

New Beginnings

Writings by Vancouver Island Women

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Celebrating and honouring the goddess within

This space I hold in this moment in time is for **all women** that have graced Mother Earth in times gone by, now and forever and for all eternity. It is with deep gratitude that I thank you with a sacred heart for being who you are: A woman! So boldly sharing the depth of your souls' journey, you have gifted me with the courage to share what is mine to share. An amazing thread of similarity has woven within my mind a conviction of truth that I am so proud and honoured to be born a woman and live as a woman. It is as though today I am seeing what is...for the first time. Thank you for all that you are.

May you go forth with blessings of rich increase of Spirit's Almighty Power... Amen!

Maureen McManus

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Introduction

by Kate Nonesuch

Early in January 2006 I met 15 brave women who came to a writing group sponsored by Malaspina University-College (where I teach) and by Cowichan Women Against Violence Society. They came to write. Along with two volunteer tutors, I came to encourage their writing.

For ten weeks, they wrote, and we talked about writing. I used my “never-fail” method for teaching writing, and they responded quickly and positively. (The never-fail method depends on sharing student writing and making specific comments on what makes it effective, while ignoring any errors or any weaknesses.)

Meanwhile, a committee of women from the group worked on planning a three-day residential writing retreat. We invited women from the mid-Island area to join us for a more concentrated writing experience, and four women came to join eight local women for an intense three days of writing, bonding, talking and taking care of ourselves.

After the retreat, the committee met again to make content and design decisions about putting this book together. All the writing was done at the retreat, except for a few pieces from women who were in the writing group but unable to attend the retreat.

Every piece in this book is about a new beginning of one kind or another, but I would like to talk about two of the sections in particular, the sections called “Courage” and “Strength.”

I saw many kinds of courage as we worked on this project: first, the courage to tell stories of hurt and pain and humiliation, which lasted sometimes for years. Many of the writers said they wrote to show others that there is a way out. Next, the special kind of courage it takes to write those stories down, to fix them on the page forever, to offer them to the eyes of strangers and friends. Finally, the courage to step up and try something never done before, whether it be to write, to offer comments on another’s writing, to work on the computer for the first time, or to make calls and organize food and accommodation for a writing retreat when you’ve never been to one before!

I have been buoyed by the strength, competence and expertise of the women who worked on this project. We have an idea that it is the teacher who is the strong one, supporting the students. Not so.

Reflections



The Drawers in My Mind

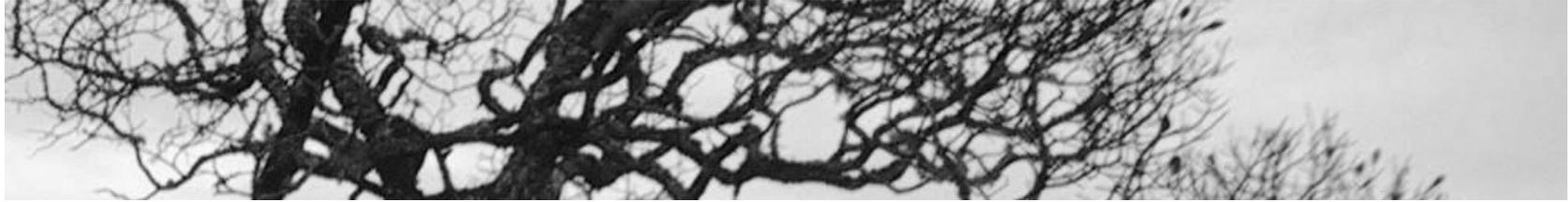
Darlene Taylor

The inside of my head is made up of a lot of drawers. I don't know what style of dresser is holding the drawers, Chippendale, Danish Modern, or 1940's junk, but I like to think it is something elegant. Each drawer holds parts of my life that I am unable to satisfactorily find closure on. Some of the drawers have not been opened for a long time and I have little memory of what is stored in there. Sometimes I peek into a drawer to see if I can deal with whatever is laying in it. The drawers are hard to open sometimes. Squeak, Squeak. Often I have forgotten the feelings that caused me to store the angst away and I can empty the drawer by throwing the bad feelings away. Sometimes when I pull open a drawer a crack, the items in it come pouring out, jostling each other for my attention. There are some drawers I have never been able to keep closed, as they are too full of undealt-with memories, hurt feelings, feelings of loss, and betrayal. These memories are loud, rude and often pop out to disturb me by clamouring for my attention. Some I can do nothing with but others need decisions made by me. Sometimes, after a long passage of time, the stuff shoved into a drawer turns to dust and doesn't matter anymore.

An example would be the death of my father when I was very young and the remarriage of my mother to a cruel, brutal man. One of my last memories of my stepfather is of an old, old man who no longer had any power over me. Poof, I have blown the dust of that memory away.

One of the biggest drawers holds the illnesses of my two hemophiliac sons and the death of my oldest son, Chris. This drawer has become easier to open as time passes and sometimes when sorting that part of the drawer, I am left with happy memories and a warm feeling in my heart. The rest of the drawer is filled with my younger son's, Nathan's, illnesses and addictions. He probably needs a large drawer of his own or a lot of smaller ones. It's almost time to empty Chris's drawer and Nathan can have it.

The biggest and messiest drawer is filled with the detritus of my marriage of thirty-five years, but I am not about to look in there. The drawer keeps creeping open but I am vigilant and slam it shut. Bang.



My Spiritual Shoes

Erica Keen

There have been many times in my life where I've stepped into my spiritual shoes. These are the shoes I wear when I need strength and support. My spiritual shoes keep me centered, balanced, and they inspire me to have faith in myself. I wear my spiritual shoes when I lead a stronger life.

In my spiritual shoes I can ask for everything I need, and have a calm knowingness that all is heard and answered. I am provided for. In my spiritual shoes I can hear the angels whispering wisdom in my ears. In my spiritual shoes I feel Great Spirit next to me, giving me my own secret guidance.

Sometimes I leave my spiritual shoes, forgetting how important they are to me. Then something happens where I remember again how much I need them. My spiritual shoes match every outfit and complement my inner beauty. I feel fearless in my spiritual shoes.

"Where do you find a pair of spiritual shoes?" you might ask.... There is a pair for everyone, all you have to do is ask

and then wait for your spiritual shoes to arrive. They don't arrive in the mail, and you can't find them in the stores.

Your spiritual shoes are directly connected to your heart. With a sprinkle of trust, and a dash of hope, you too will have your spiritual shoes. Spiritual shoes are weatherproof and can be worn at anytime. As I lead a stronger life, my spiritual shoes are all I wear. They are my only accessory and can be yours too.



My Ring

Lauren M. Flynn

For ten years, I was married to a man who would not give me positive affirmation about anything. He did not acknowledge Christmas. Even though one of his daughters shared my birthday, he ignored it. Forget anniversaries. They did not exist. For ten years, I was nothing to this man.

Finally, I realized that this marriage would never work. I was not willing to sublimate myself anymore. He found no fault in himself. It was stalemated.

During these years, I asked for a diamond ring. I am like a magpie. If it is shiny, I want it. However, his excuse was that his ten children would object to such a gift. And I accepted this.

Recently, I found the courage to leave him. It has been a struggle. I am 58 years old, chasing 59 pretty fast. The thought of spending the rest of my life alone is daunting.

Having made this decision was freeing. Even though there are uncertain days, I know in my heart that I have done the right thing. However, there was something missing. The diamond ring.

Today, I marched into a jewellery shop, found a butterfly diamond ring and bought it in under a minute. It now shines on my left hand as a symbol of my independence.



Souls of the Sea

Laurie

My life was gone. Nothing meant anything to me anymore. The simple act of breathing, a conscious effort. Does a person survive this feeling of despair? How do you get out of that place?

That question haunted me, although I didn't even care enough to find the answer.

How I wound up on the beach, I'll never remember; how I happened to be carrying a knife is also a mystery. But that is how it came to be for me that day. What my intent for that day was has left my mind forever.

While sitting in the sand that morning, thinking nothing, feeling nothing, a piece of driftwood caught my eye. I walked over to have a look. It looked like I felt, full of holes. Without any purpose in mind, I started to carve away at the softened wood around the holes. I had a thought. The holes, if carved right, could become the eyes and mouths of faces. Face after

face, the piece of driftwood came to life. After what seemed like minutes but in reality was hours (time stood still for me that day) the driftwood was completely full of faces. The faces had no noses; they actually looked like lost souls. My thoughts (for the second time that day I had a thought) went to the thousands of people who have lost their lives at sea, never to see a sunrise, a bird, or anything beautiful again. I dubbed my carving "The souls of the sea," and threw it into the ocean. The carving had done its work, given me the gift God had intended, the gift to keep on going, and I returned the gift back to its original owner, so perhaps it could find another person in need.



Setting the Mood

Marian

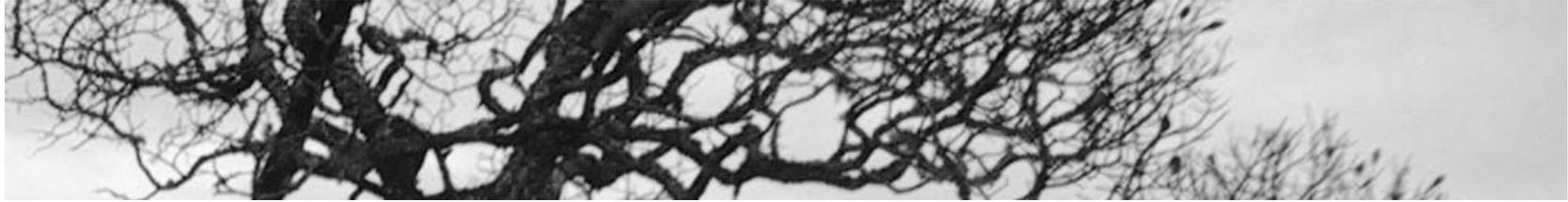
What do you do to find inner peace at the end of a busy week? What actions do you take to quiet the beating of your heart, the racing of your thoughts?

For me, I love to drive my car on the highway and listen to music. I begin with music that I can play loudly and sing even louder to, something like a Midnight Oil's song, "How can we sleep while the beds are burning?" The beat is fast and is equal to the noise going on inside of my brain. To the outside world I am just another car on the road, leaving town for the weekend, but for me it is a trip back to my inner self, to a quieter mind.

As I drive, the music will reflect my emotions, through singing and yes, even through my driving. It will take me to my inner self. Away from all of my stress and worries. Through time I will put on happier songs that are more light-hearted. I am finding freedom, freedom from work, freedom from all that I had to accomplish during the week. I will connect with

the wind in my hair and the heater blowing full blast on my legs. It amazes me that I can go through so many emotions without dealing with them through the week. I hold some peace in knowing that I am not alone; I believe that we all struggle to find our inner selves after we expose ourselves to the outside world.

The final leg of my trip is along an old highway. I am thankful for the quiet of the road and the stars twinkling overhead. It is time to put on a tape that stills my heart and allows my heart and brain to be, to feel, to rest. Now I don't have to speed, I feel no rush. I can feel my breath; I am not screaming over the music. I am one with it. More importantly, I have followed the path that has brought me back to myself. I am sure you know the feeling even if your path is different than mine.



Great Expectations

Sherry Hird

I don't expect your every moment to be one of progress,
Or for everything that you attempt to be a success.

I don't expect your life to be without struggle,
For there are situations where one must learn to juggle.

I don't expect you to always be able to find your own way,
Or to know the exact words you should say.

I don't expect you to always agree with others' point of view,
For you deserve to have your own opinion too.

I don't expect you to have a job with the highest pay,
And I understand there are decisions you may need to delay.

I don't expect you to constantly wear a smile,
For one needs to cry once in a while.

I don't expect you to be untouched by fear,
For there are occasions to be afraid and this is clear.

I don't expect you to always be unselfish and true,
Or to feel inadequate when you don't know what to do.

I don't expect you to always run ahead and win the race,
For it is all right to slow down and to set your own pace.

I don't expect you to always feel completely sane,
For the world you live in tends to pull and cause strain.

I don't expect you to always know whom you can trust,
And I understand how you may be led astray by lust.

I don't expect you to live a life void of blame,
Or to be unfamiliar with feelings of shame.

I don't expect you to excel at every task you do,
Or for your appearance to always be shiny and new.

I don't expect you to know all of the answers all of the time,
For you may make mistakes and that is fine.

Now, My child, may I be so bold as to say
That if I were you I would get down on my knees and pray
That with My help you shall find the way
To stop expecting all of the above from yourself day after day
For I as your God do not expect for you or your life to be perfect in every way.



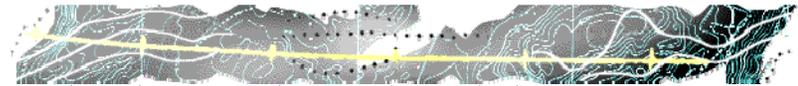
A Key

Susan D.

A key can be so many things: the access to a warm and loving home, privacy when you need to be alone, or even imaginary, as “the key to my heart.” The key I chose today is a very important one. It keeps my secret thoughts and feelings safe, in a sturdy black steel box. Without it I felt exposed, vulnerable, always worrying that someone would find my writings, and in doing so, intrude upon my personal self.

When I place my current journal in the box, it is the turn of the key afterwards that lets me turn off my mind and carry on with my day, secure in the knowledge that along with the many others already inside, my journal will remain mine and mine alone.

To look at that small key, you would never know that it plays such an important role in my life. A large responsibility for a tiny piece of metal, but it handles it well. I couldn't ask for anything more. The peace of mind I have every day is wonderful. Thanks little key; in your own tiny way you are a “key” player in the healing of my weary heart.

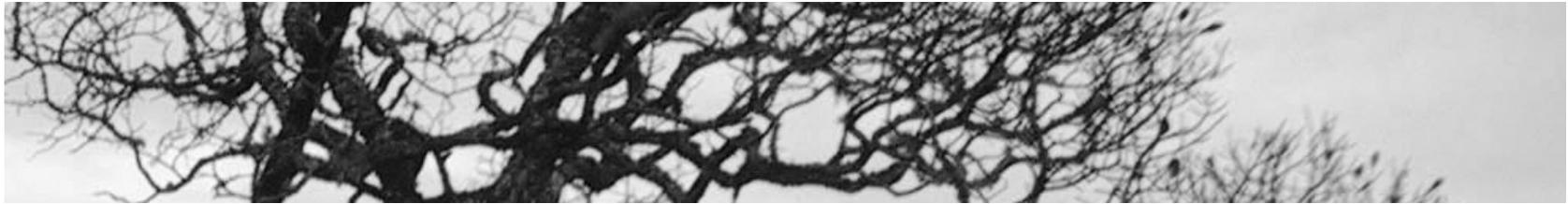


What do we need to teach our kids?

Our kids just need a lot of love and attention and communication, patience, understanding. Treat them like people, regardless of their age. When I was little, even though I loved my parents a lot, I was taught to be seen and not heard and that made me feel like I wasn't part of life.

Mona

Then and Now...



Now I'm Clean

Joanne

I used to be a druggie. Now I'm clean.

One year ago I was snorting coke and smoking pot every day. I smoked pot for over 30 years and had snorted coke for about three years.

When I would come down from the coke, it was always a very bad crash. I would always have thoughts of suicide, when coming down.

With smoking pot, I would smoke it every day, before work, during work, after work; anytime I wanted to, I smoked it. I smoked it with co-workers. Then came the night I tried coke with the people I worked with. Wow, what a high it was for me. It was my new best friend. This went on for three years.

Then one Sunday morning, a very good friend called me and asked me to do something for her. She said to me, "Joanne, I

don't ask much from you, but could you call this person on the crisis line?" My friend had called her, and the lady on the crisis line told her that she could not call me, that I had to call her. My friend asked me and I did it. I made the call.

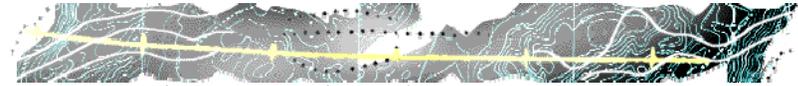
The lady said to me, "Joanne, you are worth it. You deserve to be here just as much as anyone else." She talked to me for a long time.

The next morning I went to the crisis counselling centre and talked to a gentleman there. He asked me if I was ready to make a change. I said yes. He made a few calls and in two hours I was packing to go to the detox centre.

I went back to where I was living—she was a heroin addict, one drug I never tried, thank you God. I told her where I was going; she looked at me and said, "Joanne, you don't have a problem. You don't need to go." That is when I knew for sure

I had to go, and I left and have been clean since. I never, ever thought I would give up smoking pot, especially after 30 years, but I did. Coke I did for three years. I gave it up.

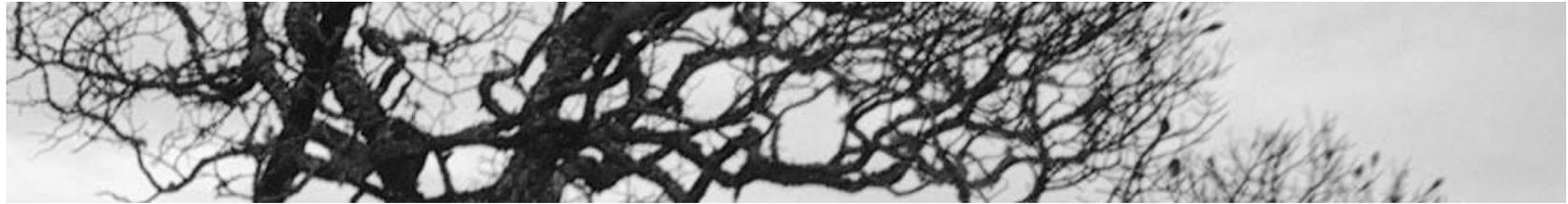
So I was a druggie. Now I'm clean.



How do People Change?

People change by wanting to, by recognizing the parts of themselves that need refinement. Releasing what is no longer needed in order to make room for the new. Letting go and allowing the magic to begin. People change by getting out of their own way so that they can truly receive the enlightenment. People change because they want to.

Erica Keen



Then and Now

Jen Waterton

When I was very small I rarely spoke and would try very hard to blend into a crowd, disappear in fact. Now I can speak to people, actually begin a conversation with a stranger. This change transpired when I went to see a psychological counsellor after my father passed. That trauma and my marriage break-up forced me to leave my shell, my comfort zone, behind and wake up to the fact that you get back what you give of yourself.

The preference I have always held for associates was animals. They do not judge, and forgive mistakes quickly and completely. To a major degree I still prefer animals, especially dogs and horses; however, in the past five or six years I have met and kept some exceptional friends.

Having found my spiritual Self has been one of the catalysts for my position on people. I am now brave enough to listen to all opinions and realize that another person has his or her own

agenda and history. From this realization it is much easier not to judge and allow all who come into my world their expression without causing me any hurt or guilt.

This has been most difficult and I have only truly mastered it, consciously, in the past six months. I still do not believe I am very brave except for the fact that I can, now, love unconditionally and allow someone else to take care of me without fear and with a lot of love.



Proud Canadian

Jennie Thirkill

The airmail letter lay on the floral hall carpet, under the brass mail slot in the blue front door. Leaving the bills and advertising matter where it had landed, I picked up the expected letter from my friend who had moved, a month ago, to Canada. Even before I opened the envelope I had a feeling I can only call inspiration, a surge of “knowing.” I realized Canada was calling me.

Being married to a military man, my children and I had travelled many, many miles on land, by air and sea during our short marriage, in order to keep our family together. Our daughter was born in Scotland, our first posting. Holland was the next place I created a home. After another short stay in England we were posted to Norway.

Of all the places we could have been sent to, Norway was the last place on my list, perhaps because I did not know any Norwegians? But, go we did. Beauty was everywhere I looked. Norwegian mountains are majestic, gigantic and

spectacular. They rise from the water to fill the sky. Norway is a water-rich country. The air was so fresh it made me gasp. Well built wooden houses were in sharp contrast to the bricks and stones of England. Norwegians are good people.

People from all NATO forces were stationed in Norway. We had to adjust in order to get along, find common ground to form friendships. Norway was the first time I met Canadians, Canadian military families, from across the vast space that is Canada.

Each nationality has its own view of the world. Some people are brash, loud and opinionated; others are quiet, civil and helpful. It runs the full spectrum of humanity in their actions and feelings.

Canadians were by far the most likeable, down-to-earth people, who can laugh at themselves with others laughing with them.

My son was born in Norway.

I held on to the envelope savouring the love contained within, written by Maureen, my high school friend. In 1966 she and her husband decided to leave England and emigrate to Canada. For all I knew she hated her new home and was booked on the next flight home. But I knew in my heart—clearly—that I was supposed to plan our migration to Canada. I was so sure of the message my feelings became convictions. I phoned my husband to tell him the great news.

Needless to say he thought I was crazy, totally mad, even. He reminded me he was signed up with the RAF until 1999. He added the new house we'd just bought so I and the children could settle down. I knew all his arguments; still, I was totally convinced we were meant to live in Canada.

Obstacles seemed endless. We dealt with them one at a time. One by one we overcame them all, including the military contract my husband signed years ago.

My husband and I agreed to stay two years in Canada. If we felt at home in our chosen country, we would stay.

Space. Wonderful space greeted us. Mountains that touch the sky or are sometimes holding up the clouds. Forests, endless green forests. Clear, clean flowing water. Endless miles of waving grain. Blue, blue skies of Alberta—which is where we decided to live because the work was there for my husband. People had time to be friendly in stores, on the bus, or wherever I went.

My children have opportunities here, have space to grow and live, have freedom in all aspects of their lives.

Canada, my chosen country. Once I was English—now I'm a very proud Canadian.



I Used to Be Scared

Mona

I've gone through a period of psychological and emotional waves in my life. Some days waves were minor problematic days like gentle breezes easy to handle. Other days it hit hard like a tornado, strong and hard and rough...almost unbearable.

I've had five nervous breakdowns since the age of fifteen. Then so young I didn't understand what was happening, I withdrew myself from life and backed into a darkened corner that just seemed to be where the nervous breakdown had taken me. As it turns out, one of the roots of this nervous breakdown was something that had happened four years prior. My parents had separated when I was eleven. Being the baby, I didn't understand why. I didn't like this process and I definitely didn't want this to be happening.

When my parents were together we lived a middle-class lifestyle. Nice home, decent furniture, and three meals a day and then some. After they separated, my siblings and I not only had to try and understand why they were separating, but step-

ping not just below, but way under, poverty level was another thing we had to deal with. As a result of not handling any of this very well I attempted suicide, was unsuccessful, as you can see, to live to talk about this. Now...no miracles happened over night—there were four more episodes of nervous breakdowns that I've experienced. But I do believe every thing happens for a reason. Had someone tried to tell me this during the nervous breakdowns, there was no way I would have agreed. No, no, absolutely no way, but after coming out of each breakdown and getting something positive out of each one, believe it or not it's actually true.... It's only when you walk the talk, actually live the experience that you get a better understanding.

Nineteen years later, through many ups and downs, everything finally fell into place with the mercy of God and the right doctors, therapist and medications. I finally stopped being afraid. Now I just get regular butterflies, all natural and normal....

Pets



My Dog Made Me an Athlete

Darlene Taylor

Before I got my first dog six years ago, I had not used my body in a competitive sport for many years. The last time was probably when I hit puberty at age eleven. I realized that I didn't like sweating, turning red in the face and gasping for air. I avoided any activity that would cause this as much as possible.

A few years ago, I bought my very first "all my own" dog. I thought I was getting a lap dog, which would suit my lifestyle perfectly. Alas, Maggie was not a sedentary dog, anything but. She emptied waste paper baskets daily, chewed up a new couch and the fringe on an antique carpet. Every chance she got, she would look for holes under the fence and go visiting neighbours. Our walks got longer and longer trying to get rid of some of her energy.

A neighbour of ours had put her dog into agility, a wonderful dog sport for some dogs and people. In order to get Maggie enough exercise going through tubes and up ladders, over ladders and other such nonsense, I was going to have to do it with her. This did not appeal to me, so I investigated coursing

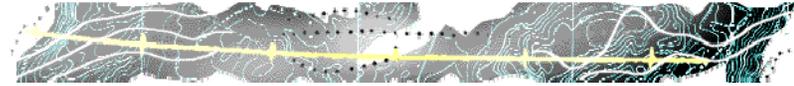
which seemed to be dogs chasing pretend food through fields. Maggie was used to getting her food from the refrigerator so this sport did not appeal to her.

We finally settled on a sport called flyball, which I thought Maggie would love, as her main activity was trying to get people or other dogs to throw the ball for her. It didn't look too strenuous to me, watching it on television. On TV they only show the well trained dogs racing down the course, not the people running alongside encouraging their dogs and then scooping the dogs up into the air to get them out of the way of even bigger dogs coming down the track. They also didn't show people trying to get very sloppy balls out of very sloppy dog mouths.

My first live experience with flyball was at a demonstration by a local team. I was amazed to see normal-looking people jumping, screaming and high fiving each other while border collies barked incessantly, never taking their beady eyes off a ball, any ball. Maggie was entranced by all this activity so we signed up for the training lessons.

Perhaps I should give a short explanation of this rather bizarre activity. It is a team sport with four dogs on each team. A run is laid out with four hurdles spaced equal distances apart and a plywood box at the end. The dog runs over the hurdles, hits the box with its front feet and a tennis ball jumps out. The dog grabs the tennis ball, runs back over the hurdles and drops the ball. The next dog then goes and everything is repeated until all four dogs have done their turn. The team that has the fastest time without errors wins. Good teams do their turn in under 17 seconds. Sounds pretty simple doesn't it? It isn't. Training the dogs takes a lot of time and hard work and an incredible amount of cheese for rewards.

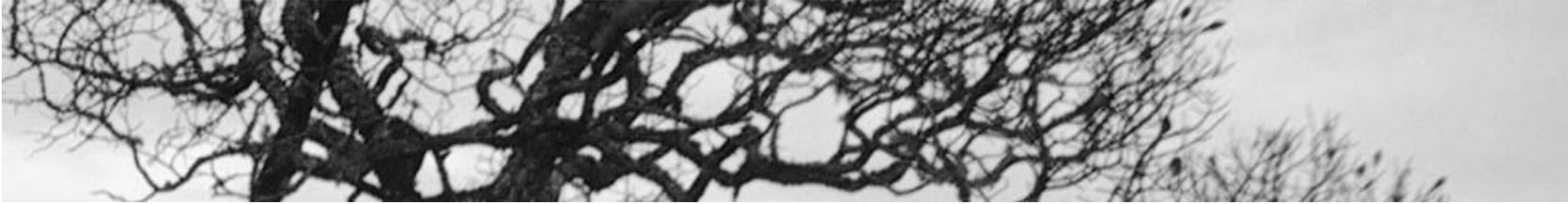
Every Sunday you will find me in a field or a dusty barn, jumping up and down and screaming, "Over, Over, Over!" at the top of my lungs and high fiving my human team mates. I am sweating, my face is red and I am gasping for air while having the best times ever playing with my toy poodle.



How do people change?

If you ask me people only change if they want to. Ask any addict. Ask anyone's spouse. I believe that I can only change myself. If you love someone, why would you want to change them? If the loved one changes, he or she is no longer the person you say you love.

Jen Waterton



Ruby

Jen Waterton

When I first saw Ruby, she was tiny. Smallest in the litter of seven, she resembled a dust ball.

My partner and I weren't supposed to have pets where we lived, so Ruby became "the bag lady." She traveled everywhere zipped inside a blue and red sports bag.

We were finally caught and moved to a much better location for us all. Our new landlady loves Ruby and the feeling is mutual. One of the things Sylvie, the landlady, loves best is that Ruby rarely barks! In fact, no one in the building has ever heard her.

Ruby's main job is to make Mom (me) laugh and she knows just how to do that. If she can't get a laugh, a smile will do.

Since she has grown up a little, she has become a beautiful little dog. Not quite fifteen pounds, she has a multi-coloured

coat from creamy white to almost mahogany. Big brown eyes with eyeliner and a slight under-bite that allows her to smile where she's really happy. Her ears tip over and she has a plume tail that wags constantly.

Ruby likes to hear the sound of my voice and will often sit alert and tip her head to one side to hear me better. The expression is one of rapt interest and intelligence.

Perhaps you have guessed that I love this little dog and you are so right. Ruby saved me when I was deeply depressed and now I would be quite lost without her. Thank you, little girl, for choosing me to be your human Mom.



Never in My Wildest

Jennie Thirkill

In my wildest imagination I never saw myself as an old woman doting on a dog. Yet here I am taking pleasure caring for Tiffany.

Unconditional love, constant companionship, laughter as she plays and amazement as she works out new attention-getting behaviours is what she gives to me. Small, black, soft, furry Tiffany is my cheerleading section, the one to whom I pour out my heart, confess my shortcomings or hug when I need to hug.

She may not be the purest poodle. She may not have the exact measurements poodles require for the show ring. She certainly doesn't look like a pom-pom poodle either. She has a sports cut.

Without a doubt, however, she is the most lovable creature, giving unconditional love every day. She greets me with enthusiasm when I come to her. And she stays as close to me as my left heel as I move about.

I admit I've never had such love and attention with so little effort on my part to reciprocate. Her needs are love, food, water, love, a walk, a bath (occasionally) and more love. Simple! Tiffany had me fully trained very quickly to her needs.

We make a great team as we continue our life's journey together.

Courage



The Empty Diaper

Cidnee Johnson

The diaper caught my attention. I began to think of my children when they were babies. All babies to me are cute, especially when they are toddlers, in their sleepers, and with a well-padded diaper. With their cute bums in the air, learning to crawl or walk, the diaper also provides padding for specific “owies” on certain occasions.

God be in my arms and in my reaching/receiving.

God be in my mouth and in my speaking.¹

Surprisingly, my thoughts changed rather swiftly. I thought of a place in my heart that is filled with sorrow, grief and yearning. Consciously, I did not want to go to that place in my heart, the unspeakable. I wanted immediately to give the diaper back. Close the topic as I have always done before! As I sat at the computer contemplating, I wondered if I could be brave, this time? I began to write about this place in my heart I could vision, where this sorrow is kept. Do I have the cour-

age to tell of my sorrow and my blessings?

God be in my head and in my understanding.

My first child, Lisa, was born in September 1971. She was the first child and grandchild on both sides of the family. I named her Lisa since being six weeks pregnant. I love her dearly, I honour her and I appreciate her. She is “a miracle child” and such a precious gift!

My last child, Jeremy, was born in September 1977. I have a son! I never had any brothers, and as a teen, I did not baby-sit boys! Having a boy, at first, was rather terrifying to me. I phoned on numerous occasions to our family doctor. On one such occasion, I finally learned my son did not lose his testicles, although this part of his anatomy kept disappearing! I did exactly what the doctor said, “Put the baby in warm water.” Voila! Like a miracle, they were back! Jeremy’s smile lights up a room. He is very sociable and soulful. He too is my “miracle child” and a precious gift!

God be in my heart and in my loving.

¹ Carolyn Mass. *Healing with Energy*. Based on words to an old hymn.

I experienced early in life the loss of my mother. I had just turned twenty (going on twelve). My sister was three years younger. Cancer had taken our mother at the age of fifty-two. This was much too young to lose your mother, your best friend, your confidant! She had been sick for many years during my youth, many treatments, and we all had hope. So I thought. I know I was shocked to hear of Mom's passing when *that* phone call came at 2:01 a.m. Mom always came home from the hospital!

I do not know if you ever get through the grieving, or past the loss; I do know that one gets better at putting on "the mask," and you do learn to hide your feelings better.

God be in my neck and in my humbling.

God be in my bowels and in my forgiving.

After the birth of my daughter, eighteen months after my mother's passing, I was thrilled to learn that I was pregnant again. There is something joyful and gleaming about being an expectant mother. Families on both sides were excited as well. Unfortunately, between the third and fourth month I miscarried twins. I heard rationalizations from the caring and concerned. For example, "It was for the best," or "This is God's way of handling things that aren't right." I found no comfort in hearing these words. It angered me to various degrees for anyone to say anything at all. The more I heard these messages, the harder it was for me to keep the pain and grief locked in my special place in my heart. I worked very hard to keep this grief in my heart and between God and myself.

God be in my head and in my understanding.

I again became pregnant, and this baby was due at Christmas-

time. Oh, that feeling of joy, and the radiance that comes with pregnancy. I could not help but project this radiance outwardly. This feeling was with me again and very hard to contain! Although guarded in my enthusiasm, I decided I would not tell anyone this time about my special secret. Again, I miscarried at the fourth month. I sombrely grieved alone, by choice, and I could not talk about the pain. I had not told anyone my special secret. My heart ached so badly and it did feel like a knife had gone through my heart, again.

God be in my feet and in my grounding.

I moved to Vancouver Island on May 1, 1975. Coming to this Island was like coming home, a place where I felt I always *should* have been, all my life. Coming from the prairies to Mill Bay was quite the culture shock! Ah yes, the yellow flowers along the highway were daffodils, not dandelions! Imagine that! Arbutus trees were leaning out from an embankment over the ocean. How do trees grow like that? I saw all new varieties of foliage, flowers and fauna. I had never before seen an eagle! I viewed all of this from the top of the Malahat! It was a moment of time that stood still, and "*knowing*" we are all connected to "*The Creator*," "*The Source*," "*God*." Oh, the smell of the ocean was like inhaling life itself!

God be in my nose and in my smelling.

God be in my eyes and in my looking.

God be in my guts and in my feeling.

God be in my lungs and in my breathing.

I was again pregnant when I moved to the Island. I was five months pregnant and overjoyed I had made it through that first trimester. On May 2, the day after I moved to Vancouver Island, I began to bleed. I was admitted to the Royal Jubilee

that same day. I had strict orders to have complete bed rest. I lay in bed for nearly two months, until the 26th of July. I prayed for this baby to be okay, and at the same time, yearning to be at home (although I was not quite sure where I lived). I missed my daughter so much! My husband drove down to Victoria every day. He was worried also.

I delivered my stillborn baby at twenty-eight weeks. I did not know I could feel worse than I had felt when I experienced previous miscarriages: devastated, disappointed and angry! No counselling (pre- or post) was offered, there was no follow-up and no one I could talk with. I pined for my mother, and in silence and in the many dark peaceful nights (listening to croaking frogs), I found solace and comfort in her words which I could hear her speaking to me. To ease the pain, subconsciously I believe I eventually became numb. At least being numb, I could get things accomplished. Not everything was unpacked yet!

God be in my flesh and in my pining.

God be in my shoulders and in my bearing.

God be in my guts and in my feeling.

God be in my joints and in my relating.

Some close friends and relatives over the years mentioned to me, “I’m too involved with my kids,” or, “I love them too much.” The people who were being kind to me did not know of that place in my heart where I kept my sorrows. I was not ready to tell, to listen, or to learn. I could never really understand the intent of those messages nor did I understand the concepts, e.g., good vs. bad, punishment for something, or “Mother Nature.” For a long time, I examined my life, my motives, my belief systems, and my values. It was not until very recently I found inner peace and a belief that fit “just

right for me.” Perhaps, all of this is part of a greater plan that I do not know about, yet. While writing this piece it came to me what I needed to do. I now have that secret place in my heart open, just a little for now. I contacted the Freedom of Information, Privacy and Protection Department. I asked for the details surrounding the death of my unborn child. When I receive this information, I will name the baby, and apply for a special birth certificate. I can then start to grieve appropriately, as opposed to what I had been doing for all these years. I do not know the outcome yet, as I am still in this process, the process that feels and fits right, for me.

God be in my mouth and in my speaking.

God be in my ears and in my hearing.

God be in my joints and in my relating.

God be in my chest and in my knowing.

I tucked these experiences as well, in that special place in my heart. That place, where I put my feelings and memories of my loved ones, with whom I had so little time. I look at the “empty” diaper, a reminder of how fortunate I am to have given birth to two beautiful children. I now keep that special place in my heart no longer a secret. Until I can be with you all again,

God be in my guts and in my feeling.

God be in my bowels and in my forgiving.

God be in my heart and in my loving.

God be in my skin and in my touching.

God be in my flesh and in my pining.

God be in my blood and in my living.

God be in my bones and in my dying.

God be at my end and at my reviving.



Fun on the Run

Cidnee Johnson

To say the least, I was an active child. My parents would say to me, “How long do you think it would take you to run around the block?” It was more of a strong suggestion, rather than a question, as my dad would commence timing me! It was not until I went to school I understood why my parents would ask, “How fast could I run around the block?” So, I would run to school, and back, and then run again to school and back. I got a lot of practice.

In grade three, I had no choice but to lie to the baseball coach. I still feel guilty about the lie, yet proud of my courage at the same time. I just could not take watching the older kids play softball any longer! You had to be in grade four to be on the team and to be at least a substitute! I could hit the ball and run really fast (all that practicing at running), whence started my passion for softball, until the ripe old age of forty-two. I was a pitcher and shortstop. I had an excellent “whip pitch” that fooled many a quick-eyed batter. The first inning of every new game, with every opposing team, was always the most fun! Playing softball was fun in its own merit; however, I could really have

fun with myself too. I was small in stature and always had a plan when I went up to bat. I would think to myself, “Okay, let’s make it real fun and ham this up a bit.” I would act like Charlie Chaplin, as if I were in a slapstick comedy. No one would have guessed I had ever held a bat in my hands before, let alone hit a ball. Inwardly, I was roaring with laughter. (My Dad taught me how to hit a softball starting when I was about four years old. I knew how to position my feet to take a fast pitch, or a different stance for a slower pitch. I learned how to “place the ball.”) This would psych out the other team. Of course, this was my plan all along.

I would hear their coach call aloud, “fielders in!” I would look out to field to see how far the fielders moved in (this would be to my advantage of course). My bat was on the plate, as planned, and I was just waiting for the pitch. Whap! That softball would go straight out to field, over the fielders’ heads, and kept on a-rolling. I usually got to third base and on occasion would hit a home run. Always a line drive down third base would at least get me on first. The second game that was scheduled for each

opposing team was not quite as much fun. I would then hear the coaches yell, “Fielders out; she can hit!” as I chuckled to myself. They all had my “shtick.”

I was equally active in basketball and volleyball in grade school, junior and senior high. In my mid-life years, I curled (fourteen in total). However, my second passion in sports was track and field. I was always bringing home my ribbons, medals and trophies (since I had much practice at running from *such an early age*). I lived in Lethbridge, Alberta, and it is notoriously known as the “Windy City.” Those Chinook winds provided me with a lot of “help” in the hop, skip and jump, and standing broad! So I feel, with humbleness, perhaps I owe some of my accolades to the winds. I am also thankful to my parents for their athletic genetics, particularly my legs and ability to run well. I took for granted my skills and abilities as a participant in sports, and in particular took for granted my legs and knees. They never had failed me!

From my early forties I began to experience aching knees with periods where I experienced sharp pains down my legs. I complained for a couple of years that it hurt me to walk, and I also had great difficulty in climbing stairs. I wouldn’t even consider the task to walk down a slightly sloped hill. I was referred to a rheumatologist and I learned I had no cartilage in my knees. My “no-fail knees” would need replacing (when I am older)! The blood tests also concurred with the doctor’s diagnosis. I have rheumatoid arthritis, which is a systemic type of arthritis that has to do with the autoimmune system. Since I could not play ball any longer, nor walk along trails, I took on a new sport called, tubing down the river. Oh, life was grand again! In the summer, all you need is an inner tube, good footwear for the water, and sunscreen. I could no longer rely on my legs, so sitting in an inner tube floating down the Cowichan River for three or four years was very appealing and thrilling. I am quite sure I was the

only grandma, a rather large one at that, tubing down the river with my grandsons. We would fly through the rapids and yell, “YEE HAA” to the top of our lungs! My youngest grandson would say, “More white water, Nana,” while my oldest grandson was quite content gliding down the river, in a smooth, effortless, and graceful way, gazing at the trees and looking for treasures. I enjoyed both the rapids and the gentle movements of the river. This was great fun, for a while!

After having four arthroscopic surgeries on my knees, it was quite evident I was desperately in need of new knees. I would go to bed night after night, for months, with ice packs on my knees, and a tensor bandage to keep them in place. Naturally, I became dependent on pain medication. I was miserable. I was advised by my doctors that no longer do I have *quantity* of life; my choice would have to be, *quality* (because of the types of medications I had to take). I was being injected weekly with gold and methotrexate, was on anti-inflammatory drugs, and started on a new biogenetic type drug called Enbrel, which I inject into myself twice a week. I eventually had to sleep on my couch downstairs. I could not climb the stairs up to the top floor to my bed. Eventually I had to sell my house and buy a house where I did not have to climb stairs. I had to think carefully and plan well, in order for me to do simple small tasks because of the chronic pain. Even to stand up from my comfortable living room chair took a lot of thought and planning. Nothing was spontaneous any more! There were many days of remorse, grieving and deep depression during this pre-operative new “bionic” total knee replacement wait. I was oppressed, depressed, suppressed and repressed. I was grieving the loss of “*me*” and how “I used to be.” I was grieving the loss of my legs and independence. I was frustrated with my life, and myself. I felt very alone, dependent, and angry.

I did not see the depression coming on. It was slow, like a black

cloud engulfing me, inside and out, and the expressions on my face reflected this. I became very introverted and eventually agoraphobic. I had tremendous difficulty with getting groceries, paying bills, remembering what I am supposed to be doing, and where was I going, to name a few obstacles. Panic attacks kept rolling and rolling in my body, anxiety that would have me going in circles and the deep desire to “*run*.” The side effect of the numerous medications I was on was enough for anyone to bear.

I often thought, truthfully, “I’m opting for quantity, not quality, for I have had enough!” The seriousness of the progression of the arthritis inflammation, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorder were managed (like a diamond in the rough, being cut with such precision) by a parade of doctors (for whom I am most grateful). I had no one I could talk to who could understand my feelings. My immediate family did not understand “invisible disabilities,” and many times I felt mistreated in many ways. I did not like or love myself, so how could anyone else get into my space, thoughts, etc.

I loved to remember in the past, and in my head would re-live my experiences of when I could walk, run, and dance. I spent many hours “remembering when” and revelled in my joyous memories. The thought that I would be getting two total new knee replacements, some day, gave me hope and something to look forward to. I also learned not to say, “It can’t get any worse,” because it always did get worse! Most importantly, I learned to appreciate good health. I learned to become patient with myself and others. I learned new skills: self-hypnosis, meditation and centering which helped me with my inner balance. We do as humans take so much for granted and *we are all just one incident away from a major crisis*.

I was finally called for surgery in Victoria. I was so excited at

the prospect of being able to walk again. All my joy and life seemed to stop when my legs could not hold out. I had my knees done by spinal injection, vs. a regular-type anesthetic. If I could do it again, I’d opt for the knockout anesthetic! I could do without hearing the saws buzz and the clunking of the bones in the kidney dishes. I’d hear one doctor say, “This is good for donation.” Then I’d hear a loud clunking sound resonating from the tin kidney dish. I went in on a Friday and was home by Monday afternoon. The doctors and nurses were amazed with my determination and progress! (They did not know I smoked!) A few weeks with a walker, a few physiotherapy sessions and another couple of months with my cane, and I got a life!

It has now been one year since my knees were replaced. I remain on my medications and continue to see a parade of medical doctors on a regular basis. I have a renewed sense of self-worth and so happy just to be able to walk and climb a few stairs. I again see green trees even more green than ever, flowers more beautiful and colourful than ever, and once again appreciating the contact I have with the outside world.

I still relish the memories of my past and smile at how I used to play softball. I can still hear my dad’s voice, “How fast can you run?” My answer now is, “As long as I can keep up the pace, walk without major pain, and sporadically make a short dash to catch my youngest granddaughter, Danika, who is now five, *I am very blessed!*”



Breaking Free

Erica Keen

Looking through my passing fragmented window of reality, I find myself reflecting on how I have arrived at where I am now. If it weren't for the perceived negative experiences, or the path I have walked until now, I would never be open to, or prepared for, the many blessings that are filling my life. I am blessed with the beauty of children's eyes looking to me to be their everything. I am blessed with the renewed strength of knowing I am good enough and I can do it on my own. I am blessed with a stronger me. I am blessed with seeing the beauty in my own soul. I am blessed with myself; I am back.

I used to be trusting, trusting of everyone and everything. Now I am cautious because I have learned that one can only have trust when they trust themselves. I have learned that trust is earned, not given freely. I am reminded of the importance of my connection with Great Spirit at this time.

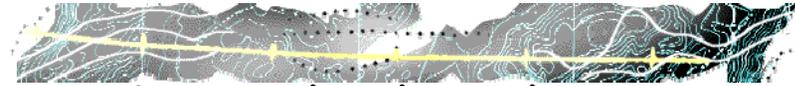
I have taken many steps towards self-acceptance and shed the many skins of illusion. My self-created illusions, that sad lit-

tle voice screaming, "You are not good enough." "You can't do it." "You'll never do it." "You are unlovable." "Who do you think you are?" "You are nobody."

I now honour my space with the smudging of sage, and dress my "woman in power" altar with healing stones and affirmations. I pray for guidance everyday. I remember where I have come from only to keep myself from going there again. I am learning to bless the obstacles in my path for they have only strengthened me and they continue to. Every physical and emotional scar from tragedy becomes my stepping-stone towards the light. I am blessed, truly blessed.

I cry for me, for the world, for all the women everywhere who suffer in silence. I am awakened to the great connection we all share. I am opened to my voice, my inner voice, the sound that has been stifled for so long with self-doubt and the pounding negative programming we all receive from children onwards, that echoes within us.

The truth shall set me free. I am living, breathing, and owning it. I see the beauty in the horror; this is my gift. I remember my inner song and know as I do, I inspire others to do the same. We honour each other by honouring ourselves.



Recipe for getting through turmoil

Believe in yourself

One hot bubble bath a day/ until symptoms subside

A warm cup of tension tamer tea/ as needed

Box of Kleenex/ honour your tears

Smile—even if it hurts

At the end of each day name at least three things you are grateful for

Journal

Dance with your kids/ if you have none pretend you do

Pray for assistance from a higher power

Invest in self-care, i.e., something for you

Go for long walks

Embrace the new

Share with someone you trust

Burn some incense, light a candle

Have patience

Erica Keen



The Whiskey Bottle

Jane Peters

Over twenty years ago this whiskey bottle ruled and had control of my life. I started with social drinking such as beer and wine, but beer didn't agree with my taste buds and wine made me violently ill and caused blackouts.

Soon I found that whiskey seemed to be easier for me to handle. I really enjoyed the different kinds of whiskey including liqueurs. The feeling the whiskey gave me was one of self-esteem, power and strength. I could conquer anything under its influence. But that feeling had its downfall: when I wasn't drinking I was fearful, no self-esteem and weak. So I started to have my whiskey first thing in the morning. Just enough to make me feel confident. I drank it in my coffee and coke and water all day long.

Soon there was evidence that it was taking its toll on me. I quit eating, I could not relax without it. I could not remember things and could not sleep.

One day I didn't have money to buy any whiskey, so I tried to

get through the day without. I became very agitated, so I called my mother. She said, "Take a Graval, it might calm you down." I bought Graval in bulk, but instead of taking just one or two, I took about 100 tablets. About an hour later I could not move. I was dizzy and totally numb. Then a friend of mine came to visit and I was stuck on the front steps. He had no idea what was wrong because I could not talk so he called another friend of mine and she told him to take me and the empty bottle of pills to the hospital.

At the hospital they wanted to pump my stomach and I wasn't going to let anyone do that to me. So they got me to drink the mustard solution, which made me throw up. Then the nurse asked me when I had eaten last? I replied in a slurred speech, "Three days ago."

I was sent to counselling and to A.A. and had to learn to let go of the whiskey bottle that controlled my life.



New Day—Hope Lives Here

Maureen McManus

So, here I am, sitting in this chair reflecting on yesterday and possibly on all the yesterdays gone by. See, I was given what I believe is one of the most honouring gifts I have been given since the births of my four babies. I was asked to participate in this amazing project of joining in with a circle of women I hadn't ever met before, weaving a collection of our personal triumphs, sorrows and, well, as a new friend put it this morning, "peaks and valleys."

I have been intensely processing the fragments of all my years over the last three and a half months. It has been in this willingness to embrace the all-important question for me, "What on earth am I here for?" No, really! Like just exactly what is the point of this whole freaking life thing anyway? It was here where I lost any meaning for me to continue to trudge through each and every gruelling, single, solitary second of agony compiled into one minute, hour, day, night and...Yikes! "What do you mean it's morning again!" "Noooo!" "Do I have to 'wake up'?" "Do I really have to be here? Why?" "I don't like it, make it stop!" "It hurts so much!" This dimension is the deep, dark, gloomy depths of a

place I know oh so well. The place of a trapped aloneness. The place where once I fall in...I realize with immense grief, I...am...here...again... and no amount of pretending or trickery will set me free. So feeling so weak and exhausted and full of grimacing shame. It is like having anesthetic injected into my vein and I am completely powerless to resist the slow, sick surge of black that easily and swiftly now overtakes my will and takes on its own life, using me as though it were a bloodsucking parasite. Maybe you know this heartless type of depression I speak of: where you know you have desperately tried to be free and to no avail can any relief be found. You stop talking to friends and family because you just can't find one positive thing to say because it's all coloured with thick, black crayon. So before you know it, days and even months go by and you don't even remember when you last brushed your teeth. And at some point, for whatever reason, it becomes terrifyingly real to you that the frayed grip you have on life is dissolving before your eyes as you continue to spiral so far down, that it just seems as though you may never escape. For a split second, in the void, I find the courage to say to myself, "Is there one reason, just one mean-

ingful reason that I have come through all the gripping misery that has left me feeling so paralyzed?” “Oh God! Please!!! Help me make some sense of all of this! I have run out of go juice, I just feel so used up. I don’t want to feel sorry for myself anymore.” I begin to search for sources of inspiration other than just being a mom. Have you ever been giving and giving all you’ve got, your very best and it just isn’t good enough? Your very reason for breathing is just not appreciating your mere existence, so what now?

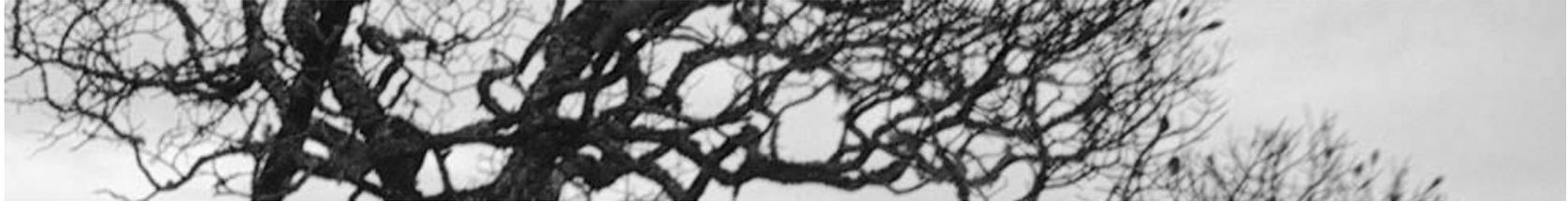
So much wreckage from the past, screaming for acceptance. Sifting through, analyzing, searching for meaning to attach to those shame-filled scenes in my mind of when I was a beautiful little girl. So bright-eyed, filled with wonder, hungry for learning and excited for living. Always singing my words as I merrily skipped and danced along the day. How wonder-filled were the first two or three years of my existence. Has my life really been a mistake? Am I really a burden on those I call family? Am I really just an embarrassing waste of skin? No!!! Damn it! It can’t be so! My life has always been an apology. I want my life to be an exclamation!! I want to be done with the muck and mire. I want my life’s mission, my purpose, to be one of radiating universal life force energy. Seeking reasons to be grateful, spreading joy everywhere, loving all people and recognizing within each of us the hero on this journey called life. I have been searching all my life for answers and maybe I’ll never quite get all my questions answered.

I had put all this pressure on myself to perform for you, the reader of these words. Hoping that I could infuse you with a morsel of joy. Hoping you would feel inspired by some beautiful wisdom I could share. When I looked back over the last

few months and years to gather this little gem, I had terror-stricken moments because of where I am right now. Somewhere along this process of embracing the past, of no longer running from me; somehow joy and feelings of empowerment have escaped me. I desperately wanted to run as I was struck down by the whole “I am not worthy” crap and felt temporarily stunned as it was still my desire to give “you” a reason to continue to trudge. Still hoping to bring to colourful life the promise of a sentence written in a well read book: “ And this too shall pass.” I guess I can’t pretend and make this all pretty for you or me. The whole focus of my healing journey was to free myself from torment by obliterating guilt and shame for my past and for whatever I was experiencing in the moment, allowing every feeling to just be. Not forcing the process or judging how long it seemed to be taking.

I guess it’s true that even in the darkest recesses of depression there is still a hope that lives there. That giving and receiving my own gift of healing, no matter what it looks like at present, will, at some point, break open the black sky with the promise of living in a new day. A day where hope meets joy, a place of higher peaks and gentler valleys.

People



Invitation

Barbara

January 27, 2006

Dear Jesus,

Jesus, I was given a writing assignment wherein I was asked to write a letter to someone inviting them for dinner. I was going to invite your trusted servant, Emmet Fox, for dinner, and I would still like to do that, but then I thought about it. I thought that I was inviting him to dinner to tell me about you. At this point I thought, well why not be brave, and ask you to come to dinner? And of course I would love to meet with Emmet as well. Perhaps we could all get together sometime soon.

So, Jesus, would you come to my place for dinner? I have heard you calling me for so long, but I have been afraid to respond. That is something I would like to talk with you about. I don't really understand why I am afraid. Somehow I

have faith that you will be able to help me with this. I know you know that there are other things we need to talk about so I would appreciate it if we could talk about those things as well.

I have been hearing you strong and clear lately. I think it is time for me to hear what it is you have to say, person to person. I feel ready, even though I'm pretty emotional and surprised that I picked you for my invitation. I just looked into my mind and there you were.

Would you be able to come tomorrow night, say around 6 p.m.? I know you know where I am. And as I write this letter I know you will come. I'll be waiting for you. I love you. See you soon.

Love,
Barbara



My Rock

Joanne

My rock on this journey for a stronger life would have to be my very good friend Diane.

Diane and her husband have been my friends for almost 32 years now. It doesn't mean that I have to see them all the time, but we do talk on the phone often. Their children are the same age as myself, but we weren't as close to each other as we are now.

I met Diane on a camping trip that I was on with my sister and cousins. I was going to the old outhouse and I just happened to have a flashlight and she didn't. I heard this voice behind me asking me to wait. I thought that voice wasn't one I had heard before.

People have asked me for the last 30 years how in the world did we meet. No one really believes the story as we tell it, but we always laugh because it really is unbelievable.

For the first ten years we knew each other we went camping all the time. Then as I became an adult, and started raising my two stepsons, we would meet once a year and camp. We see each other when necessary, you know, the face-to-face, nitty-gritty, heart-to-heart chats that we women need to touch base.

It took me a long time to realize that I could actually tell her anything and I mean anything and she was always there. She did not laugh in my face, tell me that's not right or wrong or that I should not feel this or that. What a treat.

I call her and her family my adopted family, because that is what it feels like for me. She says the same thing. I really don't know if she knows that she has been my rock for as long as I can remember.

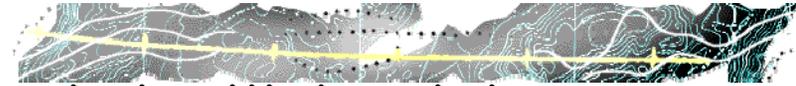
One year before my mother died she went to visit Diane. In hindsight now I know why. She wanted to ask Diane if she

was prepared to be my friend, because once I make a friend it's usually for life. Mom never told me about the visit but Diane did. I realize now that my Mother really knew me better than I knew myself. At the time of the visit I think I was 15.

The next year Mom died very suddenly. I find it very ironic now as I reflect now just how much Mom knew about me that I hadn't learned yet.

As I write this now, I know that actually I have two strong rocks in my life. My Mother who is with me in spirit, and Diane who is here for me, and I for her, when we need each other to rant and rave, laugh or cry.

My cup is full. I am very grateful for my two rocks. Thank you.



What do world leaders need to hear?

If you ask me what world leaders need to hear, I would yell as loud as possible, "Do unto others as you would have done unto you." I honestly believe that's all they need to hear and if they lived this there would be no more wars or starvation.

Jen Waterton



Knitting

Mona

When I was little, I used to watch my mother and sister knit hats, socks and sometimes sweaters with traditional sheep wool and sell them through private sales to help bring in extra income for food and bills. It is traditional through our Native heritage that as young females you learn to knit, cook and clean and young males learn to carve, hunt and fish.

Growing up in the city of Tacoma, Washington, my parents were both working, long-day, low-paying jobs. Our mother didn't really have any spare time to teach us the traditional necessities. We all caught on for the cooking and cleaning—that came with the daily chores. When our mother did knit, my sister—six years older than I—caught on just by watching and quickly started helping, which made our mom extremely happy because I am sure it lightened the stressful burden that she was experiencing, when she was pressed for time when an order was made.

Time passed, my sister had married and moved away and we

had moved to the Cowichan Valley! Mom had slowed down on knitting for a short time during those few years when she had made the decision to move from Tacoma back to her home town of Duncan.

As a result of her decision the household finances had not just doubled but tripled for the worse, and if she were to knit again, it would almost seem not even worth it due to the high cost of wool. To spin it, then knit, her profit was very slim.

Sadly she didn't really have a choice. The finances was desperately needed, so she would knit for what little she made anyway, and that's where the fun for me came in, because I tried to ask her to teach me, but by this time in her life, she didn't seem to have the patience, let alone the spare time.

Crazily, one evening when my mom was out with my grandmother, I was cleaning the house and taken notice of her knitting she had in a basket beside her favourite chair. She

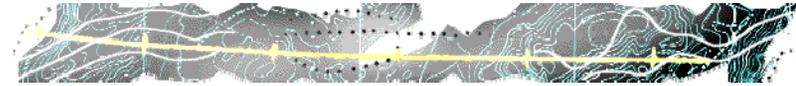
had a hat knitted about halfway, with a whale design. I picked it up and looked it over several times and wondered (um) first of all, if I could try and knit with it? Second, would mom get extremely mad if I messed this all up?

A strong desire of determination came over me, so I went ahead and gave it a try. I knitted it and messed up and this continued for h-o-u-r-s.... I finally figured out how to take it down and knit it back up. With the hours that passed it finally worked!

I was so proud of myself, I wasn't really paying attention specifically to the design. I was now the proud new knitter of a hat that had a two-headed whale on one side and two tails on the other.

And thank goodness my mom didn't even get mad when she saw it. I think she was more stumped for air than anything. After what seemed like a long time of silence, she laughed extensively because of my deformed whale design.

Anyhow, through sheer determination and a lot of mistakes, I now know how to knit quite well.



Fears

I read somewhere once that the only two fears we are born with are:

- 1) the fear of loud noises, &
- 2) the fear of falling.

Everything else is learned....

Maureen McManus

Strength



Where My Strength Comes From

Joanne

My strength comes from my Mother. We buried my Mother 26 years ago this week.

I did not know until last year, that I had a guardian angel with me. What a joy to be appraised by something that I had not believed was true for me. I have heard through the years that everyone has an “angel,” you just have to open to it. For a long time I was not open to it at all, because I didn’t believe.

For many years I believed that I was on my own in the world. I mean I have siblings but we have not always been there for each other. There was a lot of stuff that had gone on between my family and me that I didn’t understand, but I knew deep down what I knew to be true was right. My siblings thought that I was just causing problems. Nobody wanted to face the truth. They did not believe in me and that was very hard for me to understand, because in my own foggy world, I believed everything that they had told me was true. What a fool.

But as I have just found out in the last couple of months, that what I knew to be true really was true. I knew that my oldest brother had really done the things that I had said he did, and

the rest of my siblings found out that I did know what I had told was right. That I had not made these things up, I just knew, somehow. What a feeling to finally be validated.

So now I know for sure that I really have an angel and that she is my Mother. Even though she is not in this world with me, she is somewhere always looking out for me, and that I have to trust what I feel and to just let go of the rest, no matter what other people think, because only her and I have to believe in the process, and for me to always look around because I feel her always by my side, guiding me to feel worthy of walking with my head held high and feeling good about the things I’m doing that are the right things.

I have the strength to carry on and be the person I need to be in order to survive in this world. And to do the things I want to do, so that I can be happy and make a place here so that I can help whoever comes my way and asks.



Strength

Darlene Taylor

I have always considered myself to be a strong person mentally and perhaps physically. I can chop a cord of wood, walk several miles and carry heavy objects. I am the oldest child in my family and so was the physical helper to my parents. Also, because I am the oldest I was expected to “set an example” to my younger siblings. No weaknesses were encouraged or even allowed in my role as big sister. Fortunately, I was able to fulfill this role most of the time and hid any fear or uncertainty with a type of blowhard bravado.

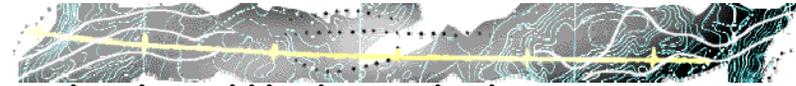
When I grew up and had my own family, I continued on with this role, DARLENE THE STRONG AND BRAVE who could handle anything. By now I believed in this role that had been put upon me and handled everything that appeared in my life. I fooled everybody including my husband. Everybody I knew thought I was strong and brave and could move mountains. When my boys were diagnosed with hemophilia I quickly learned all I could and because I was invincible, I

learned to transfuse them with blood products. This saved countless hours, not having to go to hospitals and take time from our busy schedules to ask for help. When our boys were diagnosed with AIDS and Hepatitis B and C, I was strong and continued on, nursing them, helping other moms, teaching Sex Education to young boys infected with AIDS etc., etc. My strength wavered with the death of one son and I received some help with overcoming my grief. Soon I was up and at it again. Now I was going to save the world from AIDS. I was on a myriad of committees, traveled non-stop and gloried in my strength. I also loved the attention I got—how brave I was and the strength I had.

DARLENE THE STRONG AND BRAVE continued on in this role but I changed my focus from AIDS to addictions. If some group needed a speaker, if some grieving parent needed somebody to talk to, if my husband or daughter needed a mom or a wife, I was always there. Or a least I tried to be. I

was always there for my friends and felt I was a good friend because I never burdened them with woes and fears.

Several months ago, my marriage of many years broke down. I fell to pieces, which was a shock to everybody including me. My husband said I was strong and could manage on my own; he wanted someone who needed him occasionally. I tried, really tried to pull up my bootstraps and carry on. It didn't work. In the end the only honest strength I have shown was my strength in asking for help from my friends and from professionals. I feel like I am more of a whole person and the last years of my fifth decade are going to be for me. My husband, when he realized that I really needed him (he had been the one who stayed home and looked after all the practical stuff) and that he had been a part of my amazing so-called courage, strength and bravery, came home to me. Sometimes the strongest and kindest thing you can do is to allow other people to help you.



What do world leaders need to hear?

World leaders need to listen to themselves when they first got into whichever position they hold. They each made promises to better something one way or another and I'm sure each one has gone back on their word once they got the power of the position they hold. Yes, I think world leaders need to go back and listen to themselves and what they promised when they first ran for their positions.

Mona



My Own Strength

Erica Keen

My whole life everyone has told me that I was strong. I guess if I break down the moments in my life that have contributed to my strength I would have to say my strength comes from my weakest moments (my inner strength that is). When I was raped, I gained strength from surviving it, sharing it. When I was beaten down and ridiculed, I gained strength in remembering. When I was abandoned, I gained strength in my tears.

Painful fragmenting experiences have perhaps created a more abstract me, a stained glass version of me. Only now do I realize what for years I perceived as weakness was actually strength.

Strength is survival. Strength is realizing that I am not alone. Strength is believing in myself. Strength is giving myself the freedom to fly. Strength is honouring the dark places in my reality. Strength is celebrating the loss. Strength is illuminating the shadow. Strength is asking for help.

When I don't see or recognize my strengths I feel as though I am sitting in an abyss of grief. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. There is no meaning to the madness.

Strength is what I have found sifting amongst the ashes. It looks like a glimmer of hope. It feels like maybe there is something more, like I have a purpose. I like to imagine that maybe I am an earth angel; maybe my purpose is to show that we are all angels in our own way. By believing in myself, forgiving myself, and embracing the new, I walk my purpose. I recognize my strengths and that is enough.



My Strength

Jen Waterton

Finding my strength seems to have been a very long and very painful process. It took 50 years to find it and I often ask myself where did it come from and how did I get strong?

Strength is something I never really considered. I always simply did what had to be done. Is that strength? Emotionally, I have always been a bit of a wreck, as if I didn't know what I was meant to do or be.

Getting over the trauma of Dad's death, Mother's remarriage, and Mother's subsequent slide into advanced Alzheimer's has been difficult but evidently not insurmountable. Why? I think at this moment that it stems from my close connection with Spirit.

When I was young I was very malleable, to the extent that I would do what I was told when I was told and certainly would never rock the boat. However, in my late teens I decided that adults were not always right, nor did they always

know what was best for me. I still didn't rock the boat much, but I became a little more independent (in my thinking if nothing else).

I spent six years in my first physically abusive marriage for the simple reason I wanted to be on my own, away from maternal pressures, and the marriage was the only way I saw to do this. When that dissolved, I turned to the bottle for strength, like that works, NOT. When I married the second time, I had my child and used all my internal strength for her, keeping the family together and trying not to let her see how much I hurt inside.

When that second fiasco ended, I floundered, taking care of necessities and little else. I felt like I had been set adrift with no hope on the horizon. However, I found friends, very good friends, who with their patience, understanding, and love have set me in the direction I needed to find my strength and realize I had always had it, I just didn't know where it was

hiding.

Only in the last year have I turned to Spirit for guidance and assistance in my daily living. This connection with Spirit has lifted me up to a place of joy and strength I never knew I could attain and am very grateful to the friends who have helped show me the way. I do feel strong now, knowing that doing what had to be done was strong and I am capable of anything, definitely not the same little girl who would hide in her room hoping (praying) no one would come to seek her out.



Why is the sky blue?

Stretching for a moment, the warm sunshine on my face
The feeling of spring upon us
I smile at the trees and birds
I feel alive
My son turns to me and asks
“Why is the Sky Blue?”
I take a deep breath
Turn to him and say
It is a reflection of our souls
Entwined within the universe
It is a reminder
That we are all one

Erica Keen



Strength?

Jennie Thirkill

Silence! I needed silence to process what was happening.

Emergency rooms are never quiet though. Children crying, old people moaning, someone telling jokes to ease his tension of waiting, some children playing while adults read the newspaper to pass the time.

Stop! Stop—please be quiet. I need to think, I cried inside my head. But of course life went on around me as I sat totally numb, dazed, terrified, praying hard—questioning my right to pray. And tears coursed down my face unabated.

It was early Boxing Day morning. The weather was still foul.

Christmas with Duane, my son, and his wife Ann, had been a feast to remember. The storm outside continued into the night; so we decided, my husband and I, to stay in Duncan overnight in the hope the weather would clear. There was room for us at my son's home.

Early in the morning I dressed leisurely; hearing the movement in the house, I knew I was not first to be up. A loud fearful scream ruptured the peace and quiet. Before I reached the door another scream rent the air.

“Mom! Mom! Duane has fallen off the roof. Mom!” The last call was heart rending and commanded attention immediately. I ran to Ann, finding her almost hysterical. Through the sliding patio doors I saw my son lying, face down, on the concrete patio. No movement in his prone body. I rushed outside calling to Ann to phone 911.

“Quickly Ann, phone for help!” Kneeling on the concrete I touched Duane. No response from his lifeless body. I heard and saw his agonized breathing, blood running from his face. “Thank God he is still alive,” I think I said aloud.

Ann had reached someone. “Is he still breathing, they want to know?”

“Yes” I answered.

“Leave him then until the ambulance arrives.”

“No, wait a moment.” I cried out. “He has stopped breathing. *He has stopped breathing.*” I cried loudly to Ann. This can’t be happening to him. I need to do something—quickly—I thought to myself in panic. Even though I may cause more damage to Duane’s injuries, I gave him CPR.

He coughed up blood and started to breathe. Ann appeared and said she was told we had to turn him over. By this time my husband was with us. Gently we turned Duane, carefully as we could, protecting his neck and head. It took three of us to accomplish this turn of a 250-pound man who was at least 6’ 5” tall. The noise of his breathing was horrifying, but he was still breathing.

The ambulance arrived after what seemed like forever. We followed behind it to Emergency in Duncan.

“Stabilizing his breathing, with a tube,” the doctor told us “is our first priority. Then we are sending him to Victoria General. They have the very best trauma unit. You may follow and meet Duane in Intensive Care.”

Ann’s sister drove Ann and me to the hospital. I wept hot tears of fear, pain and sorrow quietly. Ann sat behind me. I did not want her to see my tears or witness hers. We were both terrified for Duane’s life.

It took a long time for the ICU group to set up the machines my son needed to keep him alive. The doctor explained what

each machine was doing. There were ten different tubes, attached to machines or pipes monitoring the body on the bed. So battered and broken was the body I did not see how he could live through it.

“Will my son live, Doctor?” My voice was hoarse from crying. I still dared not look at Ann. He did not answer immediately. I could see he was conjuring up some hopeful words for us to cling to.

“I hope so,” he said and moved away.

I can’t explain the thoughts going through my head as I contemplated the possibility that my son may die within minutes. Where was I going to get strength from to cope with this terrible accident? And stay strong for Ann. I was not a strong person, or so I thought. Prayer came to me instantly. “Ask the Spirit for guidance,” was all I thought of.

Nancy, Ann’s sister, made reservations for Ann and me at a near-by hotel, agreed to dash up-Island for clothes and toiletries and notify the family.

Ann and I stood close together for comfort, listening to the hum, hiss and clicks of the machines. Duane did not move an eyelash. “We can talk to him, Ann.” I whispered. “People in coma still hear.”

We moved around the bed, we each took a hand, gently rubbing it and telling him we were there for him. Strength, how I prayed for strength to see Ann and Duane through this terrible ordeal. Strength for myself to cope with this tragedy and whatever the outcome would be.

The first night was a wakeful nightmare for both of us. Every time we closed our eyes we saw Duane on the concrete, smashed and bleeding. Eventually we managed a few hours sleep, but returned to hospital very early in the morning. The staff reminded us to care for ourselves. “You need to rest or do retail therapy to keep your spirits and bodies fit.”

We took them at their word and bought a new blouse or more slippers. Not that we needed them—it was something to distract our minds and pass an hour while nurses administered TLC and checked responses.

Ann’s family is very close and very supportive of each other. Every day someone came to visit us, bringing hampers of soft drinks, sandwiches, fruit, candy and love. It amazed me.

My son’s firm gave Ann and me a lovely hotel room, which they paid for and offered to pay for all long distance calls. People at all the branches of the company collected money to help Ann with out-of-town expenses. We were both close to tears with the generosity shown us. We knew it was going to be a long haul. Calls from as far away as Newfoundland came to Ann with love and support. The news traveled far and wide. We felt we had support from everywhere. What a comfort.

Days slipped into weeks. Ann and I kept our vigil, talking to my son as though he was able to hear us.

He moved his fingers. We wept with joy. When he moved his feet, we hugged each other and cried again. “Duane will not thank me for bringing him back if he is a vegetable, Ann,” I said quietly.

“I know, Mom. I’ve thought about that too,” she said, “but he moved.”

Progress was slow. First one machine was unhooked, a few days later another. Duane was confused when he started to regain consciousness. He tore at his tubes. Nothing we said helped keep him still as he struggled back to us. His determination to get out of the hospital bed was courageous.

Once it looked like Duane would make it, with very little damage to his body or mind, the doctors joked with us.

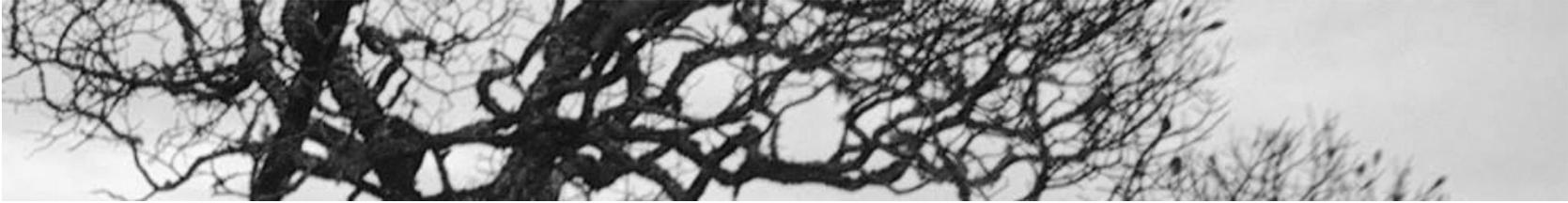
“It is not often a mother gets the opportunity to give her son life for a second time.” I smiled, feeling great relief in my heart and head, saying thank you to the Spirit. “You were both very strong through this ordeal,” he added, looking first at Ann then at me.

“I had to be,” Ann and I said together.

“I didn’t want Ann,” I said, pointing at her “to know how afraid I was that Duane might die.”

Apart from a little hearing loss and a tired walk at the end of a full day Duane has improved over the past year.

I can’t forget the moment Ann and I saw him walk down the corridor. We laughed in relief, in joy and in comfort of realizing we loved each other and we both loved Duane.



No Longer Fighting the Dragon

Maureen McManus

From the earliest of my times here on my Earth walk, have I been chasing after and running from the dragon(s), always alluring and terrifying simultaneously. Probing my mind and generating within me a constant search of who I might be and a gut wrenching fear of who or what I may truly find....

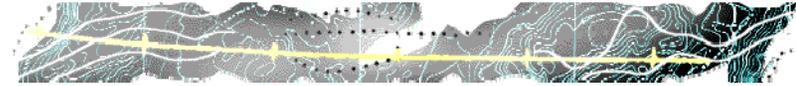
As my life began to unfold, dragons in disguise began to dance and lure me in with their gifts of promise and treasure, only, to gnash their teeth and crush me once I was captured. My beautiful, fresh, bright and shiny new life now smothered by a sickening sweet darkness that began filling me and clouding all my perception. The dragons with their serpent tongues and cruel gestures snatching and robbing me of my purity and innocence, thus leaving me with clouded vision and a twisted sense of self. Feeling numb and disconnected from anyone or anything for darkness had indeed taken over. Darkness is a ravenous force whose only quest is to squelch out all life force, or is it? I began searching out and groping in the darkness as though I were blind, feeling my way with my fingertips to sense my path. Behold! Sparks of Light! Within me, were sparks of Light, drawing to other sparks of Light in the dark, and a new sense of knowingness began to develop and grow inspiration within me, spurring me on towards hope. It was in these moments of Light that I would sense that

I was possibly created for more. I wondered if I could beat the dragons without and achieve something greater, a purpose, a life with meaning and fulfillment, that would make a difference in the world. As the moment of greatness passed, like thunder, the Fearful dragons would rear their ugly heads and spew their life sucking venom and I would cower and run for safety. Hating myself for even daring to think "I" could be anyone or thing other than that which lives in the dark.

It would seem as though I had ingenious skill for running and hiding and had invested some thirty years in the polishing and refinement of it. Ironically, for me, it would be in hiding that the slow and excruciatingly painful realization came that the actual darkness was indeed my catalyst for change. It became my deep yearning to end the incredibly self-debilitating patterns of personal exile. I had learned all I could...the bridge appeared and there were people on the other side who had crossed and who were waving at me encouraging me to step across to a new learning.... I crossed over to the other side of the Universe. Such an amazingly beautiful gift! I now have a choice.

I choose to learn about myself. To learn to accept the part I played within my history with a knowing that what is behind

me does not determine who or what I am. To choose with great determination to triumph over what appears to be obstacles, knowing I have been through the training required to achieve this. To choose to take back my power and that I can let the dragons rest...for I am no longer fighting the dragon....



Out of the mouths of babes

- ♥ clarity
- ♥ truth
- ♥ honesty
- ♥ encouragement
- ♥ loyalty
- ♥ undying faith
- ♥ proclamation of unconditional love

In all my life, without a doubt my kids have been my pillars of strength in which I draw the courage to overcome my own mountains. The priceless, countless gifts they so lavishly and freely offer to me, their mother; are symbols of their unconditional love. These are my joyous rewards, which I will carry with me for all eternity. I believe they deserve the very best in life and so many times I wonder why they chose me. They assure me I am continuing to make the right choices for all the right reasons. They have known **HELL** in their blessed lives and yet have amazing resilience and gratitude for this gift called life. They are excited to be alive and desire to experience all that their hearts dream of. It has been said that we could learn much from the children.... Thank you to my children for being my inspiration to live well and do **GREAT** things!

XOXO Mom
Maureen McManus



How I Found My Inner Strength

Mona

I never thought of myself as a strong person. I have always lived a very timid life, listening to and doing what others told me. I never really spoke up for myself as a young girl, not to my family, nor to others. Regardless of the reason why, that's just the way it had gone, when all along there must have been a sliver of strength that stewed within me. Yet I never acknowledged it.

Negativity was more of the focus. I never felt like I could be a person in charge of anything. Not a mother or a sister or even a friend. I've always just gone by what everyone else wants. It was always less complicated and less frictional that way.

I have three beautiful daughters but had very little say-so in the upbringing of my older two daughters. I don't know why, perhaps because I had them at a young age, but again, that's the way it went. With the miraculous blessing of youngest daughter, something started to change inside of me. Maybe I finally grew up? I don't know, but I do know it feels good to make a little solidier decision for myself and my girls.

Well, maybe just my youngest. My twins are now 22 and old enough to make their own decisions. However, I don't stand searching to point the blame of why my life has gone the way it has. It had to be me. I had to find my inner voice, my inner strength.

Now, I'm not entirely where I would like to be in my life, but a lot further in knowing a little more about the inner strength that dwells within me.



Strength

Tiffany

There is a place not too far from here—a horrible, deceiving, dark, and brutal place. A place where safety was not a word I was familiar with. A place where I lived in fear. Now, most people would ask, “Why would you live in such a place?” I lived there because it’s what I knew best, my comfort zone. The second I woke up I would be surrounded by horrible people who didn’t care about me and loved to manipulate at every chance they got. As I walked down the street, people would stare at me—waiting to attack. There was this dark cloud that followed me around everywhere I went, even indoors. A place where all of nature was lifeless and brittle. All the people were melancholy or miserable. They would all be out to get me, to talk about me behind my back. I had to watch my every move, every step, every breath. I never knew what awaited me around the corner, or on the other side of the street.

All the people seemed riddled with addictions or mental illnesses. Nobody ever said “Hi!” or asked how I was—they

didn’t care. The best I got was, “Hey you! Get out of my way you useless piece of crap!” I never had money, and nobody was willing to help out. I was young and didn’t know how bad this place really was. People would get beat up on the street and get discarded to the side of the road—to lie there in agonizing pain. Life never seemed like it was worth living, being around that place. I was on my own and that was it. I never had help from anyone, and if I did I was afraid to take it, in fear of what I would have to do in return. Sometimes, it seemed as though the best part of life was sleeping through most of it. Although sleeping was my favourite thing to do, I was still in fear while sleeping and would wake up every few minutes during the night to make sure that nothing was going to harm me. It was a slow, dreary, and painful lifestyle, but for me it was home.

I didn’t always live there, you know.... I live here today. A beautiful place with lots of trees and mountains and clean water and fresh air. It rains a lot, but isn’t half as dreary. The

streets are still riddled with people that have their own issues, but I just don't see them that often—it doesn't bother me anymore. People stop me along the street and ask how I am or what I've been up to. The best part—they actually care! I don't witness people getting beat on and I stick up for the people who get picked on. The biggest thing is that I don't live in fear of what will come next. I'm not worried about turning that corner to see what is in store for me. The people aren't suspect. They aren't always watching me and trying their best to bring me down. They aren't planning any attacks on me, and are more willing to just let me be.

People ask if they can help me and actually do, without expecting anything in return. I don't feel obligated to do anything, especially not feel bad for sticking up for myself and what I believe in. I can walk wherever I choose, talk to whoever I want, and enjoy every second of my life, without feeling guilty for it. It seems to be sunnier most of the time, and the breezes are calming and gentle. I can say “No,” or tell people what my true feelings are, and they don't judge. People actually care about me! I live in a place where people aren't out to get me and my surroundings are beautiful. An almost majestic place....

I learned quickly that the main reason for my major changes was strength. It took a lot of strength to take myself out of my comfort zone and step into a new world. It took strength to talk to people and accept that they genuinely cared. It took strength knowing that I was safe and I knew who I was. I now know that I am happy with who I am and where I am. I know what I want and know it's achievable; if I could move to this place—anything is achievable! I'm glad I made the transition and never plan on moving back. I'm tired of that life, tired of

everything being mediocre and barely survivable. I'm tired of the wasted time spent on feeling sorry for myself.

I am stronger now. Most of it has to do with my transition. But most of it was a mental transition. Nobody ever saw what I saw or understood what I was going through, but now they can see the change. They like the new me. It's unbelievable how different the two places I lived could be. Like night and day, ying and yang, black and white—oh! Sorry about that, I'm just so happy with where I am today.

Oh, before I go.... Just want to let you in on a little secret: the two very different places were actually the same place, just with a different mind.