



STORIES DANCE ON THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

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Love yourself. Then forget it.
Then, love the world.

– *Mary Oliver*

Tsunamis In The House Of Wholeness

Earlier this week, I was chatting with my friends Susan Piver and Jen Loudon about writing. We talked about writing that liberates rather than congeals. Writing as discovery and exploration, versus writing to confirm what we already know, or think we do.

And yet, the distinctions aren't that neatly drawn. I write to find the radiance of truth, in myself as much as in whatever I'm writing about. I write to discover wholeness.

I may have to wriggle into the house of wholeness through a half-opened window. Or climb a nearby tree, crawl out on a limb, and fall through a hole in the roof.

Writing, for me, is exploration, curiosity and adventure. And sometimes, writing is breaking and entering, in pursuit of what I truly know but have yet to discover, or rediscover.

I burrow into my body for the stories in my blood and bones. And follow my breath to the threshold of my soul's engagement with the world. Love connects me with all beings – with realities as distant as galaxies and as close as the pupil of my eye.

Writing is a place where my inner being breathes in and out with the rhythm of my world. It's an encounter with self and otherness, and with the ever-evolving relationship between these two.

When I first sat down to write today, I felt that familiar longing to cross the bright courtyard of everyday reality; to emerge into the more complex radiance of the house of wholeness. There, in its darkened ballroom, truth revolves like a mirror ball, offering reflected shards of light to the walls, to the ceiling, to the corners of the dance-floor. Illuminating faces, bodies, hands, feet, hair. A musical chiaroscuro.

And now a memory blinks in and out. Fragments.

December 2004. I was visiting my sister in Bombay. The day after Christmas, while we were still asleep, a tsunami roared across the Indian Ocean devastating everything in its path.

Why this story? Why now, so many years later?

No matter. This is the story that wants to be told. I follow it through hallways and up winding staircases in the house of wholeness, and each sentence I write reveals only a

sliver of it. In the next sentence, a different fragment flashes into view. The mirror ball turns and turns again. Offering a glimpse of this. A glimmer of that.

Experience only becomes coherent – a story, a narrative – in hindsight, when I’m sitting safely in my chair, choosing which story to tell. All the other stories – those that crowd around, clamoring to be heard, those that hover shyly in the shadows – are repressed, set adrift, until eventually they are lost or forgotten. So many stories forgotten.

What I understand now, nearly six years after the tsunami washed away all those lives, is this: The tsunami was an event, a violent, tragic event that took place primarily over the course of several hours on Boxing Day, 2004. But my experience of it unfolded over a much longer period of time; a slow, gradual understanding that could only emerge as my heart expanded and crumpled and bloomed open in a dance that continues today.

Here are some scenes that flash in the mirror ball of memory:

I had just come out of the shower and was towel-drying my hair at my sister Parvana’s home in Bombay. My scalp felt cool and tingly in the flow of air from the juddering air-conditioner.

Parvana hurried into my room with her quick, impatient stride. Without looking at me, she blurted: “Have you heard? There was a terrible earthquake in Indonesia this morning. A tsunami drowned hundreds of towns and villages. In South India too. No-one knows how many people died. It’s on the news. I’m going to phone my friends in the Maldives to see if they’re okay.”

Turning to go, she stumbled, and grabbed the door-frame to keep from falling.

Later that evening Parvana’s friends, Tanny and Nilu, came for dinner. Tanny was then an admiral in the Indian navy. He was in charge of naval rescue operations for South India and the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

All evening, while the rest of us picked at our food, and talked, and worried about what was happening out there in the tsunami-ravaged countries that ringed the Indian Ocean, Tanny was on his cell phone. Organizing relief supplies. Deploying rescue ships. And fielding phone calls from frantic parents.

Cabinet ministers, diplomats, billionaire businessmen – those who knew Tanny well enough to have his cell phone number – called and demanded that the navy send out

ships to collect their children and bring them home. These young men and women had been vacationing at beach resorts, which may or may not have vanished under the sea.

Over the clink of silverware on dinner plates, we heard Tanny explain, over and over again, that the navy was needed elsewhere; that the young people would be rescued by plane and helicopter; that he would call the parents back as soon as he had any news. His voice was soft and deep, coaxing, reassuring.

Hours later he dropped into his seat at the dinner table, exhausted. His dinner, congealed on its plate, remained uneaten. Wrinkled eggplant slices. Grains of rice stiff and bristling. Wilted romaine lettuce.

Later still, that night, on the TV screen, the same few images played over and over. Great swells of brown and grey sea. Bits of timber and unidentifiable flotsam bobbing on the waves. People running, crying. Frantic men and women looking for family members.

And the death toll, printed on a banner that scrolled across the bottom of the screen. 2,500. 12,000. 45,000.

I didn't sleep that night. Or for many nights after. And by then I was too exhausted to know what day it was. But I didn't cry; I couldn't take in a tragedy on this scale. My heart felt numb.

The Tuesday after Boxing Day, I took my sister, Nivi, and my 90-year-old aunt out for lunch at a Chinese restaurant in South Bombay. Halfway through lunch, Nivi looked worriedly at her watch. "I have to get home by two o'clock," she said. "I have to change for a funeral at three." She sighed. "If it were just a one-person funeral, I could wear what I'm wearing now. But it's a five-person funeral so I have to change into a funeral sari."

"Yes," my aunt said. "Nivi's poor neighbour. His brother and sister-in-law, and one of their twin boys, and his mother and sister—they all drowned in the tsunami. They brought the bodies home from Sri Lanka this morning. The other boy is still in hospital in a coma."

I went into the Ladies' Room, which smelled of disinfectant. No tears, but I retched up a mouthful of bile, and washed my face. This was closer to home; but still not close enough to break through the mushy crust of snow in my heart.

On the plane home from Hong Kong to Vancouver on New Year's eve, an entire section of the South China Morning Post was devoted to the tsunami—one page per country. The death toll had risen to 160,000. More photos and stories. Interviews with survivors.

I tried to sleep on the plane, but my mind kept watch while my heart pounded painfully in my chest. I wondered if I was having a heart attack.

At last, at last I was home. Exhausted, wired, grateful, tremulous, I hugged my son James tightly. So tightly, for so long, that he finally kissed me on the top of my head and said, "It's okay; I'm here."

I thought: When did he become a man?

Days later, a wild, January snowstorm hit the west coast. The wind howled and rattled the windowpanes. The power went out. And stayed out for the next fourteen hours. The house grew bitterly cold.

Sick with the flu, I huddled under my down quilt. I couldn't feel my nose or face. My ears burned. My head felt as though it needed to split open to relieve the roaring behind my eyes.

I phoned James at his dad's house. Just to hear his voice. To reassure myself that he was still there, still okay. He was patient with me. I hung up the phone.

Then I curled into a ball on the couch and cried. For a long time, I cried. Snot ran down my nose. My heart was a hundred shards of glass.

I cried for children and men and women who were cold and hungry, homeless and terrified. For all those parents who didn't know where their sons and daughters were. For our fragile, fragile lives.

.....

It's now a day and a night since I wrote this. And the question still hovers by my shoulder, insisting: Why this story? Why now, nearly six years later?

I don't know. So I take the question by the hand, and together we set off to explore the house of wholeness.

The mirror ball in the ballroom is still turning, flashing its beacon through the house.

In its light, I see: Today's tsunami is the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. I'm not there, on those beaches, in those ocean currents, choking with the fish, drowning in oil with the sea-birds. I'm not there.

But that seascape is in me.

The Gulf, the pelicans, the dying fish live in the house of wholeness too.

This time, I've been given the gift of geography. This time, I sit here in my living room, feeling the salty breath of Nanoose Bay on my cheek through the open window.

And my living room, Nanoose Bay, the ocean breeze on my face – these are in the house of wholeness too.

Attuning to the Deva of the Bay of Mexico, I find myself in a great meeting room, where beings from many dimensions have gathered. There are Devas of healing here, and Devas of pelicans, seagulls, fishes and oceans. The Soul of Humanity strolls through the room, offering around a platter of food. It stops to embrace a woman here, a fish-child there – to reassure the souls of those who are giving their love to heal and restore this wounded landscape, this bleeding, blackened sea.

The Sacred holds this gathering in the heart of the house of wholeness. It feels like we're sitting in a giant lap – soft, deep, safe.

So much of my life, I have felt helpless before the tsunamis of trauma, pain and suffering in this world. Growing up in India, and being named for the first city on earth to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, I absorbed the suffering of the world into the cells of my body when I was just a baby.

My heart has been wounded and wounded again, until it's learned the wisdom of sitting like a child in the lap of love, here in the house of wholeness.

When pain sears my heart, the fragrance of the Sacred fills my nostrils. In despair and in gratitude, my prayer remains the same: for blessing and healing for the earth, for love and wholeness for all beings everywhere.

That beautiful sea and coastline, black as a bruise. Those magnificent birds, built for air and flight, trapped by the gravity of oil on their wings. I've cried, and raged, and mourned their ravaging.

But each bead of blood in my heart knows wholeness too. I can no longer gather up the pain of the world and hold it inside my belly. It cannot be healed there – it can only damage that inner shoreline, bring death to that living sea. I am responsible for keeping my inner world healthy and whole. The quality of my presence – the peace or conflict in my

heart – is what I bring to this gathering. How can I live outside the house of wholeness and join in the work of blessing?

It's an exquisitely delicate relationship, this response of my heart to the need of the world. Because the moment I forget that the Sacred is in the world as well as in me, my little self sinks under the impossible weight of a million toxic oil spills.

Then I am no longer part of this gathering, a source of blessing and radiance, of healing and love. Instead, I stagger around blindly, stunned, bruised and bleeding. A casualty of violence, adding to the fear, the chaos and confusion around me.

The question that has me by the hand leads me to a quiet window seat overlooking the garden. Here in the house of wholeness, we curl up with our arms around each other, and turn our faces to the sun.

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Traveling Teeth Follow Rumors of Home

A couple of weeks ago, I was at the dentist's office for an annual checkup and cleaning. As the dentist examined my mouth, probing my gum line with the delicate precision of an ant in a sugar bowl, he said: "Your teeth are moving."

I mumbled: "Mrrtgwoof?"

"Teeth do that, you know," he said. "You must have had braces when you were younger."

I nodded as best I could and he continued cheerfully: "Teeth travel back to where they came from. That's why, as you get older, the gaps between your teeth get wider."

The rest of the conversation – in which he described the various "procedures" he could perform to close the gaps between my teeth – remains hazy in my memory. (Which must also be traveling homeward, since the gaps in it are growing!)

As I drove home, I ran my tongue in wonder over my miraculous teeth. My teeth know where they came from! And through forty years of forcible displacement, they've remained doggedly determined to get back to where they belong.

Everything answers the call to home.

Teeth. And spawning salmon. Birds that fly thousands of miles each spring to return home from their southern migration. Monarch butterflies. Stars. Sea lions, bats, ants trudging in military formation, and pods of whales.

We humans do too, although our lives are so noisy these days that the call of home can dwindle to the faintest whisper, inaudible to all but the most attentive ear.

That call can emerge as restlessness, emptiness, a longing for something as-yet unnamed.

We work harder, or party more. We hang onto relationships that leave our hearts blighted, or we buy stuff . . . However blindly, each of us is trying to echolocate our way home.

Home is our soul's vibration resonating in our bodies – that unique, complex, perfect hum of heart and presence that's so familiar, we ignore it because we think it has to be something more exotic. Something esoteric – an angelic choir; an epiphany on the road to Damascus. Something hard-to-get, as sexily out of reach as Johnny Depp.

So we go searching. In teachers and classes and books. In spiritual practices. In our spouses, our children – everywhere but ourselves. Like my traveling teeth, we follow every whisper and rumor of home.

Until, one day, exhausted from the search, buttering a piece of toast or listening idly to a song on the radio – or sitting in a dentist’s chair – we click into that home frequency that vibrates in our cells, in our breath, in our beating hearts. And we remember ... we are home. WE are home.

What To Do When Your Dreams Come True

Last week, I spent a day in conversation with a client whose business has quadrupled in the six months since we began working regularly together. A tidal wave of change has swept away the life she had, and brought her one more closely aligned with her dreams.

There's more money flowing through her business than she – or anyone in her family, going back several generations – has ever enjoyed before. And this flow of money is accompanied by a rising tide of time, energy and spaciousness. Time to enjoy her family, to play, to rest, to create.

To get there, she has done the outer work of marketing and content creation, shaping systems and structures to support her business. And she has done the inner work that brings her business to radiant, vibrant life. She has transformed her patterns and beliefs – about who she is, what she can create, where and how she may live and work.

She has crafted a business story that truly supports her life.

Now, her deeper fears surface. That the flow of abundance will stop as miraculously as it began. That all this spaciousness and wealth will vanish like mist when the sun of reality rises.

Her fears reflect a story I hear from so many entrepreneurs. It goes something like this.

Sarah – let's call the heroine of our story Sarah – knows in her heart that she has great gifts of love and beauty to offer the world. She wants to make a positive difference in people's lives. She also wants to be rich, famous, work no more than two hours a day, and retire at age thirty to a beach house in Vanuatu.

So long as this dream remains a collage on her vision board, a set of affirmations, something she aspires to, it retains its aura of magic. She tells herself she will be happy, fulfilled, rested, vibrant and joyful. She will travel the world on her yacht, write her great novel and discover the cure for catastrophically cold feet – once those images climb off her vision board and stroll into her life.

The thing about energy alchemy is, it reshapes you – and the You that emerges includes your dreams and visions as part of your everyday life. You wake up one day to realize that

the ecology of your life has completely changed. Everything on your list of desires is now right here, a living, breathing part of you.

If you still believe that these things that you so longed for are outside of you – that they exist independently of you – then their existence in your life is always suspect. They could leave you at any time. They could disappear, and you'd be back where you started, hoping and longing for something out there, out of reach.

So, in the midst of all this abundance, Sarah – remember Sarah? – wakes up at night with her heart pounding. She can't get enough air in her lungs; her pulse is racing. In her nightmare, her villa in Vanuatu is swallowed by a tsunami. Her customers are fleeing the harbor of her business to swarm the new, shiny marina in Pago Pago.

She worries about money more than she ever has before, because she has more of it to worry about. Forget about writing the great novel or finding the cure for terminally cold feet. She has to make sure she dreams up the next, new sparkly thing so her customers – fickle creatures that they are – don't disappear down the road to that raucous upstart of a business that's giving away free tofu dogs, and vegan iPads with every purchase.

It's a heartbreaking story. Girl nurtures dream in her secret heart. Girl's dream miraculously comes true. Girl's dream decides to decamp with dreamboat next door. Girl's heart is broken. Girl is secretly relieved. Her worst fears have come true. Now the cycle of dreaming can begin again.

But stories can be transformed, once you see the truths that lie beneath them.

The truth is, Sarah, you, me – we are all in relationship with everything around us, at every moment. And the nature of our relationships shapes our experiences, our lives, our stories. Every time.

Some of those relationships are radiant with love, tenderness, understanding, wonder.

Others are more like that annual family reunion picnic which always ends with your uncle-twice-removed wearing his boxers wrapped around his bald head, bellowing Deep In the Heart of Texas in a broken baritone while your aunt wipes the snot from your nephew-in-law's face with one hand, and wraps up the last of the potato salad with the other.

Guess which relationships gather your dreams into the lap of your life – and which ones send them scattering.

If you want a story with a happy ending, bring those qualities of love and understanding, tenderness and sovereignty, to your relationships with everyone and everything in your story. The desk at which you sit. The computer on which you write. The stories you tell yourself. (Love them. Love them.)

Your relationship with each of these is as magical, as supportive of you and your success, as your relationships with your clients, with your beloved, with your child or business or pet ferret.

And they are all reflections of your relationship with yourself, your soul and your Source.

So begin there, where your story truly begins. Begin with your relationship with yourself. Your soul. Your Source.

Romance your soul the way you'd romance the love of your life. Lavish your soul with your love, appreciation and attention. Get to know it – its depths, its desires, its particular penchant for soul food.

By the time you look up from all that canoodling, your wildest, most wondrous dreams will be curled up in your lap. The life you dreamed of will be all yours.

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Grumble Hook Guidance

You know that voice in your head? The one that groans and grumbles, squeals and squawks like an out-of-tune fiddle?

The one that fills the balloon of your head with righteous indignation at the shocking behavior of so-and-so; the temerity, the unbelievable gall of thus-and-such.

You know the one.

Its monologue goes something like this.

Okay. I know that everything out there is a reflection of me. I know I can only change myself, blah blah blah.

BLAH!

But. Really. How could she? How dare he? Why did he?

And...

What's wrong with her?

What's wrong with me? Does she love me? Will he ever love me?

Why doesn't he _____? Why won't she _____? Why can't they _____.

Or...

I can't take it anymore. I can't take his bullying; her criticism; their bickering. It's driving me crazy. They do _____. And then they don't do _____. I'm shocked. I'm appalled! How could they?

I call this voice Grumble Hook. Because it grumbles. And it hooks you into whomever or whatever you're grumbling about. Keeping you busy out there, rather than paying attention to what's inside you.

Some useful facts about Grumble Hook:

Underneath all the blame; behind all the sound and fury – angry, self-righteous, judgmental, obsessive – Grumble Hook is scared. And needs something from you. And is ashamed to ask for it. Or doesn't know how.

Grumble Hook often doesn't know what he needs or wants. She doesn't know how to connect with the desire that breathes softly under the heaving bosom of rage, helplessness, despair.

He doesn't know he can ask you for what he wants. She doesn't know she can trust you to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to help.

Grumble Hook is often loudest – most obsessed with what's wrong with the world and the people in it – when you're on the threshold of change. When you're crossing a bridge, or have just arrived on the other side of one.

When your business is growing; when you've created something new and are standing on unfamiliar ground; when you've made, or are making, an evolutionary change in your business, your life, your way of being.

When you hear Grumble Hook's voice in your head, what do you typically do?

Argue with him? Hide her fretful whining behind a seething smile?

Get really busy? Add more things to your miles-long to-do list?

Numb out – with chocolate, or TV, or work, or exercise, or whatever your drug of choice happens to be?

Do you ignore her annoying whine? Rant right along, adding fuel to his fire? Explode in fury at the object of Grumble Hook's obsession?

Do you bombard GH with positive affirmations, which he doesn't believe in at all?

Grumble Hook is – potentially – a friend and ally of your conscious self. A loving member of your Inner Guidance Crew.

Really.

Some useful facts about Grumble Hook Guidance:

Remember, no matter what GH is screeching on about, he's really saying some version of this...

I'm scared. Things are changing faster than I can control.

I feel like an ant trying to carry an elephant. It's too much. I can't.

Too much responsibility. Too much change, too fast. Too much newness. Too many expectations.

I'm afraid I'm not good enough, smart enough, rich enough, thin enough. Or brave enough. Or enough-enough.

I'm afraid I won't be able to keep up. You're racing on ahead. You'll leave me behind. I'll be all alone.

I don't know who I'll be when I become the person who lives in this new country you're striding off into. Who will I be when I'm a great success, or I have enough of everything – love, money, recognition, creative power, fame?

How will I recognize myself? Will my friends still be my friends? Will I become someone I don't like?

Grumble Hook's voice is the voice of your inner guidance, showing you what needs your loving attention.

It's some part of you – one of your inner selves – saying, Please take care of me. Please love me. Please remind me of who I really am. Please help me feel safe so I can come along with you on this adventure.

Here are some simple things you can do, to respond to Grumble Hook's plea.

Begin by gathering your own presence around you; stand in your own wholeness. Ground and center yourself. Bring yourself to a state of inner connection and calm.

Invite your inner selves – the ones who are wailing in Grumble Hook's voice – into a meeting-circle in your heart.

Ask them, one at a time, to take their seat in the middle of the circle.

Take some time to truly connect with the self that takes her place in the center of the circle. See and acknowledge her courage. His deep wisdom.

Breathe in the essence of this self. Beyond her fear, beyond his grief, this self is part of your wholeness. This self holds, in her heart, spiritual qualities that you need in order to be whole.

Once you have acknowledged her presence, ask her to tell you how old she is.

Often, these selves are younger, more vulnerable, than you are now.

Ask her to tell you what she's feeling, and what she wants and needs from you.

Let her know that she can ask you for whatever she truly wants. You will respond.

You may not be able to give her a new yacht, but if her true desire – expressed as a longing for a yacht – is for spaciousness, freedom, being out in nature under an open sky, then you will help her have the essence of her desire.

Your inner self may need help getting to the heart of what she wants. She may need you to help her put down her burden of guilt and shame. To let go of grief or pain or anger he may have absorbed from others when he was too young to distinguish his own feelings from those of everyone around him.

You may need to give your inner selves permission to make a bonfire of beliefs that no longer belong to them, or that were never theirs in the first place. Beliefs that keep them from expressing their true desire. From acting on what really moves them. You may need to give them permission to let go of old agreements – agreements to stay as they are, to live with the status quo.

Love, and patient listening, will help you connect with and nurture your inner selves.

When they feel safe, when they feel loved, when they are full and nourished, they will bring you the gifts that they hold in their hearts. And those gifts – which are spiritual qualities – will help you cross that bridge.

Together, you will build a new home on the far shore. A home to hold and nurture the unfolding miracle of your business and your life.

It starts with really hearing what Grumble Hook is saying. And responding with love, with kindness, with clear truth and appreciation.

When you bring yourself back to your own desire, and act to meet it with love, you unhook Grumble Hook from his focus out there. You bring her back home, where she belongs.

How and where is Grumble Hook showing up in your life right now? How do you meet this voice? Where is it leading you?

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What's Love Got To Do With It?

It's midsummer, and the weather here in the Pacific Northwest has been moody, unpredictable. In the grocery story, in the teller line-up at the bank, people shake their heads and say: "July!" Mournfully.

Fog erases the contours of the land; melts sea and sky into a seamless mist; swirls like a cloak around the dark apparitions of trees.

In the course of a single afternoon, July morphs into March, or November.

And then, with the suddenness of a baby's smile – radiant sunshine in a cobalt sky; the sea shimmers, an undulant gold.

And people smile at each other in the street. They turn up in droves on the beach near my house, lugging picnic baskets and beach towels, toddlers in tow. Raising their faces to the sun.

Each moment of weather has its own presence, its own qualities, unlike any other.

July isn't trying to be some notion of July. It is itself – shifting, changing, wet and cold; hot and dry. Muggy. Sultry.

Like children trying to make sense of an unpredictable parent, we make up stories about July's changing moods.

Sullen, we say. Or sparkling. Dreadful. Glorious!

We judge. We complain, or rejoice. We rush about, protecting ourselves from the wet; eagerly seizing our place in the sun.

And our judgements – our likes and dislikes, our stories about what we experience – obscure the truth of this moment, this weather, this day. They keep us disconnected from the world around us. They keep us disconnected from ourselves.

Thicker than yesterday's fog, our bewilderment about the changing weather keeps us from savoring the delicious coolness of summer rain. It numbs us to the rush of awe at the delicate tremble of a thrush's wings as she shakes raindrops off a pliant branch and launches herself into flight.

There is nothing cleaner, more satisfying, than unadorned attention to what is. There is nothing more magical, more extraordinary than the simple truth of things as they are.

Beyond our dreams, beyond our drama, lies the elegant body of life. It offers itself in each moment.

This big-eyed buck, with his two-pronged velvet horns, munching leaves off the cherry tree in my garden. The crow with his sideways waddle and glossy black feathers, pecking at the grass. Clouds resting softly against the mountain's face as it kneels in a pewter sea.

The body of life. Its sacred, inexplicable beauty.

Your business has its weather too. Its own particular, unique, ever-changing landscape. It is itself; and no amount of moaning and complaining, hoping and longing, clinging or running away, will change its essence.

Your relationship with your business is also a landscape. One you nurture with your energy and attention. One you shape with the quality of your thoughts, feelings and actions towards it.

The real basis of all transformation is love. You cannot grow your business – or change what isn't working – without loving it first. And to love it, you must give it your simple, direct attention. Beyond your stories, your dreams, your drama – to the truth of its own being.

When you try to make it something it is not – more special, more dramatic, more successful; or less demanding, less exhausting, less whatever-you-think-it-ought-not-to-be – you miss the power and beauty and magic that are its beating heart.

Can you see the beauty of your business when lightning strikes? When it rains in July? Can you love your business, when your product launch fizzles, or your systems spring a leak?

Business is as challenging as any intimate relationship. Every bit of fear, doubt, resistance you harbor in your body, will show up when you create your next thing, when you give your heart to it.

Love keeps you connected to the shining soul of your business. And love keeps you holding your business's hand when the skies open up, the monsoons hit, and the ground under your feet dissolves into a swamp.

Love keeps you nourishing your business when your team members bicker like a bunch of kids hyped up on sugar, and your biggest client walks off into the sunset with another beauty on his arm.

Love gives you the courage to change course; the resilience to explore new options; the trust to step into the swamp and to know the path will appear underfoot.

Love is the single most essential element in your business. It is the air you and your business breathe. It is oxygen, and life, and sustenance. Without it, there is no relationship between you and the soul of your business. And without that relationship, your business cannot thrive.

How do you nurture love in your business? How do you suffuse the culture and landscape of your business with love? What do you do to keep your attention to your business clean and alive?

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I Owe, I Owe ... On Right Relationship With Debt

This morning, I opened an email from a client who said:

"I recently became aware that I've been strangling the life blood out of my business by paying down debt as soon as money appears in my bank account. So I always feel behind, always short, never enough to do what I need to do – such as having a new website designed.

I've been doing this because I want to be rid of debt as soon as possible. Do you have any words of wisdom or suggestions for me, on the subject of debt? I know I need to shift my perspective on it – and not resist it as I have been. How can I work with this energy?"

In our culture, we live in an ecology of debt and credit. We are all experiencing the effects of having blithely and blindly blundered into a skewed relationship with debt.

Since 2008, we've seen record levels of consumer debt, layoffs, bankruptcies, foreclosures, business failures, and a recession that's left so many of us scared and shaken.

And yet, we have an intensely ambivalent relationship to debt.

On the one hand, we are urged to spend freely, to consider ourselves entitled to the things we want, and to have them now.

"You deserve it!" is the slogan of the Me Decade. And even though you may think you're too sophisticated to have bought into the mythologies of the consumer generation, the next time you're feeling stressed, disappointed or vulnerable, notice how you meet those feelings. What do you reach for, to alleviate them?

Faced with a global economic meltdown, we feel helpless, vulnerable, ashamed of being in debt. We're not living up to the cultural images of what constitutes a good life – a house, a car, vacations in exotic destinations, plenty of money in the bank – and that causes us shame too.

Then there's the whole "prosperity consciousness" culture, which – in a fundamental distortion and misunderstanding about the nature of Divine Abundance – says that if we're in debt, it's because our consciousness is mired in beliefs about poverty and lack.

In this scenario, there's something wrong with us if we're not riding a wave of continual prosperity. In this scenario, our faulty beliefs are to blame; our consciousness can't be trusted because it's tainted with doubt. We're doing it wrong – whatever It is.

Debt becomes evidence of our lack of moral fiber, or of our failure to align ourselves with the beneficial powers of the universe – or whatever else we believe it to be. It becomes a noose of judgment, blame and shame that we place around our necks.

Those of us who are more mindful of how we live may pride ourselves on not taking on debt. We pay our bills on time. We buy what we can afford. We are frugal, thrifty, virtuous in our relationship with debt.

And yet, we are not insulated from the larger economic currents that swirl around us. We are embedded in a cultural and economic ecology that affects us no matter how frugal or mindful we may be.

We are also embedded in an energetic ecology that includes the fear and hope, the anxiety and suffering of every single being on this planet.

When your own pain around money and debt meets the fear and pain of millions of others in the energetic ether, it is amplified and distorted.

You cannot do anything with feelings that are not your own. You can't process or integrate them, soothe or alleviate them. You can only release them – separate your own feelings from the ambient field of emotions that swirls like a great, toxic cloud in the energy field of the world – and return to the truth of your own being.

So the first step in creating a new relationship with debt is to strip it of all the existing cultural and emotional baggage that has accumulated around it. Restore it to its essence.

You can use energy alchemy, guided imagery or other means to do this. I'll offer an energy alchemy process for this in a future post.

For now, attune to the soul level of Debt. Everything that exists has a spiritual counterpart. Debt, once you've stripped it of anything that is not its essence, has its own soul as well. One of the spiritual truths at the heart of debt is interdependence.

We are interdependent beings. Every breath we take is dependent on the air we breathe, on the trees who convert carbon dioxide into oxygen, on all the beings, mortal or invisible,

who are involved in maintaining the ecology of the Earth so we can inhale and exhale in the rhythm of life.

We define debt as obligation. Yet Debt is an acknowledgment of our utter vulnerability, of our dependence on the web of life – and of life's dependence on us, in turn.

Debt makes it possible for us to grow and thrive; to contribute to our world; to participate in the activity of wholeness through reciprocity.

Take some time to appreciate and express your gratitude for all the "debts" that support your life: The activity of the sun, the Earth, the sky. Your business. Your health. The love and support of your family and friends. The contribution of your clients, colleagues and customers. The money loaned to you by your bank, or by your creditors.

Bring yourself into right relationship with debt, through acts of appreciation, gratitude and love.

Then, consider your monetary debts in the light of this renewed relationship. Receive what you need with gratitude, knowing that the Source of supply – the money with which you repay your debt – is the same Source that gives you the gift of breath and life. That causes the sun to shine each morning.

When you find yourself clenching up, feeling panicked and filled with fear, making your payments in order to get rid of debt as quickly as possible – stop.

Breathe. Remind yourself that each breath is a gift of grace.

Connect with your soul, and with the Sacred. Connect with something or someone whom you love, until the vibration of love fills you.

Then, extend that feeling of love to Debt. Meet her with love, gratitude and appreciation. Greet her as an invited guest.

Stand in your integrity and repay money you've borrowed in a way that contributes to your own wholeness, and to the wholeness of all that is. Humbly. Knowing that debt, too, is part of the Sacred. That it has its rightful place in the web of life.

If you deplete yourself and your business in order to repay your debt as quickly as possible, you are disrupting the pattern of wholeness. And that gives rise to other problems. It's the

equivalent of using pesticides to control weeds, killing beneficial bacteria in the soil and poisoning the food and water supply.

Ask yourself this question: If I trusted myself, trusted the Source of my supply, and trusted Wholeness, what rhythm of debt repayment feels right to me? What proportion of my income should I contribute to repaying my debt, and what proportion should I allocate to building my business so it can create more safety, stability, support, and income flow for me?

As your income grows, you'll need to revisit this question, and adjust your payment schedule accordingly.

When you write checks to repay loans, give thanks for the love that gave you the support you needed, when you needed it. And the grace that has given you the money to repay that support.

Cultivate faith and trust that the Source that gave you life will guide you and grace you with all that you need to remain integral and whole.

Your obligation is to honor your commitments, both to your creditors and to the wholeness and integrity of your life. And to offer your own gifts in return. To flourish. To be free. To be yourself.

Grace is not an obligation – it cannot be repaid. But you can participate in its activity through love, appreciation, gratitude, integrity – and right relationship with debt.

Share with the people you love, your stories and experiences with Debt. Have you struggled with it in the past? What is your present relationship with it? Let's talk about this and bring it out of hiding, back into our hearts.

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Stories Dance on the Rainbow Bridge

Let's talk today about story – the power of story to shape your life, your business and your world.

Each of us is born with the knowledge that all possibilities – all the stories that ever were and ever will be – are already within us.

When we first arrive in this world, we know who we are. We know what we can create. We know our future is fluid, malleable – we know we can shape it by the stories we choose to tell ourselves, by the stories we choose to live.

And then, we lose that inner knowing. What we know gets clouded over by what we're told is possible. By stories about lack and limitation. By Someday, and Maybe, and If and When.

We lose the knowledge that all things are possible, within the boundaries we have chosen for our incarnation.

Not all futures are probable. Some have more energy or juice behind them than others. Those stories that are most resonant with our gifts and talents, with our heart's desires and our life's ecology, are the ones we are more likely to create. Those that cut across the grain of our innermost selves-our souls, our values, what we truly love – are less likely to happen.

We create our future by aligning our stories with our soul's purposes-which are always about qualities we are here to express – and with our natural gifts and talents, passion and delight.

The story of your business lives in the land where your joy and your love encounter the world's need. The spirit of service and the Deva of Prosperity are both essential allies who help to shape the ecology of your business and your life.

Is the story of your business in the first half of this year one that you want to be living? Are you happy with it? Do you feel loved and supported by your business? Do you love and cherish it too?

A couple of months ago, I realized that my business and I were living in a home that had grown too small for us in every way. It was the setting for a story that had lost its juice, its flavor. The new story of my business needed a new setting.

Here's how I went about writing my new story.

Every creation has a spiritual counterpart, which holds the pattern for its perfect unfolding. I call these pattern-holders Devas, a Sanskrit word that means "Shining Ones."

I began by attuning to the soul of my business.

The Deva of my business is an old friend. We have a long history together. Our relationship has been a constant, evolving conversation over the past thirty-five years. So there's love and trust between us, and when it talks to me about what my business needs, I listen, knowing that it has my well-being at heart.

My business's Deva said, "It's time to move. You need a home that both you and your business can grow into. You need space to create, to dream, to do your work, to hold retreats and intensives."

I didn't say Yes right away. For an hour or so, I sputtered and stammered-somewhat half-heartedly, knowing all along that I would say Yes in the end.

"Yes, but..." But, I just moved. I hate moving. Maybe this could wait awhile?

And, then, knowing the truth in my heart, I said, "Yes. Yes!"

In that moment, when I said yes to the new story of my business, the future embodied in that story came forward to meet me.

I emailed a friend, and told her what I needed. She emailed right back, saying she knew the perfect place. A large, beautiful house overlooking the ocean. Her sister-in-law owned the house.

That afternoon, I drove over to see the house and to meet its owner, my friend's sister-in-law. The moment I walked through the front door, my heart lifted, took wing through the floor-to-ceiling windows, out to the sea, the sky, the wide horizon. I knew that I was home.

Although we'd never met before, my friend's sister-in-law and I drank tea and talked for over an hour, as comfortable together as though we'd known each other all our lives. We talked about her work and mine; about our families, our lives, our vision of love and service in the world.

I signed the paperwork. And moved, a month later, into the lovely home in which I now live.

The story of my business has changed significantly in the past couple of months, because this house is the right setting for its new, unfolding story.

Finding this house and moving into it happened effortlessly, miraculously, through the power of synchronicity. Not because I envisioned the exact house that I needed, and not because I repeated endless affirmations, or created vision boards, or had perfect, unwavering faith in my vision.

All of these things help, but only if they emerge from your wholeness. Only if they are held in an inner truth that embraces all of you, including your doubts and fears.

Being human, doubts and fears, fluctuations in energy level and enthusiasm, are part of our DNA.

This particular shift into a new story happened effortlessly for a number of reasons:

1. My lifelong daily practice of presence and inner connection lets me know that I'm safe, even in the face of uncertainty – even when I don't know what's coming next. It gives me the courage to recognize that my old story no longer fits me.

It gives me the support to dissolve the form of my old story, while keeping its essence.

So, I can take the essence of my old story – those qualities that are at the heart of all being – with me into my new home. And I can call in a new story, with a different ecology, a different landscape, with qualities that include greater flow and ease, gratitude and trust, service and prosperity.

2. I've developed a relationship of deep love and trust with the Deva of my business. So I asked for its help, and listened to what it had to say.

The Deva of your business holds, in its energy field, the entire ecology of your business. It holds all the stories, all the potentials into which your business can grow, and it knows the perfect timing for each story's unfolding.

If you ask, it will help you. But you have to ask.

3. Then, I acted on my intuition, which is one of the ways the Deva of my business communicates with me. I emailed the one friend who could connect me with the house that is the setting for the new story of my business, told her what I needed, and asked for her help.

Devas are powerful beings, but they cannot act directly in the physical world without our help. My business's Deva could not write that email for me-it relied on me to do the physical work to grow the story of my business.

4. I've learned, over many years of partnering with the creative flow of the universe, that if I trust it and surrender to its wisdom, it will carry me and my business into our new story. So, even though moving into this house was a stretch for me in many ways, I was willing to step into the unknown. To live the unfolding story without knowing where it will take me.

Trust, faith, surrender are qualities that are essential for shaping a new story. A new story requires your love and willingness, in order for it to enter your life.

So, as you think about the story that your business is living right now, and the story you want to shape for your business for the rest of this year, take a moment to consider this question.

When you think about your business's future, is it something mysterious and unpredictable that lurks in the dark out ahead of you? When you approach it do you feel a kind of wary alertness—you don't know if it's going to ambush you or carry you to a glorious but somewhat hazy destiny?

Or do you meet it armed with shopping lists and plans and intentions? Do you sit down in a strategy meeting with yourself or with your business adviser and come up with goals for the year?

So, by the end of this year, you say, I want my business to grow by 50% with an annual income of a million dollars and I'm going to see 5,000 clients this year and teach 98 classes and sell 25 million widgets and hang out on social media for 19 minutes a day...

Or do you meet your business's future in some other way entirely?

It's not that any of these ways of relating to your future is in itself good or bad – there is no right or wrong way to meet your future.

Your relationship with your future is just that – it's a relationship. We are incarnate souls. We carry our own future within us.

As we move towards our future, our future moves to meet us too, because it's already within us in the form of possibilities and potentials.

What you love, loves you. What you want, wants you. The soul of your business is invested in you, and in the success of your business. It has its own reason for being, its own allies, its own ecology, all of which form its unfolding story.

Similarly, your own soul is invested in the success of your incarnation. It too has its allies, and the soul of your business is one of them.

As an incarnate soul, you exist along a vast continuum. At one end of this continuum you are your own particular self, everything that makes you you, as unique as your own fingerprint. And at the other end of the continuum of your being, you are pure spirit. You are one with everything that exists. And you have your being both in this concrete, material, physical world, and in many, many, many other dimensions as well.

Each dimension has its own natural laws. So here in our physical world, you are supported and challenged by gravity, by time, by space. Your body can't be in two places at once. Time, in our world, is linear. The past is followed by the present, and the present leads inexorably to the future.

But on the other end of the continuum, there's no such thing as linear time. So what we think of as the past, the present and the future, have a much more complex relationship with each other. In one sense, they're all happening simultaneously.

I'm sitting here in my living room, looking out at the ocean, which is composed of drops of water that form waves, and waves that form currents, and currents that form the ocean, and yet they are all part of one continuum. You can't separate the drops of water from the ocean.

It's the same with each of us. At this universal end of the continuum, you are one with everything, which means you contain everything within you. All the possible futures are already potentially within you.

This means that your future is not out there somewhere, it's not shaped by someone else, or at the mercy of the marketplace, or of the economy, although each of these factors play a part in the ecology of your business. Your future is happening right now. You are already living alternate versions of your future, in other dimensions of your being.

So if you have a secret jazz singer inside you, chances are there's a dimension of your soul that is living out its life as a jazz singer. There's a you that is or is not a parent. There's a you that's written books on physics or math or history or astronomy. There's a you that's

principal dancer in a ballet company, or the head of a mining operation in the Arctic, or an adventurer out in Swaziland. You contain all of these futures within yourself, within the vast potential of your being.

Your relationship with your future is not one of two strangers meeting at some point in the distance. Instead, it's a relationship of love and intimate recognition. Because when you meet your future, you meet an aspect of yourself.

Now, although all future stories exist as potentialities, it doesn't mean that all of them are equally likely to happen. Your own personality, your own tastes, your own free will, your skills, your preferences, the gifts and talents and resources you have, will determine which of those future stories you're most likely to experience.

If you've never played a musical instrument before, you're probably not going to pick up the cello and play like Pablo Casals. But if your soul wants you to have the experience of playing the cello divinely, it'll bring cello music to your attention in all kinds of different ways. People will give you cello sonatas on CD, you'll be driving in your car and you'll hear Andres Segovia on the car radio and you'll fall in love. You might find yourself buying a car with a trunk big enough to hold a large instrument and have no idea why you're doing it. These are ways that your soul brings new stories to your attention.

When you pay attention to the stories your soul gathers for you – when you act on these intuitions, and these subtle flutters of recognition, you coax your stories out of the realm of potentiality and invite them to come and play with you in your world.

Your soul has its own essence. It has its own particular and unique vibration, which is unlike any other in the world. It holds within it, all the potentials of your being, all the stories that exist, or ever have exist, or ever will exist. By cultivating presence, you experience your soul's vibration in your body – you fill yourself and your world with the qualities of your soul.

These are universal qualities, which form the essence in all things. They are qualities of love and joy, enthusiasm and creativity, emotional depth, resonance...

You know when you are present, and experiencing your soul's vibration, because you will feel these qualities strongly. You'll feel a heightened sense of awareness, of power and love, generosity and kindness.

Similarly, you know when you are disconnected from your soul because you'll experience a sense of contraction and isolation. Your body, your mind, your breath, your emotions, will all feel narrow and constricted. You'll feel isolated, unsupported, unloved.

And the interesting thing is that it takes just a little turn, a small switching of frequencies, to switch from one state to the other-to move out of these contracted states and back into connection with your soul.

So, as you consider the story you want to create for your future, and for the future of your business, it's useful to recognize that the future is not a far-away, mysterious land of fairy tales and myths.

The story of your future is not out there. It's already within you. You already know how to create the future of your business, even if you don't know exactly what the story will be, or how it will turn out.

When you cultivate presence, when you cultivate your relationship with your soul and pay attention to your soul's promptings, you consciously shape the story you are living. You shape your future.

Your soul flows right across the continuum of your being. It is the rainbow bridge between you and your future.

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Notes From A Velvet Womb: In Praise of Rest

A little less than a month ago, I moved to my new home, which is lovely, and perfect for what I want to do in my life and my business right now.

The move happened easily—I had lots of help. Professional packers and movers did the heavy lifting.

And everywhere I look, I am surrounded by the love and labor of my son and my friends, who helped me unpack; who moved things around until they found their rightful place here.

It wasn't until the last cushion rested gently in the crook of the last armchair that my body decided enough was enough. It let me know very clearly that there was no more labor to be had, no more juice to be squeezed from it.

For me, this translates as a deep fatigue – of body, mind and heart. I can't think. Or write. Or do anything except stop. Enter into the womb of holy rest.

So I did what I always do, when I arrive at the borderlands of Depletion.

Through the magic of synchronicity, I had just two things I absolutely had to do this week.

So I booked the week off. Canceled all plans. Checked to make sure there was plenty of good, nourishing food in the house.

Then, I turned off the ringer on the phone. Turned up the heat in the fireplace. Snuggled into my favorite, silky blanket on the couch in the family room.

And watched movies. And ate. And napped.

I went to bed at eight each night, and read for a while before falling asleep. I woke early, as always, and stayed in bed until I was truly ready to be up.

The first couple of days, I felt emptied out – a shell whose occupant had moved away, leaving its fragile husk to the vagaries of sun and wind.

The first couple of days, I went for my usual morning walk. But my heart didn't stutter with joy when the sun splashed its radiance on yellow forsythia, on creamy magnolia blossoms quivering in the wind.

So for the next couple of days, I surrendered entirely to my need to live in Flatland, to be horizontal rather than vertical.

Sleep. Eat. Read a little. Watch movies. Nap. Early to bed.

Slowly, the Devas returned. Or, I returned to the Wholeness which they never leave.

The Deva of Love, the Deva of Compassion.

Of Rest. Safety. Home. Belonging.

Surrender. Innocence. Faith.

Forgiveness.

Slowly, the empty shell of my body began filling with their presence, and with mine.

I'm not there yet.

Yesterday, I ventured out for a walk in my neighborhood. And my heart lifted in delight as the air around me shimmered with birdsong, crackled with the screeching of gulls.

The sweet breath of Spring on my cheek. The flush of early morning sunshine on my neck.
O, this beautiful , beautiful world!

I had lunch with an old friend at my favorite restaurant downtown. And suddenly, I was exhausted again – a tired child who wanted nothing more than to put my head down on my pillow and sleep.

So I'm still on mini-sabbatical. For as long as it takes. Or, until I teach my next class on Monday.

When I surrender to the sweetness of rest, it fills me. It nourishes my heart, restores my spirit, soothes my body, relaxes my mind. It restores me to myself.

This spaciousness, which meets me with such love, which requires nothing of me other than my own well-being, is deeply healing.

And the Deva of my business assures me that all is well – that my business is sturdy enough to do without me for a while. That my wonderful Alexandra has things in hand. That the systems and structures I've created cradle and hold my business while I sink into sacred rest.

One thing I know for sure: When I surrender to the flow, it carries me when I need to be carried. It carries my business too.

Eventually, this shell will fill up with all that I need. My body will be my sacred home again.

The time to act will come on the current of Divine Flow.

Until then, it's time to be.

How about you? What do you need most, right now? How do you meet your own need?

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Bubble Therapy

Yes, bubbles.

Big ones, little ones. Bubbles that float and merge, shimmer like rainbow globes and dissolve into thin air.

Start with a jar of bubble solution, or make your own with dishwashing detergent and water. Make or buy a couple of wands of different sizes.

The next time you find yourself stuck in a mental loop that goes something like...

I knew this would never work

or

I just want to stay in bed and hide under the covers until roots grow out of my hair

or

What's the use? Nothing ever really changes

or

I should lose weight/eat more vegetables and chocolate/exercise every day/stop hanging out on Twitter all day/find a more decorous way to pick my nose

...get out your bubble solution and wand and blow bubbles.

It's hard to hang onto fixed beliefs when bubbles are shimmering, sparkling and popping in glorious rainbow colors all around you.

Thoughts, beliefs, mind-loops, are patterns of energy.

And energy is infinitely malleable. It changes quickly. Your intention and imagination are your allies in transforming energy.

A pattern is more resistant to change because the energy of which it is composed is locked into a rigid structure that seems impermeable to change.

Blowing bubbles is both a metaphor for transformation, and a means of creating rapid change in an energy structure. Energy is being created and destroyed and re-created constantly. Bubbles remind us of this.

They destabilize a rigid structure by following the natural flow of energy, which is in a constant state of flux.

The patterns you despair of ever changing because they seem so stubborn and intransigent are in fact composed of energy quanta that dance and twirl in a continual stream of fission and fusion, creation and destruction.

Bubbles.

Their airy transmutability is at the heart of the dark goddesses: Kali, Inanna, Demeter.

So the next time you feel stuck in a familiar groove, create and destroy and create and destroy by blowing bubbles. Literally. Or in your imagination.

Either way, the energy will shift. Old patterns will dissolve. New ones will emerge, to dissolve in turn...

Bubble therapy!

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Living Your Own Story

A couple of weeks before my son Jesse's fourth birthday, he leaned over our kitchen table, crayon in hand, carefully writing his birthday wish-list in crooked block letters on a sheet of drawing paper.

From time to time he'd stop, lay his head down on the table and close his eyes. "I'm dreaming!" he said, when I asked.

Then he'd return to his labor, his face radiant with delight.

The sheet of paper became a raft that carried him through the story he was creating with his wish list.

A guitar – he would be a rock star! A bike – he would ride to Newfoundland. A whale – yes, a real, live whale! – to play in the ocean with him.

I was almost nine months pregnant with his soon-to-be baby brother, and feeling as watery as the ocean myself. His excitement was a fizzy froth of sea spray. I loved his enthusiasm, his free-flying desire, his rocketing imagination.

And my heart clenched at the thought of all that fire fizzling into a puddle of disappointment.

I said, sadly, "Jess, we don't have the money to get you everything you want. Choose three things you want the most, and we'll make them happen."

He looked up at me with those wonderfully gleeful eyes. Seeing tears glimmer in mine, he jumped down from his seat and flung his arms around me. "Don't worry, Mum! I'll get you three...five...nine hundred dollars!"

I laughed, and hugged him close, breathing in the muffin scent of his little-boy body. Oh, the miracle of him!

Feeling shaky, I turned back to the task of making dinner.

Soon, I thought, his shining armor would be dusty and dented by the disappointments life dishes up. He would lose this glorious certainty that he could make things happen by dreaming them into being.

I mourned the inevitable loss of innocence, knowing it was part of his growing up, knowing I couldn't stop it any more than I could keep the winter fog from rolling in.

Over the next two weeks, birthday cards and checks arrived in the mail for Jesse. By the time we lit the candles on his birthday cake, he had received exactly nine hundred dollars.

That November, my son reminded me of a truth I've always known, and sometimes forget—that we each arrive here on this planet with enormous creative power to shape our world. We are fractals of the creative Source at play in the world. Creativity is in our DNA.

When our deep desires link arms with clarity of purpose and intention, certainty, love and surrender to wholeness, the universe itself moves to bring them into being.

Jesse's desire emerged spontaneously from his soul, and from his love for me. Unsullied by doubt, fear or attachment to any particular way his desire would come to be, he stated his intention and then promptly forgot about it. He ran off to play.

And the universe responded. A series of synchronicities brought him what he had invoked.

Since he lived in the Land of Wholeness, the pattern of Wholeness acted on his behalf. Together, they created the story he already knew was true.

What stories have you told yourself this year? Your stories shape your reality, so take a look at how your life has unfolded this year.

Consider those patterns that show up consistently – in a variety of ways, perhaps, but with the same underlying themes.

Patterns of victimization. Or of creativity denied, deferred or delayed.

Of giving more than you receive. Or of taking what you don't want, at the expense of what you do want.

Taking responsibility for things that aren't yours to be responsible for. Or shutting the door on your dreams, relegating them to the basement, or putting them in a closet too small to hold them.

Then trace the stories from which these patterns have emerged.

Are they your stories, or ones you've heard so often that you've begun to believe – and to live – them?

Who are the main characters in your story? What do they want more than anything?

What allies and unseen forces come to their aid?

How do they ask for help? How do they get in their own way?

And then ask yourself: How do I want to live? How do I want to feel? What qualities do I want to fill my body, my heart, my life with?

Where is my home? What am I here to give, to receive?

As you leave the country of your old story, say goodbye to it with love. It has made you who you are today.

Cross the borderlands, into the new story you're crafting now. The one that will make you who you are going to be.

Say No to those beseeching, wheedling, seductive voices that call to you from the Land of the Old Story.

Listen closely for the whisper of your new story. Let it take you by the hand. Follow it into its heartland.

There's Wisdom In Shoes

Yesterday, for the first time since I had hip replacement surgery in February, I wore shoes with laces. Black shoes, light as air on my feet, with grey and black laces that I bent over to tie into tight loops.

My feet felt more firmly supported in those shoes than they have in the sandals and slippers I've worn for the past several months. And as I went for my evening walk, my body moved with an easier grace because of that support.

As I walked, I thought about shoes. And support. And how the kind of support I need changes as I grow and change.

The first pair of shoes I remember owning were handmade Mary Janes, stitched from deliciously soft red kid leather. The strap fastened with a red button. I must have been three years old when my dad bought them for me. I remember being fitted for them at the shoemaker's. His slender hands slipping the shoes on my feet. The snug feel of the leather against the arch of my foot.

I remember their smell of new leather. The way they creased at the top of my foot. The silky feel of their suede-lined insides.

I loved those shoes. I slept with them cradled in my arms at night. I wore them every day.

Then I turned four, and went into Grade One (or First Standard, as we called it) at Queen Mary's, the big kids' school. Where I had to wear a uniform, and white canvas shoes. No more red leather Mary Janes.

What happened to those lovely shoes? Outgrown before they were outworn, I expect.

Although I don't remember when I stopped wearing them, there's a red-leather-shoes-shaped space in my heart where they live. They're all mixed in with my father's love for me, his delight in ordering them for me. My excitement when I opened up the box they came in.

Those shoes carried me from toddlerhood to school. And to a succession of white canvas shoes which I Blanched every night, and set out to dry before morning.

My first pair of heels carried me from girlhood to adolescence. They were white too, with long, pointed toes and a tiny heel, no more than a half-inch high. More the idea of a heel than the real thing.

I was fourteen, in my last year of high school. I chose those shoes myself, to wear to my cousin's wedding.

I chose them; and my dad paid for them. Reluctantly. He didn't think I was old enough to wear heels. Or pointy toed shoes. That he bought them for me anyway says something essential about the kind of dad he was. The kind of man he was.

Those were my lost years, when my mother spiraled into raging manic episodes, and our family spun with her. The centripetal force of her psychosis eventually flung my sister into boarding school, my father to business far away. And left me alone with a crazy woman who woke me in the middle of the night to sort and rearrange her closet full of shoes.

But that's another story.

When I left India for good, at the age of twenty-one, I wore black leather boots with high stiletto heels. I'd bought them in London, on sale at Selfridge's. Wearing those boots, I knew I could do anything. Leave home. Travel the world.

They were boots for the adventurer, the intrepid explorer in me.

Striding along the tarmac in those boots – which I wore with Kelly green leggings and a black mini-skirt – I boarded a Cathay Pacific flight at the airport in Bombay. As the plane roared into the star-studded sky, I didn't look down to wave goodbye to the country I was leaving behind. I flew off to Oregon as confidently as a migrating bird.

Those boots carried me through my years at university. I had planned to wear them to my graduation, but I emigrated to Canada instead.

In Canada, I bought my first hiking boots. And tramped up and down mountains, as I had when I was a child. Sturdy, ankle-high, and made of waterproof leather, they moved me through an enchanted world that was entirely new to me. Through evergreen forests and muddy mountain trails, clear streams and breathtaking blue vistas.

When my first son was born, my feet grew half a size. I never wore size nine-and-a-half's again.

Both my sons are winter babies. At each of their births, I wore woolly socks. The birthing rooms at Grace Hospital were air-conditioned, and cold. Those socks kept me warm. And helped me feel safe, cared-for, with a tenderness I'd given myself when I bought them, when I packed them in my going-to-the-hospital-to-give-birth bag.

I can't remember the shoes I wore as I shuffled through those years of my sons' babyhood, sleep-deprived and bone-weary. Mother-love blessedly screens off the mindless exhaustion. The diaper changes and night-time feedings. Leaving only a hazy afterglow of bedroom slippers on a nursery floor.

My sons' first shoes weren't really shoes. I couldn't bear the thought of folding their tender feet into shoes. So, for a long time, they wore handmade moccasins, soft and lined with lambswool.

Until one day they were little boys, and their shoes were boots or runners, always covered in mud, smelling ripely of little-boy sweat. Piled just inside the mud-room door with the shoes of their friends, while my house reverberated with the shrieks and delight of boys playing.

But that's a story for another day . . .

It was a sad day when I realized I couldn't wear heels any longer. Not even the smallest, sturdiest of heels. I had a collection of them by then, lovely shoes that remained in my closet unworn, wrapped in tissue paper, nestled forlornly in their boxes.

One evening I invited over those of my friends whose feet are the same size as my own. Who still wore high heels, and attended Gatherings Where High-Heels Are Worn.

At the end of an evening of good food, and lots of laughter, they waved goodbye as they walked to their cars, carrying boxes and boxes of shoes.

And I was left with a closet full of flats. Which I loved, and was happy to wear. So why was there a tinge of sadness at waving goodbye to my high-heel-wearing self? The self who had disappeared long before that evening's gifting.

In my fifties, menopause made the skin of my feet thin and tender. Some of my shoes hurt my feet-even though they had no heels; even though I'd worn them comfortably for years.

Another round of giving-away. Much less fraught this time, much more "let's get these to people who can wear them, and make room in my closet for footwear which supports me."

What's left now: Shoes that are kind to my feet. That feel as close to being barefoot as I can get. That keep my feet warm and dry in the winter. Cool and airy in the summer.

Simplicity. Comfort. Ease. Support.

Beauty too.

There's wisdom in shoes.

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Swimming In The Sea of Story

Walking around my backyard a few weeks ago, with the sun on my skin, the sea below and eagles calling across the bay, I slipped into a state that I used to inhabit as a child—an imaginative trance in which, even as my feet pressed down on damp grass, I found myself climbing up a steep bank, skidding on loose, dry soil, steadying myself against the rough trunk of an arbutus tree.

At first, as I scrambled up that bank, all I could see were spring-green bushes, their leaves rustling in the wind. Poplar saplings, with their sharp, citrus scent, brushed against my face. Overhead, a wide swath of cerulean sky.

Then, through an opening framed by salal bushes, I saw it: the Sea of Story. Glittering emerald and turquoise, carnelian and silver under a blazing midday sun, it stretched to the edge of the horizon. The air smelled like new bread and oranges, and the briny tang of olives. The sun stung my skin as I slipped and skidded down the bank and dove headlong into the water.

Now, in what we call real life, I can't swim. But submerged in the Sea of Story I felt as happily at home as a seal or an otter. I dove down deep and my fingers left trails of phosphorescence through a sea that glistened like shot silk. Underwater, I opened my eyes, and gasped—in a turquoise light, stories glimmered and swirled and spun in the currents. Stories floated by, transparent as jellyfish. Some darted around in colorful schools; others bloomed and glowed in solitary splendor.

The sea magnified sounds, and in the distance, I heard singing. The throbbing heartbeat of drums. A deep gong resonated over a silvery shiver of bells. I turned to look for the source of the music. Behind me, I saw a man with scraggly hair and bad teeth kicking at a bed of coral and shouting furiously in a cockney accent at an old woman. She was bent over at the waist, gathering stones off the sea floor. Each time she picked one up, she murmured to it, kissed it, and placed it carefully in a woven basket slung over her arm.

After a while, the old woman gathered up her skirts and hobbled off on the trail of a giant clam. A swarm of children ran out of the shadows towards her, shouting and laughing as they chased a short, chubby boy around a tree whose branches, heavy with jeweled fruit, swept the sandy ocean floor. The children shrieked and giggled and in their gleeful

chase, knocked the old woman down. Her basket of stones went flying, splashing in every direction.

I leaned over to help the old woman up when something cold and clammy wrapped itself around my waist and began dragging me into the shadows of an undersea cave. The thing that had me in its grip smelled of fish, cold and slimy, as tenacious as an octopus. I struggled and kicked and screamed out to the children to help me, but they were busy playing and didn't hear my cries.

As the children's voices receded into the distance, my eyes adjusted to the gloom and I could see the walls and roof of a rough cave that glowed a dim, emerald green. A deep chuckle echoed from somewhere in the shadows, and a woman's voice, as cool as mint, said: *To swim in the Sea of Story you have to open your arms wide.*

Who are you? I yelled. *You kidnap me and drag me here and now you're talking in riddles! Show yourself.*

You humans are all so impatient! she replied. *Not to mention impolite.* She snorted and hawked and harrumphed, and then said: *I am the Guardian of the Sea of Story. This grotto is my home. You're here because you asked to know yourself, to know the world around you. All real knowing begins with story.*

Look around. All the stories that have ever been told live in these waters. People have fished here for them since before the world began. They've shared them with each other around campfires, under starlight, in dreams and visions. They've whispered them in the ears of sleeping children and sung them in the dark of winter in the igloos of the Inuit. For thousands of eons, people have shouted and chanted and danced and played with Stories.

I peered into the shadows where the walls of the cave met the sea. The woman's voice was a clear bell that rang and rang again all around me. But all I could see was a wild, emerald light dancing across the water.

The woman chuckled again. *You won't see me until you come face to face with yourself, she said. Start by looking in the nursery.*

The emerald light flickered and blazed for a moment in the farthest corner of the cave.

In the nursery, you'll find embryo stories waiting to be born. You can choose any story that speaks to you. Nourish it, grow it in your heart and in your belly. Give birth to it. Then live with it.

She made that hawking sound again, and spat. I distinctly heard her spit.

But first, she said, drop that bag of stories you're carrying in your arms. Release them into the sea that is their home.

Her cut-glass voice set my teeth on edge. I opened my mouth to say something sarcastic, but there was a heaviness in my chest that tugged at me. I looked down and saw that I was clutching a great big, prickly bundle of stories tightly against my chest. So tightly that my arms ached. The bundle of stories squirmed and wriggled and sharp thorny edges of it dug into my heart.

Where did these stories come from? And why hadn't I ever noticed them before?

The woman's voice, neither young nor old, emerged from the deepest part of the cave. *Open your arms, she said, kindly. Let your stories go. They have work to do.* There was a hint of laughter under those cool tones.

Trembling, I dropped my squirmy bundle. The stories I'd been holding so tightly wriggled free and swam away towards the mouth of the cave. My arms felt empty, and cold. I felt suddenly naked, unprotected.

What do I do now, I whispered.

Why, swim around until you find a new story you want to follow, she replied. Or – and here her voice dropped into a deeper register – *you can call the stories that are your heart's companions, and they will come to you.*

Feeling foolish, I mumbled into the darkness: *Here, stories! Here, stories!*

No, she cried. *If you want your stories to find you, you must call them with all the love and longing in your heart. They must know you need them. You must want them more than anything in the world. When you can't live without them, they will come to you. Call them like a child calling his mother in the middle of the night. Like a lover calling her beloved when he returns from a long journey. Like your lungs calling your breath home.*

I stood with my back against a sturdy fir tree in my back yard that morning, and sent my voice and my heart out across the water. Calling my stories home. Hearing them in the cry of wild geese that echoed over the bay.

Every morning since then, I call – and then, I listen. Most days, a story finds me. It slips its hand in mine. It becomes my playmate for hours or days or longer. It helps me discover something about who I am, who I can be.

Together we carve new paths through our beautiful, tragic, funny world. We right ancient wrongs, sing of past sorrows and emerging joys. We get to know our neighbors.

We enter the hearts and lives of friends and enemies. We understand the language of people who live in faraway places, and discover they are as close as our own breath. As familiar as a heartbeat.

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Hiro Boga

Hiro Boga is a writer, teacher, and energy alchemist. She mentors creative women who want to shape a world in which soul and entrepreneurship, passion and profit walk hand in hand.



She has helped thousands of clients and students reclaim joy, freedom, success and creative sovereignty in their businesses, their relationships, and their lives.

As a mentor and workshop leader, Hiro blends transformative energy technologies, the magic of story, and grounded spiritual practices with pragmatic business strategies.

Hiro offers two signature group programs each year: [Become Your Own Business Adviser](#) and [How To Rule Your World From The Inside Out: The Art Of Inner Leadership](#).

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