



A Selection of True Awakening Experiences...

Artwork: The Awakening Heart by Kimberley Harding

A selection of True Awakening Experiences...

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To Shambra, The Crimson Circle and Adamas who make me feel like family and have inspired me these last 5 years to be my magnificent self...

To Heather Calini who never rests in her research on the affects of the solar flares upon the Earth and Humankind... that are so active in our solar system now...

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Introduction... Creating an Inspiring Collection of True Awakening Experiences...

2014 was approaching and I was inspired to ask my sacred friends to share an account of their life's journey and in particular the moments of their awakening to who they truly were... What followed is something I couldn't of possibly imagined... An incredible avalanche of unique beingness... has gently flowed through me for the whole month of January and into the middle of February 2014... As each new day arose and my friends posted their awakening journey, I felt my body consciousness (body, mind and spirit) expanding in knowingness, in love, in pain, in joy... Floating on a new high vibration and frequency, observing life... gaining new insights, perspectives that, to put it bluntly... exploded my whole being...

I came into a new space of acceptance, reverence and trust... Feeling the IAM speaking so individually and uniquely through each journey, yet resonating at the core of ALL was a new sense of passion and understanding... I felt a subtle shift of consciousness exposing 'The Truth'... or is it that we are creating a 'New Truth'... setting new standards to live as DivineHumanBeings here on Earth...

If we ALLOW ourself to be the new standards, living our passion and creating our hearts desire... to go where no one has ever been before... as an embodied ascended DivineHumanBeing... Can we bring into being... new potential... to be able to create together a peaceful and harmonious world here on Mother Earth?

I thank ALL my friends here on WordPress from the bottom of my heart and soul for making this a wonderful and enlightening experience...

To conclude this introduction, I have chosen some beautiful unique words that both resonated with me when reading and was inspired to write after each awakening experience was told...

Without the discovery of love, you can only talk small, judge and compare another...

It is your choice to journey into the depths of the divine...

Being the light, no darkness can penetrate you...

IAM GOD too... You are GOD too...

No more sleeping, but living your truth...

I feel, I exist...

I choose the games I play in life's theatre...

Awakening to the feeling of pure joy and oneness of life that IAM connected to...

To experience life in the fullest sense is to trust self...

Living in Freedom Now...

Love of Self is at the core of ALL...

Feeling the humor, the sadness, the pain and the joy...

I feel the wisdom, acceptance and love that I gain through my experience...

IAM coming into my own crystalline structure of awakened light...

*I have my own answers and signs that lead to the truth, my truth...
IAM a vital piece of a giant jigsaw...
Being, Allowing, Loving and Living in balance with ALL...
I recall pure bliss when I was in love, such an expansion of the heart with nature, and
the universe. That exist within me and should be accessible at anytime, but is it?
To be awake, to be conscious, to be aware of what I truly feel...
Awakening to what I feel to be true...
Awakening to get myself untangled from the matrix web of 'this is how it should be' to a
feeling of freedom...
Beingness disappears when I allow doubt to creep in...
Allowing myself to expand consciousness and raise my vibration to be a great
representative of IAM... LOVE...
The physical self shattered to feel the ooze and soothing force of an underlying calm
beingness...
You can awaken in a quantum leap now... if you so choose...
Awakening is a natural cycle, similar to that of the butterfly...
Once you are awake you can allow self to ascend, to be enlightened and walk tall as an
embodied master...
A healing journey is to love self...
Let's not allow words to separate you and take away your beingness and peaceful
existence...
Releasing all the walls of protection that you have built up from such a young age...
Heal at your own pace, but persevere...
Awakening is simply waking up...
You are taking quantum leaps of faith to a new way of living in freedom, in love...
From blindly following old conditioned patterns of others to following how you feel in
each moment...
To sing out loud, IAM free... IAM love... la...la...la
Keep living until you feel alive...
Emerging from a state of deep sleep...
Allowing self to expand consciousness...
Consciously living in the world being YOU...
Aligning our mind, heart and soul and opening self to love...*

Please enjoy this collection of True Awakening Experiences... to help inspire your heart
to aspire to its true potential... to be the change you want to see in the world and help
create a peaceful and loving world in which to live in harmony and cooperation with
each other..

IAM Barbara Franken... Inspiring New Energy Consciousness...

<http://www.sacredheartsretreat.com>

<http://memymagnificentself.wordpress.com>

Awakening to Who You Truly Are...

Based on my own 'long awakening experience and the awakening of my sacred friends, the teachings of Adamus from The Crimson Circle and the research of Heather Carlini... I have written the following words in the hope that it helps others to understand what is happening to them now... allowing their fears and pains to come home to them peacefully... and with acceptance and the conscious breath... realise their heart and soul's desire...

One heart at a time, people are naturally awakening after a long and hard 'human' experience... You remember that you are so much more than your physical human body, mind and the five senses you have used... You know that this awakening is part of a natural cycle of stages... stages that at times you thought, you were going nowhere or even backwards... but the divine part of you had it perfectly timed in all ways... You are part of this grand natural awakening of humankind, part of an expanded cosmic happening... The integration of your Humanness and your Divineness... allows the full blossoming and enlightenment of you... DivineHumanBeing to consciously live on Earth as Sovereign and Magnificent Being... A Living Ascended Master...

Shutting down the contact with your soul to fully experience your humanness...

You may remember a time in your childhood crying, feeling misunderstood and being alone in your bedroom and maybe at the same time seeing, hearing or feeling 'a presence', 'a light', 'an angelic song' or a deep knowing that everything was just fine... At some stage during your childhood, like so many others... you chose to 'shut down' the communication with your soul and spiritual essence to allow yourself freedom to fully experience your humanness and the world of duality... It was probably too early to 'come out' and tell your parents and the world of your true and magical magnificence... they wouldn't of understood back then... But you somehow found the courage to get on with your life, grow up and move away from the family home and begin your own life... Seeking your FREEDOM... Living and experiencing life, focusing on your work, children, relationship, hobby... Learning about LOVE and PAIN...

First Stage of Awakening... Your call to attention...

At the most perfect time, 'your soul' creates the most perfect situation to get 'your human' attention... Your children leave the family nest, your relationship becomes tiring, you feel agitated, feel empty, feel that you are missing out on something, other people's drama and negative behaviour becomes too overwhelming for you, you feel trapped, you feel curious as to what else is out there, you have questions about life... A book, a movie, a person suddenly catches your attention and uplifts you... You lose your career or someone close... You have a serious accident or a dis-ease of the body, mind & spirit...

Second Stage of Awakening... Dismantling your life...

Bit by bit your old life falls away... you lose your job, relationships, friends, family... your old ways of thinking, believing and doing all come up to be questioned... Your fears come into question... You re-evaluate your whole life and what you all about...

This stage can be quite traumatic if you don't understand what is happening and only fight life instead of trusting yourself... Think of it as a test... from your soul, to find out if you are ready to integrate your humanness and divineness now, here on EARTH...

Allow yourself to resonate with this natural stage of your awakening, consciously breathe, accept and flow with life... It is all going to be OK, no matter what situation you gave yourself to experience...

Third Stage of Awakening... Glimpses of Clarity and releasing human desperation...

*You become interested in different things, nature, creative pursuits, beauty, yourself... you attract different friends, jobs and find a new way talking with family... you start FEELING a deep love for yourself and life, you take time out for yourself, come up for yourself... You realise that what you have been searching for... LOVE, FREEDOM, JOY... is right there within YOU... You connect with your sixth FEELING sense... An innate intuitive communication between your divineness and humanness... You see the fog lifting and allow yourself to connect with non-physical beings... Then you become distracted from this new clarity about yourself, about life... Life throws at you worries about a project, fears of change, a body that doesn't want to work, pain, having no money, having no friends, being alone... It is essential that you understand that these are all your old doubts and aspects of your past, coming up and back home to you... wanting to be accepted, loved and released... It is all part of the integration of **ALL OF YOU**...*

Fourth Stage of Awakening... Quiet Time and Potentialising...

*Consciously breathing in acceptance, of being in a place of fun, creativeness, laughter and joy in the present moment... Accepting your mind games and allowing yourself to go beyond the limited mind and physical dual world... Allowing the distractions and doubts that continue to come home to you, to integrate... becoming **ONE WITH YOU**... You know that you always have a choice... You trust your mind to give you all the answers you need... Trust your body to take care of itself... Trust your soul and spiritual essence to bring you fully into the integration of your 'human divine' enlightenment... You allow yourself to flow with the New Energy Consciousness, living in a new and harmonious way... **Your Way**... Allowing yourself to bring your hearts desire, dream and potential into the physical reality...*

Affects and Changes of the Awakening Earth and the Human Being...

The Earth and Humankind are all part of a **Natural Shift of Consciousness** that is occurring now... Our solar system finds itself surrounded by a higher vibrational energy... a new energy that we have called forth in our declaration for no more fear, greed and power-mongering... It is an energy that resonates with LOVE... Love that humans have learned to FEEL here on Earth... Love, that creates DivineHumanBeings, allowing them to live in a peaceful and harmonious surrounding on Earth... This new energy, of intense light actually affects the magnetic make-up of our whole solar system... Creating intense magnetic storms on our sun, where strong solar flares reach the Earth's orbit and interfere with the magnetics within the Earth and the Human Being...

The human body contains millions of tiny magnetic particles... that interconnect through human antennas to the Earth's magnetic field, enabling the human to receive and transmit consciousness which influence the physical body and all its internal systems...

The interference of the magnetic field is causing 'a cleansing effect' on Earth, physical shifting and shaking the earth and her inhabitants, creating unusual weather patterns and within the Human Being... cleansing people from all their fears and yesterdays... It is actually the most beautiful gift that we can receive... Intense light to naturally awaken our consciousness, changing our DNA and crystalising our molecules... Our inner light, our soul is being ignited anew, clearing our body of past debris... burning away everything that no longer serves us, leaving nothing but pure love and passion within each Human Being and the Earth....

During this shift in consciousness... our awakening is affecting our mental, emotional and physical bodies, pulling us all ways and putting us through some uncomfortable and painful times... Not only are we integrating and releasing all our own past life patterns and karma that no longer serves us, but that of all our ancestors that have lived before us... Our body consciousness, body, mind and spirit is finding a new balance...

It is most important neither to fight nor to give in... but to trust that everything is all so perfect... This is our journey that we have chosen to live now so lets enjoy the ride and allow our enlightenment and living ascension to happen...

As I like to say... bring it on... IAM ready...

Awakening Symptoms...

Physical...

Aches and pains in the joints, especially neck, shoulders and back...
Heat sensations... beyond the menopause, feeling cold, feeling hot...
Feeling dizzy and shaky, Vertigo...
Ringing in the ears...
Nauseous...
Itchy skin, Red patchy skin, especially the face...
Exhaustion and feeling tired, waking up a lot...
Headaches and Migraine...
Stomach aches and Indigestion...
No appetite...
Extremes of diarrhea and constipation...
Eating a lot...
Heart palpitations...
Irregular heartbeats...

Emotional...

Crying...
Deep Sadness...
Confused...
Nervousness...
Passionless...

Mental...

Anxious...
Intense Dreaming...
Loneliness...
Not thinking straight...
Losing words...
Depressed...

My suggestions for more comfort...

Consciously breathing in the new energy, especially in painful areas, 10 mins. a day...
Healthy daily eating of protein, good fats, lots of fruit and veg...
Drink plenty of fresh water...
Moderate use of caffeine, coffee, tea and alcohol...
Positive and Loving self talk...
Soaking the body in Epsom salts and lavender oil...
Walking in nature, or some form of gentle exercise you enjoy 20 mins. a day
Sleep a lot, naps through the day if possible...
Trust yourself, even when doubt tries to creep into your mind...

My Awakening Experience... Barbara...

It wasn't a conscious decision that I made... to close down when I was about 7 years old... but my soul thought it an appropriate time to dive fully into my human experience... I didn't go quietly though, I cried every night for months, worrying everyone, as they didn't understand what was happening and couldn't comfort me... to tell me that everything was going to be OK... that I would awaken at an appropriate time if I chose too... My eyesight had began to deteriorate... I wasn't able to see the black board at school so well anymore and had to wear horrible glasses... I also experienced many sore throats, eventually having to leave my home and go into hospital to have my tonsils out... I remember these traumatic experiences so well... Physically, Mentally and Emotionally I was a mess and not understanding the significance, took them all into my human experience... I felt lost, abandoned and unimportant... I cried a lot to get attention from others... I became a rebellious teenager and acted without care and attention for myself... as I had now forgotten who I truly was and where I had come from...

Around the age of seventeen, I began to feel this drive to leave my home country, to leave all that I knew and go out and explore unknown territories, meet new people, experience different truths and to find out who I truly was... I arranged to work in a hotel in Switzerland from the age of 18... I packed all my possessions, said goodbye to my family and never looked back...

For a few years I moved around Europe, working and having fun with a variety of different people, eventually making my home in Amsterdam, Holland with my first husband, pets and working a nine to five job... I experienced a secure married life for about 4 years, but it wasn't for me... I craved freedom to explore more of life... I eventually found the courage to leave... (it was 1987/8, the Harmonic Convergence... a time that the Earth and her inhabitants were beginning to naturally awaken, remembering where they had come from)... I wanted my ex-husband to be able to find someone who would give him a family he wanted and for me to continue my search for a freedom that I so longed for...

Looking back this was my soul's way of calling me to attention... it was time to start opening my eyes to who I truly was... I had a good job at an International Company in Holland and enjoyed my working experience and living on my own... One of my neighbours was an older lady who took me under her wing and introduced me to the writings of Kristnamurti... They were very deep books, which inspired me to ponder my thoughts...

At my work a handsome gentleman had caught my eye, he had recently joined the company, working in the finance department... It didn't take me too long to pluck up the courage to ask him if he wanted to take Ballroom and Latin dancing lessons with me... Tom said YES and we have never looked back on our relationship... this year, 2014 we

are celebrating 25 years together...

Funnily enough Tom had collected many books of Kristnamurti too, which we enjoyed reading together, having many in-depth discussions that went on into the early mornings, bonding us together deeply... in ways I find hard to explain... During one of our first family birthday party's I was given an English book... *Out On A Limb by Shirley Maclaine*... It literally blew my mind and world wide open and inspired me to explore deeper into myself and life... And as the saying goes, when the student is ready the teacher will appear... Peter, my spiritual teacher appeared and for the next 5 years I chose for him to help me explore the depths of myself... After all Kristnamurti had said... 'You are the World'...

I learned how to feel with my heart, feeling into each moment what I liked and what was good for me... instead of relying on what other people thought was good for me and expected of me... My self-awareness expanded, I got to know myself, you could say I fell in love with myself, I trusted myself and I became important, extraordinary and magnificent...

A new world was opening up for me and slowly but surely my old life, feelings, beliefs, relationships with family and friends fell away and I began to see things in a whole different light... I was not only feeling and sensing... what was important for me to experience, but I understood that I was part of something much bigger... I understood that there was truly no separation from what was out there and within me... My outer world mirrored my inner world and this helped me make sense of myself... I became deeply excited about exploring a newfound multi-dimensional world that I was a part of... I was so much more than my physical human body and mind... I had a soul and spiritual essence that was part of me and connected to ALL... Source... Love... I AM everything and my unique magnificent self... I AM YOU and YOU ARE ME... We are all just separate in different bodies for a while enjoying unique and individual human experiences...

I began to enjoy walking in nature, feeling and seeing the beauty around me... I connected with it all... I began to paint and write... I changed my work and found different friends with whom I could discuss my new found awareness... I could no longer just talk about the weather, the mundane reality and drama that continued to happen in peoples life's... I became less materialistic and more focused on expanding into a world beyond our known physical reality... to SOURCE itself... I no longer had a need to search for more... as it was ALL right here in the now moment and within me... I was consciously breathing, living and allowing life to unfold... even the unpleasant things in life... were all part and parcel of my experience... showing me, teaching me to accept ALL... and allowing all the traumatised, unloved and frightened parts of me to come back to me and integrate as one...

We arranged for Tom to retire early and we made our move to live in Southern Spain...

We wanted to leave the dreary weather and hectic life and settle into a quieter and warmer climate to experience peace, fun and find out what we were truly passionate about and enjoyed... The quietness enabled me to go deeper into myself and allowed me to connect with 9 New Elemental Beings... Aspects of myself that have shared wise insights over the last 7 years, to help me integrate, expand my body consciousness (Mind, Body and Spirit) and bring in New Potential...

It wasn't all quietness though... in fact we both experienced a lot of distraction and confrontation with people and situations around us... giving us another opportunity to face our fears and traumas that have been waiting patiently for release... It was time for everything that no longer served me to come up, be noticed, accepted and released... I was again moving into a new space that I liked and resonated with and had friends and family around me that I could relax and enjoy fun and laughter with...

My body consciousness was coming into balance as I allowed myself to live my passion and create my dream... exploring new horizons in the New Energy Consciousness... I feel lighter and wiser now, loving and trusting myself completely... Of course I still get distracted and doubts come up, but no longer so loud or big... I take myself out into nature and breathe... consciously breathing, looking at my doubts... knowing now that they are all parts of myself, travelling home, to be welcomed, loved and to be one with ALL of me...

I live gracefully and at ease with my magnificent self... and as my doubts calm... I know that my trust in ALL THAT IAM encourages the natural process of manifesting and creating my life... my passion and hearts desire welcomes in new potential that allows the appropriate energy to come in and give birth to my grandest dream for myself and mankind...

Yes I have a grand dream... One heart at a time, humanity is naturally awakening to the truth of their own magnificence... remembering they come from and are a source of love... I stand among you all, here and now, firmly balanced... radiating my love and joy into the world... knowing that everything is perfectly well...

IAM Barbara Franken... Inspiring New Energy Consciousness...

You can read more about my journey on my blog...

www.sacredheartsretreat.com

<http://www.memymagnificentself.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... The power of music and the influence on the heart... Paddy

The most under rated experience in the world, music, a greater influence on the world, than parenting, potentially that is, if used wisely and understood, same as the scriptures of old. I joined the new year writing challenge, because I'm a lazy minded person, slow to act, I don't chase schedules, I need to set targets, but I don't set them, it's a contradiction, but a target reminds me of the goals, friends used to set for themselves, girl friends. Ladies and men can have friendships without sharing the duvet, well, it's okay to go under cover, but you get what I mean. It's possible, not everyone judges you according to your statistics, or the hormone level they are experiencing, or the inner prison they lived in. Even if society the world over has been groomed in that fashion, I myself was never a follower of fashion, as my blog will clearly indicate. Would not want to be one of those advertising guru's who sold out love across the world, or those that deliberately led love astray. If you don't have a sense of humour eternity can seem a long time. If my words seem all over the place, hang on, there is a message in it somewhere, you'll either assume this man is off the charts, occasionally you'll laugh at yourself.

The rush to get married wasn't my priority, no one rushes on love, even if it was all that seemed to matter to some, love isn't a grab, love is emotional food. If society puts a noose around you, that's society, it has nothing to do with Love. He wants to marry me, the gushing feelings, the high, the glossy eyed emotions, experienced it with friends, I was a watcher, so you have an idea now of what I am saying hopefully. What has this to do with the power of music, confused, wondering where this is going. Well go make yourself a coffee, sit alone for five minutes, remember the friends who've been through the washer emotionally, the debris, the scars they are forever referring to, it can be an addiction, in a nutshell, when the heart is damaged, the consequences can be eternal, when the heart is moved, what a feeling, long lasting. Music is a cure for many things, do you recall your favourite song, what was his name, did she smile, does it make you teary eyed every time you hear it, after she'd gone, getting the picture, the songs we attach to love, everyone has it, unless your heart is dead. Those emotionally committed to love, have the music in them, and when the musical influence starts young, it stays in the heart, a reservoir of emotional hope. You need to turn on the tap, put on that song that reminded you of him, or her, music revives the soul is what is being said here, and how it's used is vital to so many things..

The world is at a point in time, when everything is up for grabs. The older you are, the less impressed you are with modern music, only generalising. They said the same in the 1920.s, the 1930's, Elvis was a demonic influence, the Beatles encouraged drugs, the list is as long as the time it takes to grow a fully mature redwood tree 200 years old. If you have the rhythm, it's medicine for the heart. Music today is as powerful as it was twenty years ago, even more important now that ever before, as the environment for so many, is in real trouble, in particular so, for the young ones, who are as rebellious as I

was, the day I came home from college one day, and had a feather in the ear, at least it wasn't a tattoo, well they have laser's now I suppose.

Over the decades, many puritan types, the same types who lynched Jesus Christ, thought they were acting in complete faith, made a big mistake on that one, later they burnt St. Joan of Arc, attempted to destroy the faith of the eastern prophets too, in their attempts to purify us all, tried to ban heavy metal, came up with all sorts of excuses, destroyed a generation of writers in the U.S, and the same process, was repeated all over the world, for a variety of reasons, a certain method of thought, the control of others, the root source of evil everywhere.

Music frees the will, gives you the opportunity to dream, to be outside the range of those who attempt to close the minds and hearts of all, putting love in a box, suffocating our relationship with all that is healthy, turning the world into an ant hill of shoppers, who can be directed anywhere, and it's been success everywhere, except on the output of music and words, as all great and good talent, comes from the spirit of God Most High.

As a child, I had the influence of music every day at home. My older siblings, grew up to the music of the sixties, the Beatles, moody blues, the classic composers, opera, deep purple, an era of idealism, where love was central to everything, speaking up was considered normal and decent. Together with a mother, who lived to be good every day she lives, and still does, a father bent on the power of education and the wisdom of the church, not always necessarily the wisdom of God, but a great tryer as they say, a melody of grand influences as they say. But without the music, it would have made no sense to me at all, zero.

I'm still a child at heart, and find today, many years later, when in doubt about life, and the pains that go with it, I return to the safety of the heart, and the music takes me there, and it's as simple as that.

During my odyssey, life is a journey, a destination in time, that never ends for those with the gift of faith, I encountered great music along the way, that eased my worries, unloaded my emotions, love can stun you effectively, but during the great voyage, and I'm not even out of the harbour yet, I am still amazed at what music can do for you, turn you up, bring you tears, create an instant smile, raise the heart strings, whatever, and it's the one tool, that those with evil intent have never managed to control, even though they made every effort to do so.

In praise of music, words and deeds, the Great God Most High, is wisdom personified, and as Jesus so eloquently said all those years ago, if only we had the faith the size of a mustard seed, we could change everything, it's that simple...

You can read more of Paddy's journey on his website...

<http://paddypicasso.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Manny...

Like many gay men, I grew up ashamed of who I was thanks to society's insistence that being gay is one of the worst fates for a boy. You are taught that being gay lessens you as a man that you're abnormal, and that God hates you. Growing up gay can be one of the most traumatic experiences because you learn to hate a part of yourself that you are powerless to change. I hoped, wished, and prayed that I'd one day no longer be gay. Hope was lost, wishes never came true, and God stayed silent.

Things began to change for me when the United States' 2012 presidential political campaigns started. I identified myself as a Republican so I was paying close attention to the debates of the candidates who were hoping to become the Republican presidential candidate that would run against Obama. During a debate on September 22, 2011 (see videos below), a gay soldier serving in Iraq posed a question to the candidates about gays in the military and boos started coming from the Republican audience. I sat there in disbelief as none of the potential candidates on stage stood up for the soldier. At that moment, I decided I could no longer claim to support a party that promised to take a step back in terms of gay rights and it was then that I decided I would no longer remain silent on the issue of equal rights for gay people. Even though it would still be a few months before I started coming out, I started to become more vocal on these issues.

[youtube=<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJPKQ3UQslc&w=560&h=315>]

[youtube=<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiU3maL6rzE&w=560&h=315>]

I searched Youtube for a video of the soldier being booed at the debate and I stumbled upon a video of another soldier who came out to his dad just a couple of days earlier when Don't Ask Don't Tell was repealed. I admired his courage and I followed his channel. Seeing how much happier he was after letting the world know he was gay inspired me to begin turning my life around. I was 25 and miserable that I was just letting my life pass me by and not really doing anything with it. I had resigned myself to living a sedentary lifestyle and possibly face an early death due to my obesity (it may sound dramatic, but those were my feelings).

It was incredibly frightening, but I decided it was time to stop hiding myself, hating myself, and being ashamed. There was a time when I would have never checked into Walt Disney Concert Hall or the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on social media. What would people say if they saw that I went to the LA Phil or the LA Opera? I couldn't risk letting the world suspect how much I loved classical music and opera. I loved bowties, but would the other men start to wonder about me if I wear one? I was embarrassed to run because of how I looked. I was convinced everyone would laugh at me if I tried to run. I hated myself so much for being a coward and preferred the safety of hiding and isolation. It was incredibly isolating and exhausting having to hide the things you loved

out of fear, so I let the veil fall and what followed is the most incredible time of my life.

In 2013, I participated in many running events not caring if I would be ridiculed or not. I lost the shame of running and I let the world know I did it while listening to opera on my headphones. What I thought people would find alienating, they instead found interesting. I stopped trying to be "normal" and people began to not only accept me but love my unique qualities. I became their go-to person for questions on classical music and opera. I discovered that people weren't laughing at the overweight runner, they were inspired by him. I love the fact that someone can look at me and believe that they can run a marathon if I can run one. I went from feeling out of place in a group of runners, to now answering their questions and giving advice about running.

It was so incredibly inspiring to see people accepting these other aspects of my life that I decided I wanted to come out as publicly as I could and I did it on March 17, 2013 when I ran my first marathon, the Los Angeles Marathon. In the running community I had found an incredibly supportive community and I felt so at peace with myself while running that wanted my coming out to coincide with my first marathon. It was the perfect day to do it.

I felt vulnerable exposing my true self for people to judge. However, seeing so many people love the real me is priceless and the most rewarding feeling ever. I was so overwhelmed when I crossed the finish line of the LA Marathon and saw all the messages of support I was receiving through various social avenues. Now the relationships I have with people are genuine and I don't have to worry about losing them over some secret of mine. So this stage in my life was about dismantling the façades I had fabricated in my life to keep me safe from insult and ridicule, and this is when I realized that mask I wore to protect myself from insults also kept me from being loved for whom I really was.

Once I embarked on this long journey of accepting who I am, great things followed. My self-loathing began to subside, and the faint and almost extinguished will to live inside me began to shed light on the positives in my life. I saw hope's nascent flicker and it was enough to ignite in me the courage necessary to pursue the things I loved. I learned to explore art freely; I lost my fear of enjoying classical music openly and proudly; and lost the self-shame keeping me from joining the wonderful groups that introduced me to the world of fitness. Accepting my homosexuality has been the most liberating experience. If being gay is the worst things that could have happened to me, then I am very optimistic about the rest of my life. Once I realized people would judge me regardless, their opinions lost bearing on my sense of self-worth. What if I love the arts, design, cooking, and clothes? Will people think I'm gay? I am, so go ahead!

I am deeply appreciative of everyone in my life. In one way or another every person has gotten me through my most difficult moments and has shaped me into the man I am today. I cannot change the past and I cannot deny the fact that mistakes are as much a

contributing factor to who I am today as any other choice I've ever made. I've learned to love myself with all the defects that I may come with and only in this way have I been able to work towards the life I was meant to live.

Coming out, even in today's society, can be a very frightening experience, but at the end of the day it can be one of the most wonderful and rewarding ones that the straight world would be hard pressed to find its equivalence.

I realize being openly gay is only a part of my own awakening experience, however I do feel like it is the keystone. All the other aspects of my life that I hid were somehow tied to this one secret in my life. I felt like if I shared any part of who I was with the world, it would somehow lead to suspicion that I was gay. Now that this one part of my life of which I was most ashamed of is out in the open, I've felt the freedom to pursue all the things in life that I enjoy.

The best part is that not only do you feel liberated, but you feel this abundance of energy that you wish to share with those around you. I am now involved with a few LGBT organizations including an alumni association from my university where I mentor LGBT undergraduates. I've been able to take people to concerts and introduce them to the wonderful world of orchestral music. Even in running, I love sharing advice, help out with social media for my running club, and I'm in charge of coordinating where hundreds of runners meet every week.

We've all got something unique we can share with the world and it will be a better place because of it. Don't hide it. Let it flourish!

You can read more about Manny's journey on his website <http://emantable.com>

My Awakening Experience... Divine Gifts... Julianne Victoria

I chose this date for the challenge because January 5th is the Twelfth Day of Christmas and tomorrow the 6th is the Epiphany, which is the day the three Magi (wise men or astrologers), who after studying the heavens and following a specific star, visited the newborn baby Jesus. This star became known as the Star of Bethlehem.

The Magi brought gifts to their new-born king, the son of God: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold symbolizes kingship, value, and virtue. Frankincense symbolizes God, deities, and the Divine. Smells, perfumes, and incense are used in many different religious and spiritual practices. Smell is also the sense (of the 5 senses) that is related to the element of earth and the root chakra, Muladhara. This may reflect that the root of our Being, of our divine essence, of our souls is with the Divine of All. The third gift that the Magi brought was myrrh. Myrrh is a tree resin used as an oil, and it symbolizes mortality, death, and suffering. Ancient cultures, such as the Egyptians, used myrrh as a preservative embalming oil for the dead.

These three gifts, though they are fittingly symbolic for a human-deity king, can also be seen as symbolic for all of us, for we are all part of the divine source, the One. The gold represents the golden light of virtue within all of us, and that each of us has value and worth. The frankincense represents the divine within each of us, which is connected and interconnected to the divine in every single one of us and everything. The myrrh represents the experiences of suffering, growth, learning, and joy that our mortal bodies and minds experience, but our souls, our divine selves, will be preserved and live on after the death of the physical.

In resonance with the Christmas Season and the New Beginnings of the New Year, I'd like to share an awakening experience, or more of an annual re-awakening or further awakening practice, that has become a tradition for me since New Year's Eve 2005 – I do a labyrinth meditation practice. This has been a very powerful silent contemplation practice that clears and opens the way for continued and new growth each new year.

On the journey into the labyrinth, I think about all that I wish to clear out, cleanse, and both want to and need to let go of from the past year. This can be physical, material, social, mental, emotional, and energetic or vibrational. When I reach the center of the labyrinth, I stand still, either in complete mental silence or I say a prayer or chant in my mind depending on the year. I stay there as long I feel I need to, until the old that I am releasing disperses, and I feel lighter. On the journey out of the labyrinth, I meditate on all that I wish to keep, continue, expand upon, grow with, and bring into and receive into my life in the coming year.

I realized during this year's labyrinth meditation, that the journey of the Magi might also have been an awakening experience. The Three Magi are believed to have travelled a long distance and must have had much time for silent meditation and contemplation on

their journey. On their journey to the baby Jesus, they had time to contemplate all that life on earth had been, and what they hoped would change and be released. Meeting Jesus would have been like coming to the center of the labyrinth, where they stopped in prayer and adoration to the Divine. On their journey away from the nativity, they must have contemplated on how their world would soon change, and all the good they hoped would come into it.

Journeying to the center of the labyrinth is symbolic to me of journeying deep into the golden essence of my Being, to connect fully with God, the Divine, Source, All, and the One that is within. It is an awakening experience in the clear light of awareness, that allows me to look at my life with the clarity between what is and what is impermanent, empty, meaningless, and mortal. In walking the labyrinth, I receive the gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Whatever your religious beliefs, spiritual practices, or none of these, we all can strive to follow the light of our inner essence and wisdom, and allow it to guide us to ever more awareness. Like the Magi following the Star of Bethlehem, let us all follow our inner star, the light within us, and may it guide us all to many new and wondrous things in the new year and beyond...

You can read more about Julianne's Journey on her website...

<http://juliannevictoria.com>

My awakening Experience... The Quest for the Divine Glance... Sarah

Rumi wrote of it. Christ Yahshua (Jesus) certainly experienced and shared it, when he spoke of “letting your eye be single,” and “full of light.” The Hindus and Sikhs call it Darshan. And yet, with millions of Christians in this country, it seems virtually unheard of. Even feared.

This is the story of my first experience with the most powerful encounter with God — looking into God’s eyes.

I experienced it for the first time at the Healing Center in Columbia, SC, sometime in late 2001 or early 2002, if I recall. The group focused on “A Course in Miracles” and they had a leader from “The Academy” as it was referred to.

I came in a little late and the group had already started. The leader, Peter, was standing with his arms up in the middle of the room. I think someone told me later that what he was doing was called, “creating the space,” but I can’t be sure. Peter was a tall, thin man with a fascinating accent (Australian, maybe?) and medium brown close-cropped hair. He looked at me with this loving smile of joy on his face as I came into the room. I felt instantly connected to him even though I had never met him before and then I felt a force come from him that touched me all around my head and shoulders.

I didn’t recognize what it was at the time and Peter himself did not seem to know what he had done. When I told him after the meeting what had happened, he said, “That wasn’t me, that was you!” Actually, I think it was both of us. I was ready to receive it and he was ready to give it.

This happened shortly after I had a spiritual awakening in which I became aware of the presence of God in the here and now. For three months I walked around in a state of bliss. As Neale Donald Walsch says (or God says, through him) “Heaven is nowhere. Now. Here.”

It was probably a year or two later before I met a man who knew what this experience was and how to share it with intent. He was a Sufi who made chain mail armor and jewelry to sell at renaissance fairs. I met him, believe it or not, on an online dating site. His spiritual name was Hanuman but his birth name was Manny.

Manny was not much taller than I am, around 5’ 5” or 5’ 6”, thin, with long dark hair and deep brown eyes. His physical presence hid an incredibly beautiful spirit. He was Jewish but had become a follower of Sufism, the esoteric, mystical sect of Islam. He once told me that if he were on a plane hijacked by Muslim extremists, he would be one of the first they would want to kill but that he could keep the plane safe by going into a prayer chant, “La illaha illa ‘la,” There is no God but God. Muslims are forbidden to kill someone while they are connected to God, so if they were truly Muslim, they would be

unable to blow up or crash the plane as long as he was praying.

When we went out on a date, he told me that there was a time when for an initiate to enter the order, he had to be able to demonstrate mastery of the Fire breath. The initiate was taken out into the snow and told to sit under six wet blankets. In order to be accepted INTO the order, he had to use the Fire breath to dry all the blankets and melt the snow for six feet around him. Imagine that.

So, over dinner in a noisy restaurant, we were talking about our favorite subject, God, whom the Sufis call "the Beloved." I think I must have been expressing my joy in His presence and my love for Him. (Although I refer to God as He and I experience Him as masculine, I feel that Spirit is both masculine and feminine, and neither. God is Spirit. I know and respect many who experience God as She.)

At one point Manny went silent. He dropped his gaze for a second and then looked up at me and gave me the most loving, joyful smile I had ever seen. When I looked into his eyes it was suddenly like looking into the eyes of eternity, into an infinite depth of stars. That force I had felt before, through Peter, touched me with undeniable power. I felt this immense Love and suddenly it was all joy, all of it, existence itself, and I had to laugh. I knew without a doubt, this time, that I was looking into the eyes of God, the Beloved.

This may upset some people but I felt in that instant like life was a huge cosmic joke we are all enjoying. I remembered what Neale Donald Walsch taught me and I felt it when I looked into the Beloved's eyes. I know this is hard for people who have experienced a lot of pain in their lives to hear, but we are all doing this to ourselves! God is not outside of us, judging our every move. He is INSIDE us, living with us through everything that we call into our path. So it is our choice whether to experience joy or pain. I prefer to give Him my joy.

I remember saying in that instant, "I felt that!" Manny said, with that same joyful smile, "I know."

Soon after our date in Hilton Head where I lived, I went down to Florida to visit Manny. This is where I found out that the Divine Glance can also be dark.

Once, Manny looked at me and I saw something hungry, predatory, and arrogant. I can't describe it any other way except "demonic." I felt an instant of terror and I told him, "I just saw something... else..." He said, "Something more human?" I said yes, because I couldn't bear to tell him what I really saw.

I don't know what was different in that moment. Perhaps he was thinking of me with lust and that was why it shifted. Perhaps it was some unnamed fear in me, of him, that I was projecting. I don't know, but that instant still haunts me. I would like to believe that aspect of the Divine is a mask, an illusion.

Manny told me that he did share the Divine Glance in an unusual way once. He had a female friend who was being stalked by a man who claimed to be a Satanist. When this Satanist was bothering her at a party, she came to Manny for help. Manny looked at him with the Divine Glance and the man got a look of terror on his face. He left immediately and never bothered her again.

If the Divine Glance is a mirror, I can imagine what he saw. I would bet he dropped Satanism.

I was able to share the Divine Glance after Manny shared it with me but I have also experienced someone receiving it as darkness from me when I did not intend it that way. I thought my intent was pure but I honestly can't say now. I had just done a healing session on a woman which had gone extremely well, miraculously clearing almost all of her pain, but before the session she told me she was feeling a lot of fear in her life. Perhaps it was her fear of God that called it darkness. Or perhaps it was my ego that twisted it. Maybe I was "showing off" just a little instead of sharing.

I do not believe in coincidence, so what does it mean that her name was also Sarah? For me, it calls up the scene from one of the Star Wars movies, when Luke Skywalker goes into the dark cave and fights himself...

For a long time, I stopped trying to share the Divine Glance after that. I did go back to sharing it without that experience of darkness eventually. I think it is time to share it again, this way. I was afraid for a while that talking about it would create resistance from the ego but I believe ultimately in Divine Order. This article will come to only those who are ready to read it. I don't expect it to get a huge following but I would be thrilled if it did! Perhaps we are all ready to awaken.

So, keep that ego in check, and keep your eyes open for the loving Glance of God. I will be looking for you in Heaven, Beloved... Here and now...

And the quest is complete when we realize our journey is not TO God, but WITH God. With the Beloved.

You can read more about Sarah's journey on her website...

<http://theskycladwriter.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Shree

The Tower card from tarot decks usually signify an event or time in one's life when the Universe and their life stream / soul / Spirit decide it's time for the individual to wake up. It may present itself as a traumatic event or a time in when everything seems to be falling apart. I also believe that it can present itself as an inner turmoil – like thunder rumbling within the darkened sky heralding a major storm, like the turbulent sea in the midst of such a storm, with strong winds forming huge crashing waves as we grip the edge of the little row boat we seem to find ourselves in. And, I think that is when we come to certain major cross-roads in our journey, a place where we decide which way we are going to go – sometimes consciously but before that mostly unconsciously. Most times we aren't sure what we are doing, we're scared, confused and we stumble along in blind panic trying our best to talk ourselves back into some semblance of calm. Sometimes, there is a voice within us that feels like the glow from a candle still alight even with the raging storm all around us, nudging us towards a certain choice or action. Either way, these times in our lives give us the opportunities to do what can't not be done. The choice though is always ours.

This is my story.

The very first major experience that I had which I can recall wasn't too long ago – in the grand scheme of things anyway. It was about 10 years ago, in a marriage that wasn't working out too well, I fell into some sort of clinical depression. The reason why I say "some sort" is because I didn't see anyone about it. What I did have involved "starting" my day going to work in the morning, coming home at five in the evening, crashing into bed till 10, staying awake the whole night till it was time to get to work either aimlessly surfing the net to escape reality or listening to music while getting lost in a fantasy world, smoking a lot more than was normal, when eating junk food instead of actual meals seemed easier, when taking a shower seemed like a major undertaking and therefore going days without one and actually feeling your heart shrivel up like a dried up prune. It was easier to not talk to the man I had married, in fact it felt peaceful. It was easier not talking to anyone because it took more energy than I could spare AND when you spend eight to nine hours a day talking to patients you just don't have it in you to talk anymore, or that's what I told myself. If I had to describe the two years in once sentence it would be that it felt like I was living in a thick, mucoid fog, feeling the core of myself shriveling up.

In April of 2006 I left. I had to. I couldn't not leave. It was for both our sakes. I stumbled along the path I chose. It felt as if a horrible weight had lifted off my chest and being; and the times when I wondered if it had been the right choice, my palpitating heart and quickened respiration told me otherwise. It was liberating and at the same time it felt like I was still groping around in the dark. Looking back now, I feel it was like being born again. It was an opportunity of getting used to living life in the material sense – relearning how to forge friendships, being responsible for the daily things we do,

becoming financially responsible, and at the same time it should have been a time for healing. How did I do? Well, that's the thing isn't it. When we aren't really sure or aware of what's going on within and around us, not truly aware, we sort of grope around in the dark, bumping into things, tripping over things, falling down, getting up and just...moving until at one point we fall back into a rut because we just don't know any better. That is just what I did!

Fast forward to 2010 and Life nudged me along towards an open door. It wasn't one that was fully ajar, I don't think it happens that way. I feel it opens, maybe half way allowing us a peek at what lies behind the door, an idea of what it is offering and then waits to see if we choose to open it wider and walk through. That's free will. I had my first Tarot card reading and suddenly I had (again, I feel it was more an unconscious choice going along with the flow of Life rather than a conscious one) walked into and onto people and opportunities which allowed to rekindle the interest I had in all things spiritual. You see, I had always harboured strong feelings towards this, this which I used to call "the occult and religion". I loved listening to stories about other religions, spiritual teachings, the occult, life's mysteries and the like. I had even bought a Tarot deck a long time ago but for some reason found it a little too complicated at that time. In 2010...I was ready. In 2010, I unknowingly made the choice to follow the path which would then take me to that point in time when I would finally awaken from the deep, deep slumber I was in. To finally open my eyes groggily at first and then with more clarity to actually start seeing with an awakened sense of awareness.

Some people who awaken have very drastic shifts, some like me sort of gently flow into it. Some people have sudden, awesome experiences while some like me seem to gather things gently. Some seem to blaze through once they've had an experience which awakens them to themselves and some like myself seem to have these "start-stop" phases intertwined with "plateaus" and then what seems like a "downward spill". The thing is, I have learned that it really doesn't matter because the over all effect is that once you choose to wake up and have successfully (and might I add a little stubbornly) rubbed the sleep from your eyes, once you've chosen to reach that tipping point of being more awake than asleep...it's all systems go! The type of systems may be different for each person but at some point you will notice that you can't not be unaware anymore. Sure, at times it takes conscious effort, but the sum total of your experiences will be awareness.

In 2012 there was another shift which happened. It's as if my soul didn't allow me to be at peace until I did something drastic.

In 2010, I was working in the corporate world as a Medical Manager for a Pharmaceutical company. The pay was good, the people I worked with were nice and I enjoyed some parts of my job...enough to allow me to go to work every day until at one point in time when I felt something wasn't right. I didn't seem to want to go to work anymore. I felt restless and uncomfortable; and the more I felt it the more I thought it

was due to the change in the internal environment at work. I attributed it to everything else but a change in me. You see I didn't sit in silence and contemplate this feeling. Instead I panicked, pulled by the tide of "I must get out of here!!" and that is what I did. Two years later, I looked for another job and agreed to the first opportunity that came to me. Within 3 months of joining the new company (also as a Medical Manager) , the feeling of being trapped came back ...with a bigger bang. In my own way, I think this was when I sat down – maybe not so much in silence as being a little more quiet- and contemplated about why I was feeling this. As the months passed I must have listened to the voice in me and the more I listened the more it became apparent that I needed to do something that I wouldn't have thought of doing normally. What came out of this was that I left my job. I couldn't not leave my job because that wasn't an option...well it was but then I'd have to live a very uncomfortable life if I had chosen to stay.

In September of 2012, I made a choice, this time a more conscious choice to leave the corporate world and go back to practicing medicine on a part time basis even if it meant a significant pay cut. It was a conscious choice to give myself the time and the opportunity to take a journey within myself, to explore new ventures in writing and art and to see what happened as life unfolded.

It has been a year and 4 months now since that time and I am grateful that I made the choice. It worked for me. I am being given opportunities to write, to discover my ability in creating mandala, to face a lot of my fears, to experience and realize – to live a life of awareness. Does this mean that I'm blazing through life with everything falling into place just as I envisioned it?

No! BUT what it means is that I don't stumble as often as I used to and when I do stumble it's because of my fears and my stubborn mind. It means that I'm discovering things even when I do stumble and that it isn't so much of a hassle anymore but an opportunity. It means that at times things are as it always was but how I see it is different because it's perceived differently. It means that I take the conscious effort to question myself or a challenging situation when it presents itself. It means that I had to slowly learn to not be too hard on myself when I do slip. It means feeling disappointed, frustrated and at times wanting to just give everything up and go back to that deep slumber and yet taking the time to breathe and to embrace even this as an opportunity to shine. It means giving up on the idea of comparing my "progress" with the next person's because that just is not possible – at all. There is no comparison and if you have come from a background where that has always been an issue, it's one of the hardest things to overcome. It can be, because I'm half way up that wall. Sometimes, I slide then I catch myself before I slip right down, because you see...being awakened and going along this journey of choice into awareness IS that.

It IS to catch yourself before you slip back into unconsciousness. It IS to catch yourself by pausing, breathing, reflecting, centering yourself to your truth and getting back into the flow of things from a place that is calmer.

My journey continues and though it is far from “perfect”, it is as perfect as it should be for me...and as it is for each every one of us. No one gets left behind and that is something which can't be negotiated.

You can read more of Shree's journey on her website...

<http://heartsongsblog.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... My Way To Truth... Dace...

Awakening to who you truly are...is a lifelong process for some, a quick rock bottom for others, and will never happen for the rest of people.

Awakening is not a logical state one advances to. It is not something magical or something everybody should have or even want. Furthermore, it is not something that only a few chosen reach. Awakening is when you see things in their true light. Awakening is when you understand the difference between perception and reality.

Like the rest of the world throughout my life I had moments when I was utterly confused and lost. I did not know who I was, what I was doing here, and what my purpose was. So many times I felt like I was in a theater watching everybody else on the stage playing. They were so close but so far at the same time. Once in a while I felt like I had found my place but it lasted just for a few moments and I was back in the dark hole again.

I started looking around for answers. I wanted to know why nothing feels real, why people feel fake, why I feel fake, and why the truth is lingering in the air, but is so unreachable and always slips away.

I started my journey by reading books. Robert Scheinfeld's "Busting loose from a money game" and Jed McKenna's The enlightenment trilogy. Then I also explored Scheinfeld's online program, "Path To True Joy".

I chose to go down the rabbit hole. Two things turned my life upside down.

" how do you know that you are not dreaming right now?"

" you are going to die!"

As more I thought about them as deeper I reached within myself. Once you ponder long enough, life changes drastically. Let me ask you; if you found out that you will die tomorrow, what will truly matter today? What are things that will be important to you?

Exactly! I can see your marbles moving. Try to think about this for a while. Do not sweep your fear away, do not run, do not get back into your comfort zone and pretend like this doesn't apply to you. YOU WILL DIE. The question is when – in 5 minutes, tomorrow, in 20 years?

We live in a world that is built on fear, false beliefs and rules that are not ours. We create layers and layers of lies, convictions, personalities, and roles. We get told and taught what is true, how we are supposed to live, what to desire, and how to think.

The truth is that THE Truth is out there. It's all around us – in every moment of our lives, in sayings, in books, in poetry, and in quotes. One day you might have an AHA moment and you will never look back. You will not be able to. Once you see the truth, you can't go back to the ignorance.

"Life is a dream, realize it."

"Don't believe what your eyes are showing you. All they show is limitation."

"I do not exist to impress the world. I exist to live my life in a way that will make me happy."

"The process of enlightenment is not about becoming who you really are but about unbecoming who you never were."

I know, you think you understand what these quotes are telling you, but let me tell you that most likely you don't. If you did, you would not struggle, you would just be...

I've had glimpses of the truth. I have seen it, I have felt it, I have experienced it, and the more I allow myself to go with the flow, the happier I am. Once you see that people around you function and live based on fear (death, being different, disappointment, not fitting in, not living up to expectations, wrong choices), you start feeling the truth, you start embracing it, and living it.

What am I talking about? What kind of truth?

When you were born, you were an empty book. You had no understanding of what was right or wrong. You did not know what was good or bad. You did not have a set of words to describe things and you did not have experiences you associated with words and their meaning.

Now your book is almost full of references, words, and beliefs. You are a walking breathing Wikipedia of your people (parents, neighbors, teachers, friends, community). You live according to rules and beliefs that they taught you. This is a fact and it is the Truth. Your whole life is based on belief system of lies.

If I ask you to tell me what "bad" means, you will reach inside your memories and a collection of words and feelings to give a good description. Where did you get all that? Where did your beliefs, convictions, and morals come from? They are not yours. Remember, you were born without them.

Once you stop judging everything and once you stop comparing everything to a "good – bad" scale, you start living. If things just *are*, not good or bad, you experience them in a whole new way. You realize that you are not bound by them anymore. There are no such things as "I have to", "this is the right thing", "that's what people do", and etc.

Once you start realizing the falseness of who you have become, you start unlearning who you have never been.

There is only one thing you need to remember - everything in your life, including people, are the projection of your inner self and your beliefs. For something to be true, it has to be true for everyone.

Most of what we interact with is not the world itself. Those are our beliefs about it, our expectations of it, and our interpretation. We filter everything through our personal belief prism. We can't just stand aside and allow things unfold as we have a very difficult time observing events without confusing them with the thoughts we have about them, and so the majority of what we experience is imaginary things.

It was a long way to this point and I still have a long way to go to be fully integrated and not divided with the Universe, Mother nature, and my own world.

However, I am still a spectator in the theater but this time I do not feel that there is something wrong because I know – it is my play. I choose to play whatever the game is. I am not a slave to my beliefs. I enjoy everything that comes my way as I trust in myself and the Universe that whatever needs to happen, whatever I authentically desire, it will be just given to me in a way that is the best – be it a heart ripping loss of somebody close or a lottery winning.

Happiness is not a goal or a destination, happiness is a journey. Beliefs are limiting. Fear is paralyzing. Wants are based on false beliefs. You need to unlearn everything you know and everything you have considered true, and find The Truth.

You can read more of Dace's journey on her website...

<http://mywaytotruth.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Wake up and Smile at Life... Korinn

It was late November and I was taking a class on Energy Medicine. As part of the class we were guided through an Inner Smile Meditation. I had never practiced this meditation before but was open to the experience. The instructor gently led us through the first step: thinking of something that makes us smile. It could be anything as long as it induced a genuine smile to our face. Instantly I thought of my children and their bright and smiling faces appeared in my mind. It was easy to smile back at them and to feel my heart lighten with joy. The next step was to then drop the smile triggering thought and to just feel. And I mean literally just feel. To shift our attention to our body and really take notice of what our body felt like in that state of inner smiling. It felt great! And for a short blip of time my mind was actually silent because my attention was not in my mind but in my body. The instructor continued to lead us through the meditation guiding us to think of the trigger when our smile had faded and to repeat the process over and over for 10 minutes. I found the meditation to be easy enough to remember and enjoyable so I took his suggested challenge of making it a daily practice.

On day two I found myself at home setting a timer and sitting in the rocking chair in our family sunroom. I began with the same smile triggering thought of my children and continued the repetitive cycle going from thought to smile to feeling and back again for 10 minutes. On day three I started to venture out a little and now was switching up my triggering thoughts to being able to smile at the thought of other people and to memories as well. Each time my smile would fade it became easier to think of a new trigger that genuinely elicited the response of smiling brightly to myself. I realized that a smile is not just an emotional response but it is a gateway to the opening of the heart to experience more joy and presence in one's life. Spending a simple 10 minutes a day focusing on smiling and feeling my inner smile was balancing me out to be more present in other parts of the day. I wasn't only feeling its benefit I was living it.

I continued on through day four and five but it wasn't until day six that I had a spontaneous shift in opening my heart to the simple and the mundane as being worthy smile triggers. As I sat in the rocking chair in the sunroom I prepared to quiet my mind and illicit a trigger thought only this time as I became present in the moment and aware of my surroundings I heard a noise in the background. It was the noise of water running. In fact it was water running into my washing machine. Only moments before I had loaded it mindlessly thinking of something else as I shoved the clothes in, added the detergent, turned and pulled the knob, and closed the lid. Just going through the motions and then walking away ironically to go and be present in meditation. So here I sit having this beautiful and rewarding time to myself as my lovely and tireless washing machine works away for me. The thought made me smile. And in that moment I felt such genuine joy and appreciation for my washing machine. I even giggled out loud a

little bit in amusement thinking, “Really, is this really happening? I’m smiling because of my washing machine.” But as I felt into the moment it was undeniably true. The thought of my washing machine working was indeed raising a sense of joy within me and causing me to smile. In moments like this life really is so simple and so beautiful.

I continued on and in the next moment as my smile faded I needed another trigger. This time I focused on feeling the sunshine on my face. A smile came easily to my lips. What a beautiful and simple feeling I thought...sunshine. And then I dropped the thought and just felt my body. My heart felt so open and so happy as I just breathed and sat there. I continued on for the remainder of the 10 minutes focusing on the simple and the mundane, the blue sky, the chair I sat in, and my house in general. All of these thoughts were able to transcend to feelings of love, joy, and appreciation. No doubt my heart felt full upon completing the 10 minutes that day because I had consciously shifted to being ‘awake’ in viewing the beauty of the world that I was immersed in. It wasn’t the thought of the people who weren’t there, or the memories that had already happened, or even the dreams for the future. It was just me being in the space that I was in. In the space of beautiful, simple, and overflowing life.

When we stop from the normal rush of the day and practice presence, like in the Inner Smile Meditation, we open to allowing a new state of being in little by little. This is true because awakening, in truth, is not a solitary occurrence but it is an unfolding that deepens over time. It is cyclical in nature in that an opening of consciousness occurs and then each time we come around to that same opening we are able to make it a little bigger and a little bigger letting more awareness in. You see it is not the body that limits us as human beings it is the mind. And even though the inner smile first teaches you to use your mind to feel your body and open your heart it is actually training you to eventually feel that state of joy without any thought needed. It is actually priming you for a more transcendental relationship of using your heart to open your mind. In the shifting of human consciousness it is the heart that will open the mind as we move from being mind-centered beings to becoming heart-centered beings. The Inner Smile Meditation is a great place to begin deepening your own unfolding. Through it you too will connect with the potential for joy held in every moment, by smiling at life.

Korinn is an author, illustrator and Energy Healing Practitioner... You can read more about her journey on her website www.Korinn.com...

My Awakening Experience... Cindy Sue...

I have been at this for over 30 years and I have earned molecules of conscious awareness, and I am no where near being an awakened human. I have a problem when someone uses that term and claims, they are awakened, now it is probably just semantics, or a misunderstanding but.... Only a master is truly awake in consciousness. I say the Dalai Lama, is possibly an awakened human but I am not aware of others, although I am sure there are a few.

There have been numerous moments of connection with God Source where I felt truly expanded awareness, had seconds of overwhelming all knowingness but it is impossible to maintain that connection or to maintain that frequency. As at says at Delphi Temple, "Man Know Thyself," I believe that each day we endeavor at that knowing our true self and distinguishing between what is part of our being and what is not, chips away at unconsciousness and gives us just a bit more conscious awareness.

Like I said I have had many instances of connection, which I just don't have time to tell. I recall pure bliss in my backyard when I was in love, such an expansion of the heart with nature, and the universe. That exist within me and should be accessible at anytime, but is it? Not easily, maybe I need the endorphins released by love.

You can read more of Cindy's journey on her website...

<http://bluebutterfliesandme.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Stefanie...

I feel like we come into this world as newborn babies, usually soft and split open, our hearts splayed wide, as authentic human beings and partly as untamed animals. We grow. We develop. We absorb. We are shaped by our environment, our parents, our DNA. We are who we are, inside, and we are who we have to be – to survive, to be accepted in society, to get what we need. To a certain degree we are trained and tamed and in part it is for our own good. It keeps us safe in some ways. But it is a double-edged sword. To a certain extent we are also taught to squelch and ignore our intuition, we are taught to mistrust our impulses, we are taught to “control” our emotions, usually by trapping them in tension patterns in our bodies.

And then there is the trauma. It’s kind of a given for the human experience. It can look a lot of different ways but we all experience it in some form or another. We all experience pain and fear and we learn to protect ourselves from being so wide open. Unfortunately, not many of us learn effective means of processing or coping with our traumas and instead of being resolved they tend to haunt us until we are forced to deal with them and heal them...nor not

So to me, our natural state of being is to be Awakened. I think we come into the world this way. But then many of us undergo a process of being covered up, buried, molded, hurt, scarred, and masked. We hide our true selves so deeply inside we hardly know who we are anymore because we are running the automatic scripts we have been given. Some of them work great for us, others not so much.

So I had my fair share of “programming” from society as well as trauma and I ended up literally covering myself up. By the age of 30 or so I was at my highest weight of 313 pounds and supremely unhappy with my life and myself.

I think I’ve always been sensitive and intuitive but I didn’t really know how to walk confidently in the world with these gifts. Indeed, I suffered from extreme lack of confidence all through high school and was a classic overachiever. I never felt good enough and tortured myself about my body and my weight. I danced, ballet and jazz and tap, and I just didn’t have the right body type. I could never be the dancer I wanted to be so desperately. In my mind at 140 pounds and a size 8, I was as huge as I became in real life years later wearing a woman’s 2X. It didn’t surprise me how big I was because I’d always felt that big. In fact, now the outward reality matched the inner reality.

And I gave up dancing. I did nothing creative, nothing that nourished my soul. I worked and I thought that “ought” to be enough. Why was I so unhappy? What the hell was wrong with me? Why was so much wrong with me?

I would say that “Awakening” for me has been a process rather than one single “Aha!” moment. I feel like I am continuing to awaken every day, coming more and more to life with each day I eat on my plan, do my workouts, each dance lesson I take, each new friend I make. I’m expanding into other creative areas as well – besides writing on the blog, I am also discovering a penchant for poetry. It is as if as I continue to uncover myself, dig myself out from under the mountains of fat, I am also releasing creative potentials that had been blocked. I feel safer and safer to be more “me” and to explore all of me, all my potentiality.

But there are two poignant moments that come to mind when thinking about Awakening. The first was a mundane moment walking from my car into a building. It was extremely taxing. It was so difficult to just plain walk that I was startled by it. I thought to myself, “This just isn’t right! I’m a dancer! It shouldn’t be this hard to walk.” It was very disconcerting. The other moment was on a cruise with my husband. There was lots of eating and lots of drinking and I just didn’t feel well. I had these dull pains in the region of my liver and I thought to myself, no joke, “I need to change things or I am going to die. It’s time to make a decision about this – because either I am going to change and get better, or I am going to kill myself living like this.” And it scared me.

Hmmm. Not very mushy or happy lol. But sometimes life has to hit us in the head with a 2 x 4 for us to get the message. It’s not always pleasant. But I still think it’s loving, in our best interests. It’s a call to awareness of what exactly is going on, of what we are doing to ourselves. Spirituality doesn’t always feel good. Because we are incarnated as humans right now we must embrace both the esoteric and the practical. I try to live my life at the intersection of spirituality and pragmatism.

Anyways, so there I was fat, unhappy, a little bit scared, and knowing I had to do something, anything, and my previous efforts had failed miserably. I had done all these personal growth and mastery workshops and they were great and I learned a lot and implemented a lot of what I’d learned, but still I was struggling, far from a life of my dreams – in fact, far from a life that I could even really tolerate.

I think a big turning point for me was rediscovering dance. I’d never heard of ballroom dancing as a kid but life is funny. I took my first lesson out of a gym because I saw a guy teaching in the rec room and it looked more fun than the stupid treadmill that I was on. I bought 5 lessons and I was hooked. My previous dancing as a kid had prepared me quite well to take on the challenges of ballroom. And, even better, ballroom dancing resonated with my being in a way no other dance form had. There is something about the connection, being in a partnership, being responsible for my own self but also to be present for another human being, that gives me confidence in myself, helps me to stretch outside my comfort zone and grow, and has empowered me to dance my spirit. Ballroom has allowed me to show my authentic self in ways not available to me in my previous life. Indeed, dancing is as much a spiritual pursuit as it is a physical one. I believe dancing requires one’s entire being, and that includes the energetic and unseen

realms.

During my first lessons all I did was basically cry. I cried rivers moving my hips! I had so much pain to process and it was all coming out. But I knew I wanted to dance from this deep place inside. It kept me going when I had horrible blisters on my toes that I had to tape over, when my feet hurt so badly every morning that I'd hobble out of bed like an old woman, when I was exhausted and sweating and everything hurt. And you know what? Eventually it got better.

Now I move my hips with joy! In fact, they are probably one of my best dance features! And I can dance in heels, I'm working on getting into 3 inch heels now! And I used to not be able to make it through one basic Samba and now I can make it through 3 times in a row. I dance in competitions and win. I've shed 85 pounds and 6 sizes. I've been healing myself this entire time. There have been innumerable insights and awarenesses and awakenings along the way. Many lessons, many self-realizations. Many moments of being pushed out of my comfort zone. And I like to write about them on the blog. It's pretty therapeutic and an amazing record of the journey I've been on thus far.

And not only is my dancing better, I'm better, my life is better. I'm happier. I have passion, a light in my eyes. I'm reconnecting with my authentic self, the wild, untamed woman within, the goddess who dances with complete abandon and sensuality, the divine creative self who gives birth to new art. I'm pretty excited to see what's going to unfold in the coming year.

So for me, Awakening is a process I'm continuing to undergo, and hopefully will until my last breath. Am I "Awakened?" Yes. And No. I think I'm more whole than I've ever been, more aware of more parts of me, parts that I'd completely killed or forgotten or disowned. I think our natural state is to be "Awakened" and I feel like dancing is a space in which my Awakened self has a chance to show up. Also, I'm a real person moving around in the real world with bills and a job and grocery shopping. I also go on automatic pilot a lot, I'm not 100% present. But I think the Awakened self is always available to some extent. She just becomes more and more so the more of my work I do. She is present more and more of the time as I continue to engage in my process. Dancing has been an excellent portal for me to actively bring myself back to life, to a more Awakened state.

Moving forward I will continue to do my process, mold my body into a finely tuned instrument for my art, and go after my big dreams.

You can read more of Stefanie's journey on her website...

<http://dancingwithstefanie.com>

My Awakening Experience... Mick...

Catching the Light

The radio was on, the latest tune was coming to a close and the adverts kicked in. Cheaper insurance, an upcoming gig, another sale just started and then my ears pricked up, it was as if the voice was speaking to me:

“Why are you always so messy?”

“Can’t you just tie your shoes for once in your life?”

“Why do you have to be so stupid?”

“After all that I’ve done for you!

There was a short pause between each, to let the words take effect and finally a second voice asked the listener how they felt after hearing the words. A wry smile spread across my face as the words resonated in my head. The next record came on, though I barely heard it, lost in my own thoughts. I was now over 40 and much enlightened by all the tough work that had been put in over the past five years or so. Years in which every counsellor I met shed tears as the story was told.

In 1981 my father died. I was devastated but was told I had to get on with my school work, my future would depend upon my exam results. The trouble was I had told a huge lie to the judge and then promised myself that I would make things up with my father as soon as I was old enough to legally travel by myself. With my father dying tragically young, I was unable to make amends and unable to grieve. There was no one I could talk to, if it got back home it would almost certainly earn more reprimands and reminders of why I was a worthless, ungrateful child. So buried it remained for a long, long time.

Awakening

I was close to 40 and yet another relationship had ended. I ended it, it felt terrible but I knew it was the right thing to do for both of us. I also knew that unless I did something I was never going to have a long-lasting relationship, but quite why I knew not. This is not what I wanted.

True, there were signs before this, like when I was at university and drove down to a landmark bridge, got out the car and let the tears flow. In a foreign capital I periodically got such excess pains in the abdominal region that I was unable to walk, had to wait for a short while before being able to take a further step. I saw doctors and was diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), on the basis that they couldn’t pin it on anything else.

In some ways it doesn't matter, what matters is that I wanted to change, wanted to address whatever it was that was holding me back. I felt it was linked to my father's death but could not provide a link. I sought counselling, simply dipped into the yellow pages as it wasn't something I wanted to talk about with people I knew. And so my story was told and retold to a stranger. I looked back at things I preferred to keep buried, shed many a tear and found myself exhausted. It was not easy to do, but then I wanted to live and live well so I had to do it. That I think was the awakening, knowing I had to look back in order to go forward. In this case it was triggered by yet another failed relationship.

In all of this, there was one exercise that I found particularly difficult, I physically could not utter the words. My throat would dry up, my mouth would freeze and tears would well in the eyes. I simply could not state three very simple words:

"I am loveable"

The first time I did get them out of my mouth I was shaking, lips trembled and breaths were taken between each word. After they had all left my mouth I slumped back into the chair with exhaustion. I could not get my head around it, that someone could really love this wretched boy.

I needed to talk, but to who? The one person who has been there for me was my twin sister, but she had a young family and had recently been diagnosed with cancer. I had no choice, she was the only one. After almost 30 years we spoke about what happened, spoke of those things that we never spoke of before when we were caught frozen, unable to talk, living in fear. It was time to take off the mask that I had been living behind.

We talked of the great holiday we had in the Outer Hebrides when Dad hitched up the caravan to the car and off we went on a great adventure.

We loved the outdoors and on the way back climbed Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the British Isles. It then came to that fateful lie. As the bitter divorce proceeded, a judge individually asked us three children whether we wanted to live with our mother or father. This is an impossible question for a child to answer, to say one is to reject the other. In any case, I just wanted the family to be back together as a normal family unit, all living under the one roof, including the family dog.

If it was just me, I would have chosen my Dad, but critically I did not want to be alone. I felt my two sisters would both say Mum, so I lied in order not to be alone. The reality is we were each alone as we were too frightened to talk, it was the big elephant in the room. So my twin and I traced where my Dad was buried, I booked my flights and we met again in the month of January in the Highlands of Scotland. We found the unmarked grave, helpfully marked by a bright orange traffic cone courtesy of the

cemetery workers. Twelve months later we returned to see the grave marked by a beautiful, simple granite headstone.

The Second Awakening

Incredibly, I got married in a small ceremony in May 2010, on the banks of a bonnie loch not far from where my father is buried. It was, however, the passing of my dear twin sister that sparked the second awakening. In such extreme circumstances true colours are often shown and I learnt a lot. My twin and I talked much, we wished we could turn the clock back, but at least we could talk and still be there for each other. Whatever happened I was not going to have any regrets this time round. I learnt a lot, about myself and about others; that I had carried around so much guilt all my life when it wasn't mine to lug around.

Further Awakening

To help myself further, I went to a place called Dzgochen Beara in West Cork to attend a couple of courses. While the centre does include Buddhist teachings, the courses were not of a religious nature but designed to help people addressing loss and looking at relationships. At the heart of this was 'loving kindness' and looking after oneself. This was the antithesis to what I knew, the one who was always told that he was ungrateful and selfish so always put himself at the bottom of the list just to try and do right. I now see that putting oneself first makes complete sense, how can you look after others if you are not fit and well yourself?

At last I am becoming myself, freed from the chains that have held me down for so long, freed from the beliefs and guilt that were simply erroneous thoughts. Of course we'd all like to be woken up sooner, but I think the important thing is grasping the opportunity at whatever time in life it comes. You cannot force somebody into awakening, ultimately it has to be their decision.

Footnotes:

I have not been able to find the words of the radio campaign held here in Ireland that so resonated with me – if you recognise what I am talking of and can provide a link or the actual words that would be brilliant.

Needless to say I have had to omit many details from the above, but I hope the essence is sufficiently held together.

You can read more about Mick's journey on his website...

<http://meticulousmick.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Megan...

For as long as I can remember I have had the feeling that I didn't quite fit in where I was. I have always had my share of medical conditions having had asthma and eczema my whole life and I've also had my share of negative experience throughout my childhood. My parents divorced when I was still young and my siblings and I went through an extended period of upheaval as a result of this.

I think from a very early age I shut myself off from the world. Not completely, but enough that I could feel reasonably safe. I always struggled to make friends and when I did manage to I conformed with what they were doing but still felt like I was outside of the group looking in, unwanted and alone. These early experiences left me anxious and withdrawn.

When my husband and I first met I went through the same turmoil, but with his patience, support and love I believe I have gotten over my insecurities regarding our relationship and those with our friends and family. Over the past 10 years with my husband I had achieved a lot and finally built up the courage to do the things I thought I'd never do. The problem was I still had this nagging feeling in my heart that my life wasn't complete and I wasn't really where I wanted to be.

My life was great, I had a loving husband, my health, a job I loved doing and friends and family who love us and support us, but I was still missing something.

In April 2013, my health was taken away from me and I ended up on long term sick leave due to chronic pain and fatigue. Although at first view this seemed like a disaster, as I haven't worked since then and haven't been able to go out with friends and family as I would like to, I have tried to see the positive in this situation.

Being unable to do much of anything for the first 4 months or so, and my brain foggy more than 80% of the time, I had a lot of time to think. I decided that this was my opportunity to look at my life and work out what my priorities are to make sure I can live the best life I can.

I have spent the past few months dismantling my life in my mind and trying to work out who I really am and what my real passions are so I can live a purposeful, fulfilling life. I have taken up the practice of daily yoga and meditation which has allowed me to focus for longer periods of time and reduce my pain levels a little. This practice has taught me to listen to my body and my soul and to be more mindful and present in the world around me.

At the moment I am capable of short walks and outings as long as I am well rested. I have the clarity of mind to focus on tasks in 30 minute intervals (max) and so slowly and patiently I have begun to explore my creativity.

Moving forward into 2014 and beyond, I am hoping to define what and who the best ME is.

I am mindful of my physical limitations and hope to be able to increase my ability to participate in physical activities such as walking, riding, swimming and weight bearing exercises. However, I accept that this might be a very long and drawn out process.

Mentally, I hope to find a balance in life where my ability to focus is such that I'm able to work to some extent (even part time) and still participate in my creative activities I am beginning to surround myself with, such as writing, sewing, painting and drawing.

Spiritually, I will continue to focus on finding peace and contentment in my life and finding balance and connection between mind and body. I am still struggling with the idea of putting my needs and myself first. I must find a way to balance my desire to please and help others and keep the peace with what I know deep inside that I need in my life to make it complete.

This is a journey I am on and it has only just begun. I will find a way to manage my conditions so that I can live a fulfilling and purposeful life of peace and contentment.

You can read more of Megan's journey on her website...

<http://mychroniclifejourney.com>

My Awakening Experience... Inspired To Propagate Inward Beauty... Pat...

Self-realization, that perspective that propels you to search within and release that true self, the real you that is waiting to be ignited. I was tickled by the realization that I can actually steer the wheels of my life in whatever direction my heart desired.

I remember, I was about eleven years old when I decided that I wanted to be the bearer of goodness and hope. This light flashed before my eyes and I knew that doing things the simple way without that extraordinary touch was a road I did not wish to travel.

Excellence was what I chased but sometimes I felt that it was chasing me and there was nowhere to hide. Not that I wanted to hide anyway. I was shy, quiet, very much an introvert, a nerd, a bookworm. I found peace in the bosom of a book. I was known to sit in the corner noticing, observing and dreaming about what could be and have not been.

The question was 'How do I translate my thoughts into my life.

The journey to self-improvement began. Awareness of me with an appreciation and awareness of others. I became concerned with how I interacted with the world and preoccupied with the energy that I transmit. I wanted to grow and develop and become a better person so that I can have a more positive influence in the world.

Patinspire emerged from that journey allowing me to release my thoughts to the world and share the positivity.

You can read more of Pat's journey on her website... <http://patinspire.org>

My Awakening Experience... Marga...

“For those who have an intense urge for Spirit and wisdom, it sits near them, waiting.” - Patanjali *

The 17th is my day to spin my tale for the 17th is the day of my birth in september and my daughter's birth in november – which seems a poetic nod of the numeric sort to mystery and meaning.

Having signed up to participate in this challenge, suddenly I was hit with a major case of...what is the name for this feeling of reluctance to go back over the details of my life because while it all truly happened to ME, NOW it actually feels like someone else? The details feel tedious, but here is where I found a place to start:

I once lived in a modern house under a canopy of old growth oaks. We had a wooden swing hanging from a high branch out front, perfectly centered for viewing through a wall of windows.

The house was knocked down for the value of the land when we left; all of my beautiful possessions were sold in an estate sale, yet it still exists for me, not with regret, but with joy of a place I once inhabited. The mirror of this experience loves to show me the transient nature of our material world; houses, possessions, our very bodies are one way for a while then everything changes – there is no thing to hold on to in this world. There is no thing that I can grasp with my hand that will be forever the way it is right now.

I move along by some invisible force beckoning, a god-sized finger points down the road a ways, a tap on my shoulder asks me to turn around, the ground trembles, then finally earthquakes break the earth wide open beneath my feet; I fall endlessly it seems into the abyss, no house, no perceived security, a future written in permanent ink now disappears off a page that never was ~ yet some thing never stops interrupting the regularly scheduled program.

In the searching for some meaning, I've joined belief systems and left them only to create new ones to define who I thought I was. I've been Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, Agnostic, Jewish (conservative, orthodox, reconstructionist, renewal, cabalistic, reform); then I felt the pull toward Buddhism, Taoism, random philosophy, the Vedas, and now finally I have found the label I shall wear forever; finally I have found a practice that suits me. I am a Cannibal. Eating the flesh of other humans has allowed me to come full circle to my Christian roots.....Are you still reading?

NO, REALLY... NOW there are No More Labels. Finally, nothing – but an ongoing realization that when I ask, *What is next?* I am answered, for that is the way the

mystery has always spoken to me, bit by bit, pulling me in the moment to what is next. I believed myself to be abandoned many times, but in the urge and asking, I was never left that way for good.

I have died (or have gone to the other side for a bit), and returned by choice to raise my daughters. I've had a post childbirth/near-death experience depression that turned into a dark cave-dark night of the soul – that actually saved me. If I had not given myself the experience of exploring my shadow, and of feeling the discomfort of the life I had chosen, if it had not gotten really, bloody uncomfortable, I might have lived the life of obligation and slow decay – so strong was my conditioned programming! Here comes an apt quote given to me at a pivotal time from one of my key holders: SeeingM:

“Barn’s burnt down – Now I can see the moon.” - Masahide

My barn had to burn down. It felt tragic, but now I have come to a place where I would bring marshmallows for the event – most days .

My own confusion has wrought an imaginary sort of havoc; I've run around like a fool screaming *fire* more times than I can recall, but I've come to see those emergencies were of my own making. I am okay. I've always been okay.

Books often were the tool the mystery used to talk to me, though, at some points, people with the keys to my locked doors have magically appeared at the critical times they were needed. These gifts from spirit are just as real as the laundry to be folded, the dishes to be washed, the papers to be graded that I can touch with my hands. Lately, I am picking up on signals through people, numbers, patterns, flow and cilantro. ha! Not cilantro, but maybe someday. That word just wanted to be there.

One of the most profound visitations I've had was invisible to everyone around me; it occurred in a moment, and filled me with the assurance that I have tapped into throughout these many years – I have been shown how much I am loved and connected to love.

This meaningful moment for me occurred in my beautiful, modern house in my fancy neighborhood days with small children. I was overwhelmed with fatigue and drain and disconnect in the task of taking care of my girls in days that seemed to go on and on. My thyroid was beginning to not function so well, so I was exhausted all of the time without knowing why. I was sitting on the couch in our breakfast nook next to the kitchen, surrounded by such wonderful windows but drowning in sheer exhaustion. I just prayed a simple phrase, “*help me through.*“

In that moment, the most powerful and all encompassing love whooshed into my body – enough to make me swoon. I was flooded with love so big, I disappeared. What I

am describing was physical and real, and utterly unexplainable. I can't articulate just what happened. It helped me through that day, but more importantly, the memory of some thing that personal and profound that answered me has helped me through these last 10 years of challenge. As my life spiraled into outwardly seeming disarray, I had an inner knowing of this love that came when I called. I was given a gift to get me through, to help me know I wasn't alone, to pull me out of a cave, to pull me out of a marriage that could no longer work, to exhibit independence and strength to my daughters who were being sucked into the undertow of their father's mental plight.

More and more the wash of bliss seems to be a normal flow. Behind the tasks of every moment is a spaciousness full of love, and humor, so forgive my silliness; to me Awakening is not serious business but more a coming back to who I am, have always been, but forgot for a bit. This original self is known by the comfort she embodies. She is usually ready with a laugh, a dance, a deep breath, a stop for looking at the sky or a bug crawling by.

If it isn't a momentary awakening experience like Eckhart Tolle and Byron Katie, then perhaps it is just this walking along, and getting pulled along, going along, trusting the path to strip and refurbish - a cosmic car wash. And boy, do we shine, so scrubbed and buffed at the end. And boy, are we held during the tough, bristle-brush rubbings. What mystery pulls me forth, I do not know, but conveying through I am, glancing right and left as I go, seeing you and you and you along the ride with me, fractally small, connected to all, falling in love with a cat at the foot of my bed.

You can read more about Marga's journey on her website...

<http://lifeasimprov.com>

My Awakening Experience... The Awakening Heart... Kimberley...

Although we are all called to awaken our hearts, and in doing so, are rewarded with an incredible sense of liberation, I would hesitate to refer to such an awakening as “easy” or “comfortable”.

In some ways, an awakening heart is more at risk. Within the act of awakening, one almost feels as if one’s heart is more vulnerable, as protective illusions, delusions, and projections fall away.

Without this “protective” armor, we feel out of our heart-comfort zone.

However, I believe in the idea that we are each called to awaken within ourselves. As this is our call, we are supported in this process.

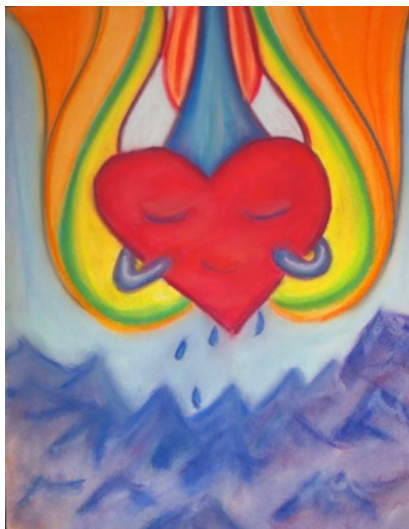
The image “Awakening Heart” used on the cover of this ‘E Book’ speaks to this idea. I see a heart being lifted up and rescued from the tumultuous waves of chaos and confusion.

This is the blessing of awakening. We are able to move beyond and above that which limited us before. In this state, when we are sometimes called upon to confront life patterns and decisions we find overwhelming, Heaven helps us.

A heart in a state of awakening is at its most vulnerable. The loss of protection, however, is more than offset by the gain in love, warmth, and compassion that is the domain of the awakened heart.

You can read more of Kimberley’s journey on her website...

<http://kimberlyharding.wordpress.com>



My Awakening Experience and Moving On... Heather...

I was born free, free of any fears or limitations and blissfully happy! This would all end fairly soon for me, just as with many of us, as I had been born into a dysfunctional family. There was really very little room for me to be free any longer once I selected this family. I was shut down over the years and frequently heard the chorus of no, shouldn't, ***what would others think***, and so much more. Also the continuous chime of being called ***clumsy*** over and over again. I began to believe I was not athletic, and that I was in fact clumsy. You might say this is where my own feelings of 'less than' began and where my separation from my spiritual self took root. If I only knew then what I know now. Perhaps I did know and selected this life experience as a lesson to grow, some karma payment from past lives. This I do not fully comprehend, but I do understand I let go of my freedom and bound myself into a cage of I am not enough, which we all know is being separate from our spiritual self because when we stand fully in the knowledge of who we are, we are all enough.

Intermittently I was sufficiently awakened to see through this façade. I found myself loving nature, rocks and the soothing balm of the outdoors. It spoke to me; it gave me comfort when none was to be had by my parental unit. I collected rocks from a very young age on; they fascinated me as I could feel their heart beats in my hands. Some of this was encouraged as a hobby, and I was given rock tumblers and more. However, I wanted to collect them, arrange them and talk to them not so much make things out of them. Soon, I would abandon this endeavor too and I was lost. I tried to comply with all that was requested of me. I tried to be a good girl, the one being requested of me by my familial unit and that of society.

As I approached my teenage years, and grew into my womanhood, my parents were unprepared (as many are) to handle any number of things ranging from sexuality to the evolving drug culture, and I was shunned even more. Now younger siblings had also come along, and my life was mired with the incessant noise of toddlers when all I wanted was rock and roll and to be left alone to create and find myself. It was the 70's after all and I was keenly aware of the awakening taking place all around me.

It was somewhere during this period of time that I found an island, a place where I could fully express myself and discuss my hopes, wants and dreams. I fell in love with a boy you see, or perhaps I fell more in love with his mother. No matter, she touched my soul. She was an artist, a free spirit who always encouraged me and talked to me like an adult. She treated me with respect. And so, I touched once again on my awakening and it felt like pure joy to exist in this place, for a while. As so often happens in the case of young love, the relationship ended. Of course, my own parents were overjoyed as they hated all this relationship represented, and were extremely uncomfortable with me coming into my self, a creative, artistic self who communed with rocks and nature. Once again, I fell back into the bubble of fear, that safe place.

I lived here for an expansive period of time. However, all the while something was nagging at me, wake up little one you are worthy, but I slept on. Then one day I began to feel ill. It didn't happen suddenly, or at least I didn't notice it all at once. As I got off of a boat in Denmark, I found myself unable to walk very well and the world was spinning. I thought it was the boat ride, little did I know something was growing inside my brain. I was now long married and had a child. I thought I was happy. I was extremely fulfilled in my role as a mother to a most beautiful soul that had chosen me, but I had given away my voice as a mate, as a person on the planet and settled for mediocrity. This was what my parents had taught me, to believe my voice did not matter. I was to go along with and do what was required by society. Never stand out at all costs! But when you are to be doing some other work, sometimes things have to occur to fully grab our attention. Ultimately, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Through all of this, I was once again guided to my spiritual side and to honoring my self. I practiced meditation and all things healing to get me through the ordeal of the surgery. I mean really, who wants their skull opened up and a piece of their gray matter removed? I chose to embrace it all, and looked upon the situation with grace. I had been given a message, and the message was to wake up and to honor myself. These lines from Rumi speak to me about this experience, really about my entire life experience.

When you fall ill, remorse and humility open;
the moment one falls ill, conscience awakens.
When you fall ill, you pray God to forgive your sins.
The murkiness of your error becomes apparent to you,
and you resolve to return to the Way.
You promise and vow that from now on you'll choose
nothing but obedience to God.
See how illness stirs your conscience and wakes you up.
So pay attention to this principle, O seeker;
Anyone who suffers pain has caught the scent.
The more wakeful anyone is, the more he suffers;
The more spiritually aware he is, the paler is his face.
If you are aware of God's compelling,
where is your humility?
Where is your feeling of being bound by His Omnipotence?
How should one who is bound in chains dance?
Since when does the prisoner act like one who is free?
And if you see that your foot is shackled
and that the Sultan's officers are keeping watch over you,
don't act like a tyrant toward those who are helpless,
since that's not how helpless people act.

Unfortunately, I fell back asleep again. I like to be compliant, and no surprise, I am an introvert. I also like to serve and please, and not to create drama and strife. You want me on your team for getting things done, because I will do as I am told. However, as is the case in life, when the universe wants your attention it will make demands! The angel of death suddenly plucked my husband of almost 20 years away from me just two years after my craniotomy. I was left in a dire mess as he had lied to me about finances, had kept them hidden from me, and left almost nothing to our minor son and myself. He left it all to his two older, grown college educated, and one married, children. I had no choice but to find my voice, and I did.

I navigated us through a complicated litigation process in order that we have something out of the Estate. You see, working full-time as I had prior to being married was not so much in the cards for me after having brain surgery. While recovered, it greatly affected my spatial recognition and also word retrieval and concentration. No one would know anything was wrong with me, but sitting 40 hours or more a week at a desk as I once did was no longer an option. My husband knew this; he assured me I would never have to worry. I was not concerned; he had a successful law practice. However, I should have been concerned, as he was wrapped up in his own demons over money. As the poem reflects, I lost my humility and thought I was impervious to certain things in life because after all I was married to someone successful. I gave away my voice, just as I had been taught. I gave up who I was, what mattered to me and what I wanted in life. I was still a caged prisoner with one foot shackled.

It wasn't until I allowed myself to begin dating again some 7 years after his death that I would truly allow myself to become unshackled, but not without becoming a little paler in the face. To begin with, I got into a relationship where I gave away my voice. If you are still reading, you are probably asking yourself what is wrong with this woman? I was trained to be compliant, and who am I to question my journey, or anyone's journey for that matter? Every step has been important in the awakening of who I am as a human being. As to this relationship, I am not certain how I did this yet again, but I have a sneaking suspicion it had a lot to do with money, a place where I had experienced great wounding. This man offered me a lifetime of never having to worry about it, you see he was a trust fund baby with millions in his bank account and had never worked a day in his life. It represented safety to me! He offered me "forever". Alas, he was a narcissist. The worst possible love match for a person like me, or anyone really. The universe has to get in your face and scream sometimes, especially with someone like me where it is so deeply imbedded that I am not enough as a woman and that by my mere rank, I am second class.

It was the culmination of these many events that finally stirred me from my cage. This time I become fully in touch with my spiritual side, reading, studying everything and I continue to grow it with each and every day. I am attempting to keep the door open to abundance by practicing gratitude. I am a work in progress, and I have found my voice! I am empowered. I truly believe that the universe is the stage on which you

dance, guided by your heart. I am attempting to live with an open heart, and to forgive all those that held me back along my path, and perhaps they did not hold me back at all, but rather were guiding me to my true authentic self. It is after all my path and my responsibility as to how I travel it, as victim or as love. Mother nature is speaking to me once again and I have surrounded myself with a beautiful collection of rocks and crystals. No matter what anyone says about crystals, my studying them, or using them for healing I am not yielding this time. There will be no loss of voice, no being that clumsy girl who has no confidence in herself, the introvert who only wants to please. I may have been raised to believe that others would provide for me if I were simply a good, compliant girl and by societal conventions this was what I was supposed to do. Mediocrity is not my emotional home, and I have thankfully found that I can only rely on my self and that I am worthy, smart, and gifted. I am only gaining strength and confidence. This is the path I am on and how I became awakened to my gifts, the gifts that we all come into the world with and have a duty to share.

I am no longer bound to a cage of not enough! I thank you Barbara for providing this opportunity to write about it and for all of you that have read my story and for sharing your own stories. We are all interconnected and like a ripple of water we touch one another and my goal is to be love with that touch. Yes, I am still an introvert, and still like to be a caregiver, but I am learning to do these things without giving up who and what I am. Thank you for not judging me, and I too will, as Rumi's poem says, not act like a tyrant toward those who are helpless, since that is not how helpless people act. Namaste...

You can read more about Heather's journey on her website
<http://wildflowerwomen.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... The Signs... Sue...

Waking up does not always mean a spiritual awakening, of becoming aware of those energies and the life force's 'Chi' around them.. We are all of us capable of feeling these forces, but most of us have forgotten upon entry to this world how to use our Mind and Energies. Plus our young minds are often suppressed at a young age to forget the nonsense of invisible playmates.

Barbara asks us to give us a brief description about our backgrounds. That is is the easy bit.. The harder bit is telling you what constitutes to the Awakening process, as its a very different set of experiences for all of us..

I don't wish this to sound like a biography, so for those wishing to learn more about my early soul journey they can read more in My Soul Journey series in my first draft of that series... I wrote... *"Since being a small child I felt I had a mission to complete....."*

For those interested enough you can find in part 2 of My Journey, my early life experiences in my spiritual awakening, where I saw spirit in the form of a Nun, which many years later was confirmed to be one of my guides helping me through my young life.

I was destined to follow the 'Signs' to follow my spiritual path in the form of a Newspaper add which literally jumped out at me as I wanted to de-stress. That's how I first came to go to a Meditation class held in our Local Spiritualist Centre. From there one step led to another as I enrolled in development and awareness classes as I re-discovered my mediumistic abilities and became a Spiritual Healer... Later taking classes of my own. The story of this Stage can be found in Part 3 of My Journey.

Finding oneself and waking up! often means we need to lose ourselves first...

This came in the form of a Nervous Breakdown, which can be read in more detail Here in part 4 of My Journey. What isn't discussed there is how I healed, and what inner work I did upon myself.

Signs

'Signs' are everywhere if we take heed of them.. But at that times I was blind to them, I had been given a 'Sign' in the form of my breakdown, I had been given a Sign when I was made redundant, and I was given the 'Signs' many times, which I ignored and sometimes these come in various forms, such as the time on my way to interview as someone drove past my car knocking the wing mirror off.. Another 'Sign' not to be on the road I was!.. But I ignored it and took a job I regretted from the very first day.. I should have followed my gut I knew even at the interview the job didn't feel right. But I had ignored my 'Gut' ... I left after a few weeks.

So I climbed down my ladder, I had had enough responsibility so thought OK, I am going back onto Machines, and just going to sit and sew. I knew all the machine processes and could use each one, so I can go back on Piecework and go to work and come home and forget about it.. I did this for another 3 yrs being made redundant twice more as the textile industry in the UK came into decline as work went more and more overseas... The places I worked were also going down hill, as they were nothing but sweat-shop types of factories.. Still not listening to the Signs of my redundancies! as factories closed I hung onto what I knew... .. During these 3 yrs my health took a dive to the point I would sit and cry in pain at my machine as my muscles felt like they were being shredded and fatigue would sweep over me..

A Dr finally diagnosed I had Fibromyalgia after repeated visits to the surgery with muscle pain, the hospital confirmed it and I had 6 months off work.. This time I Listened to my body.. I had not listened before to change my career direction, and as I have so often found if we do not listen to the 'Signs' they keep being repeated until we learn the lessons. So this time my body had made me take notice and stopped me literally in my tracks. Plus throughout all of my day job working life I was still working with Spirit, I was still serving Spiritualist Centres giving messages from loved ones from the other side... This too I put on temporary hold so I could heal from within..

You might ask... How if I was so attune to Spirit, and healing with the spiritual realm did I not get answers to my own pathway or at least glimpses of an easier way physically and emotionally.. Believe me I did ask... And I was told quite simply from spirit, we are each on our own pathway to learn through our experiences... I am no different than anyone else in learning lessons and through them we discover ourselves in the process, **This is the Awakening Process.** Many are now going through these dark tunnels as they discover who they are...

Knowing what I did, being a Spiritual Healer, I spent the time off work nurturing Me.. I painted more, I set about clearing the Raynaud's Disease, you can found our how I did that in my Past Life Regression part 1 and my healing of the symptoms in part 2 . What I have not really wrote about is healing my Fibromyalgia.. Healing which took me from fatigue and intense pain out of breath and hardly managing my stairs to back to full health and walking for miles in the countryside.. I still need to pace myself, and not over do the muscle strain... but I am 100% better than I was and its up to me to keep it that way.

To heal the body, we first need to work on the mind... I did that with You can Heal your Life with Louise Hays book.. with affirmations and I also started upon Spring Forest QiGong. This was another 'Sign' which I followed as I bought Master Chunyi Lin tapes and video which offered his unique method of healing with some amazing testimonies of healing miracles can be found too if you look on the net... This literally dropped through the door one day in some 'junk-mail' as it too leapt out at me to be read, it turned out to be the best 'Sign' I followed..

It didn't happen over night, I meditated daily and I would do my Qigong exercises and deep breathing and focusing my intent.. My pains became less and my fatigue diminished, I pulled in energy and felt more alive than I had for a long time... I had Gong Baths from spiritual friends, I embarked upon a course of Body Talk too and learnt the art of tapping my body for answers, and incorporated it to help others.. I had Spiritual Healing, and Reiki I also joined a self help group which my Dr had put me in touch with The Expert Patience Programme for those with Chronic Conditions. Which showed me to take small steps and achievable goals..

Finally I knew I had to change career paths, A 'chance' (I have learnt nothing is ever by chance!) conversation with a colleague about where her daughter was working in Support came about and I decided to apply for an interview as they were recruiting.. It felt right! and the interview felt right.. I was honest with my condition and left nothing out including the need to have Sunday 'Service' nights and Monday group nights off... Everything fell into place.. That is some 10 years ago now, 8 yrs I have been working in supporting adults with learning difficulties within their shared homes. And 2 yrs with my present Support work. Now once again, the Signs are pointing me to take another look at where I am and what I wish to do... This time I think I am going to listen!

We Wake UP to so much along our journey, I see the world as being connected, and how each of us are a vital piece waiting like a giant jigsaw to be fitted together when the time is right.. Sometimes it takes us a while searching for the right piece until we fit. We may turn over our pieces many times until they slot together with the right one..

Slowly as we join together we are at last I think realising that we are ALL ONE and ALL part of this Giant Universal Plan in which our lives are part of the process as we evolve along with Earth .. We are now each of us waking up to ourselves and our potential as we understand the Power of our Minds and that our energy is all connected in the Matrix of those invisible realms that pulse through us all... We are Beings of Light.. and its time to wake up to who we really are..

You can read more about Sue's journey on her website
<http://suedreamwalker.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Maren...

“A frog dreamed of becoming a king and became one”

Sharing a story of awakening is an interesting thing to contemplate. Once we truly remember what we once did not know, I have found it a challenge to recall the nuances of the not knowing. For me it is like continually just catching on to a remembrance at the edges of the wisps of a dream. Upon opening the eyes and awakening in the morning, the dream fades. I think that forgetting the fine details can be a good thing. Not dwelling too much on where we have been frees up bandwidth for attention focused on what the future is bringing to our front doors now.

However, in thinking about what I would like to share, I recalled an art installation I saw last year. This was the announcement for what was to be found within outside on the museum window: We tell ourselves stories to order to live...

The story of Maren's awakening is not really all that important or worth sharing... that is unless it can tell you something about your own. So here we go.

Awakening within the story of M is not really about events that have occurred, but rather is unfolded within a pattern of evolving thought that assigns meaning to the events. Looking at awakening this way means it takes place within what I am thinking and how this makes me feel. And for me, my thought and feeling evolve over time due to a natural propensity I have for continuously questioning myself and the world around me.

As I question, this then gives awakening into the unknown being known more room to bump up against the experience of actually living. I am living the life called M, but in a loosely held together space. Oh the joys this brings testing out BEING who and what we actually are and are not!

‘Often without knowing it, we are waiting for a new idea to come in and set us free from our entanglement... When the idea is true, the space is ready for it, the idea overtakes everything.... With grace like swiftness, it ascends and claims recognition... It cannot be returned or reversed... It becomes the mother of a whole sequence of new feeling, thinking and action... A PERSON CAN DWELL INSIDE A THOUGHT’ John ODonohue

We all have amazing experiences with intricate details making up the story of our lives. However for me, it is our thoughts of meaning assigned to what has, is and will happen that create our true awakeningS. This thinking about what has, is, CAN and will happen is the beginning connection point for sharing true awakening on the planet. It is in our ideas about the happenings that we have the beginning potentials to trap us sound asleep and also to awaken us setting us free.

Boiling down the ideas and thought from the first 30 years of my life, I think it pretty much can be summed up with this sentence:

Maren did all the “right” things for mostly the “wrong” reasons.

There is a laundry list of externalized success defined and determined by western education in consumer culture and Judeo-Christian values within which I checked off most all the boxes on. This left M at age 25 as a MSW magna cum laude, building her therapy practice, while teaching Sociology 101, living in her newly built 3500 square foot house, married her college sweetheart turned eye doctor.

I was firmly planted in a story of living superficially overachieving in an idea of “righteousness” while waiting to hang it all up when becoming a mother...at which point (complete with a pearl choker and child care help) afternoons are then spent out with the ladies who lunch from church, doing service and charity work. That was the future awaiting me.

I had worked hard and by the world’s standards had it all. I was the living proof of the fulfillment of the quintessential American dream. At age 29 I could see the road ahead...years and years stretched out before me with every detail planned, accounted for and neatly organized in my Franklin-Covey day planner. I had achieved everything that was dreamed of for me. The only problem was, I was completely miserable.

Just one story from that time helps sum this up...

From age 26-29 there was an old Victorian house in the valley below on the road that lead to the home which my first husband and I had built in the hills above a beautiful lake. Out in the front garden of this house near the road there was placed a statue of a duck. Each day I drove down the hill and past this house, and each day the woman who owned it would dress this duck in a different outfit. So it was, day in and day out, my life stretched out before me doing all the things I was raised to believe I was supposed to do. I spent my time worshiping at the feet of the rat in this race. And each day the only real detectable difference from one to the next would be what was found on this duck. Over time, I found myself looking forward to seeing this fowl spectacle as it was one of the only changes and unknowns in my life flow.

Then... one day... it happened.

I drove by this Victorian house and found that the statue was gone.

It turned out that the duck lady had moved. The lady and her bird had flown the coop. In that moment of discovery, a light went off in my head and I knew in that instant that things can always be different. Life and all potentials are always contained just a new

thought away moving away from the known into the making of different unknown choices.

Years 30-39 are then basically covered with having the courage to leave **Punxsutawney**. I attempted picking apart the ideas of any externalized right and wrong. It was a moving of the location of living to a personalized inner one and then, transcending that. It was relooking at the meanings in life:

'Out beyond ideas of wrong and right doing is a field...

I'll meet you there...

When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full of talk about it'... Rumi

In my questioning I had gone from an understanding of right and wrong as preset and determined outside myself, to a right and wrong personalized uniquely to me. In seeking to meet the "you" (which I would describe as unconditional love knowing my truer self) in that field, I imploded my life as I had known it. I preformed kariah at the death of the unreal life. Doing this was completely liberating and utterly terrifying all at once! I was standing at the edge of an abyss and CHOOSING to jump not knowing what I would find catching me.

At age 30, in a six month period, I:

- *Divorced my first husband
- *Stopped weekly attending the Christian church of my birth
- *Sold my house
- *Shuttered my private therapy practice
- *Went on a three month road trip around north America (while living out of my car)
- *Started working as a flight attendant based out of NY City
- *Moved across the country to start a new life...

I set myself FREE from the then known !!!

BUT WHAT TO DO WITH THAT FREEDOM??? I was not yet clear about what thoughts to set this inner compass guide by.

In my beginning awakenings, there was a little hijack attempt made by pleasures found in spiritual Las Vegas to keep me trapped in a new type of thinking about "light" and "love" being "IT". There were shiny new insights and warm fuzzies shared with others (also in their new, little life rafts) as we floated and huddled together while charting unsailed territory. This was a period of time immersed in the delicious surface fluff of the happy-happy of what could be termed the "new age" awakening movement on our planet. What an important role that particular port of call played in the story of the journey of awakening. However, contrary to what many of my fellow travelers experienced, it wasn't a final destination for me.

What I had yet to understand was the importance of honoring my past and current ignorance by allowing of an ONGOING daily death of life as I now know it. I also had yet to understand the importance of also loving the-our-my shadow. Not doing so back then created a void of sorts. It created a situation where half of life on our planet was not really dealt with. It is a feeling of (as Tyler from *Fight Club* states): “premature enlightenment”

We glimpse nirvana, but only fleeting as we are forced into continuing to cat nap quite often within our awakening because we are still out of balance...

It is only after we have lost everything that we are really free to do ANY thing!

So years 40- to today have been about discovering the thoughts that lead to living in balance, to have gratitude for everything, staying with the pleasure and pain of life, and then transcending the need for anything at all. It has been about more and more sustained time awake just being...allowing...being in love in the light AND in the shadow found here. And within this being, we then cease the experience of polarity. Observation of events that happen in the life of M is still present, but the need to assign meaning in the same way isn't.

For me today, awakening is about finding beauty and power in EVERYTHING... trash and treasure found as just the same. It has been about a focus shifting from what is done in my life to how it is done in complete gratitude with the details of actually what is done having less and less importance. I am remembering. I AM.

You can read more about Maren's journey on her website

<http://seeingm.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... This is Me, This is Who I AM... Brian...

I am struggling a bit on what to write here because at the root I have to question...

“What is awakening?” and “Am I awake?”.

That seems like the best place to start and I hope that I am able to pepper in the spirit of the challenge and hit the points. If not, I beg forgiveness, but whatever comes out here is what I have done.

So, what is awakening? I will skip looking up the Webster’s dictionary definition of the word and go to the heart of how I define awakening. To me, being awake is being aware and mindful that reality is deeper than what we perceive on the surface. I keep wanting to assign additional attributes to this that are more feelings than realization of the true nature of things.

Based on this simple definition, am I awake? I would have to say no, but I think the key here is to look at this as a verb and not a noun. I am not awake, but I am awakening. This is a process. One of growth and determination. One where I must drop the search to truly find. I am awakening. I am.

“That which makes you think that you are a human is not human. It is but a dimensionless point of consciousness, a conscious nothing; all you can say about yourself is: ‘I am’. You are pure being-awareness-bliss. To realize that is the end of all seeking. You come to it when you see all you think yourself to be as a mere imagination and stand aloof in pure awareness of the transient as transient, imaginary as imaginary, unreal as unreal.”

Looking back to childhood, as Barbara suggests, I remember lying on my bedroom floor with a stuffed tiger, similar to Hobbes, and then feeling myself rise out of my body. Whether this was a lucid dream or a transmigration of my conscious, I don’t know. This happened a couple of times in my early childhood, but not since. I remember being interested in the book of Revelation growing up. The end of times. I was raised Christian and I never really understood the getting “saved” concept. When I turned 16 I was in church with my mom and I did feel something. Something ushering me to make some sort of commitment. I went up front and cried. My family was happy and it was sort of a congratulatory type of thing. I wondered afterward if I didn’t do it just because it was expected. I do remember that it was a very strong feeling that made me want to stand up in front of the church and lay myself out. However, I don’t know that it really changed who I was or what I did.

I never stood in the prayer circle at high school where the other Christian students professed their faith and devotion every morning. I just didn’t get it. I did pray and I still do, but the focus of my prayers has changed from an anthropomorphic deity to my self. When I got to college, I pretty much was separated from my mom urging me to go

to school every Sunday to just dropping it all together. I am not sure how that has felt to her, but she has never said anything or pushed me to go in my adult life. I never remember my dad going to church other than for weddings or funerals, and she never pushed him to go or made him feel bad about not going either. My mother is a very strong woman in many ways and her faith is really at the top of that list. I really admire her and as I have evolved my philosophies, I never disdain her for her beliefs.

During college I smoked weed and took philosophy classes. I majored in computer science with a minor in math. I have always been interested in physics and science through I never pursued expanding my education in those areas. College exposed me to ideas beyond my Christian background. It allowed me to see that the world and its inhabitants are very diverse. Many different viewpoints. Many different beliefs. And we are all here trying to understand something. Trying to better ourselves. The other thing that college brought out in retrospect was that things could be explained. Our understanding of the inner workings of the universe could be broken down into bits and pieces. A seemingly simple formula could describe complex motion. Things that humans developed could grow and learn on their own.

Between my junior and senior year, I decided that I did not want to go back home for the summer. I wanted to get an internship and start preparing myself for the “real” world. Mostly, I wanted to free myself more of who I was and what I identified with by living with my parents. I opened up the phone book under software development and I started calling. Rejection after rejection and I got down to O and I struck gold. I spoke with the owner of this small software development company and I sent them my resume. They didn’t ask me any technical questions. It was an informal discussion more focused around my personality and how I learn. I got the job. I still work for the company 14 years later.

After I got the job, I realized that I actually knew nothing about the programming languages that were being used. I went to Borders and bought a thousand plus page book on Visual Basic and I also picked up “Wherever You Go, There You Are” by Jon Kabat Zinn. I still have that book, but not the book on Visual Basic. Programming languages come and go. Techniques change and things are modernized. The awareness and awaking described in “WYGYA” will still apply many years from now. I never really had what I would call an awakening experience. I have heard Tolle say that with his experience he just walked around and sat in the park for 3 days blissed out. One time lying on my couch letting things go, I did feel sort of the roller coaster sensation that he described, but I pulled myself out of it and only one other time have come close to something akin to the death of ego that he describes.

I eventually got married (maybe a story for another time, I feel I am getting off track) and had kids. I truly look at being a parent as the ultimate learning experience. Not just in how to raise another human being, but I have two little mirrors running around my house. I see their reaction to things and I see myself either now or in the past. I see

them picking up on things that I do. They are an expression of my self, but they are their own unique individual self. They are a combination of my wife, me, and everything before us. Then they sprinkle in their own unique flavor. The biggest thing for me is allowing them to be themselves. Since they seem so much like me, I have to hold back from projecting myself on them. I want to jump to how I would react in a situation. I need to give them the freedom to respond and react on their own. This is the true teaching. See yourself in others, but don't assume that they are you.

My friends grew up, got married, had kids, got divorced.... We philosophized and decided to try marijuana again. This was a very opening experience on a few levels. The experiences initially were a slingshot into a different way of thinking. The layers of reality started to peel away and I felt myself being more open. At one point I was lying on the floor listening to music and I saw different scenes from my life. I zoomed out and saw those scenes floating around like TV screens. I could zoom in where I wanted, but I zoomed out further. The pieces fit together and I could see things outside of my life. I zoomed out further and it was as if the scenes were forming an interlocking pattern of birds like an MC Escher drawing. I went further and the patterns were forming an undulating purple tube. I woke up. I felt like I had really experienced something beyond myself. I tried to relate this to someone a few days later and their response was along the lines of brushing it off. That really hit me hard. Doubt sunk in and the joy of the experience faded. I realize that while marijuana may help open my eyes, it won't keep them open because of that doubt.

While trying to come up with the next "big idea", I find tumblr. I am drawn in by the images and beauty on many levels. I reblog stuff and write out some of my own ideas. I find quotes and images and blogs dedicated to awakening. I start dip my toes into the ocean of information. The main thing I pull from this is a theory of mindfulness and a real push to start a meditation practice. I keep my eyes and mind open and what I read starts to make more and more sense. I am exposed to the Buddha, Lao Tzu, the Dalai Lama, Shunryu Suzuki, Alan Watts, Eckhart Tolle, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Sadhguru, and many other modern day "regular" people like The Wanderling, Samsaran Musing and Lazy Yogi. Inspired by the last two, I decide that I want to go further in and share my thoughts and experiences.

"You don't have to let go of anything. You have to realize that everything has let go of you. You are not attached to anything in reality. Everything will die and change regardless of your love and attachment."

It is all a mess at first, but my main goal is to just be honest. This site provides somewhat of a layer of anonymity, and the people that follow me here, I do not know outside of the site. This allows a bit of freedom that I would feel uncomfortable with if I were to shout it out in public. So just like this post, I am trying to bare my soul for both your benefit and mine. One thing that I have learned through this blogging adventure is that with each post I make I learn more about myself. I project out into the world and a

reflection comes back that I can analyze and adjust. There is the anxiety sometimes of “what will they think of me after they read this” or “will this post get any likes”, but I try to drop that more and more.

Life is beyond meaning and that’s why it is so beautiful... I slowly grow the blog and I will let it speak for itself. You can read about my journey over the past year. One of the highlights is my trip to Inner Engineering. Just like my spiritual practice, I dip in my toes, but remain skeptical. This is probably the thing that I am learning the most about myself. I need to find a way to make myself more committed and drop the doubt and expectations.

Sometimes I feel out of my depth when writing, like I am writing about something that I really have no authority to write about, but I do it anyway. When I read my posts again months later, I feel pretty good about what I wrote. My post on “Mirror Image” was something I wrote a year ago and posted on Tumblr. I recycle. But yeah, probably half of what I write, I am just winging it. However, I try to never write bullshit. I try to keep it true to what my thoughts are at the moment. I really enjoy the community of friends that I have here on WordPress and other sites. I am not as interactive as I should be, but I try to stop by and read as I have time or feel guilty. I am very thankful for the loyal readers here and those that just stop by for whatever reason. You are part of my journey. I grow and learn for you.

My main reason for saying that I am not awake or enlightened or whatever you want to call it, is that I still feel tied to the matrix. I still feel part of this body. I still feel part of this illusion, and I just can’t seem to break it. I feel that I have this big Kensho, satori moment looming nearby where the dam will break and the valley will be flooded and washed clean. I think it is because I look for it, that I cannot find it. In the moments where I have not been looking, I have come the closest to finding.

Everyone and everything is a reflection of the self. There is an underlying reality that the senses perceive and the mind interprets. It forms this additional layer of reality that we reside in now. This is useful. It allows us to interact, communicate and share. However, it is not reality, it is only a perception bent by past experiences and identification producing a false projection into the future. The past and future are nothing but machinations of the mind. We only have what is in front of us. Since everyone and everything is a reflection of the self, how we treat other people is really how we are treating our self. Karma. Karma is not just debt carried to the next life. It is that, but it is also current moment evaluation and guilt over decisions made. In a moment, we have the capacity for unlimited response. With what we have available at that moment we can choose how we respond to a situation. If we respond with something less than we know we should, then that generates bad karma. A seed is sown immediately. This seed grows into plant that continues to dominate our life until we decide that we can change and either chop it down or nurture it.

Manifest your destiny. Live an extraordinary life. Be you independent of the thoughts that you think other people think of you. I write this for me as much as (if not more than) for you.

I want to revisit the topic, describing my awakening experience. One word. Now.

And I have changed my mind, I am none of these things.

You can read more about Brian's journey on his website <http://middlepane.com>

My Awakening Experience... Dotta...

I realized there was simply more to life than this physical one at a very early age, and this was significantly glaring after a few incidents. I grew up partly in my home town of Nkwessi, a small village in the eastern region of my home country Nigeria. Filled with mysteries and things I deemed magical. At the time, I always wondered how everything just managed to make sense to the villagers.

I was enthralled and in love with this home town of mine, and could not wait to go there at any given opportunity. I spent my time between our home in the village and our home in Lagos, with my papa and step mother; while my mom went back to get a degree in the university of Ife, in the south of the country.

Shuttling between Lagos and Nkwessi with my parents, was the norm growing up. I explored every nook and cranny of my paradise, spending a lot of time in the river swimming. I believe this endeared me so much to water and I have a really close spiritual connection to this life source...

My best friend was my cousin, Chinelo. We called her Chichi. Chichi and I did everything together; we would sit by the big rubber tree near my uncle's house and talk about the village elders and the weird traditions and rites, commonly practiced in our village. Chichi and I were fascinated by the many rites that went on around us.

Now you must understand the setup of this place, there were rules and traditions excluding females from so many things. Back then, we used to wonder why our younger brothers and cousins were considered older and superior by village laws, and the strangeness of not being allowed into certain areas of the village and not being able to see certain masquerades because of being female, all were a mystery to us. The village had so many do's and don'ts, we simple chalked it all up to ignorance.

In retrospect, after our introduction and understanding of worshiping in a church environment, I began to see similarities in how women were viewed as spiritually different to men, even though the village version was cruder. My siblings and I were exposed to different types of churches through our mother. She was sold on Christ, his death and coming back, and she made sure all her children got to know about him. Most folks in my village were Anglicans at the time, but this never stopped many of them from participating in traditional rites and cults. These were different to our mode of worship in churches. We found amusement in others, who questioned those engaged in traditional rites, casting them into the pits of hell for being heathens. Our rationale was that God did put us all on earth, but he also permitted diverse ways of worship and ways of praising him. But no one ever paid any attention to us, what did we know?

The churches my mother attended, outside the Anglican mode of worship, aroused my curiosity about spirituality. Unlike the Anglican songs of praise, and stifling conformity,

spiritual churches like Christ healing Holy Sabbath Church, were filled with energy and charisma. Hands were clapped, drums beat and worshipers jumped high into the air, shouting Jehovah, hallelujah and hosanna at the top of their lungs. There was candle burnings and speaking in tongues, the display of which both frightened and mesmerized me. The only thing I had against them was the sting of candle wax on my poor skin (many would scream child abuse today) lol.

Chichi and I were seven years old when she fell ill with malaria. This was a killer back then, as different strains eluded various treatments. I remember going home and seeing her so frail and skeletal. I did tease her, but I was filled with overwhelming sadness. She was still ill, as of the day I returned with my parents to our home in the city. I could only hope that my papa would allow me return with him on his next visit.

Two weeks after my return to the city, I also fell ill. I was off school for about a week. I had a dream, one of the nights on which my illness was worst. I was on a vast beach. The beach stretched far beyond my view and there were people queued on two lines. On one line were hundreds of people dressed in flowing white robes. On the second line, hundreds of people dressed in regular clothing. Both lines were made up of people of different races, color, male, female and children. Considering the vast number of people on both lines, I could not comprehend how the two men, who stood on a raised platform at the very front, where the lines started, would be able to conclude the roll call in time. I was on the line with people dressed in regular clothing, and while there, I felt someone tug at my arm. I turned around and standing there was Chichi, dressed in a flowing bright white robe. I hugged her excitedly and asked what she was doing here and why she was dressed in white. Isn't it exciting to be in this awesome place, I asked. Chichi looked sad and shook her head repeatedly, saying no, no, I did not belong here. I asked why. Her response was to plead with me to come with her. She tried pulling me out of the line and I struggled to remain where I was, but Chichi was much powerful than I. She succeeded in pulling me away from the line, to a corner. This was when I noticed that she no longer looked skeletal. She was radiant! She hugged me tightly and whispered, "We'll see again Njide, but not now, later you understand." (Njide is my Igbo name, pronounced In-gee-day).

I woke up with my arms still in an embrace, and calling her name. I was covered in sweat and my heart felt as if it would break in two. I cried so much that morning, my stepmom almost went crazy with worry. She did not want my father to blame her for my unhappiness...another story. Later that evening, my father came home with the news. Chichi had died a week ago back in the village.

I was devastated, confused and angry, looking for someone to blame. I remember telling my father it was his fault I never got to say goodbye. If only he had taken me to the village one last time. Of course mine was the ranting of an angry child. He understood and did not reprimand me for my rudeness.

I missed out attending Chichi's burial ceremony and farewell ritual. When a young child dies, it was customary in my village, for all her younger siblings and playmates to be cleansed of her aura and spirit. This is done by bathing each child by her graveside, chanting incantations to sever ties of the dead from the living. This is done, because, prior to these rituals, kids told their parents or adults, that they still see and play with their dead friends and siblings. On this occasion of Chichi's death, I was the only one who did not have this ritual bath. In the aftermath of my dream, it dawned on me that Chichi appearing in my dream, saved my life.

If I had remained on that line, I would have responded to my name during the roll call, to the end that I would not have woken from my sleep. There's nothing wrong with death...it just was not my time. The universe orchestrated circumstances to ensure the separation rite was not performed on me, making it possible for Chichi to reach and save me. This incident with Chichi is something that will remain with me as long as I live and I still miss her to this day.

For me, being awakened is a process and not a destination. Like the stages of infancy to adulthood, man undergoes stages of awareness before attaining a higher level of consciousness: worshiping a God through object before ultimately realizing that we are gods to each other. Representatives of the Great I AM. My awareness is about being spiritually conscious of my surroundings and me. I believe in Christ and have the uttermost respect for Eastern, and other belief systems; simple because I have grown to understand that the only true form of worship, or praise of God or the Infinite, is for man to find himself and acknowledge the I Am, in himself.

There is no need for dogma in the worship of God, the Creator or the Being: the only prerequisite is Love.

Mom returned home one day to tell me she had found God. I smiled and asked her where. She said in the 'O'. I asked what is the 'O'? Her reply was, the 'O' is infinite, endless and beyond measure. The infinite nature of the letter 'O', is symbolic of the completeness and dual nature of man. The spiritual and physical nature of God, reflected in the spiritual and physical nature of man as God. This awareness, catapulted me to a whole new dimension which I'm glad to say, continues to date.

I have had experiences whereby, I was shown things in my dreams, many of which have occurred. I grew up surrounded by instances of supernatural occurrences to myself and others around me. Some involved being saved from disasters or accidents that should have taken their lives. My husband is an example: traveling to work on a busy stretch of road in London, Fulham Palace Road (A219) towards Putney Bridge, he fell asleep driving. He was about to crash into the side railings when the horn (his own horn) woke him up! For 9am in the morning, he did not run into any other car, there were no pedestrians about and surprisingly no other car close by. Something or someone used his own hands to blast the horn of the car he was driving. As if that was

not enough for the day, at the exact spot, driving back home and the same thing happened. The only difference being, he was now driving on the opposite side of the road.

Fulham Palace Road is always busy, both with vehicles and pedestrians. But surprisingly, twice on the same day, in the exact spot, no one was anywhere close to him. Using his own hands, the horn was pressed, waking him up the moment before he would have gone headlong into the railings and then the buildings behind them. Growing up around such occurrences made it impossible to ignore the existence of something beyond the physical; an awareness of the spiritual nature of man.

At age fourteen, I had my first experience with the Light (I refer to it as Light, because that is what I know it to be...). I was upset one afternoon because mom would not let me visit my friend who lived in another part of Lagos. I did everything possible to persuade her, but she was weary of that area of town and what I might be influenced to get up to, over there. I remember telling her she had no confidence in her job raising me, if a simple visit to the other side of town was such a threat to her. For that, I was banished to my room. Teenage hormones, or fury, I don't know which, but something completely took over me...Rage!

All I wanted to do was die, which would show her. I thought stupidly and I proceeded to hold my breath. Something I had done in the past, and strangely, the sensation of the effect was always, rather pleasing. On this particular day, I over did it. The sensation started as a slight heat on my forehead and immediately it shot down my spine. Soon, my entire body was overwhelmed with heat. The discomforting feeling of not breathing began to wear off. All I felt was calm. I was floating and I liked it, very much. I was going towards a light. I remember saying to myself, I'm leaving, and soon I'll be dead.

The word DEAD, sent panic waves through me and my whole world flashed before my eyes. It was like a movie trailer and it ended with my mom's face as she looked down on me with tears streaming down her face. I was no longer happy, or eager to remain where I was, but it was almost too late to come back. I began to reach back, step further away from the light, but it was as though a force field was pulling against me. I could still hear the physical world, faintly...cars and street noise. I was tired and out of breath.

Suddenly, I heard a loud banging and then another. Then I heard mom yelling my name. She wanted me to stop whining and come help her with dinner. I remember holding on to her voice and with one final struggle, I was virtually hurled away from the force. When I opened my eyes, I was no longer on my bed, but on floor. Mom was still banging on the door. I crawled and let her in, whispering that I will be out a minute.

Fast forward to my adult years, I was now married and a mother to seven children. Part of my journey towards being enlightened is my experience with Light. Several years ago, I was at a place in my life, when everything was falling apart. I suppose the stress

brought on the headaches. This also was the period when second experience with the Light began. It started at first as a tiny stream of light that would suddenly take over me, especially when really tired. This was around 2009, the period I was diagnosed with migraine headaches. I would lie awake in bed. Aware of the noises around me—I could hear the kids and the television downstairs—until I felt a concentration of heat on my forehead and next, I would see a stream of bright light. Gradually, I began to see images, almost like a silent motion picture. I would see the most beautiful falling hills, and sometimes mountains glazed with ice and snow. At other times, it would be a meadow, or a vast never ending desert of sand. These images were soothing and calming to me. Knowing I was awake and yet having this experience, I called out to one of the kids, to know if they could see what I saw. I did call but no sound emitted from me.

These experiences never last long when I do observe the time, but over there, it seems as if I had spent hours. At this point, once I get off the bed, my head always felt better. I somehow understood that there was much more to the light than making my headaches go away. As time went on, these light visitations began to last longer, and the images also began to change. I started to see silhouettes of people. Over a period of time, the silhouettes became clearer and I began to see people. I found all this exciting, and soon discovered that I no longer had to be tired or have an aura of migraine to have the Light experience. Soon, I began to put myself in a state where the lights came to me. I see people, in gardens or malls or in their living rooms. Most times I don't know who they are, sometimes I do. So far, I have had no communication with anyone, even though I have observed people communicating with each other; without being privy to their discussions.

I am ecstatic about these experiences for two reasons: this was a means of getting rid of my migraines without medication. Secondly, the calm and soothing experience this also brought into my life in the aftermath of each experience. My awakening is realizing that God exists through man. Man is God to man. If I can love my fellow-man, I can love God, and my neighbor can and will experience the love of God. Whatever little act of kindness I show to those who need it—whether they deserving or not—will make the world a better place. Every cruel or good act performed towards any other living thing is done by God. If man is more caring and tolerant of his fellow-man, everyone will perceive a loving caring God, as experienced firsthand through another being. Refer to my blog post from last year: I AM BECAUSE OF LOVE.

Life is a school and I am its avid student; a work in progress. I'm still learning, and will continue to learn from life and all that is life. The opportunity to rehash aspects of my life is a wonderful experience, which I thank Barbara for providing. I consider this a soul-searching exercise, as our individual and collective journeys serve as a compass to each other.

You can read more about Dotta's journey on her website

<http://www.dottaraphels.com/blog/>

My Awakening Experience... CW...

When I first signed up for this challenge, I thought really hard. What were the incidents that have happened that changed me the most? To many of us, some changes are inevitable and probably we might just even treat them as parts and parcels of life.

What I felt when I first saw this “awakening experience”, I thought about a scenario whereby a life-changing experience have happened to a certain person and it changes the person’s life and allowing him or her to realize their true inner self that have been concealed in them for a long period of time. It is not the usual self that they have portrayed to the society, but the real them.

I recalled this incident vividly that have happened to me and yes, an awakening experience for me. It happened when I was 18. I was just a normal school girl until one fine day. When everything changes...

It was during my hectic period of school life and one fine day, I spotted a floater in my left eye. I thought it was just because I was too tired recently and I prayed hard nothing major was going to happen. But days after days, there were still no changes. I started to worry. I decided maybe it was time for me to see the doctor. Till today, I remembered the fear and worry I had back then. I remembered going to the nearby clinic and the doctor got worried as well, she told me she suspected it was retinal detachment and referred me to the hospital. My check-up at the hospital was around 4 days after going to the clinic and those 4 days were probably the longest period of time I have gone through. Time seemed to be passing so slowly and every single day, I cannot help but think about what was really wrong with me. There were nights I spent hiding in my blanket and cried until I slept. The suspense was really too much for me to take and I felt really helpless.

So eventually that day came. During the check up, I was really nervous and when it was confirmed that I was diagnosed with retinal detachment, my heart literally sank. Knowing I had to do a surgery, I was not sure how I could handle it. I had matters that were worrying me. First, it was the surgery. Who will not freak out when you heard that the doctor is going to remove your eyeball, put something in and put your eyeball in? I was not just afraid of the surgery process but I was also afraid of the result. All I can say was I was afraid because I was afraid. I felt I did not have the courage and confidence to handle this and this was what scared me even more. Secondly, it was my school project work. I understood how important these two were to me and all I could think about was why me? Why out of so many people, and it just had to be me?

My mother brought me to a private hospital for a second consultation and listen to their views. They said that retinal detachment normally happened to older people and I was only 18! Once again, I felt that it was unfair. However, the doctor wanted to do the surgery immediately because he said it was an emergency case. He decided to try laser

surgery first due to my young age and if necessary, then the big surgery. I was shocked. I had not made any mental preparation! He decided to do a laser surgery first to see if he could stop the retinal from falling any further. So at 4pm that afternoon, I had my surgery. I remembered the doctor telling me to try and keep the lens in my eyes or if it dropped out, he would have to redo it again. Hearing that, I somehow felt courage surging up. I was determined to get this done, once and for all. I even told the nurse to press me down if I were to move because of the pain. I guess never in my whole life would I forget the surgery process. During the surgery, I thought about happy memories and the number of things I have not done yet. This surgery had to be successful.

Eventually, the surgery was over. Even the doctor and nurse praised that I was brave. I was glad but I was hurting too. When I thought everything was over, it was not. The very next day, when I went for a follow-up check-up then he realized, I had to go through another round because there was still fluid at that portion of the retinal. So in the end, I had my second round of surgery. I was sure that I was even braver this time round.

However after the surgery, I felt like my inner self had been awakened and it was as if I was a new-born all over again and everything just seemed to fall into place. Though I have lost 10% of my vision, I was thankful that the surgery went well and even more grateful that it made me appreciate things in my life, even those small little ones. For example, in the morning, someone could just say a simple, "Good morning!" That simple gesture could totally brighten up my morning! These are small little things we always tend to neglect and take for granted in life, or it could just be that we do not even bother to care.

After that incident, I learnt to see things in another perspective. I slowly learnt to see things more in depth than just looking at the things that were just on the surface point and dealt with problems with a different approach. Not only that, I am definitely thankful for my optimism in life all along since young and grateful for my family and friends' support throughout this hard period of time.

So after that, I continued blogging and found my interest in the things I want to blog. I did not just want to purely want to talk about my own life, but I want to share with everyone lessons I have learnt in my life. I want to inspire people through my words and through experiences I have gone through. From that, I really wish that they could find out their real self too.

I started to write poems from feelings I have experienced or stories I have seen or heard. Although I might not have seen a lot in my life because of my young age but I can say that, up till now, I have learnt many lessons in life that many have not discovered or "attended" yet. I am really glad to say that I am enjoying how things are right now and though there are small little obstacles here and there in my life, I know how to handle it better than before.

I also started to read books that were more to the philosophy types and I really loved them. Then it came to me at a point of time, when I saw this quote and thought how true it was. It was a quote, written by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "It is not length of life, but depth of life", and I thought I did not just want to live my life plainly but I want to do things that I love, things that I have passion in and try out things that I did not want to back then. I want to count my blessings, enjoy my life to the fullest extent and leave no regrets in this journey.

I am really happy to say that, I really love how I am right now and I hope the same for you too!

You can read more about CW's journey on her website
<http://sunflowerrosecw.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Laurie...

And so I made a vow
to become my own healer
whatever that meant -
to fix the brokenness
for once and for all,
to risk finding myself
broken beyond repair,
to enter the unknown,
to go all the way
to my very core,
to risk it all
with no guarantee,
to somehow understand
the world around me
just a little,
to prove it was possible,
to reach out
one more last time,
to let go completely,
and to find my way back
here, to my heart.

It has been a long journey. I have had to learn to confront every part of me. I have walked through dark places and wondered how I would ever find my way. There were times when I gathered every last bit of strength just to reach out one last time. Each time, I was met with a hand. Each time, I felt the presence of another brave soul who was making the journey back with me. It was this presence that saved me, that I held on to and reached for.

It is so strange to look back now...at the struggle...the years that I bravely walked through, the loneliness and abuse as a child, the eating disorder voice that both saved my life and almost killed me, over 20 years of therapy and hospitals and doctors and every other kind of thing I could find to try and somehow fix what appeared to be an incurable condition.

Many gave up on me. Some never did. I never did. I was turned away by therapists, alternative therapists, and friends because they just didn't know how

to help me.

About 3 years ago, at 38, I returned to my most recent therapist, with a toddler, scared to death because I was starting to relapse, and I was determined not to leave her to be hospitalized again. I had to find another way. I was turned away. It was frightening.

I knew my only hope was to become my own healer, to risk everything, to let go completely, to finally heal myself for once and for all. This time, when I reached out, I found even more hands to hold, and I found my own soul.

I searched out the strongest, calmest healers I could find. I tried to absorb as much as I could. I was met with an incredible, unconditional love...

For the next 2 years, I worked to gather and heal parts of myself, with the help of some strong women who had also done this. I'm not sure how I was able to do this with a toddler, as I didn't have time, money, or family support (I didn't speak to my parents during this time.) I did have the support of my husband, to whom I am eternally grateful. The truth is there were many piled up dishes and many late nights when I sat up with all of the parts of my Self, as I would have done had my daughter needed comforting.

It truly has been a beautiful process, even with the pain. I am completely free from the eating disorder I struggled with for so long, and I feel closer to my wholeness than I ever thought possible. The strong love I felt from healers, I now feel inside. I have reunited with my parents, and we are healing. As I continue to integrate all of this, I am honored to reach out and share something so sacred... the journey back to my heart.

You can read more about Laurie's journey on her website
<http://lauriesnotes.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Debra...

This is a story in which the right kind of trouble unexpectedly brings a gift.

From an early age, I struggled to feel a sense of belonging and identity. As a child I loved play-acting and imagining what it might be like to be a bear, a dog, a fox, or an orphan, a prisoner or conductor. My attempts at belonging were easily expressed by play-acting where I could put on a mask and give myself over to fantasy. But when not play-acting, I felt lost, convinced that I was missing something that others must have.

According to my parents Merriam-Webster dictionary, identity was defined as the quality of being a particular thing and not some other thing. Yes, I thought, my problem has something to do with a lack of being someone in particular. As I grew older, anytime I felt that others were defining me, even when they were being complimentary, I felt alienated. How could they know something about me when I had no clue? I was a fake, and I knew it.

Years later when in my early 30's I moved to Oregon from Long Island, New York. After a few stormy years of relationships that failed, and feeling the need for solitude to just let myself be me, I started to practice meditation.

Some months later though I started to feel strong, uncontrollable emotions and I could no longer make it through a single day without crying. This was not the kind of crying where a few tears run down your cheeks, but gut-wrenching crying that would last until I finally fell asleep exhausted.

A year later, I was ready to seek out a guide. Having a love and familiarity with the writings of C.G. Jung and James Hillman, I entered into analysis. In the course of a three-year long therapy, traveling to the depths of hell and back, I experienced a most amazing and unexpected healing.

Not that I went from 0 to 250 in an instant. There was plenty of work to be done. Exploring my dreams, memories and relationships led me to see that I was filtering my experience through a very cloudy lens. There was a series of recognitions that came from therapy that both broadened my view and opened me up to not be afraid of an ongoing increase in that opening.

Many insights began to come into view, including a painful recognition that how I understood myself, others and the events of my life needed a revisioning. But with that came a recognition that nothing could happen without seeing how tightly I held on to a view of the past and present which bled into the future. Even if there are objective facts about my life that get to tell the story their way, what I needed was a story that made room for all the longings I ever knew and how to live with and through their power over me. That meant looking fear right in the face and learning how to talk back, and most

importantly, learning to talk at all.

Seeing a deficiency in my use of language was a huge part of the work and it still is today. A love of words and language allows for an ongoing stream of ideas leading to new ways to experience and understand all that life has to offer. And for me, learning to open up to deeper levels of myself and others eventually led to the following life-changing experience.

One morning, much later in the therapy, upon waking from an emotional dream, I felt an intense burning and buzzing at the base of my spine. I sat up in bed, and felt what can only be described as an electric shock shooting up my spine into my head. I thought I might die it was so intense, but it only lasted a few seconds. I knew that something very big had happened. Over the course of the next few years, I began to feel different, physically, emotionally and intellectually. I felt tremendous healing as I slowly began to live closer and truer to matters of the heart.

It is as if now I am now more like a hollow reed where before I was a lead stick. It's difficult to describe, but I continue to feel a sense of opening, enfolding, better able to love and be loved. And especially to belong – in my body, in my family, and in the entirety of this big, beautiful and crazy world.

There's not freedom from suffering but to suffer as love does when it lives on in spite of the relentless longings. Feelings flow, moving through me without resistance. If I could bottle the experience, I gladly would and give it away. I am most grateful for feeling a sense of renewal.

Surprisingly, the one thing I thought I was missing; having an identity, I now know I never needed.

You can read more about Debra's journey on her website <http://ptero9.com>

My Awakening Experience... It is always about Love... Linda...

**The dawn is breaking
A light shining through
You're barely waking
And I'm tangled up in you
Yeah**

Fitting words from the song *Collide* by Howie Day for an experience that really defies the limits of human communication. This looks like the beginning of a romantic love story. Looks though, can be deceiving! On January 30th, Uranus the Awakener (modern ruler of Aquarius) is in full force. Today also marks the Chinese New Year, the Year of the Wood Horse. I chose today on this rare Black Moon, the Aquarius New Moon (a few degrees behind my Ascendant) that also features Mercury conjunct Neptune to post my offering for my participation in Barbara's January Challenge on Awakening. Thank you Barbara for giving me a nudge to look back at this time in order to gain some perspective and share with others.

It is an auspicious time to herald new awakenings (Aquarius/Uranus) and write about mystical openings (Mercury conjunct Neptune). I am not claiming to be enlightened or awakened, far from it. Growth to me is both cyclic and nonlinear in nature. I envision a spiral when I reflect on my life thus far. I have moved through life with many highs and lows, but each time a challenge comes, I emerge somewhat changed and move further along the larger individual /collective spiral. I will now attempt to describe an experience that was otherworldly and incredibly trans-formative. While my memories have faded, I still see that this glimpse beyond the veil has relevance in my present life. There have been many other openings before, and many since. But this particular time it was all about love. And love is all that really prevails in the energetic field of consciousness. I chose the song *Collide* because it was popular during the Summer of 2005 when I experienced this brief but poignant opening. In fact I crafted my first blog series ~ *the Collision Series*, with both this song and that awakening in mind to illustrate how subtle awakenings can trigger a new (or renewed) way of *BEing*.

Background

It helps to have some background, a context for my journey. I did not fit in as a child. I felt alone, awkward, misunderstood, and unimportant. My parents desperately wanted a child, but not the one they got! Some respite was found in my imagination. My inner world and my curiosity were my refuge. The occasional teacher or neighbor offered guidance and a more progressive outlook. I also had a chance as a small child to visit my great-aunt and uncle a few times and use their art supplies. I recall feeling excited and so at peace creating and learning about art, and feeling more understood by them than other adults in my family. I have a feeling that they were people who I had more in common with, but I will never know. I did not get an opportunity to know them well.

Fear, anger, and upheaval were a constant growing up in my complex, dysfunctional family. My parents were not equipped to love me in the way that I needed. It took years for this truth to become clear to me. I also felt isolated because we moved so often. I never knew my extended family very well because they lived far away from us. I began to gain some footing, however, once my progressed sun moved from Scorpio to Sagittarius. I made some new friends that I could trust and thrived in their company. Yet when I began to heavily experiment with drugs and started having vivid dreams and heightened psychic abilities, I was utterly alone. I had no one to confide in. I eventually shut down out of fear. I attributed these "experiences" to be artificially drug induced and unimportant. So I minimized them and packed them away for a while.

My journey

Once I left home, moved into my own apartment out of state, and began my senior year in college I met a coworker who would days later become my boyfriend. Within less than 2 weeks, my life had dramatically shifted! This was an extraordinary time. He was involved in a spiritual cult based on Indian meditation and philosophical practices. I did not approve of his dependence on this "teacher" Osho/Rajneesh, but I was open to exploring my spirituality again. While I avoided involvement in anything cultish, my knowledge of astrology, dream-work, meditation, and metaphysics accelerated. I remained open and met more people "on the path". In graduate school a student led me to meditation classes at a center on South St. This is where I first saw the material from *A Course in Miracles*. This center organized a retreat in the Pocono mountains. A couple I met at the retreat instantly bonded with me and invited me to a raw foods spiritual group. And on and on it goes.. I experimented with many teachings such as channeled lessons, RAMTHA, raw food, A Course in Miracles, Hindu and Buddhist practices, Quakerism, and a few I no longer remember. I am so grateful for the people I met and the knowledge acquired.

Between two worlds

In 2004 I was very busy in the outer world. I had 2 demanding jobs; I was recovering from a devastating breakup with a coworker; I was fully ensconced in my Quaker Meeting community, and I was editing and co-writing a book with my friend. I had just transferred to a new unit at my government social service job, but (to quote Prince in *Raspberry Beret*) "Seems that I was busy doing something close 2 nothing, but different than the day before." My duties had become stagnant and stale in this toxic, soul-depleting environment. I knew I needed a change but my efforts to find a new job were unsuccessful. I was also looking to buy a house. Surprisingly, I could not find the right property. I typically find whatever I like eventually, so this really had me baffled. So I sought out a clearness committee. Within Quakerism, the clearness committee represents a process for discernment. I also continued meeting with my spiritual advisor about figuring out my calling and defining next steps. I felt loved and supported outside of work, and tormented by ghosts and adversaries on the job. I also loved my editing/writing and it kept me going. Life was busy and moving at a rapid pace.

One day I was invited to attend a weekend workshop at Pendle Hill. Pendle Hill is a Quaker center in Wallingford, PA that is internationally known for Spirit-led learning, retreat, and community. My meeting agreed to pay for half of the tuition and Pendle Hill would absorb the remainder. I was so excited to get away, if even for just a long weekend. My book was about mystical experiences and my interest in the ethereal was heightened. I hoped to meet people with similar interests.

The first evening we gathered around in a large circle at the beautiful conference room at Brinton House and introduced ourselves. A couple of much younger people were sitting at the opposite end of this majestic room with beautiful hardwood floors and a cathedral ceiling. A young man with a foreign accent began to speak. I will call him "James". He used few words and was very soft-spoken. But I distinctly heard him say "I have had a few mystical experiences." No one else mentioned this topic that evening. I took it as a sign to introduce myself. The next morning I bravely went up to James and asked him if he would be willing to speak with me. He said we could talk after the workshop was over. James was new on staff at the retreat center and worked as a gardener. He had just returned from extensive travel overseas and actually grew up just a few miles away. I was nervous about talking with him because he was so much younger than I, and I was feeling an attraction towards him that was subtle but uncomfortable. For the remainder of the weekend James would join my table for meals and look over at me during class sessions. He was observing me and again I was a bit unsettled.

We got together at the end of the weekend. We talked for hours about anything and everything. We had so much in common despite the age difference. Time and space dissipated. I told him things about myself that my closest friends did not know. I think this was because I figured I would never see him again. He was just staying here temporarily in-between his travels. I saw the faces and smiles of all the men in my past in his expressions and his gaze. Light radiated from his eyes and it was dazzling and brilliant. I knew him and yet I did not know him. Venus had just gone retrograde (on my moon) and conjoined the sun a couple weeks before. It was about to station near my IC in just 2 days. But I was not thinking about Venus because I was not looking for love...

Magical meeting

In the year that followed, my life moved along. I lost touch with James. The book project was suspended in definitely because my friend was distracted with other concerns. Work was tense and isolating. I continued to look for a house and a new job. I also continued to attend Quaker worship and meet with my advisor. I felt angry, tired, sad, and lonely. Neptune was slowly making its way towards my Ascendant at this time. I was looking forward to this major transit, but had no expectations on how it would manifest in me. I noticed that Pendle Hill was offering a class on spiritual discernment. The same class was offered the year before and it looked really interesting. I received financial support for attending a 5 day class in the middle of Summer. I recall that I was

put on a waiting list for the spiritual discernment class and another class that was offered a few weeks later. I eventually was contacted that there was a spot for me in the spiritual discernment class! Neptune would land on my Ascendant the very first night of the class. How exciting! My intentions were clear for this 5 day class/ retreat. I was very focused on my goal – to decide whether or not to quit my full-time job and to consider new ways of following my calling.

I arrived to the center very stressed out and anxious. I was so eager to submerge myself in the calm yet powerful energies of Pendle Hill. Upon arrival that evening at Brinton House, I went to the large wooden conference room after I unpacked my bags. It was around sunset and I felt a presence. I felt a sense of peace and excitement in the silence. It was familiar somehow. A Divine Spark was about to be ignited. I thought about James, the young man I met here in this very room. I had figured he was back traveling and creating new adventures for himself. Yet it seemed like he was in the room with me! On the first evening we all gathered in the main dining area for dinner. I went into the kitchen with my tray to get some dinner. I saw a young man working in the kitchen who looked a bit familiar but he had long hair and a beard. Literally a few seconds later a woman in the room shouted " James!" and he turned around. It was *him! He was still HERE.* I was partially in shock, but also felt a sense of confirmation that my intuition was in full gear back at the classroom. The next day I saw James at breakfast and we looked at one another. When he was right behind me while emptying our trays. I simply said hello and smiled. He responded by calling me by name and declaring that I came back here to take the class I was curious about last year. How did he know? He then suggested we get together later. My head was spinning. Here I am with a strong mission and focus and this person comes back into my life. All of the sudden I feel myself being pulled into this vortex. How will I handle this cosmic curve ball?

We did meet for a few hours on the day before I was scheduled to leave. Like before, we just talked and talked and talked and talked some more. I was so blown away by our time together that I forgot when dinner was served and showed up an hour late. James was startled to hear I was leaving the next day , so he asked to meet again after my classes were over, just like last summer. I knew intuitively that there was something incomplete between us, so I agreed to meet one last time.

We met after my class ended, outside on this sweltering July afternoon. That's when it happened. I could tell you where we sat and about the weather (close to 100 degrees the entire week!) but I would be remiss to be able to logically explain what happened next. I felt like our spirits merged. I was totally understood and loved in a way that was new to me. *Love without expectations.* He wanted no-thing from me in return. I had *never* experienced this before! We just listened to each other and let silence in, and shared who we are at a soul level. It seemed like we were blending our energies in our words and actions. Neptune was on my Ascendant so perfect timing was in play. I did not realize it at the time, but I was getting an upgrade. There was no instruction manual. I doubt it would have made it a difference anyway. I was on a magic carpet ride

and there was no turning back!

While we were having our marathon encounter , I had a very unique thought. I heard my inner voice say " *If I were to die right now, it would be fine. I am at peace because I am totally understood , seen, accepted, and known.*" In fact at certain moments it felt like I was already in a higher dimension having my life review. I was touched by Divine Love and everything was aligned. It was not about the young man really. Referencing our astrological synastry or the telepathy between us or other links is really superfluous in this case. To quote what my friend, the talented psychic and astrologer Robert Graham, said when I later told him about what happened, " He is just a clue." What I mean here is that my openness to James created a portal to the Divine. Months later when we discussed our relationship, he admitted that when we are together, he would transcend. I learned or should I say re-membered about the power and magic of combining energies and raising the combined frequencies. A 3rd semi-distinct consciousness was created when we were together. I was in a haze after we said goodbye. I walked around the grounds and saw light in the silence. I drove home on a busy interstate highway, but the car was driving me. Typically this road is scary and intimidating for me, but that evening I was lost in song and the car seemed to glide on the road. I lost all sense of time and space. I have no idea how I got home.

For a few more days I stayed with the light and bliss. I only had contact with James a few more times. But I realized that Robert was correct in that this man was not a goal. James was representative of the divine in action. I had reflected intently on an exercise held towards the end of the spiritual discernment class where we reviewed the names of various roles posted on the walls and recorded which ones were part of our calling. Mystic was one of the choices . I decided that I was in fact a mystic, or at least a beginner mystic. I was very drawn to Rumi for inspiration. The poetry of Rumi was very helpful in showing me examples of the Cosmic Union. This was not about romantic love at all and I saw that clearly. We were very intimately linked but not like romantic lovers. He was everything and nothing. He was family and a stranger all wrapped into one. We were so similar and yet so different. This experience was exquisitely a meeting of 2 energetic beings in a very strong portal (Pendle Hill) at a time where Neptune was coming to my Ascendent. Time and Space collided in such a way to bring this potentiality into form.

Moving On

When I returned to work after my vacation, events occurred in a way that revealed it was time to move on. My Clearness committee was very helpful in assisting me in clarifying my experiences. So I lived on my " house money" and quit my job before finding a new one. I was scared and liberated at the same time. I continued to notice light and symmetry in the silence, especially in nature. Communion with birds often triggered an opening for me. I discovered that Pendle Hill and Longwood Gardens were "power places" for me. Eckhart Tolle talks about these portals in *The Power of Now*. My perspective on love between humans shifted as well. I now had a glimpse of

what is truly real. Love without conditions. Love that pulsates all around us and within us. The song *Collide* is written from the man's point of view and I believe it mirrors how I imagine James felt about our time together. Having said that; this song also resonates at a more cosmic level, especially the first section.

**The dawn is breaking
A light shining through
You're barely waking
And I'm tangled up in you
Yeah**

The dawn was breaking within my being and the light was beginning to enter my awareness. I was *barely waking* to what waits beyond the physical plane. The entanglement was both between myself and this young man, and also occurring at the quantum level. Was this awakening fleeting, ephemeral and anomalous? Was it a miracle in the purest of the word? Am I still wondering what more can happen as Neptune continues to spend many more years in my 1st house?

Hell, yeah!

Collide *live*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li-Q9aRs3zc> Still with me? Thank you if you read this entire story! This soulful version of the song, complete with a string section!, is performed on the Dave Letterman show a few months before my experience. Notice how he mentions this track was mysteriously re-released? (and coincided with my awakening) Collide is the backdrop for that feeling of awakening and I was also re-released!

You can read more about Linda's journey on her website
<http://lindalitebeing.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Michael...

The journey to a spiritual existence is, I suppose, different for different people. Who can say if any two journeys are exactly the same? What follows is my journey, as best I can understand it, and placed against the framework that Barbara has kindly suggested:

Remembering My Childhood

We were a military family, and so we moved rather frequently. I have generally fond memories of my family. I remain close to my two younger sisters, and I also enjoy wonderful relationships with both my parents, who are now in their early 70s. Ours was a moderate Catholic family that focused on love, forgiveness, charity, and generally behaving in a good way. No fire-and-brimstone. It was an excellent start in life towards a spiritual existence, with my father being more orthodox in his interpretation, and my mother being more intuitive. Due to the frequent moves, I was always the new kid and was often bullied and occasionally beaten on. Thus, I had plenty of learning experiences in terms of forgiving, although I was decidedly imperfect in this.

But I did try.

First Stage of Awakening

I suppose this could be said to have started when I was in high school, when I began to think more actively about being a good person in the moderate Catholic context. I was to later learn, thanks to an insightful question from blogger Kim Saeed, that I am likely INTJ on the Briggs-Myers personality type inventory. Basically, everything in my world has to logically fit together. Even spirituality. My brain is constantly trying to knit things together to find patterns amongst even disparate things. The pursuit of wisdom at this early age seemed to me to be a very logical and noble quest, as with wisdom one could discern between right and wrong in God's eyes, and thus with some confidence one could lead a decent life.

I thus carried on in the tradition of my father, being a moderate Catholic, getting married, and having three children. Well, at least contributing to having three children, to give credit where credit is due. };-)> Tai Chi was a part of this in the earlier years, and it is something that I enjoyed and would like to have the time and resources to be able to pursue once again.

Second Stage of Awakening

Given my INTJ nature, in the mind-body-soul triumvirate, my mind is, perhaps, senior amongst equals, or tends to be. The dismantling of my life began intellectually with a book by the late Professor Charles Hapgood titled *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*. Succinctly, Hapgood's analysis of maps that stretch as far back as the Library of Alexandria showed or implied geographical, mathematical, and clock technology knowledge that history records us not having achieved (together) until the late 1700s. Mind blowing! This, in turn, opened my eyes to the field of alternative research – history,

archaeology, science, engineering. Together, this implies that there perhaps was, in high antiquity, a unification of all branches of knowledge that continues to elude us today. Maybe the biblical story of the great flood isn't so crazy, after all.

Third & Fourth Stages

I am not certain where I am in terms of the third and fourth stages. I had a terrible divorce starting in 2008. My ex-wife, it turned out, has expert-confirmed narcissistic personality traits. The utter opposite of genuine spirituality. She severely alienated our three children from me during this, and every feminist within 100 miles seemed to line up to assist her – social workers, lawyers, politicians, and judges. I still haven't seen my daughter in over five years due to this, although with a prolonged fight, I was able to salvage relationships with my two sons.

Learning to forgive and let go of the anger has been a challenge, but I've made progress. If there was a purpose to it all, it was that my mind could see the underlying pattern in everything the kids and I went through, and then tie it into the broader world that surrounds us. I've had some magnificent insights into people, narcissism, and society, and I am capturing these in a two book set, the first of which will hopefully be out next month (i.e., end February or early March): *The Mirror, Book One – Welcome to the Evil Sisterhood*. I've never written a book before, so this itself is exciting, especially as I've had highly encouraging test reader feedback.

The books are an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual catharsis. Through these, I hope to be able to move onto to the fourth stage of awakening and learn to live a truly spiritual life.

I invite people to visit me at <http://www.navigator1965.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... A Slow Awakening... Leigh...

I'm not one of those people who felt spiritual connection from an early age. That said, I always believed that ghosts wandered the earth. I read the story of Bridey Murphy in high school and never doubted the reality of reincarnation — in fact I began reading other things about it. I so lacked a sense of spirituality, however, that I never connected those things to anything about spiritual or religious doctrine. I always saw an energy field around people and I took it so for granted that everyone did that I never mentioned it and never realized that most people don't see it until I was 30.

Aside from those little connections, I lived knotted in anxiety and worry and by the time I graduated from law school in 1983 at 30, I was numb, tense and miserable. After more than a year of listening to my constant laments a number of friends gently asked me if I'd thought about therapy. One of them had been seeing a transpersonal psychologist, Michele, who used meditation and past life regression, etc. in her work. In 1985, once I finally acknowledged that I needed therapy, Michele was the only one I considered even though it involved two hours round-trip to see her.

She quickly started me on meditation, introduced me to the basic philosophy that I create everything in my life; if I don't like something that's in it I need to ask myself what I believe that has created that reality. One of her first reading assignments for me was *The Nature of Personal Reality* by Jane Roberts. The world made sense to me for the first time ever when I read it. I loved the meditating and reading and the new life view that opened up for me but I still didn't think of any of this as spiritual or myself as being on a spiritual path.

I think that years of going to church because my parents thought we should and sitting through both Sunday school classes and church services that always left me bored and feeling nothing of spirit numbed me to the idea that spirituality could be meaningful or feel good. I had no framework of spirituality as I now understand it so my feelings about ghosts and reincarnation didn't connect to spirit for me. To me the path I'd begun under Michele's guidance was about personal growth and trying to find some way to be glad I woke up in the morning instead of sad that I hadn't died in the night.

In 1986 I started yoga, which has been an integral part of me ever since. Even though my teacher based our practice on balancing chakras (that's also stuck with me), I'm not sure how much I got about the spiritual connection, though I did wind up taking meditation classes at the Temple of Kriya Yoga and studied briefly with Goswami Kriyananda. It all just seemed natural to me. I immersed myself in classes and practices and loved it all but somehow I didn't have a conscious sense of being on a spiritual journey. I just so naturally and absolutely believed in a world beyond the physical that it all seemed matter-of-course to me.

It wasn't until some time after going to Nine Gates Mystery School in 1990 that I really

saw my path as deeply spiritual as well as one of personal growth. I still sometimes have a tendency to see a lot of spiritual practices as tools in service of personal growth, but overall I become more committed to a spiritual path year by year. I feel a lot of spiritual practices **are** designed to help open the dark places — hence the help for personal growth — and at the same time the energy created by them takes me deeper.

In hindsight I can see that some part of me was always open to all of this and open to it so naturally that I didn't have an intellectual framework for it. In that sense the work with Michele felt like coming home. My mind just had no reference point for true spirituality because my early experience intertwined church, religion and spirituality in a package that lacked any personal sense of the divine. I moved along with meditation, yoga, and other metaphysical pursuits and allowed them to transform me but it was six or eight years before I began to think of it as a spiritual journey.

I don't really consider myself enlightened or awakened and I don't really do practices with enlightenment as a goal. I've become committed to "Being Peace" — or what I like to think of for myself as "Becoming Peace" since I'm definitely a work in progress. Check out the Collective Prayer Sundays page if you're interested in joining me on the journey to peace.

You can read more about Leigh's journey on her website
<http://bluegrassnotes.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... River of My Life... Shaman...

At the beginning there was a pool of water: deep, still, profound.



The pool wished for movement, yearning for a new experience, impatient to explore its boundaries. It became friends with the Sun, the Earth, and the Wind. Together they created a life stream for the pool to follow.

The pool was excited by this initial movement which felt both like a tiny pure blue stream and a little shiny mermaid. The little mermaid was comfortable both swimming in the stream and resting on the surrounding sunny rocks. She felt connected to the sun, earth and water.

Slowly, the stream grew wider and curvy, and formed a river. The little mermaid felt a stranger to the new river and returned to the pool. The pool therefore had to create a little girl who could continue the journey.

The little girl had a larger body and legs. She could both swim and run and the pool thought she would be more apt to follow the river. But the little girl's body wasn't as adjusted to the water as the pool had hoped. Even though the river was transparent to her, the little girl felt fearful, insecure and cautious of the river's unknown flow. She followed the river observing from the river bank.

Little by little, the little girl grew a bit bigger, got acquainted with the river and started identifying with its flow. Through this process, she was gradually forgetting about her body, and, at one point, she dived courageously into the river. Excited by her new environment, she made friends with the river's other inhabitants and felt like she fit in perfectly well.

She led herself to believe there was nothing else but the river. Feeling extremely

comfortable, like a fish in the water, the little girl didn't even notice how much bigger and different her body became.

Suddenly her growing adolescent body rebelled against the river. Feeling like it wasn't appreciated, her body started moving uncontrollably creating waves and whirlpools. The young girl struggled to stay on the surface. Her body felt heavy, angry and provocative. She was surprised that she didn't feel like she was either her body or the river and she wasn't in control of either.

She was angry at both of them for the conflict they had created. The river, she felt, wasn't making things easier for her. For the first time in the longest time, the young girl felt she had to fight for herself. She realized she had to listen to her body if she was to survive.

Having newly discovered her changed body, the young girl started admiring its beauty. She enjoyed dressing it up, caressing it, and feeding it with love and happiness. She rode on the river catching all its gifts with pleasure and wonder. She became a young woman.

Although the young woman still felt part of the river, she also felt like she had outgrown it in some way. She was aware of the river's flow, but she stopped identifying with it. The latest gift the river offered to the young woman was a magic stick. She was told it can transform the river into the pool; deep, still, profound. But she still hasn't figured out how to use it. She thought she got to know the river quite well by now, but she felt she still needed its help to get to the pool. She has therefore decided to continue journeying with the river at a slower pace and an increased awareness.

She is looking to become one with the river and one with the pool...

I created this painting with the story line more than ten years ago while studying Transpersonal Psychology and Creative Expression. It is called the River of my Life. I used the body of water as the main element throughout the story because in my heart of hearts I am a child of the oceans (but my soul belongs to the stars...



I have since discovered how to use the magic stick and it has transformed my life, as well as lives of others. For which I am eternally grateful to the Great Spirit who has thousand names and who is the unnamed one. Aho!

You can read more about Shaman's journey on her website
<http://shamanictracking.com>

My Awakening Experience... Joss...

Yesterday was my scheduled day and I totally missed the boat. Yet the Universe has a sense of humour, indeed, as the reason I didn't post yesterday and the story I am posting today have a connecting thread. You see, the story I'm sharing has to do with the awakening that came into my life as a result of illness and the reason I am a day late is because yesterday was a day of healing from a blood infection caused by a fall a few days ago.

My journey towards waking up to my body's messages...

In 1992, after a few years of sleepless nights and unending pain in my body, I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia. Well, actually with Fibrositis as they called it back then. It was a diagnosis that put you in "no man's land" as no one really understood what it was, where it came from, or what to do about it.

Throughout my years with Fibromyalgia, much advice has come my way. From the dentist who suggested I attend a healing service to the co-worker who told me her aunt had healed herself from arthritis by eating bushels of alfalfa – I kid you not- many people expressed their opinion about the route I should follow.

For me, the journey to health began as one of discovery; of searching out medical studies, of reading books on stress, on chronic pain, on sleep, on childhood trauma. Somehow, I knew that there was some connection to my current situation of being on the couch, unable to function, and the abuse that I lived with as a child.

Was it that the psychic wounds from beatings suffered at the hands of my mother had lodged within my body and gotten stuck there? Was my pain the result of months of sleeplessness? Was my pain psychogenic i.e. my body was mirroring the pain that was in my heart? Was this all the result of some errant virus? Was my pain caused by being overwhelmed by life? Was my body giving me a much needed 'time out'? Many books have been written in an attempt to provide answers to each one of these questions. I needed to find my own answers, answers that resonated with me. Somehow, I knew that the road to health would begin from within.

The more I read, the more questions surfaced. No one had a definitive answer and, at the same time, many were quick to offer solutions. Fortunately, for me, a lesson I had learned when I was a teenager stood me in good stead. When I was seventeen I attended a local church and many of the people in that congregation blessed my life with acts of kindness. One thing that occurred has stayed with me and guided me throughout my life. At one point, the issue of the day became eye make-up. This was the late 1960s when women didn't wear pants to church or draw attention to themselves in any way. So, there we were, debating the fact that, somehow, lipstick was okay but eye make-up was "worldly". Looking around, I decided the reason lipstick was okay

was because the women over 40 all wore it and only the teenage girls wanted to wear eye make-up to church! I remember thinking that if God had nothing more to worry about then whether or not I was wearing eye make-up, the world was in serious trouble. I decided that day that I would need to discover for myself what I believed and that I would not rely on other people's edicts.

That lesson, learned many years earlier, fueled my thinking, my research, and my determination. I would not wait for science to come up with an answer; I would not wait for the doctors to continue to try a variety of medications and / or therapies. I would read, I would learn, and I would decide. Of course, writing this down makes it sound so simple. It wasn't. When you are incapable of fixing breakfast for your children, when you are laying on the couch most of the day with auditory hallucinations plaguing you, when you are so tired and so in pain that you wish you could just die, when you chase after sleep as ineffectively as a dog chasing a butterfly, when you forget what it is like to get up in the morning feeling good, then making decisions, figuring things out, becomes a colossal mountain to climb. Change happens slowly, oh so slowly.

There was, however, no alternative. No one was going to wave a magic wand and make it all better. No one was there to help me research or even discuss with me what might be the cause and the solution to my health situation. My ex-husband often commented "you are the only one who can help yourself" and he was right. Oh, it would have been nice to have felt supported, understood, cared for even. But that aside, I was the one who had to accept the responsibility for my own health and well-being. My future was in my hands, feeble and shaky as they were.

One thing that made sense to me was that the longer I stayed on that damn couch, the less able I was to be active in any way. One day I needed to mail a letter to my insurance company. The mailbox was about a 4 minute walk away. I decided I would attempt it. I walked to the mailbox, mailed my letter, and returned home to spend the rest of the day lying down. About a week later, I decided that maybe I could walk that far again and I did. Two days later I walked to the mailbox, looked down the street to where the next street light was and walked that far. Two days afterward, I did it again. Over the next few months I increased my daily walk by one light post every week till, three months later, I could walk for 30 minutes. I wasn't walking at a pace that would win a marathon, that was for sure, but I was walking thirty slow minutes a day! What a victory that was.

After consulting with my doctor, I went off the medication that was causing me to have auditory hallucinations. Did my pain increase? I'm really not sure because I had been too zoned out on the medication to truly know where my level of pain had been as compared to where it was once I stopped the pills. My mind was clearer and that mattered a lot to me. I encouraged my doctor to put me on the waiting list for a residential pain program and 18 months later I was admitted. I learned two vital things during those four weeks of the program. One was to do half of what exhausted me. For

example, if washing the dishes wore me out, I should wash half the dishes and stop. If ironing for ten minutes exhausted me, I should iron for no more than five minutes. The other thing I learned was that I had done as much work as I could, on my own, to process the events of my childhood. I needed to see a professional.

Over the next eleven years I continued to learn, to research, and to try those things that resonated with me. I taught myself to listen. To listen to my body when my pain increased. I learned to ask “what have I been doing that isn’t working for me any longer?” I learned to rely on my own inner wisdom. In a nutshell, I learned how to live my life. The behaviours I learned as a child, in order to survive, were not the ones I needed to live as an adult. I have been twelve years without a flare-up of my pain now. How did I get here?

First, I continued my physical activity. When the weather got bad, I purchased a used treadmill and over a period of two years worked up to walking five miles at a time, three times a week. At a moderate speed but still, compared to being able to walk to the mailbox, it was huge progress. I bought a Yoga book and started doing yoga on my own, three times a week. I don’t know how effective my poses were but they did gently stretch my body and it was fun. Mostly it was fun because it made me feel like I was doing something to regain my health.

I kept a food journal for three months. I wrote down everything that I put in my mouth, and every two hours, wrote down how I was feeling. This showed me some foods that were causing my pain and my migraines to worsen. I kept on reading and learning. I read that people with chronic pain have low levels of serotonin and when a medication came on the market that purported to increase those levels, I went and suggested to my doctor we give it a try. Within five days my sleep improved. Was it a magic pill? No, I don’t think so, but along with some techniques and behaviours surrounding sleep, it helped a lot.

I went for massage, I went to see a chiropractor who practiced bio-energetics, I met with a psychiatrist every week for 18 months. I started to pay attention to my life as best I could. I started to notice how often I said “yes” when I was exhausted. Why is it we do that to ourselves? Is it that we are afraid that ‘they’ won’t like us anymore if we say no? Chances are ‘they’ are the same ones that disappear when we are in need! I learned to say “yes” to me. Yes, to being healthy; yes, to getting rest, yes to doing what made sense to me.

Did it all happen overnight? Absolutely not. It took me eleven long years to become truly healthy and well. I’m a slow learner when it comes to taking care of myself! And I had years behind me of ignoring my own feelings, my own wants, for the sake of keeping peace around me.

When I look back on my 18 months of sessions with the psychiatrist what stands out the

most to me is the strong words that he used. I used “alcoholic” and he used “sociopath”. I used grief and he used “trauma”. I used “beatings” and he used “concentration camp victim”. Even now, it’s difficult for me to truly comprehend the horror of being beaten for telling the neighbour I didn’t like soup. When I left home, at fourteen, I had scars on my arms that took years to disappear – the result of being beaten with a wood file for having worn my Sunday shoes to school! Writing this, I shake my head. Imagine, being fourteen and on your own!

Of course, during those eleven years of healing from Fibromyalgia, life did not stand still. No one, nothing paused because I needed a time out to learn how to live my life. The final step of this phase of healing, for me, was to leave my marriage. For 28 years I lived with a man who didn’t actually like me! I talked too much, I laughed too loud, I was too opinionated and so on. Was he a bad person? No, not really. About half way through my therapy sessions, he was exasperated with me one day and asked “what is it you want from me?” and I responded “I want you to think that I’m the best thing that ever happened to you.” He looked at me, shook his head and sighed “I’m not ever going to feel that way.” Eight long years later, I left! It was time, for both of us, to be with someone who celebrated who we each were. Neither of us was going to get that from the other.

So what am I saying? That in order to deal effectively with Chronic Pain you have to see a psychiatrist, exercise, go for massage, do yoga, watch what you eat and leave your spouse? Ha! If that was the formula I could patent it and become a millionaire. What I’m saying is that Pain is not the enemy; your body is not the enemy. Pain is a messenger that something is out of balance. Listen! Pain Shouts! It shouts to get your attention, to get you to listen to what is going on inside of you. It’s not about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and continuing on no matter what. I tried that. It doesn’t work. It’s about treasuring who you are and treating yourself – your body, your person – like a precious vessel.

Fibromyalgia has gifted me with knowing that taking care of myself has to be my number one priority. The road to healing is paved with honour. Honouring the woman I am, the amazing woman I am has, step by step, brought me to a place of well-being; of being free from chronic pain.

No one knows my body, my story, my life better than I do. By listening, by nurturing myself, by developing healthy habits, by paying attention to what is going on within me and around me, I have created a life of healing and joy and left behind the pain that Fibromyalgia brought into my life. Twelve years free of flare ups is something to celebrate. Even more, I celebrate that I listened. Our body has a wisdom to share with us that will lead us to wellness and health if we but stop and listen!

You can read more about Joss’s journey on her website
<http://ccwow.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Be True to Yourself...Jenna...

The concept of human awakening (spiritual or personal) sparks extraordinary interest considering the number of books, websites and YouTube videos that exist on the subject.

The definition of awakening is 'an act or moment of becoming suddenly aware of something'. Once aware we strive to create positive change in our lives, and from experience I know that this is not easy. Like the lion in *The Wizard of Oz* I once lacked courage to face truths and react to a new perspective.

In my early twenties I was in a loveless marriage but refused to face reality. On holiday my husband and I were caught in a fierce cyclone. At first I was terrified but eventually I had an overwhelming feeling of calm and knew without a doubt my husband was not the person I wanted to spend my life with.

When we returned home I ignored the warning by convincing myself our marriage would improve if we started a family. It didn't go well, the marriage fell apart and I became a shattered single mother with a baby who ultimately suffered as a result of the doomed marriage.

A while later I was vulnerable during the legal process of ending the marriage. At every meeting I felt bullied and manipulated to resolve the issues. I have never felt so powerless or weak.

It was during one of these meetings that I knew I could challenge the pompous lawyers and stand up for myself. I momentarily lost my fear and this experience was liberating.

However instead of seizing this change in attitude and going forward living without fear, I reverted to my previous demeanor and spent many more years being submissive.

Turning 50 was a milestone I saw as another opportunity to be courageous and shatter the protective box I had imposed around myself.

One night I awoke during the quietest hours and knew the only way I would be content was to regain my individuality and rebuild my confidence.

I wanted to revert to using my name at birth rather than be known by my second husband's family name, which I had used for 22 years. This was difficult because I deeply love my husband and my intention infuriated him.

I thought about the times I'd previously ignored the signs from awakening experiences and I knew I couldn't let myself down again. So after many weeks of upsetting and confronting discussions I told my husband I was going ahead and changing my name.

It wasn't easy contacting the relevant authorities to prove that I was the person on my birth certificate, it was demeaning but I persisted. Telling family, friends and work colleagues I had changed my name made me uncomfortable and the subject of whispers about whether my marriage was in trouble (which it never was).

I felt I had let everyone down and crushed expectations of who I should be, but I held firm knowing my decision was right for me. It took all my strength to push away fear but it was liberating and ultimately made me whole again. (*My post I am who I am describes more of this story*)

From then on I tapped into an infinite reserve of courage and slowly started living with confidence and being true to myself. Freedom is bliss.

My fourth awakening experience was spiritual and inspired an overwhelming feeling of peace and optimism that things are as they should be. This day I knew I've found the right path after being lost for so many years. (*My post Serenity describes more about this*)

It took me 50+ years to learn the truth in the following quote. I hope everyone else discovers it long before I did.

The best day of your life is the one on which you decide your life is your own. No apologies or excuses. No one to lean on, rely on, or blame. The gift is yours – it is an amazing journey – and you alone are responsible for the quality of it. This is the day your life really begins. Bob Moawad

You can read more about Jenna's journey on her website
<http://jennadee222.wordpress.com>

My Awakening to Life... Shelley...

I am going to write my awakening story in two parts. In the first part I'd like to talk about where I was at that time of my life, how low I had fallen and why. Then in the second part I will tell you about what changed all that, how I awoke. I don't feel like I want to muddy the awakening with so much back-story but it's of greatest importance to know the fall before the rise!

Part 1

My awakening was both a figurative and literal occurrence that happened about five years ago. I was at my lowest ebb. I was trying to deal with so much going on in my life while coming to terms with the loss of my good health.

My teenage daughter had been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, she had been experiencing "growing pains" occasionally for throughout the years but these pains were different and coming often along with other associated symptoms, I could immediately see the similarities to my own health problems. It was something I had worried about when she was born, she arrived with very loose hip joints where I had arrived with completely dislocated hip joints but she hadn't experienced any early problems walking or pain and so it was something I forgot about. She had the usual host of tests, including lymes disease because we had both been bitten by tics a couple of years earlier. Fibromyalgia is diagnosed by process of elimination. When she was given this diagnosis the bottom fell out of my world. Here I was in my 30's living like an old lady in a care home and I had perhaps sealed my daughter to the same fate? This happened at a time she was just leaving the teenage miss bitch behind, boy was she a handful at times but we were all growing closer again. My husband and I were trying to support her in an upbeat manner, attempting to sell her on the it's great to know while you are so young, you can be more prepared than I was, live healthily, make changes now so you will stay healthy. The thing is this illness does not always work this way, it affects the young and the old, the healthy and the unhealthy. It is one of the reasons it is so hard to deal with and still such a mystery. What helps one person will not help another. She became increasingly anxious and began to have panic attacks, not wanting to leave the house, not going in to school and pushing friends away in favour of solitude in her bedroom. She lost all confidence, became depressed and lost. I'm happy to tell you that she's back in control now.. She is amazing! Her school offered to let her stay on an extra year, usually fees are required but they waived them. She never failed any of her exams but a few were lower grades than she had hoped meaning they did not total up enough points to get her into university. She had tried her best but the anxiety and cognitive problems that comes with fibro worked against her on exams days. Anyway, she worked her butt off that year and secured a place in her first choice university. So last year she began year Zero of a fine art degree course.. four more years to go. She works part time in a local supermarket at weekends to help support herself. She has fallen in love with a nice guy who treats her so well. She's working hard for uni but is also enjoying having some social life again. And healthwise? Well she deals with the

fibro pains when they come, painkillers and heat pads and when it's really bad some tears. She deals extremely well with her anxiety issues, rarely having panic attacks now.

My son was in his first year of secondary school, around twelve/thirteen and was having a really hard time. He was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome at around age nine, followed by Aspergers, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and more. He was encouraged to write a speech and stand up at an assembly meeting and talk about Tourettes and how it affects him. In some ways it was very freeing for him, people understood why he would act weird sometimes and just accepted it thereafter. Letting his teachers in on his secret made class time less anxious for him! The downside was the negative attention, the pointing, the whispering and the laughing. Being branded tic-boy and losing some he had considered friends all the while trying to cope with and get his head around worsening and numerous newly developed tics. Hating not being "normal" at a time that peer group acceptance is so important. Although he had support from the school and the child & adolescent mental health Services things kept slipping downhill for him. Frequent accidents and dislocations led to being told he had hypermobility syndrome, getting him to do the physiotherapy was a nightmare and in the end he had to stop taking part in school gym class, further alienating him. He began to refuse to go to school, often faking sickies, we tried banning all entertainment other than books all day and night if he stayed off that day. We tried offering rewards, we tried it all but our teenage bundle of hormones, frustration and anger just didn't care. He became anxious and had a very low mood. he was investigated at the sleep clinic for night terrors which turned out to be night panic attacks, he had never needed much sleep to get by, four to five hours a night, but now he limped by on one to two. He began to play video games a lot more than we liked. He said they gave him a break from the tics in his head, when we asked him what he meant he told us that for years every word he heard and every word he saw he would mentally type out on an imagined keyboard, he didn't have to do that when he gamed. It became a struggle to ever get him off his games. Things were terrible; there was no communicating with him, only yelling matches. It felt so selfish and hurtful; days when he was most frustrated he would be looking for a fight, breaking his frustrations on us. I began to feel very trapped, that I was once again stuck in an abusive relationship and it was with my son, someone I could not love more if I tried! He seemed blind to my poor health and everything else going on, but I was wrong! Working with his CAMHS psychiatrist finally began to pay off a year or so later when he began to talk about what had really been going on. My poor boy has been trapped in his own hell but that's for another day, what I want you to know is that he is doing so much better. He can still be challenging! He still does not go into school every day but the school works within his limitations and he always has work he can do at home through the pc. With a 50% attendance rate last year he still passed all his exams with flying colours; he is studying and his attendance is up so I have great hopes for him this year! He still struggles with games addiction, which is a clinical diagnosis, the worse his mood the more time he spends on them. However he has partly turned it to his advantage by focusing his education towards a computer/gaming career. He talks with us about any problems now and is happy spending time in our company again, yes he is on the other

side of the teenage mess now and I can only hope things keep going well for him.

I had been at home and out of work for over two years at this point. I have worked many jobs over the years.. figurine painter, waitress, retail, barmaid, childminder and then nursery assistant. You see I felt like a slave in my childhood home, feeding, changing and generally looking after my 5 step-siblings whom I loved dearly. I resented doing it but I was also good at it. I had a natural nurture instinct. It never went away but it took me half my life to realise I had a gift when it came to childcare. That to do it now was my choice not my task and it was a revelation! I adored my job! I still miss it so much! I had begun studying to be a fully qualified nursery nurse, the course was provided at no cost through my job. You had to have 12 hours working in a nursery environment to qualify for the course. I worked 26 hours a week but when myself and my colleagues contract came up for renewal they had slashed my hours down to 7, knowing we would have to agree to make up the hours voluntarily to stay on the course. I was furious but not having joined the union there was nothing I could do. I was struggling with the course which was strange for me as that was something I'd always found easy. I was having to re-read and re-re-read pages over and over again before taking in any of the information. I was forgetting the names of co-workers and children in my care. I was always so so tired. My son would come around and meet me when the school closed and we would walk home together, once in the house the frustration game would start! The angry feelings in him that had built up during the day while he suppressed his behaviours had to come out and so he would throw a tantrum after almost every school day as soon as we got home. It was like a magic door that changed my child into an animal! All I wanted to do was have a lie down and cry! I was also noticing my pain levels, the same pains I'd had in childhood were returning and as much as I tried to ignore and pretend this wasn't happening it was. You expect aches and pains when you work in a nursery, all the chairs and tables are at the height best for three to five year olds. Leaning over these or sitting at them was awkward, playing in the wendy house, on the climbing frame, on your knees, up and down, up and down, slipping on spilled water (or worse!), the kick back began to build up a little stronger bit by bit. So when the new contract landed I had a choice to make, do I let them do this to me? I decided it was also time to go to the doctors and that was the start of my fibro journey. The tests began. I talked with my husband, how I felt I wasn't being the best mother I could be as I was so tired and sore. Could we cope on one wage? Maybe not but he still supported my decision to quit. I don't regret quitting, my health was declining and it was taking more and more from me to soldier on and it was the best decision for my son especially as things were about to go haywire from him too but that doesn't mean I don't miss it!

Give me full health and I'd go back to working in early education in a heartbeat, paid or not! Two years out of work and my husband was working three jobs, while playing mother and nurse, and those ends refused to meet. Instead of luxuries like birthday presents going on the credit card the grocery shopping and petrol started creeping into those statements! I was not entitled to incapacity benefit as my national insurance contributions had fallen short for the requirement. I was not eligible for income support

as my husband was working and I could not claim job seekers allowance because I was not well enough to work. We had already been in debt and were bailed out by my granddad and his wife, not only were we struggling to be able to pay them anything back but we were heading into a situation that we might have to beg for help again! His mother was helping us out almost weekly with shopping money. This had been eating away at my husband. He couldn't work any harder and his own health was slipping. He had to give up the small job first and a few months later the other small job. We'd had a scary time years previously when he was so exhausted no matter how much he'd slept. He would take bouts of being ill for a week, not cold/flu ill, no appetite, sore head, slurring words, weakness, dizziness and nausea. He had tests at a sleep clinic and we found out he had sleep apnoea. He was tested for MS, brain scans showed dead spots in his brain. It turned out his severely high blood pressure was causing something like mini strokes.. rare and actually had been studied in Europe where the yearly brain scans of pilots had revealed that those with high untreated blood pressure would experience small spots in the brain dying off suddenly. His blood pressure resisted treatment and some of the side effects of the pills were horrid. It was all finally under control, steady blood pressure and using a cpap machine nightly worked wonders but he was over stretching himself and I was terrified that he would get really ill, perhaps a large stroke would steal him away from us. I had made the wrong choice, I should have been out there helping, bringing in a wage and at home I should have been cooking, cleaning and sharing the hard work but I couldn't. I was a failure at being a mother and now at being a wife and then my health got worse again. The children were looking after me when my husband worked. The youngest would do his best when my daughter went out to work. She needed an income of her own to buy the things we couldn't get her and she wanted to pay some of it as "board" to help out! Over the course of a few months I became completely housebound, my legs refusing to obey me and the pain soaring. I kept falling, my leg would just collapse under me and I'd hit the floor hard. The children would do their best to help me up but in the end they would have to phone their dad at work and he'd have to come home to help. He worked a good half hours drive away so it took a chunk of his working day. After a particularly bad fall it was sit down and talk time again. We looked into all our options and agreed to apply for a benefit called disability living allowance. If eligible at middle or high rate then my husband could claim a carers allowance. In the meantime he gave up his work to care for me, claiming income support and on the understanding they would re-hire him the moment things got better. He was good at his job, he didn't love it, he always had a family first attitude but he was happy there and he was in line for a great promotion. I was a drain on my family, I was ruining their lives!

My husband was now my nursemaid more than a life partner. We couldn't be intimate, it hurt too much. I needed help with everything and I mean everything! Being mid thirties and having to ask your partner to wipe your backside when you are not paralyzed, have no limbs missing and don't even have a clear diagnosis or understanding of the illness. I felt disgusting, more and more as weight piled on from my comfort eating. I was already large because of comfort and secret binge eating, food has always been my crutch and

I leaned heavily on it during all our problems. I could not have felt more useless and I spent most days in bed. When my pain got bad at night and I would ask my husband for help to get downstairs and then tell him to go back to bed and I'd call if I needed anything I would sit and cry my heart out. I'd heard my mother tell me often enough that I should never have been born, that I was nothing and would amount to nothing. I could see it was all true. I was inching my way closer to death with each day. I even checked to see if suicide was covered in my life insurance policy. I could only see my family better off without me. Suicide wasn't a new idea to me, I tried twice before as the only way I could see out of my trap and I had come very close to succeeding. I was sure I could do it properly this time, I was certain I would lose my husband, how could he bear to stay with me. I should free him to find the person he deserves. We had been through a rough patch in our marriage, the drama and divorce of a very close couple, the strains of life and an early miscarriage knocked us off track but we had come through it stronger. I didn't see a way through now. I saw my children coming to hate me and a husband who would not want me soon enough and I could not face that so that was the state of my mind. I had reached my lowest of lows. Wallowing in self-pity and grief I had given up on life because I couldn't see past the shadows.

Part 2

My Uncle lived with us when I was little, he needed a place to stay and my mother needed the extra cash. Our first home was a two bedroom apartment. Mother had her own bedroom and my uncle and I shared the other. They were happy times. We had bunk beds and I have one vivid memory of sharing them! The mattress rested on a series of slats which were joined together by two strips of tough material. The top and bottom slats held in place on wooden pegs. Somehow the top slat had jumped loose from the pegs. During the night the slats slowly worked themselves down the bed, bunching up together and the mattress slowly tipping downwards. At some point during the night gravity did its work and I slid down through the bed landing squarely on my poor uncles' head! It was one hell of a wake up for us! No injuries thankfully and after our hearts had stopped beating their way through our chests we were able to have a good laugh! He put up with being woken up often, nosebleeds, pains, nightmares but never one any more memorable than that! He always showed such caring and patience. I loved sharing a room with him, he wasn't always around, often spending time at his girlfriends but when he was it was lovely. I felt loved and safe.

In our next home we had separate rooms but we still hung out a lot. I adored his taste in rock music and whenever I heard it start I'd go through. I'd get a row from mother most times she found me there, being a country, musicals and pop girl she didn't approve of my musical education! I'd also spend time with him in the little shed where he worked on his motorbike and sometimes he would take me to the park or beach. He joined the merchant navy when I was around eight and he would be away months at a time. I missed him so much; he had given me permission to listen to his records as long as I was very careful and so I would do as often as I could get away with. Sometimes I would go into his room just to lie on his bed, you could still smell his scent and it made

me feel nearer to him. It was so exciting when he would come home, there were always presents but having him back was the best gift. He can't have been in the merchant navy more than two years when mother got a phone call to say he was missing. It was weeks before they found him. He wasn't alive. He'd had an accident in port and drowned.

There was so much sorrow but also anger as our family got further ripped apart by my mothers' greed. My mother decided she was moving away, leaving our hometown behind and separating me from my grandfather. I was lost and frightened. Then this one day my mother told me to bring her my hot water bottle to be filled. I should have fished under the covers at the bottom of the bed as usual but I decided to be awkward instead and so I burrowed under the covers from the top down. I have no idea how what happened next happened! Did I fall asleep, daydream or did my dead uncle visit me? I felt the blackness open up, I was still in complete darkness but it no longer felt like I was in a small space and there with me was my uncle. I ran to him, throwing myself at him and he scooped me up into a hug. He sat down and placed me in his lap. I can't remember the exact conversation but I know I said something along the lines of "So you aren't dead anymore! That's good!" He looked at me so sadly and he told me he wasn't able to be with us anymore but he needed to talk to me. He told me things were going to get difficult but I was a strong girl. He told me that things would be okay, that I would be okay. That he would be with me and always watching. He began to say something else but I was ripped from that place. Rough hands were hauling me out of the bed. Mother was yelling, how dare I ignore her, I must have heard her calling, I'd be getting no bottle for making her wait and all the while she spanked me. I said "but mum I was talking to uncle" and she grew furious but it was pain I saw in her eyes. "You and your bloody lies" she screamed! I stopped trying to explain and just cried.

In my teens I would sneak into mothers bedroom cupboard and take my favourite album from the box of his possessions to listen to for a while. I would hold the gifts he had given to me that she had confiscated and remember him. When I got married I longed for him to be there and see what a good man I had in my life. As my children were born and grew I wished he could hold them and give them the love he had given me. And when I became so ill I would silently ask him how much longer I needed to be strong, why so much pain, was I a bad person that deserved this?

One afternoon I got answers. If you have read part 1 of this you will know where I was in my life. If you have not then I will just say I was in a very bad state of mind, I had given up the fight and felt ready to welcome death.

I was in bed, the curtains drawn, not sleeping but just lying there. My husband came up to let me know he was going to collect our son from school and would get the shopping in, I nodded. He asked if I wanted anything, I shook my head, no. He left. I felt drowsy, held by my usual medication haze. I found myself in an open blackness and a figure approached. A Dark figure yet I could see clearly in the blackness, he had a face but yet

did not, I can't really explain. He had a soft blur over his a face, features as if seen through opaque glass. "Hello" I said and "Hello" he replied, "I am here to help you understand". "Understand what?" I snapped. There was no hint of irritation from the figure, he radiated peace and I felt no fear. He told me there were some things I needed to know. He told me there are many paths open to us during our lives and there are many divergences along these paths. He explained to me that there was at one point a road for me onwards in my hometown, a safe road, one that would see me fulfil my dreams but one that was shut off to me. The other path left had been treacherous but I had been strong.

He told me we don't always get the life we want but sometimes we end up with the life we need. I felt a truth in this.. I was waking from my nightmare.

Down this road I had learned to rely on myself and in all relationships I held up a wall, a glass wall that I could see through but not fully feel through. It was hard for me to trust, it was hard for me to need help.

I had stayed strong but my strength had fled. I was left vulnerable and scared but having to ask for help, to rely on others to get me through was not something I could tolerate easily. I was to be relied upon, I was to be needed. I did not want to need.

He told me I had the life I NEED! I have the people I NEED!
I had a husband who made me feel so loved and needed.
I had children who made me feel so loved and needed.
I had a family that was there for me.

It was time to awaken and realise it was okay, it was alright for me to let the truth out that I needed them more!

I began to cry, I didn't just hear him, I could feel his words change me. Something deep and dark lifted within me. I thanked him, "I understand now" I said. He placed a hand on my shoulder and then turned, beginning to walk away. "Wait" I said "Why can't I see your face?" I asked him. It suddenly seemed extremely important for me to ask this, his not there face bothered me now. I know you I thought.. I know who you are! He stopped but didn't turn around "Because you have forgotten what I look like Shelley!" "Uncle" I yelled out! I hadn't seen a photograph of him in 30 years and yes I had no clear recollection of his features, just an opaque memory. I began to run to him but I never reached him. I was back in the world with my husbands hand on my shoulder "I'm home hunny, do you need anything?" I started to cry, he looked panicked. I was sobbing; I could not speak at all. He climbed up beside me and cuddled me "What is it hunny?"

I cried for a long time before I was able to talk. When I was able I was fearful, "you're going to laugh at me", "you won't believe me" I said but I told him everything. I told him about my dream/visitation, I told him about how I had been feeling, I told him how sorry I

was and how much I needed him. I had been relying on my husband from day one but not enough, not fully trusting, not being fully open; too much fear. I felt unburdened. I let my last wall crash down.

Then I got up, I was wide awake now.

I was still worried about our troubles but I knew I could get through anything with my family at my side. Letting them help me as I help them and that is what I have done. I have embraced my vulnerability and I have shared it and I feel stronger now than ever.

One last part to the story.

I phoned up my grandad the next day to catch up, He told me something strange had happened the previous day. That it has been a really dark gloomy day. In the late afternoon he stood looking out the window when suddenly light parted the deep cloud and a small beam of brilliant light shone through for just a short time and then was gone. Wow! I immediately knew I'd have to share my experience with him, taking the chance he would think I was crazy! He didn't call me crazy! What I found out was a revelation! Before my uncle died he had hoped to convince my mother to allow me to stay behind, perhaps to live with himself and his girlfriend? I don't know but there was my closed off path. I have two thoughts on the beam of light, I feel it as was meant as a starter to that conversation and it was a sign of love to my grandad.

So I have no idea what my experiences were. I was raised a christian but I lost my faith many years ago though I still feel I am a spiritual person. Maybe I was simply dreaming, maybe my subconscious was talking to me or just maybe the spirit of my uncle visited me to save me.

You can read more about Shelley's journey on her website
<http://livingwithshadows.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... The Fire within me... Elisabeth...

I have taken this as an opportunity for me to summarize the change in my thinking of me as half a couple ('we') and my transformation to 'me' after late-life divorce. Twenty-eight months ago I found myself in the crisis of my marriage suddenly ending.

The Loss Of 'WE'

I believed at the time, I had lost everything I had ever loved and cherished; my companion and soul mate, my intact family unit, stability, security, trust, truth, and my dreams for the future – it was all gone. I was thrown into a deep grief process of mourning my losses with the resultant swirling emotions of shock, anger, yearning, and constant sadness. After some time, I came to an acknowledgement of what had happened, and I was able to let go of the emotional ties to my husband, of blame, resentment and the illusion of the happy-ever-after. I gradually disentangled myself from the coupledness that was.

I was, for a while, at peace with myself. I found a wondrous place of calm in rising to watch the sunrise each morning, walking, writing and living for the joys of each day. I revelled in seeing myself as an individual with my own thoughts, opinions, feelings and needs.

The Loss of 'ME'

From that magnificent state of calm, I went through a period of deep self-reflection. I affirmed my own values, beliefs, attitudes, needs, wants, responsibilities and priorities. As I reflected on my life and inner being, slowly I came to realise that, although inside I was now a strong individual with affirmed core values and a belief that I could do whatever I wanted, in my practical world I was still living **our** life my way. I was not living **my** life my way.

I had an epiphany, a sudden realisation that I wanted to change. I wanted to become the real me and live my own life. However, that change would require me to cast off the practical remnants of my old life (home, business and community); and to let go of some parts of me; the old me, and my old roles. I spiralled downwards again, this time mourning the loss of who I had been and wondering who it was that I could become. I was in extreme distress and became inconsolable. I fell into an extended period of darkness and despair. I cocooned myself into a ball of nothingness.

Then I woke up.

My Awakening

Unlike the sudden earlier epiphany when I made the **decision** to change, my awakening to **making** change has been a gradual realisation of the fact that I have already begun to change. Even-so, this realisation has occurred after some profound confidence-building discoveries.

Firstly, I woke up to the fact of the truth of my marriage; that it had ended long before I thought it had. Behind that truth is the fact that what I thought I had, I didn't have. That truth, whilst painful to accept, has set me free.

Secondly, I woke up to the fact that I am a worthwhile person and always have been. Any thought that I am not, is not spoken by my own voice. I will now only listen to my voice.

Thirdly, I woke up to the fact that I matter. What I have done and what I do is worthwhile.

Fourthly, I woke up with an energy change and clarity of purpose. I feel a fire within me. I have a vision forming of what my new life will be. Moreover, I have the clarity to decide what parts of my old life to hold on to and what to let go of. Letting go of those parts that do not serve me well is crucial to free space for my new life.

An awakening is simply that, waking up. My real challenges of planning and living my dream lie ahead of me.

Yet, how exciting it is to awaken to the opportunity of a new dream, of a new beginning.

You can read more about Elisabeth's journey on her website
<http://almostspring.com>

My Awakening Experience... Michael...

One of my favorite descriptions of awakening comes from the book *Dialogues on Awakening* by Tom Carpenter. These are Tom's recounting of conversations he has had with his friend and brother, Jesus, that grew out of his daily practice of the teachings contained within *A Course in Miracles*. After a time, Tom came to recognize Jesus' presence and developed the faculty to sustain a type of inner dialogue with him. This quote is from Jesus in one of these exchanges.

"What is it like to be enlightened or awake? It is when you see only God as cause and effect being you expressing Him wholly. You will no longer feel the need to see your mind as separately identified within the whole Mind, but you will feel its presence there and you will recognize your Self in it. Fear of any nature becomes unknown. Joy abounds with every thought as Love is once again remembered."

This is a good place for me to start because I studied *A Course in Miracles* quietly for a good decade or so, and Jesus never talked to me like that once. (Ha! Laugh with me, for such foolishness has passed...) That's obviously a statement fraught with difficulties, so let me rephrase and simply say that I never had that type of experience on my end. I used to wish that I had, though, on many an occasion. When you're staring down the barrel of meaninglessness and coming apart at the seams, decked out in your "Love is real" paraphernalia—fake beard, t-shirts, wrist bands, etc.—and making a really good show of it, inwardly hoping against hope it isn't all just an exercise in self-delusion, staving off the inner "I told you so" voice that already has it all figured out (and not for the better), you really want the forces of Light to make an entrance somewhere in your story and roll out a little razzle dazzle—put paid once and for all to the notion of doubt being a reasonable consideration. Offer something irrefutable. I did, anyway.

And when it doesn't come, the hole just gets deeper, the confusion surreal, like you're watching it in slow motion.

My continuing journey towards awakening has been largely absent the lightning strike experiences you sometimes read about. The irrefutable and obvious moment that drops out of the sky and affords one a fresh identity and a clean break with history has been like that tree alone in the forest. It definitely dropped, but, did it make a sound...? Did I miss it? I can't say when exactly it dropped. This process was (and remains) more like a sunrise in slow motion. Sometimes I'm not even sure it's happening. Then I think about it, and realize it's a lot brighter out than it was before. When before? I don't know. Before. This type of slowly-building Recognition has brought me to wit's end on numerous occasions, but has simultaneously been a beautiful and extremely powerful process to live within. It has indelibly stamped into my being a number of admissions and discoveries I think are valuable and worth sharing.

The first one is that comparison is so, so very useless. Life is not a contest, and every

life has a rhythm and a tapestry of meaning that is all its own. I have ultimately begun to trust in the wisdom of my own experiences, and while that may seem an obvious and natural thing to do, I can only say that when one is in the grip of fear, it absolutely is not. And there is that fear thing, so what of it? What is it to be in the grip of fear?

Does having fear in one's inner vocabulary mean we walk around all day petrified? I don't think so. (Until one day, when we do.) Life may be fine for a good long while, but then it brings us back to this precipice. Suffering arises. Confusion. Fear. A dilemma. Call it what you like. Once we face it—whatever "it" is—squarely and it lunges at us, it can be difficult to stomp it back into its cage, and even if we succeed, we can't keep carrying this caged animal around with us forever... I think fear is probably one of the most useless words in the English language because it fails to address the depth and complexity of this experience of separation we have dreamed up. We like to say we're afraid of something in particular—like falling or failure, or being vulnerable or trusting in our relationships—but fear is not necessarily so particular. We can fix all these one-offs, and still, a moment arises and we find... we are at odds with something inside ourselves again... Fear is living inside of a conflict we don't even know exists, a conflict that seems it just might swallow us whole. It simply haunts us. If it were obvious what to do about this, we'd do it.

In *A Course in Miracles* Jesus speaks periodically about the fact that the natural state of our mind is wholly abstract, and it took me a good long while to grasp hold of that one. Love is abstract in the sense that it doesn't really require any particular object or attribute to identify with in order to be what it is. We are like that, too, we just aren't familiar with identifying ourselves with this type of being, and I think that the specific object of our fear is similarly irrelevant. Fear in its most abstract or generalized sense, for me, is the sensation of being on the wrong side of what is real. There's no such thing as being on the wrong side of what is real, but if I had known that, known it absolutely in my bones such that living it was the most obvious and natural thing to do/be in the face of any event or circumstance this crazy world can concoct, then I'd have known I was truly real, and really true. I wouldn't have been thinking I was alone, and been trying to— even as I feared doing so— invoke the razzle dazzle. Fear may not have permeated my daily experience, but I found I could not prevent this sensation of being on the wrong side from what is real from creeping into and slowly discoloring my world, chipping it away into bits and fragments, and eventually I realized, I'm crippled inside.

I'm not operating at full strength here.

Realizing that personally, and hungry for this experience called "awakening", I wanted to call in some air support to set things straight. It's like I was in jail, and hoping Love would come bail me out. Surely Love would do that for me. I felt I was ready for a storied ending. I waited patiently, but... I never made bail. Even though I *knew* this reality of Love was real, I felt (at times) completely abandoned or alone, left to my own

devices, and plagued by uncertainty. Other people seemed to be having this and that experience, but I was confronted by this confounding enigma we call a self. I was confronted by all the things I had asked this self to be. No more. No less. And I felt intensely and extremely conflicted.

In addition to not comparing one's experience to that of anyone else, another big one for me was the realization I was being told something very important with the silence that seemed to greet every desperate plea for an obvious sign of redemption. In the particular form of validation I sought, which never quite came as requested, I was being shown, directly and gently: the jail doesn't exist. What need for redemption do the already redeemed have? When I realized this was perhaps "the message" all along, Love's seemingly empty silence transformed entirely into something solid and dependable. I realized She'd been veritably drowning me with the only answer I had ever needed. I was knocked over. There were some things I had thought that were simply incorrect, and could not be validated. There were lines that couldn't be and would never be crossed and I was too confused to know them.

Love wasn't going to spring me from a trap that wasn't real to begin with. To do so, at least on the terms I had set, would have been akin to acknowledging that the trap in which I was so utterly convinced I was stuck, was indeed real. The possibility of dwelling in a state of peace that surpasses all understanding hinges upon Love's inviolate position in this regard. Even though we take the bait sometimes, Love never does. Jesus is a specific representation of this principle: of dwelling in an error free state of mind. This, I have come to discover, is true power: to remain in perpetual communion with the Truth.

In realizing Love's message to me, I discovered as well that I can't figure this stuff out on my own. I didn't have the wherewithal to know, as Love does, how to properly interpret my experiences in this world. A Course in Miracles was a lifeline for a period of time as it provided the type of powerful clarity I needed in this regard. Many other sources of information as well. For me, it has been about piecing this together, with tremendous help, one breath at a time. This path for me has been a million tiny quanta of lightning that collectively are assembling into freedom. Now, the training wheels are steadily coming off.

Now the sunrise has gained enough momentum I'm pretty sure there's no going back. Awake or not awake? I don't know. It's a huge relief to be at peace with not needing to dignify questions such as these with an answer. The sun is still enfolding me, enveloping us all. I think some sort of merging awaits, some relinquishment of final barriers, but the reality of such a relinquishment seems less of a question than an inevitability. It will come. It is happening.

I found ultimately that regardless of what we think, believe or experience, we live on the right side of real. That's one choice we don't get to make, and thank God for

that. Because I thought I knew something about myself once, and I was quite mistaken... To walk away from ignorance unscathed is the outcome we are guaranteed. It is humbling to begin to accept that such things are truly real...

You can read more about Michael's journey on his website

<http://embracingforever.com>

My Awakening Experience... Lehua...

I thought this awakening challenge would be a fun thing to do. Then I sat down and tried to write. I couldn't do it. I tried five different times and with each attempt, I ended up throwing away everything I wrote. What was it about the subject that I just couldn't get past?

It was the word *awakening*. For me to type and tell you about my experience of waking up would imply that I am awake and no longer asleep. One is either awake or asleep and leaves no room for in-between. This, I believe, is far from the truth.

I have had many Ah-ha! moments that woke me up to a new paradigm. Moments that made me realize how insignificant I really am. How magnificent I am. How humble and jaded and powerful and weak I am. There have been moments of awakening where I've fully grasped that I am everything and nothing. Both good and bad. Both light and dark.

But I do not like saying that I am an awakened being, for to me that smacks of self-righteousness. Now I am not claiming that others who say they have woken up are disenchanting. Far from it! I am only speaking from my own experience and cannot judge how another chooses to label an experience that is uniquely their own.

I only know that FOR ME, the moment I begin to think I'm awake, enlightened, wise, smart, I am no longer such.

The moment I think I know it all, is the moment I become both ignorant & stagnant.

Stuck in limbo. Not moving forward. Not challenging myself to grow, to love, to improve upon everything I've accomplished up to this point in my life.

Socrates is sometimes attributed as saying: *I know one thing: that I know nothing.*

Chapter 71, sentence 1 of Tao Te Ching (according to the Beck's translation) says: *To know that you do not know is the best. To think you know when you do not is a disease. Recognizing this disease as a disease is to be free of it.*

So it is with trepidation that I embark on this storytelling venture. I will gladly relay to you certain markers that I've experienced over and over again that has led me to a moment of enlightenment, but know that there is no end to gaining wisdom on this plane of existence.

So here is, in my personal experience, **the first marker** of waking up to a new paradigm of thinking/experiencing/living: **Depression, dis-ease, unease.**

Something doesn't feel right. Something doesn't sit right. Something bugs the hell out of you but you don't quite feel right in rocking the boat. So you don't.

If you don't, things slowly get worse.

Until you're pushed to do something about it. Or you die with a million regrets.

Don't do the later.

Second marker: You begin to make changes and you're met with resistance.

Many times it comes from those who are closest to you.

They get angry at your choices. They don't like who you've become. You're pressured into remaining exactly where you are, with the person you're with, in the job that seems so stable.

You're essentially told to sit down and shut up. To stop questioning life. And while we're at it, how dare you upset the natural order. It's been done this way for eons. Who are you to challenge the status quo.

(To be honest, this is the marker that makes me the most excited; that I look forward to the most. Because if I am met with this very difficult challenge, I know I'm on the right track.)

Marker Three (you're almost there): You begin to seriously doubt yourself.

What felt so solid and sure deep within your bones will suddenly disappear the very next day. You'll flounder. You'll waffle. You may even go back into that job/relationship/behavior pattern because your scared.

You're scared and struck hard by FEAR.

Fear is good. Fear is natural and wholesome and good. It's a litmus test that you must pass, because knowledge and freedom always, always comes with a price.

Are you willing to pay that price?

Are you willing to conquer your fears to achieve that new nugget of enlightenment? That moment of complete bliss? Feeling that full acceptance within yourself?

Then you have to tackle the fear.

What are you afraid of? What is stopping you from following your heart?

When I can't figure it out, I begin to look at my family history.

How would my mother act in a situation like this? My father? My ancestors? Am I just expressing a fear they had, living a life they had, or have I created this fear on my own?

Family templates are tricky things to uncover. But they're there and I bet it has a lot to do with how you act when you meet your fear head on.

But that's just me, speaking from only my own experiences.

If you can get beyond your fear, if you can get beyond your attachment to how you're feeling and really use that magnificent analytical brain of yours to dismantle your beliefs, you will be set free.

You will be set free!

Enlightenment will follow and you will wake up to a new sense of being. A new sense of knowing.

And let me tell you, that high is not like anything you've experienced before. That moment when you get it, when you *truly* get it and the lightbulb explodes above your head, illuminating all the dark corners of your mind, you'll be able to look back on all the hardship and turmoil you had to trudge through and say:

"Damn that was SO worth it!"

But you've got to do the work. And you've got to understand that each hard-won moment is just that. A moment. You'll neutralize and acclimate, absorbing and integrating the new knowledge.

Then the whole process begins again.

Enjoy the highs and embrace the lows. The less you are attached to this idea of being an "awakened being" or "wise" or "enlightened" (which *most* of us are not) the smoother the transition will be; the easier and quicker you'll be able to assimilate each lesson and grain of knowledge.

"Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every conceived notion, follow humbly wherever and whatever abysses nature leads, or you will learn nothing." -Thomas Huxley

You can read more about Lehua's journey on her website

<http://amusingspirit.wordpress.com>

My Awakening Experience... Authentically Me... Aleya...

I'd attended my Creative Writing class. It was only our third group session, but I felt compelled to share a very personal, short piece I'd written on the subject of trust. I think the class was surprised – and maybe a little uncomfortable – to hear a virtual stranger speaking so openly about something relatively intimate.

As I walked home afterwards, I felt a little over-exposed. *Why did I do that?*, I wondered. Why not choose a less personal piece? Why put myself out there like that? Do I lack boundaries? Do I want attention?

Vulnerability can be very uncomfortable sometimes.

I grew up with my feet in two different worlds. Born in Canada just two years after my parents arrived as refugees, life required straddling two cultures that often seemed at great odds with each other. I think now of my small-child self, and I feel her immense free spirit...and her sense of confinement. Her tribe was her whole world, and she loved them mightily, yet she felt somewhat alone and longed for something more. She didn't know how much she wanted to break free.

I remember family members visiting our home one evening, when I was about six years old. During a group prayer, I recalled something funny that had happened at school that day. I couldn't wait for the prayer to be over, so I could tell everyone about it. When I shared my story, I was chastised. I remember the shame I felt in that moment. *I'm a bad girl for thinking funny things during prayer. God is mad at me.*

It wasn't just that incident. I couldn't connect with many aspects of my religion. I felt somewhat deficient; that I was missing some reverence or knowledge that everyone else seemed to have. There was heavy guilt surrounding this. But guilt couldn't force the connection.

What I *did* have was an obsession with the metaphysical, particularly reincarnation. I remember telling my mother, at four years old: "In my next life I want you to be my mommy again. Only this time I want green eyes." And for the longest time, my plan was to write my name on a piece of paper before I died; this way, when I 'woke up' in my next life, I'd know that I was 'Aleya' the last time.

Throughout my teen years my fascination with the supernatural deepened. I couldn't get enough Astrology. I surrounded myself with Egyptian ankhs. I analyzed my dreams and studied the Rider Waite tarot deck. These realms were so esoteric, mysterious, and enticing. I was hooked.

I loved contemplating all things spiritual, and yet, the niggling guilt was constant. Why be born into a religion I felt no connection to? I figured the day would probably come

where I would put away all my silly New Age books, and finally embrace my religion – I would ‘come back to my roots’ instead of rejecting them.

This is how I viewed myself for a long time – that *I was wrong for not adapting to what never felt right.*

In my twenties, the rage showed up. I had moved to a different city with my best friend, and something broke loose within. We would go to the bars every weekend. I would drink a lot and subsequently turn into the meanest person alive, my poor best friend taking the brunt of my unprovoked fury. My eyes opened: I was one angry woman. *Why was I so angry?*

It took years to understand that I was angry because I felt fundamentally separated. I felt different (disconnected) from my family, and different (disconnected) from the society I so desperately wanted to fit into. I was fragmented, my identity pieced together by various roles and voices, with no core sense of who ‘I’ was, and what ‘I’ wanted. I felt I had to impress God, but was terrified that winning God’s favour meant living a life I really didn’t want to live. I felt too big for my tribe but too small for society. I felt guilt at the thought of leaving my tribe, because *what if something really bad happened if I did?*

I look back on those years and feel the fighting, the resistance. I also feel the deep desire for healing, for relief...and the strength and determination to find that peace. The ego’s story is one of pain and separation, and eventually it became too damn hard to play that game anymore. I threw in the towel.

At this stage in my journey, I am allowing the possibility of something more. New life is breathing itself into me. Joy is peeking in.

I am now able to see what a rich blessing it is, to have my unique history pulsing in my blood. My worlds are coalescing nicely. I am now willing to expose my heart. And I am seeing wonderful things. There is acceptance. Forgiveness. Authenticity. Love. Connection.

I am learning that I am not defined by anyone or anything; I choose who I want to be, how I want to feel, and what I want to create. And in doing so, I allow others those same things. There is support.

I am learning to honour my own needs, while knowing I am connected to All, and that my piece affects the whole. For a long time, life was about negotiating my identity through living in two worlds, neither of which felt fully ‘me’. Now I am sensing that life is actually far more complex, beautiful, and mysterious than I could have imagined. There are infinite words and dimensions, within and without. And I am not so different from anyone after all.

Sometimes my journey means doing 'the work'. Other times it means simply Allowing and Being.

To share my personal feelings and experiences in this blog, and in my Creative Writing class just a few nights ago – to *go there*, to hear my words being spoken in front of a group, to feel people's reactions, to see their eyes looking directly at me (as well as averting) – means I am building deep self-trust and love. My belly wavers, but *I am okay. This is me.*

Going to my depths unlocks something that needs to be expressed, so that I can experience life in a new way. *This is who I am and I trust myself enough to share it with you. And I trust you enough to receive it.* Trust in myself – and in God – is growing with each breath.

You can read more about Aleya's journey on her website
<http://alohaleya.wordpress.com>