourite apples and drinks!”

“Wait a minute, there’s something else in here,” he commented as he reached into the bag and pulled out the special treat for his furry friend. “Clover’s favourite treats!”

Clover stood up on her wee legs, wagging her tail and let out a little bark in Jamie’s direction, as if saying thank you.

“Sweetheart, may I ask your name?” asked the music man.

“Jamie,” she replied in a quiet voice.

“Jamie, this is very thoughtful of you and your mom. Thank you from both of us. Would it be okay if I gave you a hug or handshake?” he asked with a small quiver in his voice and a small tear in his eye.

Jamie looked at me and I told her, “It’s okay whatever you choose, if you choose to. I am right here beside you.”

Jamie opened her arms and the man gave her a gentle hug. Clover let out a little whimper as her owner embraced Jamie. “Looks to me as if someone would like to have a small treat. Jamie, would you like to give Clover a treat? I promise she is gentle. She also has a sitting trick; would you like to see?” asked the music man.

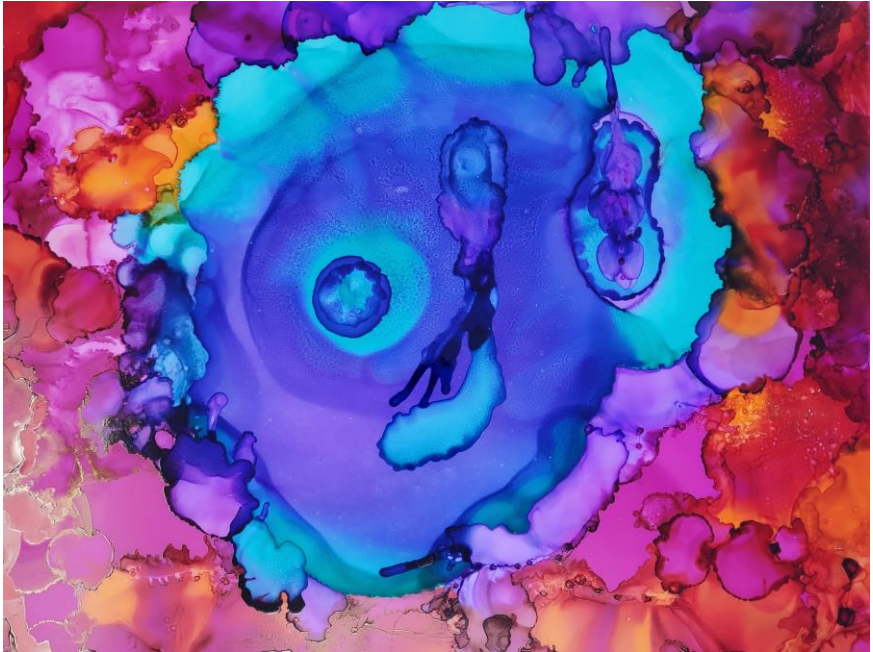
Jamie’s eyes became wide and said excitedly, “Yes please!” Clover sat on her back legs, crossed her front paws and tilted her head to one side. The musician instructed Jamie to place the treat on top of Clover’s crossed paws and tell her to pray.

Jamie did as she was told, and the wee dog closed her eyes, then let out a quiet whimper. The musician told her to tell his furry friend amen. Jamie said, “Amen!”

Clover slightly tossed the treat in the air and caught it in her mouth, devouring the tasty treat. We all laughed. Even onlookers had a chuckle at Clover’s performance.

The music man looked at Jamie, and said smiling, “You are a very special person, to think of others as you have today. You are a very lucky young lady to have a parent, like your mom, to teach you how to use your heart as a gift. I will remember you and your mom’s kindness, as I promise to do something unexpectedly kind for someone else every day.”

Dedicated to Jossie Carter, my child whose heart & mind are truly selflessly inspiring.



Art © JQK Creations “DayDreaming”



I Am A Person

Everyone just wants to be seen and heard and acknowledged as a person

There is a young woman that I see almost every day in my travels around town. She is always walking and shouting. Sometimes it's directed towards someone in a car or at a person but usually there is no target, just the shouting.

The first time that I encountered her, I was in front of my house working in the garden. It was one of the first warm sunny days of spring and the warm sun and earthy scent of the soil had me happy and relaxed. I was startled by a voice yelling at me, "What are you doing you stupid B*****?" Ready to fight, I stood up and turned to see a young woman who just kept walking on by.

She didn't even seem to look my way as she kept walking. The young woman continued to yell, but I didn't hear what she was saying. I thought that maybe she was on a phone or something, and that she probably hadn't yelled at me. I shrugged my shoulders and thought "that was weird" and went back to my gardening.

Day after day, as I went out around the city, I started seeing the same young woman everywhere. She was always walking and shouting.

One day I was walking with my son close to my home. We encountered the young woman who seemed to be very agitated as she was shouting into open windows of cars on our very busy street. He calmly walked over to the woman and greeted her and introduced himself.

I was a little scared, but she stopped yelling and came closer to both of us, looking surprised. He offered her a cigarette and asked if there was anything we could do to help. She had moved away from the road now, and was standing very calmly with us smoking the cigarette that he had given her.

I introduced myself, and asked her name. The woman looked intently at me, and just answered very quietly, “I am a person. Thank you. I am a person.” She turned away, and walked down the street, shouting over and over “I AM A PERSON!”

I feel like we made a brief connection with this young woman, even though we didn’t even learn her name. Her response really made me think about how we all just want to be seen and heard and acknowledged as a person.



Christmas Love

Christmas is a time of songs and lights
Snow falling softly over little villages tucked in tight
Blanketing them in a cozy white slumber
Fires crackling keeping everyone nice and warm
While presents overflow under the tree

But there's so much more than this you see
There's a darker side of Christmas
That people only dare to whisper softly about
If at all

People donate money and toys into bins at the mall
Stuffed bears and dolls with trucks and balls
But no one stops to think about the actual kids who get it all

The little girl with no tree
Eating a peanut butter sandwich
While others feast on turkey and stuffing and cranberries and pie
Her mom just wants her to be happy
And picks up a community hamper for them this year

It's a feast tonight, a small turkey, bread, some canned veggies,
And two toys from Santa
Her smile sparkles like the freshly fallen snow
Her eyes twinkling like the bright stars above
Her heart is bursting with so much love

On this night they feast and play
Forgetting about their usual struggles
Just for today
To enjoy the magic of Christmas
Made possible by the little donations
And love

Around the corner in a darkened room alone
Sits a young man wanting to give up and give in
The guilt felt this time of year
When everyone is happy and filled with cheer

And he can't even find his smile
Not even for a little while
He can't breathe with his heart so heavy

No family or presents
No decorations or meal

Just him alone with his dark thoughts
Trapped in his head in the cycle he's caught
When he's almost convinced to end it all
He picks up the phone and makes the call

The crisis workers calmly taking calls
Helping people find their way
They don't quit just because it's a holiday
They know that's usually when their work is needed most
His life is saved by the kind words of love they didn't have to say
Together they talk, ensuring he lives another day

Further down the street, the shelter doors are open
Extending warmth to those who need it most
There's warm soup and blankets
Gloves, scarves and hats to wear
Tonight no one here will go cold
Because of donations and volunteers
And love freely shared

The magic of Christmas touches every corner tonight
But when the Christmas lights are taken down
Tucked away out of sight
We must not lose sight of this spirit of good cheer
The hungry, depressed and cold
Must not be forgotten and need to be kept near
For they need our love, all throughout the year

Random Moments

A few weeks ago, a lady paid for my order in a drive-through because she liked my bumper sticker. It said, “I hope something good happens to you today”. She said it was the best one she had ever seen. That made my day. – Tammy Arbour

In 2013 the power went off at a mall in Hamilton & the stores closed, so people gathered in the middle of the mall and sang Christmas carols.

I saw an elderly man who was in a wheelchair sitting on the sidewalk near a bank, people watching on a busy street. It started to rain, and the crossing guard who was nearby left their post and quickly moved the man under the awning so he could stay dry. – A.E.

I also saw someone asking for spare change and a construction worker went to his truck and opened his lunch box and gave the person almost half of what was in it. – A.E.

I was at the pet store and an older lady asked me to help her with cat food. We discussed her cat’s challenges and I shared my experience with mine and the food she eats. I managed to sell her on the store brand my cat eats. As I’d walked in, I noticed a Help Wanted sign on the door, and overhearing my interaction with the lady, the manager asked me to apply! - A.E.

I was picking up a vacuum I was purchasing from someone so I parked my car on the street. A woman was on her porch with her two daughters and she looked excited as I got out of my car. I told her I was going to the house next door, and she was disappointed, as they thought they were getting a visitor! She said that doesn’t happen due to the pandemic. So I said, ‘I could visit if you’d like?!’ And I stood and chatted with them for 10 minutes.. – A.E.

I was working as a cleaner at the hospital and it was a typical day of cleaning patient rooms. There was a room that had four beds in it and it was right across from the nursing station.

While I was cleaning, I would always talk to the patients and check in with them to see how they were doing or if they needed anything. I was paid to clean the rooms but I felt like my job extended farther than that because sometimes patients felt more comfortable opening up to the cleaner than medical staff because they knew I wasn't there to give them the bad news.

There was a patient named Gary, a middle-aged man with white hair. This particular day he wasn't feeling good so I checked in with him to see if I could get anything. He wanted ice water so I got him one.

Later in the day as my shift was ending, I checked in with the patients again in the rooms that I cleaned. Gary was of course in one of those rooms. Gary looked a lot better from the morning.

"How are you doing? Can I get you anything?" I inquired.

Gary immediately burst into tears.

"Gary, what's wrong?" I asked.

He looked at me, his eyes still flooded with tears and gave me a soft smile.

"People around here...they take care of me because of this." He lifted his hand and gestured with his hand the money sign. "You take care of me because of this," and he pointed to his heart.

Gary was soon discharged from the hospital but I never forgot him. His tears touched a chord in me because not only did it affect him that someone saw him, it affected me as well. It made me realize how important such a small gesture of checking in with someone can completely change their whole day. I try to remember that with every patient I interact with. We all have the power to change someone's day and potentially their life.

The Courage to Love

To love someone long-term is to attend a thousand funerals of the people they used to be.

The people they're too exhausted to be any longer. The people they grew out of, the people they never ended up growing into. We so badly want the people we love to get their spark back when it burns out, to become speedily found when they are lost.

But it is not our job to hold anyone accountable to the people they used to be. It is our job to travel with them between each version and to honour what emerges along the way. Sometimes it will be an even more luminescent flame. Sometimes it will be a flicker that temporarily floods the room with a perfect and necessary darkness.

~ Heidi Priebe

Thank you to Kelly Hudson for finding and sharing this quote
Love Yourself Like There's No Tomorrow

After spending fifteen years with "Mr. Wrong" at age 36, I finally found "Mr. Right". His name was Dann (yes, with two "n's".) It was love at first sight - we liked the same activities, the same foods, we had similar backgrounds and the same wacky sense of humour. We'd go running together, shared a love of all things chocolate, dark beer and we talked nonstop. He was my knight in shining armour and he treated me like I was his princess. He fixed things around my house without being asked, he'd buy me cute little presents, and he was always a gentleman.

He had a couple of skeletons in his closet, but who doesn't, and I decided it didn't matter. He also had a history of depression and I "knew" if I loved him enough, he wouldn't need to go down that dark road again. Everything was wonderful. Several of my girlfriends were envious that their partners didn't treat them as well as Dann treated me.

After we had been together for just over a year, Dann suffered a workplace injury when he hurt his back while descending a ladder on a very windy day. He was holding the ladder when the wind caught it and he held onto it to stop it from being wrenched out of his grasp and hitting overhead hydro wires. In the process, he herniated two discs in his back.

After this incident, Dann was off work for a long time. He attempted many different forms of treatment, both traditional and holistic.

We were already engaged to be married and went ahead with our wedding three months after Dann's accident. He was still very loving and we were so happy together.

Throughout the next couple of years, after dealing with the bureaucracy of The Workplace Safety & Insurance Board, his herniated discs not healing, and being denied as a candidate for back surgery, Dann's demeanour, and indeed his personality, changed. He was seeing pain specialists without much relief and he was seeing a family doctor who did psychological counselling.

He was using pain medication, psychiatric drugs and alcohol to numb both his physical and emotional pain. He slowly stopped seeing all of his holistic practitioners, concluding that they weren't helping (despite improvements in his physical condition) and that they were costing too much money, given that he wasn't working.

After the orthopedic surgeon told him that he was not a candidate for back surgery (something that Dann had decided would be his "saving grace"), Dann went into a fast and deep downward emotional spiral. He was angry a lot of the time. He withdrew from friends and family, and he started communicating with me less and less.

One Sunday evening after cleaning up the dinner dishes, I noticed Dann walking back up our driveway from the road. He had moved my car onto the road, and was heading towards his car. I knew he shouldn't be driving as he'd been "self-medicating" with a fair amount of beer that day. I ran out to the driveway and asked him what he was doing. He said that he was going for a drive to crash his car and kill himself. He'd had enough of living with chronic pain.

I pulled his car keys out of his hand and told him that he wasn't killing himself on my watch and chances are, if he was in his car, he'd hurt or kill someone else too. To say that he was angry is an understatement. He walked down the street with me in tow. I was so afraid he was going to throw himself into traffic or find another way.

He realized I wasn't relenting, so he eventually turned around and walked back home. When we were walking up the front steps to enter the front door, Dann turned and looked at me with such an anguished combination of despair and hatred, that it caught me by surprise. He spat out the words, "F*&k you" and entered the house to spend the rest of the evening sitting in the living room with me, and talking very little.

In hindsight I maybe should have called the police to take him to the hospital for suicide watch; I really don't know. I know I was in shock and denial. A part of me thought he didn't really mean it; he was just crying for help.

He actually got up for work the next morning almost as if the previous evening hadn't happened. He had gotten a job as a manager of a self-storage facility fairly recently, and he didn't want to mess that up, given I had foiled his evening's plans. He promised not to attempt to take his life again.

After that, he continued to grow more sullen and withdrawn. His amazing sense of humour was gone. He told me on several occasions that I deserved better than him, and that he really thought he should move out. He was worried that, with his anger level, he might physically hurt me someday. I never really thought that he would.

About a month later he told me he'd found a one-bedroom apartment and that he was moving out in two weeks. Two weeks! I was dumbfounded. I didn't think he'd actually leave. I thought it was just talk. The "old" Dann was going to come back to the way he used to be - I was sure of it. He just needed more time to heal and to return to his old self again.

Dann did move out, and he didn't return to his old self. We stayed in almost daily email or phone communication for a while. I went to his apartment at least weekly for dinner, and he would come to the house occasionally as well. After about six months I realized that he couldn't handle the stress of living with me, or anyone else for that matter. He wasn't coming back. I felt like I had failed him and our marriage. I hadn't been able to heal him or help him cope with his depression or his physical pain.

Over time our communication decreased to about once a week and then to about once a month. About two years after he left, Dann was at my house for dinner and he said that his back pain was worse than ever. He'd slipped a few months prior on a patch of ice outside his apartment building. A few months before that, he'd been let go from his job - his anger had come out a few too many times at work. His family doctor had advised him to apply for a disability pension as she didn't think he'd be able to work again. This destroyed his sense of self-worth.

Two weeks after this visit, I received an email from Dann sent to numerous friends that read, "So long and thanks for all the fish." This is a line from "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." It's a departing remark.

By the time I saw the email, several hours had passed since Dann had sent it. It had an ominous tone and I called his cell phone right away. His voicemail picked up. I then called his girlfriend's cell phone and left her a message. Yes, he actually had a girlfriend despite all of his issues - a woman he'd been seeing for about six months. I thought perhaps the two of them had had an argument or even broken up, given his worsened state. I hoped she could shed some light on the situation. I kept calling both of them the next day with no response.

On the second day, I called his apartment superintendent and asked if they could go into his apartment to check on him. Of course, they couldn't do that legally. I told them I was calling the police. I did call the police and, at first, they didn't want to do anything. After all, I was the ex-wife. They also didn't understand the strange email and how that could be indicative of someone possibly harming themselves. I convinced them to go to his apartment.

When they reached his building, the police officer called me again. Was I sure there was the possibility that Dann could have harmed himself? Dammit, yes, could they *please* go in and check on him?!? They said that they would and that they would call me back.

They didn't call me back. Two hours later, two uniformed police officers, a male and a female, came to my office. I met with them in a boardroom, where they informed me that Dann was indeed in his apartment and he was no longer living. Part of me already knew he was gone, and part of me was in a state of disbelief. I had to give a statement to the officers. They were very kind to me during the whole process.

I was numb for the days following. I was also really angry at Dann. Not only for killing himself, but for giving up. I realize now that that was a huge judgement on my part. I had no idea, really, what he was going through either physically or emotionally, and it was not my place to judge him or his actions.

The passage of time has allowed me to see that Dann chose the only option that *he* saw was available to him at that time to release both his physical and emotional pain.

I can also see that it wasn't my job to fix him. I had always felt like I failed him somehow by not finding a way to alleviate his pain. I introduced him to different holistic modalities and after trying them and even having some great results, he had rejected them.

I used to think...if only I had loved him MORE. I could have saved him.

Now I see that I did love him enough. That love had changed after he left, over time, to the love that one has for a dear friend. I also see now that he loved me and wanted to spare me from being with the person he had become. He had loved *me*, but he hadn't loved *himself*.

We must allow love to change and evolve when it's required.

I can now be grateful for the person Dann was, even when he changed. I can also be in allowance of his choice. Without that allowance, I could not heal.

I also learned to be grateful for myself, and not to make myself wrong for choosing him. That is truly a precious gift - to *never* make oneself wrong for the choices that we make.

I invite you to look at ALL of the places and events in your life where you have made yourself wrong and turn the wrongness into gratitude. Yes, even the things that you think are horrible.

Gratitude is one of the biggest healers and creators of love that there is. Be grateful for the good things, and be grateful for the things that are "bad", because even in the "bad", there is something to be learned or it can be a catalyst for something greater in your life.

You cannot live your life for, or through, someone else. Not your parents, your partner, your kids, your friends. We can't look to someone else to complete us or to make us feel whole or happy. That's something we must do for ourselves.

You must live your life for YOU. If you don't, you'll never be happy. If you live for someone else, you will end up being resentful. Only when your cup is full of love for yourself can it overflow with love for others.

Another important thing I learned is to never wait to go after your dreams. Go after them NOW. You never know if there is going to be a tomorrow.

Love yourself like there is no tomorrow.

D & J Universe

Opportunities in life surround you every single day. From the moment you open your eyes to your last conscious breath before you slip into slumber. Some opportunities are extraordinary; they are a gift, such as being part of this book about love. Some people call me crazy for saying things like ‘opportunities are in abundance’.

I did not always experience life as abundant and full. It is something I have learned over the last few years. I used to be very concerned about what other people thought about me, how I looked, how I felt, what I did, and where I went. I say “used to” because as I sit here writing this piece, this tribute to my friend Dylan, I am at the start of a journey of healing from trauma I was not even aware I lived, because it felt normal to me.

It was what I knew. I thought it was normal to look in the mirror and cringe at the reflection, while emotional demons whispered in my ear how I should and could be better. My stomach tightening up, binge eating to fill the pain of being an embarrassment to friends and family. I thought it was normal to bend over backwards for people, never thinking about what I wanted or needed. I thought it was normal to always keep in mind how others would react and ensure they were happy to avoid conflict. I thought it was normal for me to be overlooked, ignored, and only be valued or wanted for what I could do for others.

Last year, in November 2020, that opinion and belief system started to shift and lose ground. I had a significant, gentle, and thought-provoking conversation with a friend, who is also a mentor. That conversation inspired me to reflect, reframe and revisit my childhood and teenage years. I discovered and realized that I grew up in an emotionally abusive, dysfunctional, and neglectful home. This journey has led me to join support groups and reframe my life to heal and release emotional wounds that have weighed me down most of my life.

The start of this journey has given me a strange liberation and freedom. It has created space on spiritual and emotional levels. This space has given me the ability to breathe and find new perspectives to reflect on memories that either broke my heart, or made me smile and be happy and everything in between.

For the first time, so much of my life now makes sense to me. I was not doing anything wrong, I was not unworthy, and I was not an embarrassment. I was learning the only things my family could teach me due to their own challenges.

I learned how to read the subtle signs of depression and be a codependent instead of a daughter. I learned how to anticipate a fight or walk on eggshells to avoid the escalation of upset in the house. I learned how to please people by doing things for them without being asked. I learned how to avoid my own feelings, desires, and wants to keep the peace, to be a good wife or girlfriend. I learned how to use humour to veil pain and anger. I learned how to be the referee and peacekeeper. I learned how to be emotionally abused, because that was my "normal."

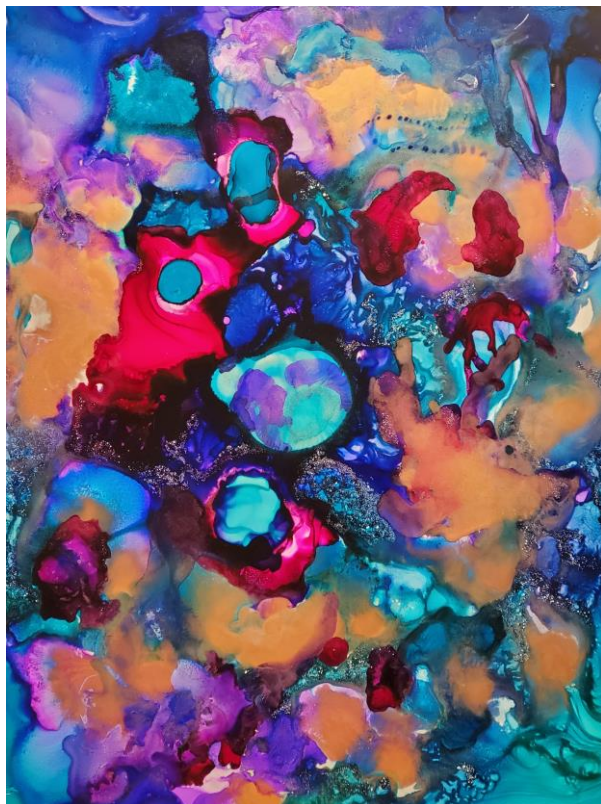
I still feel out of place, like I do not belong, like I am not good enough, despite my recent emotional liberation and a new understanding of how my life was as a child and the cascade effect it created in eroding my self-confidence and self-worth, and dictates how I function as an adult.

The trauma, pain, and wrong beliefs entrenched in my subconscious mind and soul are finally being identified, addressed, and released. I am sharing all of this with you so you can appreciate the gift it is for me to contribute to this book about love.

My story has a place now. A place where it can be shared. A place where it might resonate and help someone else who is trying to navigate emotional trauma and know they are not the only one standing in a storm of emotional chaos. If it is you that this story resonates with, deep in your soul, please let me tell you three important facts I learned when I started my journey:

You are worthy, You are enough, and You are love.

When my journey began last November, it caused uncertainty and stirred up a cyclone of emotions. It was also when one of my best friends in the world, Dylan, was diagnosed with Covid and needed to be isolated until he was well. It was not an ideal time to invite him to stand with me through my storm, my cyclone, and yet, he is the one that I knew would stand by me. He was my rock and my shelter.



Art © JQK Creations "D&J Universe"

Last December, Dylan overdosed. The inspiration to write this piece is to pay tribute to one of the most incredible people I was lucky to know and to love, and have him love me back. Dylan's friendship is forever woven into who I am today. As my heart aches every time, I wish I could talk to him, or look into his beautiful eyes, or hear his full laugh. I can still feel him and know he is by my side, because his spirit is eternal.

So how is this a gift, you ask? Dylan lived in New Hampshire, and I live in Ontario. Due to the Covid pandemic restrictions last December, the borders to the USA were closed. Dylan and I were not able to visit in person. We were waiting until it was safe, and then we were planning a long-overdue visit. When I found out he had passed away, it was an emotional overload. It was too much. I didn't know what to do with my emotional cyclone, or how I would get through it without Dylan. I suddenly felt very alone and scared.

Our friendship is unique for many reasons, including things that strengthened our bond, such as having a limited connection with our own biological families, for various reasons. We understood each other in ways that could not be articulated with words, only a look. We saw each other beyond the surface; we could see the core of each other's soul and know without any doubt how we felt about each other and that we needed each other.

There was an unspoken understanding of how special our friendship was in our lives. It was our respite, our hideaway, our safe place from the uncertainty, anxiety, and loneliness that polluted the rest of our daily life. So, when Dylan passed away, it was his girlfriend who reached out to tell me the news, not his family. His family was unaware of who I was, or the friendship we had.

It has been a challenging year not having my rock to hold onto as I explore old trauma for the first time in my life. It has been devastating not having closure or a proper way to say goodbye to Dylan.

I have not had a chance to celebrate and share who Dylan was, who he was to me, and how he has imprinted into who I am. These couple of pages in this book are a precious gift. They are a gift of closure; an opportunity to share the grief of losing someone so incredible and loved, not just by me but also by his family and other friends. This book is a way for all of us who miss Dylan, but do not know each other, to connect, reflect and celebrate a man who knew how to love.

When I heard the news that Dylan had passed away, at that moment, my life changed forever. It is only in the previous two months that I have been able to discern why his death has cut me so deep, and why it has changed me. Dylan taught me about love. He taught me what love is by being my friend. I know that may seem obvious and simple but how I came to understand what this friendship means, is what makes this so incredible.

I have learned through my support groups that someone who is emotionally abused and neglected is taught that love means conditions. Love depends on the day, the sobriety of someone, the desires of another, and most poignantly, what you can offer in exchange for that love and attention. What you offer influences how long someone gives you their attention, hugs, time, and support.

Sometimes it is the lack of any attention that skews the understanding of what love is to someone. This mangles, distorts and teaches us that to find love and be loved, you must take care of another person, putting them before yourself and sacrificing your own voice. Love is taking care of another. Love is keeping the peace. Love is overlooking when people mistreat you because YOU LOVE THEM.

Allow me to take a moment and share that I have *also* learned that love is natural, kind, and real love is unconditional. No matter what life throws at you, it means you are worthy, valuable, and that you matter. Everyone matters to someone. Everyone influences another person, whether they are aware of it or not. It is up to you to live a life inspired by love or fear, because those are the two choices we have.

For those of us who were not taught or shown real love, we know deep down that we deserve it and want it. When it is not there, we blindly hunt for love, not knowing its features, where it resides, or who can share it. The longer we go without it, the stronger our desire to find it, to validate we are worth being loved.

This quest for love leads to many dark paths littered with deep rabbit holes. Some paths lead to drug addiction; some lead to promiscuity; some lead to self-harm and self-deprecation. Other not-so-obvious paths lead to overachieving and taking care of others for the quest of love. It is a messy mission looking for love blindly, stumbling on these paths that are all connected. You never know when, and where, one rabbit hole will take you.

The hunters of love, those of us seeking to be loved, often miss the most powerful love of all. Self-love. We have it. Everyone has self-love, the ability to love oneself. It is part of your soul, your essence. It is what guides you and lets you know what REAL LOVE feels like because you know you are worthy, enough, and love itself.

Unfortunately, this self-love is invisible and inaccessible when someone is not loved unconditionally, because they do not know what it feels, or looks like to be loved. Self-love is still there, in the core and pit of who you are. It is an ember of energy that burns, that whispers to your soul,

"You are loved, You are worthy, You are enough."

When your outside world is in strong contradiction to your inner world - your inner knowing is that you want and deserve to be happy but are not receiving it from the outside world - that is when you start to hunt for love. Both Dylan and I are hunters of love. His journey took him down a path of drug addiction. My journey leads me to save others, self-sabotage, put others before myself, and accept emotional abuse as normal.

Connecting with Dylan was natural. We would talk and text for hours every day for the first six months we knew each other. It was like home. It was comforting, welcoming, and safe. It was not something either of us had a lot of experience in - feeling safe and able to be ourselves.

We never discussed it, we just did it. We shared things with each other that we hid from others. We would celebrate little wins that no one else would ever notice. Dylan would come grocery shopping with me via video chat. We would go for walks and talk about our days, work, and the different people we were dating. We were friends. Best friends. Drug addiction, emotional abuse and neglect, and death are the seeds of abundance in my life. Without these struggles and having similar invisible wounds, Dylan and I would not have found each other. We would not have understood each other and the unspoken self-hatred we held inside. We would not have been able to see each other past the superficial posturing and masks we would wear to function and survive in the "real world."

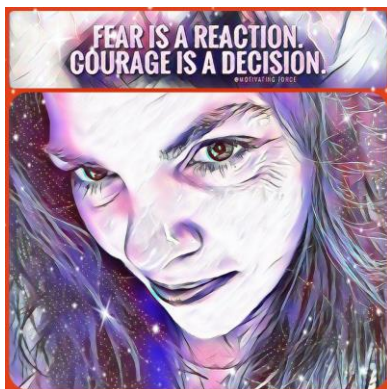
Without the darkness we walked in, we could not have seen the light in each other. We did not need to understand how or why we connected, we just knew we did, and we made each other stronger, braver, and bold. I now understand it is because we love each other unconditionally.

Love is the opportunity we all have each and every day. The love we can give. The love we can receive, including the keystone to a happy life, the self-love we each hold inside.

I often created and shared inspirational posters with Dylan. It was my way of being there with him when we could not talk on the phone or text. Last September, I created a poster and a short paragraph. This is how I wish to end this tribute to the man who taught me about unconditional love, by being my rock and my friend.

Because of how Dylan loved me, I now know the difference between real love and conditional love. Having Dylan in my life and suddenly losing him has changed how I love others, how I love myself, and how I live my life to this day.

Do not miss the opportunities of abundance in front of you each day. Love as much as you can, especially yourself, because you are worthy, enough, and loved.



As I took some time to reflect tonight, I realized true courage is like love...the more it is woven into your life in little ways, the stronger it is.

I hope this resonates with someone else...that is why I created this poster and shared it tonight.

---September 2, 2020, text to Dylan

Love and Grief

This collaborative book you are reading right now is about love in all its transcendent and wonderful forms that it comes in. Love is the greatest gift to receive, and a beautiful gift to give to another person. However, when you decide to love another person, the shadow self of love becomes present. To me the shadow self of love is grief. Grief and love can co-exist together however, the experience of grief does not need to be exclusively painful. This is my story of how I chose to make something beautiful out of tragedy. This is my story of love and grief.

I was twenty-six years old when I found out the devastating news that my ex-boyfriend, Jason, had passed away. He was thirty-two. It had been several years since I last saw him, when we both worked at Costco Wholesale and began dating. Soon after our break-up, I quit my job. Despite the heavy heartbreak our breakup left me with, I still cared for him and did wish him well.

Jason died of a drug overdose. He had struggled with addiction for years and it was one of the factors that led to our relationship ending. On the night he died, Jason ingested a drug that was laced with carfentanil. It would later come out that he was not aware of what he was taking. Just to give some perspective here, carfentanil is 10,000 times more potent than morphine, 4,000 times more potent than heroin, and 100 times more potent than fentanyl.

On Valentine's Day 2019, I was in my bedroom alone on my laptop. Out of the blue, while I sat in my bed, I heard a voice and a laugh that sounded exactly like Jason's. I froze as I tried to rationalize where the voice came from, and frankly, why did I think of him? I hadn't seen or heard from Jason in years! However, I smiled at the memory, and hoped Jason was well.

Being curious and equally freaked out about the mysterious voice I had just heard out of nowhere, I decided to google Jason's name, and my heart dropped as his obituary popped up.

Coincidentally enough, "*Sad Beautiful Tragic*" by Taylor Swift played in the background as I burst into tears. I wasn't listening to Taylor Swift on my YouTube recommendations but that's what started playing. To me, I saw this song as a symbol. I sat on my bed in disbelief reading his obituary. He died two weeks prior on February 1st, 2019.

The following week when I was home alone in my bed, memories ran through my mind of Jason. My soul was heavy with grief. I mourned for his family and the permanent hole they carried in their hearts. I mourned for him, how haunted he was by his addictions and for the adventures in life he had yet to have. I mourned for my former self, and the love she had for him. I also mourned the missed opportunity to speak to him face to face and positively say goodbye. I had so much I wanted to say to him and throughout the years of not seeing him I had many questions but what was I going to do now knowing that he had died?

I wanted to find a way to honour Jason, but also to say what I couldn't do to him while he was alive. I wanted it to come from the heart and something only I could do. I wanted it to feel like I was giving a gift from me on earth to him in heaven. I hummed and hawed with what I should do. Within the next week, I was mindlessly scrolling through Facebook when I saw an ad for a local theatre festival that was accepting plays. The plays had to be centred around mental health. The festival was going to run on May 31st and June 1st, 2019. May 31st would be Jason's 33rd birthday. A chill went up my spine at the synchronicity.

While first dating Jason, I told him my dreams of being a professional actress, which he admired and encouraged. He also used to read my writing and give his feedback. We attended a local theatre show together and I would tell him about my auditions. It meant a lot to me that he supported my ambitions.

My gut immediately knew what I had to do.

I sat down and wrote a play about my relationship with Jason through the drug addiction, the saviour complex I dealt with and the overwhelming grief I felt after finding out that drugs killed him.

The main theme of the play however was how death separates us physically, but the most powerful thing that remains is love. For me, my former romantic love I had for Jason turned into friendship as I wrote this play. I poured everything I had into this play: the love, the sadness, the gratitude, and the regrets I carried. *Maybe Jason wasn't alive to hear in person my thoughts, but his spirit could hear it in a play?*

I submitted the play, "Dear Jason", and heard back pretty quickly that it was accepted into the theatre festival. I shrieked with excitement.

There was one problem however, I hadn't gotten the approval of his family and they were in deep grief. He had only passed not even a month ago. I messaged Jason's sister, Courtney, on Facebook. I told Courtney about the play and she asked to read it. I sent it to her and anxiously waited to hear back from her. The entire family read it and gave their approval. She called me and asked where the play was going to be performed.

"The festival runs from May 31st to June 1st. It's at the Staircase Theatre." I answered.

She gasped and my chest tightened.

"So, the play falls on Jason's birthday which is the 31st and my birthday which is on the 1st of June."

"Yes," I replied. "Kinda strange."

"And the theatre that you are performing at - The Staircase," Courtney stated. "I was supposed to see a play there the very night that Jason died but cancelled due to circumstances."

"Wow, what an eerie coincidence," I said.

"Everyone has their own way on how to grieve and this is your way." she remarked. "The day you came over to give your condolences, I almost fell to the floor."

"Why's that?" I inquired.

"Because the night before I had a dream where Jason appeared to me, he was playing his guitar and he was walking away. I asked him where he was going and he said, "I'm going to see the girl from work. Then you appeared at our door."

A shiver went down my spine as I thought of the voice I had heard that night that sounded like Jason. I thanked Courtney for telling me about her dream.

After I hung up the call, a great relief poured over me as I had gotten approval from his family and the urge to do this play became greater. The day was approaching quickly.

On the night of the play, my stomach was filled with butterflies and it made me smile to think that Jason used to make me feel the same way when we first started working together. I don't know if there's a spirit world, but I like to think there is, and that Jason was in attendance for the theatre festival. Something about the night seemed full circle. I walked on stage, with my heart beating rapidly and took a deep breath.

"Dear Jason," I began.

As I performed the play I heard sniffles, gasps and sighs from the crowd as I went through the highs and lows of addiction and grief. It touched me to know that strangers were affected. Jason's family came to the play, which meant the world to me. I took a deep breath as the final speech of my one-woman play had arrived.

I looked into the crowd and saw dark silhouettes, intensely watching me. The room was silent.

"Dear Jason," I remarked. "Today it's your 33rd birthday and although you aren't here physically, I wanted to find a way to celebrate the man you were to me. Yes, our romantic relationship may have been rocky at times, but I loved you, and that love has now formed into an unbreakable bond and friendship as I ask you to be my guardian angel for me for the rest of my life.

Thank you for the time you spent with me and the growth you've brought to my soul. I have to go and live my life as there is much for me to do. I'm only 27 after all. I plan to be a very old lady by the time our souls finally meet again. I might be a Mom or Grandma, I might be married, and hopefully fulfilled my purpose on this earth. I hope you can say to me that you're proud of me. Death comes to us all but love will always remain. Happy Birthday, Jason!"

I bowed and smiled, hearing the applause of the audience. I mouthed thank you and walked off stage. I like to think that Jason is now my guardian angel and since I performed that play, we have an everlasting bond. I like to think Jason enjoyed the play from heaven.

Since performing the play, I wanted to make the day he died a day to celebrate him as I did on his birthday with the play. Grief is such a heavy load to carry but what makes it easier to carry for me is doing positive things in memory of him. On every February 1st, I donate blankets to a homeless shelter in memory of him with a patch sewn to the blankets that say "*Made in Loving Memory*". This has given my heart great healing and maybe might inspire you to do something positive in someone's memory or maybe get out feelings that you were never allowed to say to someone before they passed.

Grief and love can co-exist together however, the experience of grief does not need to be just painful; it can be beautiful as well, as beautiful as loving the person was.

Dear Jason

****This play was performed at the Staircase Theatre in Hamilton, Ontario on May 31st and June 1st, 2019 as part of the Mind Play Theatre Festival. A special thank you to the Kerr Family for all their support. ****



STAGE DIRECTIONS:

BARE STAGE EXCEPT FOR A SINGLE CHAIR ON THE LEFT SIDE FACING CENTRE STAGE. LIGHTING ON BOTH CHAIR AND YOUNG WOMAN.

A young woman stands in the middle of the stage and looks at the empty chair. She smiles at the chair and starts speaking to it.

SHANNON:

Dear Jason,

Hi. I know it's been some time since we last spoke. It's been years – five years in fact. A lot has happened to both of us since we saw each other last. Where do I begin?

When I found out you died, my heart shattered into a million pieces and have thought about you literally every day since.

You see, Jason, there are some people we meet in our lives that although they are only in our life for a short time, leave a tattoo on our hearts that never fades, and this is how I feel about you.

I don't consider myself a religious person but I do like to imagine that we have a team of guardian angels looking out for us. I asked my guardian angels to pull up a special seat for you tonight (*Shannon signals to the chair*) because I'm doing this for you. I want everyone in the audience tonight to feel how special you are, and were to me.

So Jason, let's take a trip down memory lane, shall we?

Shannon turns to face the audience.

SHANNON:

October 10th, 2012

Dear Diary,

Today was my first day at Costco Wholesale. It seems okay so far...I hope I come to like it.

October 26th, 2012

Dear Diary,

I have a very strong intuition - I get a vibe off a person immediately when I meet them.

There's this guy. He works in the deli. He's tall, good-looking and has short brown hair. His name is Jason. He's always wearing a snapback hat and from what I've observed he has quite the collection of them.

Today I walked into the staff lunchroom and immediately got that feeling in my stomach - that intuitive feeling. I just know I am going to date him. I don't know why my intuition is saying this, but there's something about him that I just can't shake.

November 23rd, 2012

Dear Diary,

It's official. I have a huge crush on Jason. However, I get so nervous around him and I can barely get words out of my mouth. Sometimes when I'm walking around Costco I find Jason staring at me and smiling. I always blush when I catch him doing that. Maybe he likes me too? Or there is a continual stain on my shirt that I am unaware of. Some of my friends are wary of him because they're convinced Jason has a drinking problem. I don't think so.

December 23rd, 2012

Today was my last day as a seasonal employee at Costco and I think I made Jason aware that I am into him. I hugged him and kissed him on the cheek!

(Shannon talking to herself) Intuition seriously what the hell? I thought you said we'd date. I am making myself available and this man is just not taking the hint. I bet it's because I'm too young. He did ask my age and when I told him I was 20, he looked worried like child services were going to show up for his arrest. He's 26 but the way he tries to get my attention at work says something... right?

May 18th, 2013

Dear Diary,

After months of not seeing each other and getting rehired at Costco finally, Jason and I went out on our first date today. Oh diary, I write in here with a very giddy heart!

We went to Montana's. Jason told me that he thinks I'm hilarious and adorable. Today was the BEST day.

June 6th, 2013

Dear Diary,

Jason revealed to me that he used to be addicted to drugs but went to rehab and got clean. He is trying his best to live a better life and from what I'm seeing he's doing a great job. He's full-time at Costco, he has nice friends and comes from a good family who supports him. I'm pretty naïve to the drug scene so I had a lot of questions for him. I didn't even know what an opiate was until he told me. He was very open with me today and I felt special that he shared that vulnerable part of his life with me. Despite Jason's past with drugs, he still does drink but it doesn't seem like an issue. When I'm around he doesn't drink much at all.

I decided to show him one of my early diary entries about how nervous he used to make me and we laughed at all my entries. Later on, Jason asked me to be his girlfriend today and of course, I said YES!

July 5th, 2013

Dear Diary,

One of my favourite things that Jason does is he comes to visit me after he's done his shift at 11 pm. I tiptoe quietly out of the house so my parents don't hear and I rush down the driveway to greet him. Then we walk back up the driveway to sit on the bench on my porch, look up at the stars and talk.

Jason didn't come to visit last night as he went to go see some friends. After seeing them he got into a bad car accident and could have died because he was drunk. The car is completely totalled. He was lucky to walk away from the accident with minor cuts and bruises.

I don't even want to imagine him dying, that would be too much to bear. It saddens me greatly to say that he's relapsed. I just don't get it, when I look at him, I see someone better than the drugs and alcohol he consumes. I wish he could see the greatness I see in him.

July 24th, 2013

My parents are away in Scotland, so I had Jason stay with me while I have the house to myself. I did not realize how great of a cook he is! He made a fantastic Fettucine alfredo tonight.

We ended up watching a movie, and we listened to some of his favourite rap music. Eventually, we tried making up our own song - I failed miserably but Jason had some decent flow. We are going to go see a Fringe Festival Show since Jason's never been and he knows how much I love theatre. It makes me feel good that Jason supports my dreams of becoming an actress and will give constructive criticism on scripts that I've written. Jason is looking into getting an apartment and I'm going to help him look for one. Stay tuned for more on this.

August 25th, 2013

Jason found a really cute apartment and it overlooks the city beautifully. I could tell how proud he was of himself after everything was set up. His place looks awesome! Today was a good day.

September 1st, 2013

I'm really worried about Jason's drinking and his mood. When I'm with him most of the time he is happy and cracking jokes, but occasionally I see him get solemn and pensive. He'll look out the window of his apartment as he plays the song "Wake Up" by MadChild. The lyrics of the song are about how the rapper MadChild is struggling with addiction.

Maybe this is his way to communicate to me that he is struggling? But what do I do? I don't know anything about addiction! I thought I was helping because he doesn't dare use around me or even drink too much. I have noticed while we're texting his tone changes and I wonder if I'm speaking to the same person. I found a whole collection of beer cans under his sink and asked him why he didn't return them to the beer store to get some money back. He said he was too embarrassed too. I feel very sad and discouraged tonight because I really thought that I was helping him. What do you do when your love loves his habit more?

October 13th, 2013

Dear Diary,

Jason and I broke up today. I told him to give up drinking but he wouldn't. I know he still loves me but it seems that the addiction is stronger.

PRESENT DAY (talking to Jason/the chair):

In March 2014, I quit my job at Costco. I decided to move forward, even though I still deeply cared about you. I worried about your addiction and I just prayed that you'd be ok.

In July 2014, you reached out through text to apologize to me about our breakup and to tell me that you wanted us to be friends again as we always did have great conversations. I wanted to keep in touch and to be friends but my heart was still broken. I took your addiction personally like you didn't care enough about me to get clean. I now have a different perspective on the matter. I thought of you a lot after we last talked and really wish we would have kept in touch.

In 2018, I ran into people who we used to work with at Costco. They had told me that you had disappeared from Costco. The disappearing part made me worried.

Feb 14th, 2019

Dear Diary,

Out of nowhere, I strangely thought about Jason today and hoped he was doing well, so like any curious ex-girlfriend - I googled his name, and his obituary popped up. Immediately, I started sobbing. He died on Feb 1st, Diary. My worst fear has come true.

February 15th, 2019

Dear Jason,

I visited your family today. My body went numb when I stopped the car in front of your parent's house. I cried as I hugged your mom and sister, Courtney. Your house looks exactly the same as I remember it. Maybe I'm crazy to think this, but I couldn't help but feel that you were there in the room listening.

February 23, 2019

Dear Jason,

I hate how some people just dismiss you as a low-life addict and say it with such judgement. They don't know your story - they've never felt your pain!

Addiction is a symptom of trauma; it will *never* define who **you** are. You are, and will always be, an incredible person who could make anyone laugh, offered cool and interesting perspectives to conversations and touched more people's lives than you ever realized.

It's weird to think that I'm the same age as you were when I first met you. My parents are on vacation in Arizona, and the last time I was alone looking after the house was when you were staying with me when my parents were in Scotland.

I know this sounds crazy but I can feel your presence in the house and it's turned me into Sherlock Homes with researching about your death. I have found out from your best friend Tyler that you were in rehab this past year, and you were trying to overcome your addiction. I'm sorry I wasn't around to support you, and I truly think if you were alive and we met up, we would have had a great time together.

Each day, I deal with the loss of you differently. Some days I thank whatever power allowed me to meet you, and some days, I think life is unfair. Some days, talking about you comforts me, and other days, I can't whisper your name without falling to pieces.

April 15th, 2019

Dear Jason,

I talked to your sister tonight on the phone. She told me of a dream she had, where you appeared before her and told her you were going to go visit the girl from work. The next day after she had this dream, I appeared at their door. It makes me feel less crazy knowing she had that dream, because I felt your presence in my house. She told me the night she found out you died, she was going to see a play at the Staircase Theatre and look where I'm presenting my story. If that's not you working your magic, then I don't know what is.

May 31st, 2019

Dear Jason,

Today it's your 33rd birthday and although you aren't here physically, I wanted to find a way to celebrate the man you were to me. Yes, our romantic relationship may have been rocky at times but I loved you and that love has now formed into an *unbreakable bond* and *friendship* as I ask you to be my guardian angel for me for the rest of my life.

Thank you for the time you spent with me and the growth you've brought to my soul. I have to go and live my life as there is much for me too. I'm only 27 after all. I plan to be a very old lady by the time our souls finally meet again. I might be a Mom or Grandma, I might be married, and hopefully fulfilled my purpose on this earth. I hope you can say to me that you're proud of me. Death comes to us all but love will always remain. Happy Birthday, Jason!

Garden Walk

My ear filled with a warm reception, “Hello sweetheart, how are you?”

“I’m doing good. You?” I responded.

“I’m good and so are the kids. What are you up to?” he replied.

“I’m calling because I have this feeling I should go visit mom, before coming home. I wanted to know if this was a good time to go, or if I was needed at home?” I inquired.

“We are all good here. Go see mom, take as long as you need.” he said lovingly.

“Thank you, love you guys. See you in a while. Ciao!” I hung up and started the truck. Closing my eyes and taking a long inhale and slowly exhaling, I realized that for some reason I was nervous about visiting my mom in palliative care. Weird, I thought. Something important is about to happen. I put the truck in gear and drove to the long-term care facility.

As I parked the truck and got out, I noticed the vibration feeling within my body was increasing and as I walked towards the building, it got even stronger. I started to wonder if I should leave and go home or call someone to go in with me.

Then I heard a voice whisper, “Everything is good, go see her.”

I took another long breath as I entered the building and tapped my jugular notch three times, to reset my energy. I continued walking to my mom’s room and greeted a few familiar faces on the way. I found her current nurse and asked how my mom was doing, she replied, “Resting a lot today and actually doing well.” I patted her on the shoulder and thanked her.

As I entered mom’s room, I noticed she was resting peacefully, so I stood there in one spot and soaked in that feeling of peacefulness. A few seconds later, I felt a presence touch my arm and a voice said, “Sit with her.”

I placed my belongings on the floor out of the way and pulled a chair up alongside the bed, beside the window. I sat there for a few minutes and continued to watch mom sleep peacefully.

“Take her hand in yours,” a voice instructed. I gently took her hand and held it in both of mine. “Close your eyes, she wants to communicate with you.” I closed my eyes, took a deep breath and cleared my mind.

Everything was black at first, then I could hear birds of various kinds singing, followed by the smell of fresh air and a variety of scented flowers. A beautiful garden started to reveal itself to me and I could see it had many dirt pathways to walk around and enjoy its wondrous beauty.

“Thank you for joining me,” I heard my mom’s voice say and I looked to my right from which her voice came. Mom was walking unassisted, usually she uses a cane.

“Hello mom, of course I came,” I responded as I embraced her with a warm heartfelt hug.

“Let’s walk and explore this garden together,” she suggested. I agreed. We walked around arm in arm and it brought so much joy to my heart to spend this precious time together. Mom pointed out the various butterflies and surprisingly knew the name of all the species that we encountered on our walk. She expressed how proud she was of all of us, my brother, sister and me, and really wanted us to follow our hearts and dreams. Even though she would be transitioning soon, she would always be with us in heart and spirit. If any one of us wanted to speak with her, just invite her to come and talk, she would be there.

Our pace slowed as a bench came into view, as she motioned towards it, she said, “Let’s sit for a bit.” We walked over and sat on the wooden bench with a cast iron frame that resembled the one at our home, where she had raised us.

Mom turned towards me slightly and took my hands in hers, looking into my eyes and said, “There’s something I want to share with you. I am actually going to show you, as I know you can handle it with your special gifts. I am confident and trust you will know what to do with the information,” she paused for a moment, “Now close your eyes,” and I did.

She continued, "Empty your mind, so it is clear. Then I would like for you to focus on the thought I send you. I won't speak, so that you have full ability to concentrate." I focused on my breath and cleared my mind. Blackness was all I could see. I waited patiently for a few minutes so my mom could formulate the picture and open it to my mind.

A small white dot appeared in the very far distance. I waited. "It's far away," I whispered. It came closer into view and I noticed it was surrounded by something in a brown colour. The image was very slowly moving towards me and I patiently waited. When the image was close enough in view, I could see it was a wall calendar with a beautiful wooden frame. Something seemed odd about it though, I knew I needed to remain quiet and patient to maintain the connection with mom, so I did.

Within a few more minutes, it was directly in front of me. A little over half of the calendar was white with dates showing, the remainder was completely blackened. A wave of sadness came over me.

"You know what to do, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes," I responded. I opened my eyes, tears slowly trickling down my cheeks.

Mom was gone. "It's okay to cry, it will help you heal. Remember, I'm always here, whenever you need me. I love you," she said.

Then I came back into her room as I felt a presence gently touch my shoulder and said, "Take some time for yourself now. You will need your strength when you contact those you need to share her message with."

I spent the next hour crying and slowly stood up to go for a walk. I called my siblings and told them what mom had shared with me. Then I called my common-law spouse and explained to him what was happening. He totally understood and said everything was still going well at home and to do what I needed to do.

My siblings helped in sharing the news with those close to the family. They allowed me to call our uncle, who was our mom's twin and tell him the news. I couldn't bring myself to tell him exactly how I knew there wasn't much time, however he needed to come to see her as soon as possible, to smooth out the latest misunderstanding.

Returning to my mom's room, one of her favourite nurses saw me and asked if I was okay. I quickly told her about the vision my mom had shared with me and she was very comforting. The nurse told me that my mom was awake and she had told her that I was here and would be returning in a few minutes, as I had gone for a short walk.

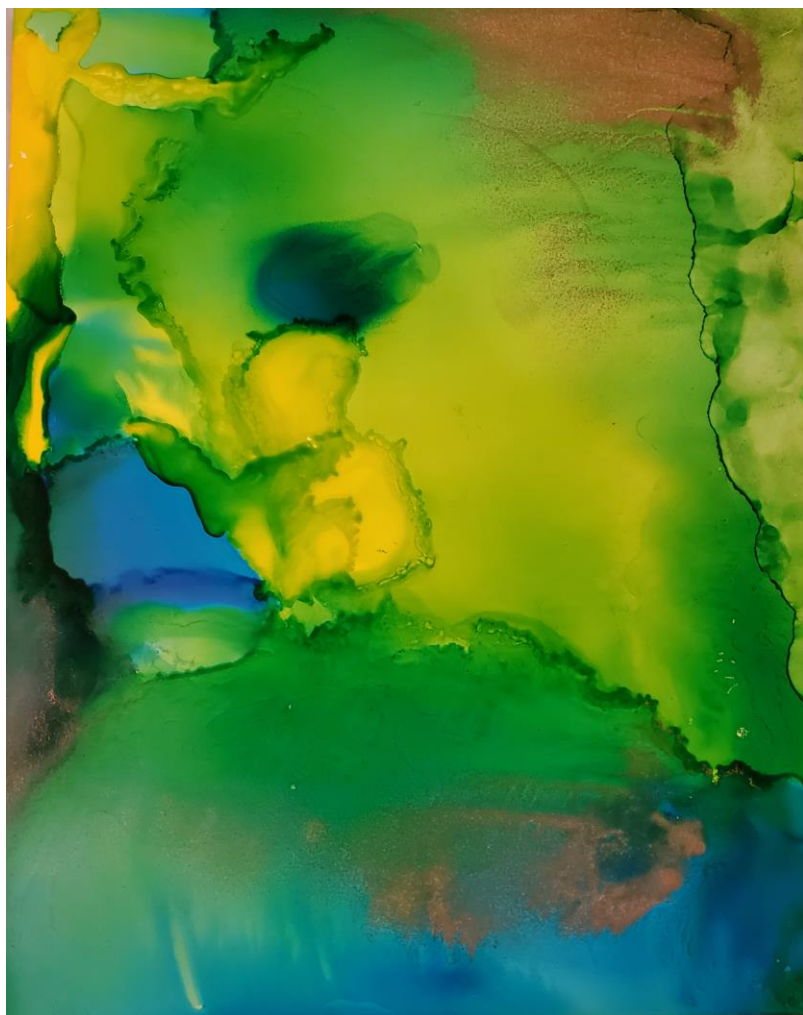
Entering the room my mom looked at me and smiled, "Are you ok? You look as if you have been crying," she said with concern. "I'm good, mom," I replied. "You know something. Tell me" She said softly. "You shared a vision with me," I explained, "You showed me your transition day."

Mom looked at me, holding my hand and said, "You're strong and full of heart." I told her about my conversation with her twin brother and she smiled as a tear rolled down her cheek, "Thank you," she said with a slight shakiness in her voice. We heard a soft knock on the door.

People started coming that evening to see my mom, one last time. Mom received warm heartfelt hugs from the few visitors that were able to come and have one last moment with her. Each person had their own private time with her and people patiently waited about five or ten minutes before entering after the previous person left the room, so as not to overwhelm mom.

After the last visitor left, I sat with her briefly. "So nice to have some quality time with some of my favourites of your friends," she said with a smile. "A nice little surprise. I enjoyed that very much."

We exchanged our good night wishes. I went home with tears trickling down my face, knowing mom had a pleasant and enjoyable evening. Mom was happy, and that's what mattered to me.



Art © JQK Creations "In The Wind"

Patience

"Tell me. I want to know!"

Instead of answering me, you looked down on me with those eyes of mischief. Your hand resting on your chin as your fingers play peekaboo with that smirk on your face. You shook your head silently, side to side.

"Please!" I almost screamed. You dropped your hand, turned your back to me, and started to walk away.

"Not now. It can wait. Let's go for a walk. It is so lovely".

I reluctantly followed. I caught up to you and kept pace with your quick step. We paused for a moment at the door to put on our coats, hats, and mitts. You smiled at me, adjusted my hat, and continued to lead the way outside. A quick sprint, and once again, I was by your side, matching each step and arm swing as the autumn wind whistled past our ears, warning us, "Jack is on his way, Mr. Frost is in a hurry this year...Jack is on his way."

I adjusted my black and green scarf to protect me from both the wind and Jack's impending arrival. As the scarf became snug around my throat, my mind started to race once more. Out blurts the question that kept cycling over and over again.

"When? And how will I know when?" you kept on walking, acting as though you did not hear my question even though I knew you did because as soon as the words danced in the air, your silent smirk returned to your face. My frustration and anger heated me so much that I had to loosen my scarf that I just adjusted. My cheeks flush, my heart racing, and my mind cycling faster and faster. I started to contemplate that perhaps you did not know the answer. I wondered if you were the wrong person to be asking.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I was drawing in the crisp air like a wave dampening and putting out my burning anger and frustration. Two more deep breaths and the slow-burning in my mind was smothered.

I felt your gloved hand in mine. A gentle tug and we were again in sync, in motion step by step as the leaves crunched under our feet. We stopped at the small bridge on the trail. I was watching the water pushing its way around the rocks. The soft gush whispering, "Jack is on his way. Mr. Frost is in a hurry this season." I tightened my scarf once more, and I took the lead as you did a quick hop, skip and jump to join my rhythmic left, right, left, right.

Back at the house, we boiled the kettle until it sang. We embraced warm mugs of hot chocolate and sat wrapped up in the large fluffy blanket on our sofa. I looked to you in a quiet moment and shifted my gaze to the white swirl which used to be my marshmallow. I whispered, "When? When will I know?"

"Tomorrow, we can discuss it. Right now, just come here and hug me." I put down my mug, stood up, walked next to where you were, and knelt next to the sofa, wrapped my arms around your waist like a child-placing my head on your chest so I could hear your heartbeat.

I must have fallen asleep, as I woke up in bed with the sunshine streaming across the room. It was early and bright. I shuffled to look out the window and saw that there was frost on the trees, the windows of the car, and the bedroom windowpane. I touched the glass in the middle of the window, and the heat of my hand left an invisible handprint that started to frost over immediately after I lifted my hand. I recalled the words of the wind and the river, "Jack is on his way, Mr. Frost is in a hurry, Jack is on his way."

The smell of toast, bacon, and coffee put me in a trance that guided me down to the kitchen table. You were already sitting there, in your chair with your coffee and book. The radio in the background and my spot at the table had a shiny, clean empty plate.

"Good morning," I said softly.

"Good morning, Sunshine. You better eat before it gets cold. It is in the oven."

I filled my plate with eggs, bacon, and toast. I sat down and had no interest in the song on the radio or the newspaper that rested on the chair between us. I did not want to interrupt your reading, but the question again fell forward as I buttered my toast.

“I think I have been patient. I really, really want to know when?”
No smirk, no eye contact, not even a pause.

"Could you make the pancakes now? The batter is in the fridge." The heat in my belly, fueled by frustration, rose once more as you ignored my direct question. My cheeks flushed again, my heart racing, and I bit my tongue. I pushed my chair back with such force that it squeaked across the floor, and I nearly pulled the fridge door off its hinges in anger. The poor fridge, did nothing to deserve that.

The water droplets captured my focus as I tested the grill to determine if it was ready for the batter. Hiss hiss. It was. I tossed in a handful of chocolate chips and fresh blueberries into the batter before making the pancakes. I made two stacks of pancakes and kept them warm in the oven next to the last two lonely pieces of bacon.

I served you two and took a couple for myself. You moved the newspaper on the chair next to you.

"Come and sit next to me." I shifted my plate and my butt into the middle chair—my left hand rested on the table. My right hand wielded my fork like a sword gouging enough pancake to fill my mouth, stuffing it in to stifle the angry words that were fighting to come up. Instead of the words squeaking out, the sweet taste of the chocolate and blueberries drifted down my throat, and started to soothe me. Then Nat King Cole joined in and sang the song "SMILE." What a wonderful piece of music that flowed from the tiny radio on top of our kitchen counter. I started to sing loudly and off-key with this great musical man; you placed your hand on mine, and quickly we became a trio.

"Smile, and maybe tomorrow you'll see the sun come shining through for you...just smile."

Jack has arrived in the middle of the night. Jack is early as they said he would be. The winter solstice has not yet passed, and yet snow covers every rock, road, tree, and car in sight. It baffles my mind how only a few weeks ago, before this moment, the world was so different, so much warmer, it was just so much more.

Even though you never answered my question, I now know the answer. When? This morning at 11:39. That is when you took your last breath. I see now that it was an unfair question to ask. I think you knew the answer all along. I needed to know the worst. I wanted to prepare for your absence.

Instead, you distracted me, spent time with me, and held my hand as often as you could these last few weeks. That is what makes you the most incredible mother in the world. You knew you did not need to tell me "WHEN" I would know when it happened. How could I not?

Instead of dwelling on the inevitable, we delighted in the moments we had each day. I am glad you did not tell me when. I am grateful you had patience with me up to the very end and loved me so much to make sure I have these memories to cushion the absence I knew would steal my breath and break my heart.

The Courage to Love

Life's heartbreaks have devastated me, too many times.
Taken advantage of me, I ignored every sign.
Attempted to drown me in darkness, stab me in spite.
Despite everything, I still choose to be the white light.

You see I do not know where this life will truly take me.
All I know is that love is a precious gift and it's free.
So I will spread it around, give purely and expect nothing back.
Maybe someone will return the love when my life has gone off track.

Whether they do or don't, my aura will sparkle bright.
From the lantern of my soul, incandescent all night.
I choose to be courageous in love, to feel in the dark.
To illuminate compassion and leave a lasting spark.

Love is vulnerable and can bring you to your knees.
And when you express your love there are no guarantees.
That love will be reciprocated, felt or even stay.
But try to find the inner strength to show love the next day.

We'll never know the true impact of a simple gesture or a kind word.
Or the healing you might have brought someone when you allowed
them to be heard.
It could stay with them until their final day.
That radiant sun in the cloud full of grey.

This is why I continuously choose to keep love in my heart even
when I'm not shown.
To be a courageous warrior in love, emanating from my heart and
my throne.
Understanding the true power and beauty of love is key.
Because love is a rare and precious gift to give and it's free.

Letting Go

My home is more a container for memories
A museum to grief, as you will
I feel the heavy burden of being the memory keeper
For all others around me are no more

If I don't hold on to that item
That piece of the past from a time long ago
Will that person cease to exist?
What if I toss their obituary?
The funeral notice of gatherings I never went to
Or at least didn't want to

Some are good memories like baseball game programs
Souvenirs of trips enjoyed in the past
If I throw them out
Will that negate the trip ever happening?
What if I can't remember when it happened?
Does it really even matter at all?
With no one to pass things down to
If I'm gone, no one will even know what they are from, or likely
even care

A heavy weight, literally
Moving with me again and again
These boxes weighing me down
Staring at them, wondering why they are there
Will I regret freeing myself
From the heavy energy all around me?

When my mom died, I got rid of so much
Because she had so much
Sometimes I wish I still had this thing or that
But it's far and few between

Moving so many times I have let go and replaced so many items
I am a new person now
Yet old stuff still surrounds me

Clinging to what was
Out of an obligation, a responsibility I never chose
But did anyone even ever give it to me?
No one else cared, so I stepped in
It's how I've become a leader for so many things
By default.

Moving is so difficult, all 40 years and more come with me always
But why?
Why am I the keeper of the memories?
My head has been failing
My memory spotty
My brain gives up in overload

There has just been so much
Always exhausted and uninspired at home
It's probably the weight of a lifetime of memories
Hanging on, the past unwilling to let go

How am I to move on to a bigger life
A life that is truly my own
If I'm hanging on to baby slippers
My own mother outgrew over 60 years ago

Panic and fear as I think of letting go
But I cannot keep this weight around me
Suffocating me with the past
Not knowing who I am
What I really want around me

So much clutter in my space
We can't play or have fun
When we first got the keys, we played
Then life moved in and my life stopped

Free when I'm in my car
Inspiration flows
Then stops dead in here
My head breaks down

I can't create
I can't think
I can't live
The stuff has to go

I need to connect to myself
Not to expectations of people long passed
It's time to move forward
Reclaim my life and learn who I really am
It's time to be me



Love Beyond
Our Sight

I Can See Clearly Now

“When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change” Wayne Dyer

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 hugs
That were right in front of me all along

Love is Blind

She walks down by the river almost every day. She uses a white cane, because she is blind. It leads her where she needs to go, and—as almost anyone can see—that need is visceral. It's like she's being pulled by an invisible thread that's connecting her to something bigger than herself.

But where is she going so determinedly? It isn't a stroll to stretch her legs. It is a confident, purposeful march...clomp clomp clomp. The scratching of the stick—which sways from side to side in front of her, carving out a half circle on the pavement—announces her presence to the world. Her back as straight as a rail and knees pressed forward, she is a sight to behold.

I consider how this woman who's shrouded in darkness—100 percent sightless, as she will later tell me—can maneuver so confidently. What's her secret?

When you know what you want and where you are going, the path opens up. There are no roadblocks, she will say.

After several steadfast minutes of forward motion, she arrives at her destination. It's a grassy knoll above the rocky ledge of the river where her backside has carved an outline from countless sittings. It reminds me of the imprint a wave makes when it washes over a rock for thousands of years.

“What is it you do here?” I ask her one day. “I see you waiting for hours. Is it meditation?”

“Meditation? Haha, no. I wait for my ships. You know the high-speed passenger ferries?” she asks, a bit dismissively. “You must know them; they pass by here twice a day before joining the main river.”

I feel a bit stupid. First because of my question and also because this is such a small and narrow arm of the Danube, I never really thought about any of the other ships that pass here. I was only aware of the police boats or some small dinghies that announce their presence with a horn blast every so often.

“I’m Amanda,” I offer. “Laura,” she says.

I don’t dare ask more. I’m reading her body language and she doesn’t seem open to explaining. But now I am intrigued as to why she is so drawn to these vessels.

Later as I see one pass by, I spot Laura from a distance. It looks like she’s in another world. Is it the spray of the water on her face, or the roaring of the engines? The sounds of the waves splashing the rocks? It’s all of this, but so much more, as I will discover in time.

.....

We start meeting more regularly along the walking path that winds along the river. In the tiniest of increments, Laura starts opening to me. And I learn that as still waters run deep, so does she.

We talk about her very solitary life. Naturally, it entails a lot of listening; she enjoys science podcasts, radio plays, music. She tells me about what it was like to grow up blind, and how mean the other kids could be. How their words stung. Her mom is her only true companion. I silently hope I’m becoming a friend.

Sometimes on our walks, realizing she’d let me in a little too far, she’d abruptly say she needs to go home. That her mother is waiting for her. Her open doors shutting quickly.

Other days, when she feels safe, she goes deeper. One day she finally explains her relationship with these high-speed boats.

“You know, they pull me out of my smallness and plant me firmly on the earth. They ground me unlike anything else in this world,” she explains. “They are my family.”

I'm quiet. I'm considering how an inanimate object can be like family to a human being. I can see she feels exposed; like I just walked in on her naked.

"I realize it's strange. I know how it sounds. But it's true."

One of the catamarans is scheduled to arrive soon. She has an inner time clock for their arrivals and departures. She doesn't really need that wristwatch that speaks the time out loud. Not for this schedule anyway. She's better than any Swiss watch when it comes to her beloveds.

Suddenly she grabs my hand and rushes me to her lookout station on the grassy edge. "Come see for yourself." When we get to the shoreline and sit down, I instinctively know to be very, very quiet, and just witness what is about to happen. I'm humbled that she even brought me here, and I can tell this is a big moment. I close my eyes. She asks, "Can you hear it?" I cannot.

But before long, even my ears that don't have her heightened sensitivity begin to take in a distant rumbling. The ship is about to round the bend. The two 2500 horsepower-strong engines of the 40-meter catamaran are beginning their long, loud approach.

The sound of the engines changes from a far-distant background hum, building slowly to an ear-crushing crescendo when the steel of the hull roars by us, just a few meters away. What was just a few minutes ago a placid, waveless river becomes a thrashing, threshing waterway. The huge bow waves are slamming against the rocks like they're in a mosh pit. Their spray lashes us in the face. The temptation to open my eyes is overwhelming but I resist.

The catamaran's vibrating body speeds by quickly, and just as quickly as it comes, it retreats into the mist. The waves need time to recover from the assault. Slowly they reclaim their wits. They rock gently back and forth, and re-settle into their natural calm flow. The engines' sounds disappear into the distance and are now taking on the gentle hum of a bumblebee.

Even though the ship is gone, my body still buzzes with the vibration of this event. And it's not just me—there's clearly still a disturbance in the force. The air, the waves, the *energy*—still haven't settled down.

As I reopen my eyes, I see that Laura's are still closed in concentration and observation. She's still buzzing too, and for her it isn't even over yet. Her sight is gone, but her other senses are enhanced and they're still lapping up the experience. I am quite certain she can still hear the engines. I know to remain still for a bit.

Finally, Laura moves and indicates that the spectacle is over. A spectacle that took not more than five minutes from beginning to end. This short ceremony is her lighthouse in a dark world and the part of her day she most craves.

I know I will never *truly* get it. But suddenly I do understand this: the small moments in life are all we have, and these are hers. The siren call of a loved one is what brings her here without fail, day in and day out—rain, sun, snow, hail. Ad infinitum. It is as important to her as breathing.

And it isn't just the five (if I'm being generous) minutes that it takes for the passing. No, it's the whole ritual of arriving early, sitting just so, waiting. The birds, the waves—it's a sensory-laden buildup to the main event. Flaubert once astutely wrote, "Pleasure is found first in anticipation, later in memory." Each day, Laura is creating a memory bank for her future.

One day, almost casually, she reveals her most profound truth to me.

She said, "I know you're spiritual by nature, and I am absolutely not." But then she proceeded to deliver the following: "You know it's as if my ships are a part of me... I feel, hear and know in my depths the difference between them, as if they were my own children. Some people love humans, some are connected to animals, I have my catamarans."

And as the late summer sun waned in the distance, she added, **“We are all made of stardust, every single one of us, and sometimes we just align with things wholly and completely.”**

I laughed a little and said, “Yeah, I see exactly how un-spiritual you are, Laura.”

I just stood there for a minute, fully in awe of her. Not just in her uncanny ability to get around by herself, or the spiritual side she unwittingly just revealed to me, but also her ability to create—and delight in—a profound sense of magic in her tiny, dark corner of the world. How many of us could walk that path, both literal and metaphorical, without a sense of self-pity or sorrow? I’m not sure I could.

Like Laura’s imprint on the shore, befriending her has left an indelible mark on my life. I started asking myself some questions since meeting her. I’ve worded them here for you to ponder for yourself.



- What are we not seeing in our own lives that become our own stumbling blocks? What keeps us in the dark or keeps our hearts closed?
- What is *your* true passion? What is the siren call in your life? Do you keep it close to your heart or share it with others?
- We all have light and dark within us. Can you connect with your own darkness? Can you transmute it into light?
- Is there anything you're keeping in the dark from yourself or someone else? Can you bring it into the light? Sometimes we are scared to be truly seen by others for fear of rejection, but being truly witnessed by another soul can be life-affirming. We all need to know our deepest fears about ourselves are usually not that bad, and are often shared by others. They say sunlight is the best disinfectant. Can you truly show yourself to another person?
- Do you have rituals that are important to you? If you didn't before the lockdowns, have you established any since?
- What brings you true joy and the feeling of freedom and sovereignty? Are you doing enough of that in your daily life? If not, why not? Can you make it a priority to do so? We have all learned the hard way in the last years that life is short and can be over in an instant.
- On the journey of your own life, are you the captain or the passenger?

Sudden Blindness

When I stood in front of the open door I was initially blinded. My eyes scrambled to adjust the hesitation as I surrendered to temporary blindness, my step faltering. I laughed seeing a shadow of a human, my humour a momentary defence against my vulnerability.

Kindness—to feel the acceptance of the person within the darkness, whose outline I see moving, stooping around their horse in the stable.

The smells of dust, hay and dung warmth: the barn in wintertime. It's the time of year when this blindness occurs most.

Yet our bodies are made for adjusting, and our pupils are only one of those parts—an intricate piece of our puzzle. We learn from them—know when they misfire to be astute enough to take care of them. Listen to them.

When one piece fails, we look to adjust our form, without consciously knowing that we are doing it. Does a three-legged dog make a conscious attempt to redeem the missing leg? Of course not, they just get on with it.

Standing in front of that door I, in some ways, am thrilled by the immediate sense of insecurity. Because I know I am capable of recovery.

Wible the Pretty Gold Daisy

This is a story about a tiny flower named Wible who became friends with a young girl named Cathy. Wible was a little Goldstar, also known as a black-eyed Susan, also known as the "pretty gold daisy" in the garden. Wible liked the last name best because it is the one that Cathy gave her. Cathy was the young girl who lived in the red brick house where Wible lived. Wible lived in the front garden box underneath Cathy's bedroom window.

Cathy was considered an odd girl because she talked to the flowers, plants, and trees. Several of the neighbours mentioned this concern to her mother in casual conversation. Her mother knew that it was nothing to fuss over, and she would reply to the neighbours' concerns with a smile and a polite, "Oh really? Thank you for sharing".

"Good morning, ladies and gentleman," Cathy said as she bounced down the front steps towards her favourite place under the big maple tree, "Isn't today just beautiful?"

Wible wanted to shout, YES!! Unfortunately, flowers have no lips or mouths. All Wible could do was hold herself as tall as possible and spread out her petals in the happiest display possible. It was such an effort and fantastic display, Cathy did notice.

"Well, aren't you just something special?" Cathy knelt to look at Wible closer. She smiled, "You know, people think I am crazy for talking to plants, but it just feels natural to me," Cathy giggled and explained her joke to Wible as if she understood, "Nature, plants, natural, get it?"

Wible did, in fact, understand and found the pun funny so her petals waved in the wind as her way of laughing. Cathy was mesmerized for a moment, "Did you just respond to me?"

Without hesitation, Cathy shared another joke, "How do the trees in the forest access the internet?" Cathy's stare was laser-focused on Wible's petals as she continued, "They log on". It happened again, and the petals definitely moved in a happy and quick flutter.

"Cool" was Cathy's way of confirming Wible did respond.

From that day forward, Cathy found a new favourite spot in the garden, sitting next to her favourite pretty gold daisy, Wible. Each day Cathy would share a story, a joke, and sometimes she would sit silently with Wible, enjoying the gentle warm breezes of summer washing over them.

Wible found ways to share her moods. Petals wide open and full meant she was happy, and when they drooped and were rolled into themselves, she was sad. If she wanted to say "yes," she would point her leaves one way, and "no," she pointed her leaves in the opposite direction.

Cathy was fascinated by this blossoming friendship with this one flower. Wible also was curious as to why and how this connection, this friendship, was possible.

The answer came unexpectedly one afternoon.

One day, Michael, Christopher and Dylan, the Smithson boys, were quite loud and difficult to ignore from across the street. More accurately, Michael and Dylan were fighting about what they wanted to do.

Christopher was off to the side, waiting for the yelling to stop. Michael was demanding and telling the other two what to do. Dylan yelled back at Michael then asked Christopher what he wanted to do.

The yelling continued, and Christopher sat down on the edge of the driveway covering his ears, not saying a word. Michael finally gave up and walked away. Dylan watched his little brother and sat across from him. Dylan rolled the basketball in the driveway to his brother. His brother rolled it back a few times, and then it evolved into a game of one on one, laughing and goofing around.

Cathy felt a wave of understanding wash over her at that moment, watching the brothers. She felt confident that she now knew it was magic that allowed her to have a friendship with her favourite daisy. It is the magic of love, her love for the flowers. It was mixed with a pinch of curiosity and patience, which most people call listening.

Like Wible, Christopher did not say a word and clearly communicated he wanted the yelling to stop. Once the ball started bouncing, laughter followed, and the connection made between the two brothers was beautiful. It was love.

Cathy could not explain the magic she had discovered that day, but she knew it was magic. Some combination of her love, Wible's desire to be part of something, and both listening to each other. The magic connection Cathy now understood is communication, listening and expressing, through love.

That is how Wible, the pretty gold daisy, and Cathy, the odd young girl, became friends through listening, sharing, and caring.



Art © JQK Creations “Wible”

Calla Lily

Warm rays of sunshine brush the surface of my skin, gradually soaking into the depths of my body like water into a sponge, filling every cell with a newness of life. Tickles from the gentle breeze are felt upon the small hairs of my body. My eyes take in the beauty that surrounds me in the Chakra Garden of Wilka Tika, as the aroma of the flourishing flowers fills my sense of smell.

Upon closing my eyes, allowing all my senses to take over, I can feel my intuition reaching out like tentacles to feel the flower that speaks to me the most. I turn my body to the right towards the heart chakra mini garden, eyes remaining closed. I feel my heart chakra gently tug me in the direction of this breathtaking mini garden, and I open my eyes to move slowly and intuitively walk into it.

Greeted by a tree in the center, I approach and ask permission to embrace, and it accepts openly. I can feel the presence of all the flowers in the garden, like a gentle hand touching me on my hands, arms, shoulders, back, legs and feet. I intuitively ask which one has a message for me.

Drawn to my left, I thank the tree for its warm greeting and gently step away, turning towards my left. I slowly look with my third eye to discover which flower called to me.

There in front of me, is a magnificent flower, standing solely on its own, poised straight with confidence. Its petals are pure white and perfectly shaped. Its name did not matter to me. I was drawn to its magnificence and soft fragrance. Standing straight and tall as a Royal Guard, on duty, in England. It had many flowering friends around it, none of which came close to touching its grace.

Its thick petals, soft to touch, boldly wrap themselves around the filaments, allowing a selective amount of exposure for all to view its inner self. The tip of its petal tipped slightly outwards to allow the smallest of creatures a place of rest. White, as if portraying a sense of purity. As the breeze gently blows, the calla lily stands strong after dancing with the air currents. What is your message for me?

“You can stand alone and stand strong. Nourish yourself with what is around you. Surround yourself with those who are willing to support you and let you take on your own growth, those are the ones that matter, let the others fall away, as they are toxic. Offer your shoulder to those who may need a rest or friend to help once in a while, let them be who they are on their own. You need not take on their burdens, you will only suppress your own growth. Those who are attentive and love you enough, will offer help when they see you need it, as they are in a position to lend a helping hand. Recognizing when you need support and assistance is a place of strength, not weakness. Accept their offer and their action of generosity, it will humble you and make you more accepting of love. Love yourself enough to know when these things all fall into place. It is your heart and space of self-love that will show you your true value. From this knowing of self-worth comes confidence and growth.”

Silence followed, as I heard the music of nature all around me. Breeze playing in the tree branches. Bees buzzing on their journey in search of nectar. Birds singing their sweet songs. I thanked the Calla Lily for its beautiful message and wished it a wonderful, blossoming life.

I slowly walked around the small garden and thanked all of its inhabitants for their presence and role in the garden. Returning to the tree, I reached out and gently laid my hand on its bark and gave it a gentle long hug. “Thank you for leading me here,” I said. “I received a very strong message and I will for sure be applying it now and going forward.”

A Hummingbird says “Thank you”

Most people are fascinated with hummingbirds. Their beauty and style of movement are mesmerizing to watch. For such a tiny creature, their statistics for a heartbeat, wing speed and range of motion are staggering. Not very many people have the opportunity of witnessing a hummingbird up close. If we are really quick, and lucky, we can capture a photograph that is actually in focus.

Nothing could have prepared me for the interaction I had with a hummingbird as I walked into a greenhouse one sunny afternoon. Twenty-five years later the memory is still vivid in my mind. It broke my heart to see, what appeared to be, the lifeless body of a brightly coloured hummingbird. He had no doubt been overcome by the heat. In his distress, he could not find his way out and fell to the floor.

I carefully picked him up and walked outside. It was unbearably hot in the greenhouse even for me. As I gazed down at the body of the hummingbird, I was in awe of his tiny legs and beak. His feathers were so amazingly delicate. His limp body covered less than one-quarter of the palm of my hand. This was such an exquisite part of creation!

As I slowly closed my hand around him, I sensed some movement. He was not dead! How do you steady a hummingbird that is regaining consciousness? The jolt of fresh air was clearly what his little system needed. I cupped my free hand around him as he slowly sat up. I wanted to assist without frightening him and support him without being a restriction.

The intensity with which he looked at me was unforgettable. He must have instantly recognized that I meant him no harm. As a result, he exhibited no fear. He sensed the love and compassion in my hands as I handled him. As his strength started coming back, he was perched on my pointer finger. It was amazing to slowly feel the pressure of his claws on my fingers increasing.

During this entire encounter, our eyes were locked on each other. As his strength returned, the brightness of his eyes also increased.

About ten minutes later, he fluttered his wings and became airborne. What happened next is what made this interaction most memorable for me.

He stopped directly in front of my face, not even twenty centimeters away. He held that position for nearly a minute. In his unique way, he was expressing gratitude for the compassion I had shown a little soul in distress. He was saying “thank you for saving my life”.

And then in the blink of an eye, he was gone.



Travel in Your Own Backyard

Because travel in most of the world is either impossible or difficult these days, why not discover your own backyard? So many people are re-discovering close-to-home favourites, or even uncovering hidden gems they never even knew existed. Einstein said, “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity,” so I figured why not check out some things I’d never seen in my adopted city of Vienna, Austria?

One place I don’t get to nearly often enough is Yppenplatz, a hip, vibrant square in the 16th district (Ottakring). It’s a great place to meet for a drink or a coffee, sometimes even live music, and is lined by some amazing restaurants. But one of its true gems is Brunnenmarkt, which abuts the square, and my lovely Viennese friend, Uschi, showed me around her neighbourhood. (Earlier I had asked her if she would join me in doing something ‘different’, and it was with much excitement that I said yes to her offer to guide me around her favourite parts of the market!)

Featuring 170 market stalls, Brunnenmarkt is the city’s largest street market. It has a lively Middle-Eastern flair, and features fruit and vegetable stands, fish, cheeses, and all kinds of snack foods. You can find Persian and Turkish delights like fresh figs, dates, olives, teas, coffee, and on and on. And even in this trendy area, the prices are incredibly good. My friend bought some creamy Danish sheep’s cheese, which was just 3 Euro per kilo. She said, “Listen for the total,” which was .76 cents for her quarter kilo. (I may have done the math wrong but she got a good chunk for so little!)

We didn’t go on farmer’s market day, (Saturday) so it wasn’t as crowded as normal, which was fine with me. But apparently, Saturdays are also pretty amazing.

There are lots of markets like this one in Vienna, but this was so much fun to visit, mostly because it was different than my usual one. Uschi really brought it to life for me.

You’ll be surprised what delights you can find in your own city or town. Challenge yourself to discover something new, or just look at the ‘usual’ stuff with new eyes. I can guarantee you’ll see it differently, especially these days when we often have to make our own fun.

When They Were Young

When they were young, they always dreamed of travelling to places with wide-open fields crammed with colour, and ruins to be explored and adventured in.

They wished upon a star that one day, someone would whisk them off to dig in the moist brown earth and reveal hollow-cheeked faces of the long dead, and the things they clutched close, afraid of parting, even in death.

Wherever they go, they take their trowels and Tilley hats, and bastard files for sharpening.

Now, even though they sit at home in front of Acorn television documentaries of others who pursued their dream, they still make a perfect 1 meter by 1 meter square in the garden in hopes that they will eventually discover the treasure.

Every. Single. Day.

Because that's what it means to be together, loving the dream you've awoken to.



Koda in Flight

As I sit in the car with mommy, I watch the birds fly by
The air conditioning blows thru my hair feathers as I pretend I can
soar the skies with them
I push my snout closer, getting lost in my daydream of being up in
the clouds
How do they do it? It looks like so much fun! I wish they'd show me
how
Flying up so high where you can see everything
It must be so wonderful and exciting
Mommy doesn't understand that's why I chase the birdies
I don't want to eat them! I want to whisper to them, ask them their
secrets
Maybe one day I'll catch one, and he'll tell me
Until then, I will watch, and wait, and wonder





The Four Smiles

Harry and Layla love to play. They love to dress up, love to be colourful, and love to do all sorts of things, like drawing and singing and using their imagination. The reason they are so full of love and creativity is that they are children. Two of the most extraordinary children you will ever know.

One day they met Gus at the park. It was a beautiful sunny day. It was summer, the breeze was blowing, the sun was high, and they were sitting in the park. Harry was smiling. "Welcome to my kingdom," he proclaimed as he opened his arms wide to demonstrate the vast area that kingdom included.

"I am so happy you are here. You must join me and be the princess of the trees and the Queen of the Ants. I shall be the Prince of the Plants and Flowers and the King of the Squirrels. We must look after these fine creatures and make sure they are safe and that they are loved and have adventures."

"Yes, your majesty." Layla's eyes were glistening with excitement. She smiled. Layla always smiles this beautiful and sweet smile that lights up wherever she happens to be. Layla and Harry are more than the King of the Squirrels and Queen of the Ants; they are family. They are brother and sister.

One day while walking through their kingdom to inspect their subjects on the ground, high in the trees and in between, the King and Queen noticed a grumpy looking man sitting on a bench. This man's name was Gus. Gus was a good-looking guy. He wore beautiful shiny businessman shoes and a grey fitted suit with a sharp white shirt and a blue tie. His hair was sculpted to just the right style, locked in with gel that made it look as though his hair was still wet, despite the fact he had his shower hours earlier.

The one thing Gus was missing was a smile. When Harry saw this, he walked closer to Gus, said "Hi," and smiled. Gus lifted his eyes for just a moment to see who was speaking. He nodded and returned his gaze to the paved pathway in front of the bench, essentially ignoring Harry and unable to muster a hello in response.

Harry walked back to join his place next to Layla, and the two continued their inspection of their kingdom. They continued to take care of the ants, the grass, and the trees. At the end of their play day, Layla hugged three of her favourite trees and whispered into their bark, as though they were the ears of the trees, "I LOVE YOU." As they walked home, Harry reached up to high-five the mighty maple, oak, and pine trees he passed each day, "See you tomorrow, dudes."

They came back the next day. Again, around the same time, mid-afternoon, they saw that Gus was back too. Today he wore a dark blue suit with a light blue shirt and a grey tie loosened and the top two buttons of his shirt undone. Again, Gus was missing his smile. Walking past Gus, Harry reached out and took the Queen's hand, squeezing it softly to gain her attention while slightly tugging her towards him. The Queen understood and followed him to some shade under one of the mighty maple trees.

"Your highness," Harry addressed Layla with the command of a king because he was one.

"Your majesty," Layla replied with a smile, burning curiosity, and a twinkle in her eyes.

"We must come up with an idea to help this poor, poor person."

Layla nodded, and it was her turn to pull the King in the direction she was inspired to go. He followed. She led them back to a bench with a beautiful woman with stylish short, red hair, a colourful blouse with teals and blues, accented with orange and yellow flowers. On the collar of her blouse was a beautiful pin of an angel. Her fingers were all decorated with an assortment of rings, from plain to bold. She was reading a book. She was smiling. Next to her on the ground was a bag full of things. Layla started heading towards the overflowing bag of things. Harry knew exactly what she was looking for.

The woman with the smile looked up. "Hey, you two, what are you up to?"

"We just need to grab something from the bag, ok, Grandma?"

"Of course." With that, the beautiful woman with the red hair continued to smile, as she returned her attention to her book, while through the corner of her eye, she watched Harry and Layla grab what they wanted from the bag.

The two went off into the royal forest, seeking their favourite three trees in this urban park; they sat in their royal spots, under their favourite trees. They pulled out the two small fleece and flannel-type blankets Layla had grabbed from the bag. One for the King and one for the Queen.

Harry spoke, "Are you prepared to wear the blankets of bounty?"
"Yes, your majesty."

They placed the blankets on their heads. They closed their eyes. They stroked their heads, feeling the soft brushed fleece under their little fingers and above their closed eyes. Layla could imagine her fingers floating across the blue and pink bunnies on her blanket of bounty, and she smiled. Harry's blanket was a bit fancier and had clouds decorated with sparkly fabric that was a distinct contrast to the soft fleece surrounding it. Each time this sparkle tickled his fingers, Harry would smile, knowing it was a rainbow he was touching.

They opened their eyes for a moment looked at each other; they asked the question out loud, "How can we help this man?" They repeated it over and over and over, almost a whisper, like a chant, as their eyes closed again. They kept repeating the question, and they reached out and held each other's hands. A few minutes later, both began to giggle as their eyes popped open.

"Are you thinking what I am thinking?" Harry asked his sister.
"I think so."
"Ok, let's go."

They removed their blankets of bounty from their head and tied them around their neck like capes. They held hands again, smiled, and ran back to the bench where their grandma was still reading her book.

"Can we please go home? We want to do a craft!"

They went home, and pulled out the most beautiful bright white paper they could find. All over the dining room were their best markers and popsicle sticks. They pulled out all sorts of glitter glue, ribbons, and scissors. They filled their afternoon creating, fueled by their imagination and mission to help poor poor Gus.

The next day they were up early and decided that today would be a day to celebrate and sparkle. Being the King and Queen of Exhibition Park, they knew that they must dress the part today. They knew today was going to be special.

After breakfast, the two royal figures opened their closet and pulled out beautiful clothes adorned with sequins, bright colours, and pink tutus, defying gravity. There were purple feathery parts and two soft fleece jackets. His Majesty, the King, chose a white fleece jacket with an array of happy and silly yellow emoji faces. Her Majesty, the Queen, chose a white jacket with rainbows and colourful stars. So different, yet they matched.

When they returned to the park, sure enough, that afternoon on the same bench, sat Gus. Today he wore a black suit, another white shirt, his jacket draped across one knee while a red tie drooped over the other. Gus was bent over, holding his head in his hands, supported by his arms which were propped up onto his knees, and still staring at the grey pathway resting below his beautiful shiny businessman shoes. He seemed deflated.

Layla was nervous as she twirled two popsicle sticks in her hands behind her back.

"Come on," encouraged Harry with a wave and a smile as he walked towards Gus. They walked up to Gus, stood still for a moment to see if he noticed them. He did not. Harry nudged his sister.

"Excuse me," Layla said softly.

"Yeah," Gus replied without lifting his eyes or head to address the kids.

"Ummm," stuttered Layla...Harry stepped closer and mustered his most commanding king voice, "We just wanted to give you something, if that is ok, mister?"

Gus shook his head and sat up to see these two children standing before him, and he realized immediately that these two children were very unusual. He took in the royal apparel of sequins, fluff, tutus, and face paint. Layla had a black dot on her nose and black whiskers. There was pink, purple and green glitter on her cheeks. She was also wearing that beautiful and constant smile.

Gus turned his attention to Harry. Harry also had whiskers, with blue and purple glitter highlighting his cheeks that were full and round. They bookended a smile that was equally as intoxicating and enticing as Layla's. Harry was also wearing a top with larger and more bold sequins of green, blue, and pink and an impressive pink tutu.

Gus finally reined in his attention into the moment. The King and Queen captured his full attention. He noticed that both of these children were hiding something behind their backs. Curiosity slipped into Gus' mind and was expressed through his words of "Uhhh, sure?!"

It was more of a question than a YES.

Harry and Layla giggled, "Well, mister, we noticed the last few days that you have been here, in our kingdom, we noticed that you seem to have forgotten your smile," Harry began.

"We made you some extras," Layla explained. Gus slowly shook his head. He did not understand what they were talking about and decided to keep listening because these two kids had his curiosity fully engaged.

Layla and Harry produced four incredible, unique smiles on popsicle sticks, like puppets, out from behind their backs. They demonstrated as they held up all four different smiles.

“Well,” Layla said, “We didn’t know which smile you had lost, so we created four for you.”

Harry continued, "That's right," and as he held up the first smile, Gus saw it was timid and shy, but definitely a smile with closed lips and a soft turn of the corners of the mouth.

"This smile is for when you want to be polite and let people know you are a little bit happy. So, this is your polite smile; this is for you." Gus accepted the smile and rested it on his lap next to his tie.

Layla took a half step closer to Gus, "This smile is your giggle smile." She held up a big smile with red lips, big teeth, and an orange tongue that sat in behind. It almost looked as if she had pulled it off the face of a clown and stuck it on a popsicle stick.

Placing it in front of her face, "like this," as she demonstrated how to use it. Handing Gus the giggle smile, she added, "Oh, by the way, you have to giggle when you use this smile. Otherwise, it doesn't work."

Gus's gaze drifted back to Harry, who was ready to share the third smile. "This smile is actually a smirk". He held it up to his own face to model this unique smile. The smile was sort of sideways. The base of the smirk was to the left, and the thin part of the lips was to the right, and it was smiling. The lips were blue, pressed tightly together, with no teeth showing. Still, in front of his face, Harry detailed the instructions for Gus.

"A smirk is when you want to let someone you like know you liked their joke, but not too much. You want them to know it is funny, even though you do not think it is that funny, but it is a little bit funny. So, you still have to share a smile, you gotta smirk. Here is your smirk."

Gus rested the smirk in between the first two smiles on his lap. He watched as Layla took one more step towards him. She was so close that the edge of her tutu tickled the black pant leg of Gus' suit in the warm summer breeze of the afternoon.

She twirled the last popsicle stick between her fingers. With purpose and pride, Layla locked eyes with Gus, then spoke.

"Here. This is YOUR smile." She held up the smile. It was gentle. Everything was balanced and even. A few teeth were showing. Something about this last smile was powerful. Just looking at it, Gus felt the edges of his mouth start to twitch. "This is your smile. I made it so it could fold, look." In her tiny hands, she demonstrated how the edges of the lips had creases in the paper, allowing her to fold the smile, so it was more of a rectangular shape than a smile.

After folding it up, she smiled. She looked at Gus and slipped it into the right pocket of his dress shirt.

"This one fits into your pocket. So even if you don't feel like smiling, you will always have a smile with you, wherever you go. Because you know what, mister?" Layla said as she stepped back to stand beside Harry. "There is always a reason to smile. So when you can't find yours, you can pull your smile out of your pocket. We hope you like your smiles."

Gus didn't know what to say. He looked at the kids, unable to find the words or understand what had just happened. Harry and Layla waved, joined hands, and walked away giggling and zig-zagging between trees and the gardens of their kingdom. Layla looked back once more to wave at Gus and share her smile with him one last time. "See ya later!" they both shouted. Then they were gone.

Gus looked at the three popsicle stick smiles sitting in his lap. He pulled the smile out of his shirt pocket. He played with edges, flapping them backwards and forwards, transforming the smile into a rectangle, then back into a smile, and repeated this a few times. The funny thing was, as he held it up to his face, he felt his lips try to rise and mimic the paper template. He lay it down away from his face. His own lips returned to a grimace, pointing towards the pathway and his shiny shoes. He did not understand why. What was making him so sad? Maybe he didn't need to focus on that, Gus pondered. Perhaps he just needed to focus on practicing with his paper smile. He lifted it back in front of his face.

Just like a marionette whose strings controlled their body, as soon as the paper smile was in front of his face, Gus' lips mirrored the shape of the smile. He dropped the paper smile again, but this time the smile on his face stayed for a moment. He kept repeating this over and over.

After about ten minutes, all he had to do was think of Layla and Harry in their royal clothes and face paint, giving him these four smiles, and magically his smile actually would surface and stay put, stirring feelings of happiness.

Gus stood up, put on his jacket, folded his tie, placing it in his pocket next to the smirk, giggle smile, and polite smile. Gus caught himself laughing aloud for the first time in a long time as he thought, “You truly are never fully dressed without a smile.” He placed his paper smile in his pocket and held his head high, smiling and walking through the kingdom of Harry and Layla.



Art © JQK Creations “Dance With Me”

Life Happens For Us

Trusting we are where we are meant to be and that things are playing out in a bigger divine plan that we can't fully comprehend is really tough.

Mental health struggles, physical challenges, difficult interactions with others, financial burdens and insecurities, “accidents,” “mishaps” and more...

Hearing the phrase “Life is happening FOR you, not TO you” was always a bitter pill to swallow.

And then one day, I understood. Something clicked. And then my heart sunk.

The gravity of this new responsibility of understanding hit me.

So getting in a car accident and dealing with dishonest people, losing a very close friend and associated drama and hurt, and having to put my cat down – a beloved family member of nine years and one of the few constants through all the perceived chaos we've been through – you mean these things were happening FOR me? Are you crazy??

Beyond the surface physical pain and struggle, was support – love, kind messages, caring – we are all one, we are all connected.

Pleading, I had asked, “Why are there so many shady awful people in the world??”

“I don't know” was the simple reply.

But it came to me that the “shady awful people” are still connected, they are still one as well, they still yearn for love deep down like the rest of us – maybe even more. Love beyond sight. We have the OPPORTUNITY to ground ourselves deeper into love and share from our abundance of the love we have inside, even more. We are love; we do not need to mirror their actions. We can lead by example.

Losing those we love is devastating, no matter how it happens. But we have the OPPORTUNITY to be comforted by the moments we DID share, the love we DID share, the time we DID have. And remember that they are never truly gone, whether that be their spirit around us, signs and messages they show us that they are nearby, or simply the love in our hearts through which they live on through.

Life happens for us – so we can learn to love beyond sight. To connect to the bigger connection. The bigger reason we are all here. To remember to live connected to love is one of the best gifts we are given on this planet. Love is all around us. Often in the places we least expect it, or from those unexpected angels who come along and help us in our time of need. Love happens for us. The best love happens beyond our traditional sight and can only be felt, deep down in our hearts.



Spiritual Connections

We Are One

We are all one, one energy, one love, in communion together (both consciously and unconsciously.)

One act of kindness feeds so many people: the kind one, the one who receives, everyone who witnessed the act, and *everyone* who comes into contact with all involved.

That is energy - a collective consciousness that exists regardless of whether we acknowledge it or not.

Everything is energy - we are one.

There's a reason why the power of love heals.

There's a reason why kindness spreads.

There's a reason why gratitude grows.

Everything is energy - we are one.

When I Open My Heart to Love...

When I open my heart to love, I feel like I can do anything.

I feel like all is right in my world and I feel connected to the world around me and all people around me.

I let go of all the hurts from the past and realize that nothing ever happens “to me” but actually happens “for me.” I realize that everyone is doing the best that they can with the information and awareness that they have at that time.

I know that everyone is carrying a burden that no one else can see.

I realize that we are all connected and we are all one human family.

When I open my heart to love, I know that I was born to be the loving contribution that I came here to be.

When I open my heart to love, I feel invincible and that anything is possible, especially when I share that love with others.

When I open my heart to love, I know that there is a higher power that is all-knowing, all-loving and that nothing ever happens without a reason or a lesson to be learned.

When I open my heart to love, I see the beauty that is everywhere.

When I open my heart to love, I know that there isn't anything that I cannot do or have or be.

When I open my heart to love, I can look outside myself and see the good in others.

I know that if I share my love with others that it keeps growing.

I know that I chose to be here, right now, for a reason.

I know that I have never made a wrong decision.

I know that judgement is never the answer.

I know that we are all on a different journey, but we are also all, ultimately searching for the same thing.

When I open my heart to love, I know that the answers that each of us seeks are inside us and that if we are willing to get quiet, really quiet, we can hear the whispers that will unlock the wisdom that we all seek.

When I open my heart to love, I know that no matter what the question is, love is always the answer.



Signs From All Around

Feathers dropping, Angels sighing
Letting me know I'm not as alone as I feel

Robins, crows, hummingbirds,
All fly by with their own reassurances
Monarchs dance around me
Reminding me I'm supported during this transition

When I'm in alignment
The whole universe conspires to make sure I keep the momentum
Magic money just as I need it
People send messages as the first tear falls

Was I blind before? Or had they simply vanished,
As I spun further into darkness
I didn't realize I'd fallen so far off the path
Yet now as I'm finding my way again
I see I am supported in every corner

Proof

The universe loves to show it has a sense of humour.

Several years ago, my husband and I were thinking about taking a safari. His company had gifted him a trip to almost anywhere in the world, and I was trying to convince him how incredible an African safari would be.

One day we were driving on the *Autobahn* towards Salzburg, and were discussing the pros and cons of the potential journey. No less than three different 18-wheeler trucks passed us, each with an African animal logo painted on it. We saw a lion, an elephant and a zebra, almost in succession.

“Look! Those are signs! We need to go on a safari,” I practically screamed after seeing the third one.

At the time I had been having premonitions and other kinds of messages and synchronicities from the universe and was struggling to understand their meaning. I hadn't learned to fully trust them yet. We continued our debate about these kinds of signs and if they were true and reliable or just random coincidences.

“I just wish there was some kind of proof that all these things I've been experiencing lately are actually nudges from the universe,” I said wistfully, more to myself than my husband.

Literally about 10 minutes later, I looked over at the motorcycle that was passing us in the left lane. The driver was wearing a jacket sporting the word: PROOF. All caps.

You can't make this stuff up.

(By the way, we didn't end up going on safari. We did, however, travel to South Africa and went on some game drives. And we visited Addo Elephant National Park and got a rare glimpse of a lion sleeping on the side of the road.)

Gifts From Heaven

My name is Tammy Arbour and I am sharing a true story about grief, loss, gifts and hope. My wish is that you find comfort and hope to help you throughout your journey through grief.

The day my only daughter, my baby girl was murdered, I found myself beyond broken, numb, angry, incredibly sad and scared. These feelings would haunt me for the foreseeable future and I knew life would never be the same again. It truly stopped me in my tracks, as you could imagine after such a tragedy.

The moments, hours and days that followed were a blur, sleep was minimal, I was overwhelmed, I felt so broken and it took everything I had to just get out of bed in the morning. As awful as that sounds, I was truly doing my best to survive.

I also had a very strong awareness that my daughter Alyshia was still energetically around. Trying her best to hold me up and help me cope through it all. She was always helping and encouraging other people during her life, so nothing had changed in that regard. People do not change their ways when they cross over.

I could feel her gentle but powerful presence, which really helped me put one foot in front of the other even when I did not want to. We trusted each other when she was present on earth and thank goodness that trust did not diminish.

The feeling of love and support that she would give me was profound. I could not deny it. Her energy, love and relentless efforts to let me know she was ever-present to help me in any way, was beyond beautiful.

You see, I am an Angel and Guide communicator and I can connect to the other side. This is a gift I have had since I was a very young child. Alyshia knew this and worked tirelessly to reach me even though the grief had blocked my connection some of the time. She was determined to clear the heavy fog I was living in and get through to me because she loved me so much. She wanted to connect as well.

One sunny morning, I was walking my little chihuahua Taco, a dog that Alyshia had rescued the year before her passing. I was talking to Alyshia as I walked, and was asking her for a sign that she was around and could hear me. I wanted to know that she was ok and still available energetically.

As Taco and I walked around the neighbourhood, which was in a large Canadian city, so basically a concrete jungle, Taco started to pull me towards some of the short shrubs that were along the outside of the condo I lived in. Taco is only 5 pounds, but he was really pulling and would not stop. It was very out of character for him. He was usually so gentle and agreeable. I became a little annoyed because I had to get to work and he was not cooperating at all.

After about the 5th time asking him to stop, I finally decided to go to where he was pulling me. I noticed this purple sparkle? I literally had to bend down and look under the shrub to see what was there as only a little bit was exposed. To my surprise, it was a very large heart-shaped amethyst crystal and a bundle of lavender that was wrapped with a string. I was speechless. I thought what a strange place for this to be.

You see, my husband's (Alyshia's father) birthstone is the amethyst. I also collect and love crystals very much. The amethyst is a crystal that helps us living people here on earth to connect to loved ones on the other side. It also helps bring calmness, to help with sleep, and I was in desperate need of that for sure.

When she was younger, on a family trip to B.C, we visited a lavender farm and she loved the smell so much as did I. Lavender is also a scent that encourages spirit to come forward and connect to loved ones. This really resonated with me on so many levels. I could not deny it even if I tried, which I did not. I was excited.

My mouth was wide open in shock and then I started to cry and thanked Alyshia for these beautiful signs that she had handed picked for me. She knew I would connect the symbolism and get the confirmation I needed that she absolutely heard me and is with me each day. I felt such a sense of gratitude and was overwhelmed with her warm, loving energy and the more I acknowledged her presence, the stronger it was

I thanked her and smiled at Taco for being her assistant. Animals are so connected to spirit and they do Devine work each and every day. Alyshia knew who she could ask for help. How cute is that? I put the beautiful crystal in my pocket and will treasure it forever. I tell my husband I want it to come with me to the other side when it is my turn to go.

I truly hope that this true event I have shared with you will bring you some awareness that there are signs and symbols all around from your loved ones on the other side. Dimes, feathers, crystals, songs, cardinals, and so many more.

Please do not dismiss them as coincidence, our loved ones work very hard to help us heal and find hope. Just say thank you and you will keep finding these incredible signs all over the place. Especially when you need them the most.

Sending much love and light to you all.



Who I Am Meant To Be

When I open my heart to love, I feel at peace. I'm connected to my authentic spirit and who I want to be

When I open my heart to love, I'm proud of who I am. I feel confident in my ability to create change in the world. I feel like it matters that I'm here.

I feel alive. I feel passionate and connected. I want to take care of myself properly and the creativity flows. I want to create and help others – when my heart is open to love.

I need that connection. I need to feel like this matters. That what I do matters.

When I let anger, jealousy, hate, comparison, negativity, fear, doubt, take over – my head sears in pain. I physically, am told to stop. Because I'm not meant to be in those places.

Trusting. Having faith. Believing. Creating. Putting out there what's been given and told to me, that's where I'm meant to be.

Trust and believe in myself. Follow the joy. Love what I do and share from love.

When I open my heart to love, magic and miracles are able to happen. When I open my heart to love, I live the life that's waiting for me. When I open my heart to love, I am who I am meant to be.

Box

Sitting in the fetal position, darkness all around
Skyscraper walls surrounding me
Staring into the abyss of blackness.
Despair & loneliness brushing upon my skin
Hugging me like a blanket of rejection.
Outside of me, there isn't much to see
Lack of sight, for the guidance I seek.
Closing my eyes, going within the layers of self
Here I explore a different world.
Light illuminates the colours of my life
Travelling anywhere I desire, near and far
Encountering the beingness of others I meet.
Granting myself the freedom of choice
I am in love with this discovery.
My spirit drinks in the nourishment
Strength and courage arise from the depths.
Springing to my feet, extending every limb
Grazing the surface of the walls, I unleash my light
Hollering, "THIS IS MY LIFE!"
Earthquaking tremors vibrate the space
Protective walls constructed of my self-limitations,
Crumbling without hesitation to the ground.
Exhaling cleansing tears, the debris washes away
Revealing before me, the world I designed from inside.
Reconnecting me to the world of possibilities,
Empowered with an abundance of opportunities.
Breaking free, I no longer place myself in a box.
I choose freedom to create my life on purpose.

My Spiritual Diet ... A Journey From Fear to Love

What number showed up when you stepped on the spiritual scale last night? Maybe a simpler question would be is, “How heavy do you feel emotionally?”

I had been feeling emotionally overweight for a long time. I did not know how to change it. I did not know if I should change, or even why. I didn't even recognize the heavy feeling as abnormal. “The new normal” is a phrase we hear so often now. Just because something feels normal or natural does not mean it is good or healthy.

Stress, anxiety, fear, chaos, guilt, and judgement are all emotions that can weigh you down. It did for me. I had lived with fear so long, I no longer even recognized what things I was fearful of. I positively did not see my fear for what it really is ... an absence of love.

One of the heaviest fears to weigh me down was, “Am I good enough?” This went well beyond being good enough to be appreciated or liked in my community. Was I good enough to go to heaven when I died? I was part of such a judgemental religious community at the time, that I had my doubts of “making the cut”.

Religiously, I believed that I was checking off all of the right boxes but was it enough? There was no joy in my heart and spiritually I felt bloated. I had a gnawing feeling that things were not right or on the right path.

This fear caused me to judge myself and to judge others. This judgement of myself often triggered anxiety. The chaos that was all around me felt so normal. It meant that I did not even see that my life was devoid of peace and joy. I was weighed down by the burdens of the world. And the guilt I was living with was like the icing on the cake.

The scarcity mindset that I lived with, led me to want more. It also created a feeling of needing more, but never being satisfied. The more I consumed, the more I needed.

It was very similar to the physical body wanting sweets or salt or caffeine. The craving never went away and the paradox was that it felt normal.

The emotional pounds had been sneaking up on me for such a long time. It was such a gradual process that I did not discern it for the unhealthy state that it was. I was not conscious of the fact that I had become spiritually obese.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can readily see what the starting point of my spiritual diet was. The starting point may have felt like an accident at the time but I can see now how I was guided. On January 1, 2015, I started a gratitude list. Every day I would write down something from the previous day that I was grateful for. I also spent a few moments reviewing what I had written previously. The idea behind this is to start each day with a grateful mindset.

I discovered an amazing thing about gratitude. The more that I am grateful for, the more that I have to be grateful for. Gratitude is like a superfood for my spirit!

Because I was grateful, I was open to love, open to forgiveness, open to all of the things that are the exact opposite of stress, anxiety, fear, chaos, guilt, and judgement. All of the things that weighed me down and made me feel heavy. Just like with a physical diet, the results were not instant. There were discouraging times, but I could feel the progress.

A physical diet requires exercise and proper food. A spiritual diet requires quiet time ... (meditation) and gratitude. All of the chaos in my life was noise designed to distract me from hearing divine guidance. Meditation is one of those activities where "practice makes perfect". Each time that I meditated I was better at focusing. Meditation was nourishing my connection with the divine.

Each time that I started meditating it felt like I was going to the spiritual gym. In the quiet, my spirit was revived with the energy to serve. My heart overflowed with joy for the abundance in my life. The burdens that weighed me down, melted away.

I also made an amazing discovery about meditation. During meditation, the mental chaos which had been so prevalent in my life was replaced with peace. That is when the pounds really were being shed. In that time of peace, there was no guilt, no judgement, and no anxiety. I no longer felt the need to be in control, because my higher power was on it.

As love filled my being, my heart was filled with compassion and forgiveness. I now saw forgiveness as letting go. It was healing for my heart. Bit by bit the heaviness was dissipating. The spiritual food of meditation and forgiveness felt like the balanced diet that had been missing in my life for a long time.

I had struggled with the fear of not being good enough for many years. A simple example with an orange, led to an epiphany that freed me from that fear. Even when an orange is rolled in the mud, it is still capable of producing the same pure and refreshing juice. I have been created perfectly. My imperfect choices do not diminish my capacity for showing perfect love and kindness.

This was an emotionally freeing revelation. I had been created with the perfect ability to serve according to the divine plan for my life. Nothing I could do would detract from that amazing potential!

With a physical diet, when you get to your goal weight, the work is not done. The routines must be maintained. The same applies to the spiritual diet; the routines must be maintained. I consider myself as the living proof of the joy that there is in every step along the journey of the spiritual diet.

In This Moment

What happens tomorrow isn't nearly as important as what happens today

Today we can create a better tomorrow

We can lay the groundwork to make our dreams a reality, one step at a time

Today we can reach out and make a connection

We can help someone feel important, like they truly matter

Today we can plant a seed, both in the garden, or in someone's mind

A new life, a new idea, that will germinate and grow and has unlimited possibilities

Today we can help a neighbour or rescue an animal

We can give love that will ripple out far and wide

We can donate what we don't need

So someone who does, can get farther along, tomorrow

What we do today can have so much significance if we open our hearts and share the love inside

And truly trust that what will happen tomorrow

Will be all it's meant to be

Because we did all we could today

Here's to 2022! (Originally published for 2021)

A new year is just hours away. The energy is palpable.

We have the chance for a fresh start—a proverbial clean slate. To leave the past behind.

Let's stop talking about getting back to normal, whatever that was. Look where normal got us. Normal wasn't working. The 'same old same old' was hell for millions of people.

We are better than normal.

We need to wake up and release the conditioning of the last 50 years.

It's time for new inventions, new ways to work, and creative innovations for the planet. Every thought you think contributes to the collective. Every small action adds up and creates positive change. Every little rejection of 'the way we always did things' help.

Let's bring forth a new world. One that works for ALL of humanity.

What can you do today to help? Start by envisioning a better world. What does it look like? Even visualizing it helps bring it forth. You can't birth something without having an idea first. Then, think of one tiny action you can do today. And then another tomorrow, or next week. Just continue to move forward.

As Gandhi said, be the change you want to see in the world. It's important now more than ever. And to quote the Dalai Lama, 'If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.'

A better world won't happen overnight but there's no going back to normal. We have to adapt and change now, or be stuck in old, cyclical patterns. Change is in the air, let's embrace it and move forward together as one.

Tomorrow time begins anew. It's an opportunity for a reset. What will you do with your precious blank slate?

A beautiful future starts with each of us. It starts now. Let's do this.

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EACH OF YOU!!!



Art © JQK Creations "The Other Side"

Expanding Love Meditation

Sit quietly with your hands comfortably in your lap or at your sides, eyes lightly shut.

Connect with your breath and feel it coming into your belly and expanding and softly releasing as you exhale

Settle into that rhythm of your natural in-and-out in and out as you ground yourself into your body
feel yourself connected deeper into yourself and the room with each breath

feel yourself in the energy of the room and the chair
feel the way the air moves in and out of your body over your arms and through you
nourishing your concentration and focus
releasing any unnecessary mind chatter
just letting it all go as you breathe out the worries with each exhale
breathing in peace and breathing out any stress

filling yourself with relaxing white energy to every corner of your body
tense up your toes on the breath in
and relax them as you breathe out
now up your body tensing your legs and thighs and letting it go as you breathe out
feel the muscles under you tighten in the chair and relax them on the breath out
tense up your back and shoulders and roll them out to let it all go
feel your arms and hands and fingers as you tighten them up for a moment and shake it out as you breathe out
feel your neck and head as you release the tension in them fully
relaxing your entire body

now imagine red energy glowing out from your legs and feet like roots coming from a tree
down through the chair and building all the way down to the core of the earth,
grounding you and rooting you firmly, safely, connecting you securely to all around you

now connect with your crown energy from the top of your head
Breathe into this space for a moment
as you become aware of this empowering white light,
it grows stronger connecting you all the way to the heavens and
beyond
you feel your awareness expand, opening your mind, allowing a free
exchange of positive thoughts and energy continuing to fill up every
corner of your being
sit in that feeling of connectedness for a moment, feeling it
throughout your entire body

now connect to your favourite place, your safe place, travel there in
your mind to the place or time where you have experienced pure
happiness and peace

it can be somewhere you've been, something you've experienced or
a dream that you'd like to.
Really feel yourself there
what does it feel like?
what do you see?
what do you hear?
what do you smell?

now imagine a spinning ball of green energy in the middle of your
chest
you can feel its soft warm glow grow larger the more you become
aware of it
it begins to expand out of your chest and surrounds you like a bubble
sit in that feeling of warmth and protection

as you connect with the spinning energy you feel yourself filled with
love
and feel a bubble expand further out around you, touching
everything around you
let it expand further and further until you can no longer see the edges
of it
but you can still feel it part of you as it expands to circle the entire
world

feel that love connecting you and from you out to everywhere in the world touching everywhere it's needed

now repeat in your mind

I fill myself with love and abundance

I look for the good and find it in every corner of my life

I am surrounded by love

I give out love and let go of anger, hate and resentment

I empower myself for the changes I can make in my life

What I allow into my life persists, I allow only peace and love and light

I am responsible for my reactions or my responses

I feel strong and courageous and able to make the necessary changes to move forward in my life

I recognize that I am love and have the opportunity to share that everywhere I go

Breathe back into your favourite place for a moment

Contemplate these words and feel what effect they have on you

Let it flow to the surface, really connecting the words into your belly

Breathe in deep and slowly exhale

You feel calm, connected, relaxed

As you turn to walk away from your favourite place, you feel energized and refreshed

You're leaving this place for now but you can come back whenever you feel you need to, to tap into the love and peace that is your right

It will always be here waiting for your return

Just take yourself back with your breath

Feel the relaxation in your entire body

Feel yourself filled with love

Start becoming more grounded into your body

Back into this room, slowly

When you're ready wiggle your toes and fingers

Cover your eyes as you blink them open and gently adjust

Coming back only when you're ready and do a few stretches to shake off anything left inside

If you would like the audio version of this meditation, please visit:

<https://soundcloud.com/andrea-eygenraam/expanding-love-meditation>



Art © JQK Creations "Rising Up"

Love Heals

Creating change starts with me
It starts with love, it starts with joy

Channelling the anger and hurt
Into something that can make a difference
And not add more destruction
Is why I turn inward to find the answers

How can I make a heart-centred impact?
Spreading love throughout the world

Love is the only antidote to hate
The stronger hate grows, whether justified or not
It is not the answer we truly seek

We find what we look for
What we look for expands

The more energy we can give to love
To compassion and understanding
The more we can right the wrongs
And start to heal

We've needed the shadows exposed
So we could gain awareness of what needs healing

But we cannot let those shadows snuff out the light
Because even though it may not seem like it at times
The light is stronger, love will win

It's not a question of if
It's a matter of when

Trust

It is only in being pushed to the edge that we come alive – that soul can work through us:

To trust you will know what to do.

To trust yourself in those moments – to breath and go within, ask for guidance, and tap into something bigger than your little Self.

Let your Higher Self, Source, and Soul lead you.

If a mountain appears before you – start climbing.

It's only an illusion – stay in the climb – in the journey.

Do not stop to look at the summit –

You are already where you need to BE.

Stay in the journey.

Don't worry about the climb.

Focus on today – what must be “done” today from an energetic and physical state.

Remember: *you are one with all* – do not separate yourself.

You will be guided – tap back in, connect back in.

There is a powerful force always ready to lead you – let it.

Have faith.

In Another's Eyes

When you've been betrayed and hurt by someone who was supposed
to care and be important
It is key, vitally equally important to lean on loving yourself

Just because someone doesn't see your worth
Doesn't make you unworthy
Because someone doesn't value who you are
Doesn't make you less valuable

We must go within
To the place that is pure love
To connect to deep parts of ourselves
To remember who we are
To remember what we are made of

We are made of love, we are worthy, we are valuable, we matter and
have so much to bring to this world
If we choose to

So many get overwhelmed
They give up
Extinguishing their flame far before it's necessary

But when the pain of staying the same, becomes greater
Sometimes instead of changing
We give up.

The thing that gets changed is our existence
Done and over before our time
Sometimes that's the way that seems easier
Easier than connecting to love and compassion within us
When we aren't shown it around us

The problem is, we are all made of love
Some just don't know how to show it without hurting others
And ultimately themselves the most
For they lose out on the love of those who really care
They lose out on people who wanted to help

The problem is, we are all made of love
But when we are hurting, we get scared to open ourselves to the love
from others
We blind ourselves to the very thing that could save us
We push away and deny that which is all around us
We shut down, shut out, shut off

The possibility that maybe it's only ONE person hurting us
ONE person denying us love
While the rest of the world waits with open arms
Waiting for us to stop staring at the closed door
And turn around to breathe the fresh air of the open window
In front of us all along

The world waits with love
For those most scared to accept it
What we look for expands
So for heaven's sake
Seek out love like your life depends on it
Because in many cases, it just might.

Get in the habit of finding it

In the stranger's eyes at the corner store, counting pennies to make
sure they can afford the bread and soup to eat

In the mother carrying her crying baby down the street trying to
ignore the stares

In the vagrant asking for change as his belly rumbles, unsure if it's
money he wants, or a society that cares

In the cashier's eyes at the corner store who tries to find hope again
instead of fear after just being held up at knifepoint

In the woman rushing to catch a cab to go home to an empty
apartment, not knowing her husband has packed up and left

In the businessman rushing to catch the train, he almost missed
because he was grabbing flowers for his wife who was waiting to
reheat dinner at home again

In the artist on the sidewalk hoping to just make one sale to help feel
her art was worth it for another day

In the bank clerk helping the man in the wheelchair outside to move
under the overhang as it started to rain

In the toddler presenting his mommy with a world's greatest mom
drawing hoping to get some of her attention and make her smile

In the teen hitting a home run and looking up to the stands to see if
his family was still there watching

In the kettlebell ringer hoping for a few more coins on this cold night
to pass on and share with those who need it most

In the young man getting down on one knee with a makeshift twist
tie ring for his soon to be bride

Because their love is worth more than traditional symbols when they
struggle together to make ends meet

In the dreamer who holds on to the vision that one day, her fairy tale
can come true and all the struggle and long nights will finally be
worth it

In the eyes of all those who have dared to try, to risk, to care, to live,
to love, to be

In mine, in yours, in everyone's all around

Together, we are one, we are made of love

Gratitude and Love Meditation

Relax sit back in your chair, rest your hands softly in your lap or at your sides

Feel your feet flat on the ground, gently close your eyes to help maintain focus easier

Take a deep breath into your belly, letting it expand

Slowly let it all the way out of your body, letting your belly deflate

Then breathe in deep again feeling the refreshing air fill up every corner of your body

Imagine your breath collecting any swirling thoughts, and as you breathe out, they are released into the ether no longer swirling inside of you

Breathe into the space at the top of your head, imagining the cool air entering you and cleansing you

It releases any tension in your head as you slowly breathe out your head feels more relaxed calm

Take in another deep breath, feeling the air entering your nose and hold it deep in your body

Now slowly release it through your mouth feeling the hot air pass over your tongue and out of your body

Breathe into the back of your neck now

Noticing as the tension releases, leaving you feeling more free

Breathe out fully, letting the air go all the way out of your body

Roll your shoulders back and around as you take another deep breath in, collecting anything weighing you down

you do not have to carry that anymore

it's safe to let it go

Breathe out with a deep satisfying sigh

Releasing your shoulders and feeling relaxed all the way through your back

Take a deep breath into your chest into your heart space
Fill yourself up with warmth and love

Imagine someone you're grateful for
wrap them in a blanket of love
Send them the warmth in your heart
Pause and feel fully connected to them with your love

Imagine a place you love
Picture what it looks like, the sounds that you hear, the smells that
fill the air reaching out to your nostrils, filling you with the
memories that make your heart sing
Feel the air in this place inviting you in and welcoming you

As you look down into your hands you see a special trinket
A memento you hold very dear that means a lot to you
Feel the love you have from this memory
Hold the trinket close in this special space
Fill yourself with all the love and gratitude you feel
Breathe deep into that love
Wrap yourself in the happiness and let a deep satisfying sigh out

Feel your hip muscles relax as you twist a bit in place, breathing in
deep to your midsection, Twist as you breathe out releasing and
relaxing

Tighten the muscles under you as you breathe in, hold it, and breathe
out through your back and into your buttocks, letting the relaxation
cascade down through you

Breathe into the tops of your legs, feeling the muscles respond as
you acknowledge them, breathe out flowing over your legs and out

Breathe love into your knees, feel the support and compassion flow
down your legs and into the ground

Twist your ankles around in small circles as you breathe in then hold it

As you breathe out imagine a waterfall of refreshing relaxation pouring over your whole body, from the top of your head over each relaxed area, and down to your feet and into the ground

As it flows over you, do a check and see if there are any areas still tight

Breathe into them with love and willingness to let go

Make small circles with your wrists, moving into your elbows and arms and shoulders

Welcome creativity in with openness

Feel the looseness in your arms and imagine your creativity in front of you however you see it, embrace it, feel ready to work with it, and let it express itself through you

Let go of any feelings of doubt limitation or lack
you have abundant creativity in you to heal
just get out of its way and it will help you

Take one more deep deep breath in, filling yourself once again with all the love you imagined for others, wrap yourself in that love know you deserve it and are worthy of a golden abundant love accept it feel it let go and let it in
be ready for amazing things

take another deep breath in, slowly let it go
wiggle your fingers and toes
cover your eyes to blink them open as you come back into this room slowly adjusting
becoming more present and aware of this room

If you would like the audio version of this meditation, please visit:
<https://soundcloud.com/andrea-eygenraam/breathe-in-gratitude-and-love>

From all of our hearts to yours, Thank you
For buying and reading this book
For believing in love
For trying to restore your faith in humanity
For wanting to believe in the good
For not just wishing and hoping, but doing
Together, we can change the world
Together, we are all made of love

Heart & Soul Author Collective

Heart & Soul Author Collective:

Abdulkarim Farah, Alice Wisniewski, Amanda Read, Darcy Patrick, Denise Beaulieu, Jenny Kuspira, Kelly Hudson, Kim Louise Morrison, Megan Sykes, Nadine Wagner, Norm Eygenraam, Ryan Westwood, Sarah Farr, Shannon MacKinnon, Stephen Van Vugt, Sue Ellis-Saller, Tammy Arbour, Andie Eygenraam



Abdulkarim Farah is a 40-year-old, Somali/Canadian who lives in Hamilton Ontario. He is a child & Youth Worker and is a representative for Amway and their fine products.

He is also interested in helping empower men to connect to their authentic selves and overcome past programming and addictions to live more fulfilled lives. He is currently self-employed and wishes to contribute more of his artistry to the world. He is very grateful to be a part of this book and hopes you enjoy the contributions he has shared. Much love and thank you.
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Pieces: Abdul's Love, Ode to My Dad, An Invitation to Love



Alice Wisniewski lives in Guelph, Ontario. She is a mother to two sons and a grandmother to two grandsons. She graduated with a degree in Nursing from Conestoga College and worked in various nursing positions for 34 years. She loves to read, knit, and dance.

Pieces: Everyone Wants to be Seen, Not Always a Loss



Amanda Read is a health and natural healing lifestyle blogger. She likes to do yoga, eat healthy and all the things, but sometimes just wants a good burger. Amanda also works with refugees and teaches Business English. She has lived in Vienna, Austria with her husband for the last decade but originally hails from Nantucket, MA, USA. In normal times (read: the past) she visits home at least once a year and stays connected to her friends and family there. She has a strong love for travel to exotic places (or actually anywhere) and anything to do with the moon. She has a strong aversion to learning German more fluently.

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Pieces: Love Is Blind, Travel in Your Own Backyard, Here's to 2022, Proof, Photo Credits



Darcy Patrick For 25 years or more years Darcy was a professional bass player. In 2013 the perfect storm happened in his life and pushed him over the edge. He had struggled for over 38 years from depression and had to make a call for help! Which was one of the hardest things he had ever done. Since Starting therapy 8 years ago he has become an author of 4 books, creator of 3 courses, he has also become a public speaker doing talks all over southern Ontario. Darcy now lives a life of purpose, that purpose is helping as many people as he can, breaking the stigma behind mental health and depression.

Author/Public Speaker/Wellness Writing Coach/Peer Support Worker
darcypatrick.com

"Only with open conversation can we break the stigma behind depression, let's start talking and do it together"

Piece: All You Need is Love



Denise Beaulieu lives in New England and is the founder of Inspire Good Vibes which is about getting aligned with Soul, Self, and Source to manifest faster. She has a journal and notebook line, and is the creator of the "Flow Journal System," a program to help you get aligned in Soul and Mind, start taking action on your dreams, and live on purpose.

<https://inspiregoodvibes.com> IG: InspireGoodVibes

Pieces: We Are One, Trust



Jenny Kuspira (JennyQ) is a creative soul who was first published in 2017 as a contributor to the book *Empowered Hearts*, followed by *Sweet Treat* (2019). Jenny has done many creative things including hosting a video series with her puppet Willy Wuz, performing with the Guelph Guild of Storytellers, organizing an art fundraiser and selling various forms of her artwork such as prints, decorative tiles, note cards and original paintings.

JennyQ is driven by four core beliefs: Happiness, Humour, Respect and Inclusion. She has a passion and purpose to teach and create happiness in all she does.

Jenny's artwork is throughout the book and you can contact her for any commissions or reprints of the pieces

Jennyqkuspira.com

Art page: Jennyqkuspira.com/art-gallery Instagram: @jqkcreations

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YouTube <https://youtube.com/channel/UC6byulw-xSj1f2akgLtztUg>

Pieces: The Four Smiles, Wible the Pretty Gold Daisy, Patience, D&J Universe, art credits



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.

Piece: Changes, Quote



Kim Louise Morrison is a #1 international bestselling author, an intuitive empowerment coach, and a practitioner of several energetic healing modalities including Reiki, IET and various energy processes of Access Consciousness®. She has an active coaching, healing and speaking business. Kim currently lives in London, Ontario Canada.

As an empowerment coach and recovered "supreme self-judger", Kim understands the self-confidence struggle. It's her business and her passion to guide people to release the self-judgement that stops them from thriving and embrace dynamic self-empowerment, so they have both the confidence and tools to go after and achieve their dreams.

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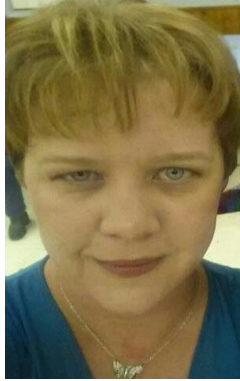
Pieces: Love Yourself Like There's No Tomorrow, When I Open My Heart to Love



Megan Sykes is a life-long equestrian and owner of Chiron Equine. She is a certified Equine Assisted Learning facilitator, horse and rider biomechanics instructor and breeder. Megan operates a small facility in Ancaster, Ontario, where she specializes in injury rehabilitation, delivering foals and young horse training.

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Piece: We Are All Made of Love



Nadine Wagner is an R.M.T. and R.R.Pr. in Guelph, Ontario, where she was born and raised. Her focus is on helping clients to learn that they are investing in their well-being with each massage therapy session and does her best to give them home care practices that are easy to fit into their lifestyle.

Balancing a career and being a single mom of two children, has proven to be a worthwhile challenge to allow Nadine personal growth and become a positive role model. Teaching her children to pursue what makes them happy, strong core values, skills for independence, follow intuition and above all, to value themselves.

Nadine has had a dream of writing and being published since the age of 16 and this is her second participation in a collaboration of magical pieces coordinated by Andie Eygenraam. Nadine truly believes dreams can come true, even if you don't know how or when, by living your life on purpose.

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Pieces: Garden Walk, Box, Calla Lilly, A Woman to Admire, The Music Man



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 published in 2021 to share their partnership and journey.

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Pieces: Hummingbird Says Thank You, My Spiritual Diet



Ryan Westwood was born in Salt Lake City Utah. He studied acting and music at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. As an Americana, folk storyteller, he's written over a hundred original songs, releasing his first set of singles in 2021. He currently resides in Portland, Oregon is hard at work recording his first album, and building a houseboat with his best friend.

Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/artist/5j1wQLIsp9UNmTwc3sEs4J?si=ZNz2pOQUQ2yP_P1Np_f3PA

Patreon: patreon.com/ryanwestwood

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Piece: Jan the Quaker



Sarah Farr explores investigative journalism, writing about infamous characters from Hamilton, Ontario, and is a researcher for a cold case investigation group.

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Piece: Sudden Blindness



Shannon MacKinnon is an actress, TV host, and commercial model. She has acted in such shows as "If I Should Die" (Investigative Discovery) and "Homicide: Hours to Kill" (Amazon Prime UK). She has created and hosted Cable 14 Hamilton's "The Artist's Toolbox" and "Lily's Life Lessons" for YourTV Cogeco. She is thrilled to be a part of this and honour her friend Jason Kerr who passed away far too soon. A special thank you to the Kerr Family for their support for this publication

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Pieces: Dear Jason, Love & Grief, The Courage to Love, Random Moments



Stephen Van Vugt is an IT Applications Manager at a mortgage bank in Kitchener, Ontario. When he is not working, he can be found journal writing, participating in the year's NaNoWriMo, being an amateur storyteller and spending time with his family.

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Pieces: Run Don't Walk, When They Were Young, When You Love



Susan 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

www.sueellissaller.com

Pieces: The Modern Quest for True/Real Love, My Daughter's Middle Name is Epiphany, Gritty Love



Tammy Arbour is a proud wife and mother of two. She grew up in Northern Quebec in a large French & Irish family. After the sudden passing of her only daughter Alyshia (Rosie), she searched for signs of hope to keep her going. The pieces in this book are one of many hopeful moments she gifted Tammy. It gave her oxygen and joy. She is grateful to be able to share it with you all.

www.whereangelsconnect.com

Pieces: Gifts From Heaven, Love Eternal, Random Moments

Photo Credits



Andie Eygenraam is a multiple-time international best-selling author, a collector of stories, a change alchemist, a mentor of movement and momentum, a course creator, word wizard, book scribbler and idea engineer.

She is a certified writing & life coach and change mentor and has been facilitating workshops through writing and other activities for more than a decade. She does one on one and group coaching and will be releasing online courses next year.

Her motivational speaking events help people navigate change in a healthy way with grace to live their dreams.

She is also a branding & marketing specialist helping businesses grow in Authenticity and Impact.

Andie has been writing for more than 35 years and now has twelve books published. She has a passion to help others through her words, and their own.

She lives in Toronto, Ontario with her Border Collie, Koda, and loves to do anything that stretches her creativity and challenges her comfort zone.

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Photo and Image Credits

For colour prints of the art pieces in the book, please contact Jenny Kuspira: Jennykuspira@gmail.com she also does commissions and has shared her art in this book to help further express our theme, of we are all made of love. **We are very grateful for the added creativity we were able to include. Please do not reprint without her permission.** Jenny also submitted her own art for D&J Universe as well as the photo for Wible.



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Photo credit goes to Shannon MacKinnon for the art at the start of the Dear Jason play.

Norm Eygenraam submitted the photo of the hummingbird in his own piece

Tammy Arbour submitted the drawing and photos for her own pieces of Love Eternal and Gifts from Heaven

Nadine Wagner submitted the photo of her mother for A Woman To Admire

Andie Eygenraam submitted the photos for When I Open My Heart to Love, and Koda in Flight x2, Life Happens For Us