

Self-Empowerment

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REBOOT 2013

What does it take to unplug from a life story, and reboot for a fresh new start? Usually it is some kind of drastic change – in a job, a relationship, or a life circumstance. Well, I certainly have had a major reboot this year!

When I retired from my fulltime job with City government at the end of 2012, I thought that I would be easing into a gentle expansion of my already established ministry. Instead, there was a series of major circumstances leading to a whole different focus.

Both of my parents passed away within five months of each other, *and* I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I embarked upon a journey of healing (including surgery, chemotherapy and radiation) which has truly unplugged me from my many commitments and activities. The journey is not purely medical, but is also one of psychological and spiritual depth. It is as if I signed up for an intense fulltime workshop to re-discover deeper levels of “Who Am I?”

Admittedly, I am not new to self-exploration. I am extremely grateful for all the emotional and spiritual work that I have done in the past. Crises are dealt with much more gracefully if you’ve already done some inner work, but there are so many more gifts and insights that I have received over the past few months, some of which I am happy to share here.

Spiritual Background

As a student of various spiritual teachings and an ordained interfaith minister, I believe that we are already perfect, whole and complete – but we do not fully experience our wholeness while we are identified with our human personality and body. The “journey home” is one of undoing the misperceptions of the ego, and allowing Truth to heal our mind of imperfection, lack and limitation.

My spiritual practice helps me to experience a healing of my mind, or a choosing again to remember Who I Am (or *Whose* I Am). While outwardly I appear

to be a cancer patient, my intermittently perceived reality is that I am a great spirit, supported by mighty companions. As I fulfill my temporary role as a cancer patient, only God knows what my next role might be.

I have already had many roles in my 60 years as Jill: daughter, sister, wife, mother, library assistant, administrator, preacher, counselor, workshop leader, etc. I look forward with enthusiastic anticipation to what Life might yet have in store for me.

Positive Attitude

Inquiring minds want to know—Am I a “Pollyanna”? Do I act happy when I am not? Do I sugar-coat everything?

While I may project a stiff-upper-lip at times, I am committed to being honest about my current feelings and needs – to myself and to the appropriate people in my life. When I feel sick or in great need, I may not broadcast it to the world, but I have the increasing ability to stop, reflect, listen, and respond with greater clarity and vulnerability than ever before.

Thanks to practicing the skills of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) I am getting better at recognizing and honoring the feelings and needs of myself, as well as others. I am getting better at putting self-care higher on my “to do” list than ever before, as physical limitations shout for my attention.

Yet, I seem to be hard-wired for optimism and a smiling countenance. My default setting is cheerfulness. I am not yet grateful for *all* things, but after a little reflection, I can always seem to find something to be grateful for, including being in recovery from cancer.

Inner Explorations

Receiving a cancer diagnosis was shocking, to say the least. Yet I quickly accepted the surgeon’s recommendations and felt ready to move forward with the medical course of surgery, chemo, and radiation.

The first psychological hurdle involved my husband’s expression of upset, anger, sadness, and fear. My immediate (thoughtless) reaction was to attempt to calm him down and convince him to feel peaceful and confident – *like me*.

Facing illness is a golden opportunity to consider thoughts and feelings that are easy to ignore when all is going well.

Ha! It was only a short time before I recognized that he was vocalizing feelings that I was denying in myself and projecting onto him, as in “He’s upset. I’m fine.” I apologized to him for invalidating his feelings, and reclaimed my own projection.

It was important for me to find and feel the “negative” feelings that I am so good at denying, the flip side of my ingrained optimism.

The book *Close to the Bone: Life Threatening Illness and the Search for Meaning* by Jean Shinoda Bolen was recommended to me, and was extremely helpful in this initial part of my journey. Dr. Bolen is a Jungian analyst and professor of psychiatry. She uses classical mythology to explore the rich personal and spiritual meaning that illness can bring to light.

I relished the time to explore my values and fears, reflecting on issues of surrender, patience, forgiveness, and gratitude. Facing illness is a golden opportunity to consider thoughts and feelings that are easy to ignore when all is going well.

Practical Meeting of Needs

The greatest gift of this illness that emerged for me was the shift from my usual activity of being helpful to others to being helped *by* others. The amount of support that I’ve been receiving in the form of food being cooked and delivered to me, rides to medical appointments, prayers, massages, and other gifts and services is not only a God-send, but serves as a transformative experience. Initial discomfort at being on the receiving end of such generosity soon morphed into immense joy and gratitude. It is lovely to receive so much.

It was in the midst of my own medical care that my 91-year-old newly widowed father began spiraling down in health. I was in some distress about the focus of my attention. Friends and family were outstanding in their helpfulness as I managed a balance between my dad’s needs and my own. In my hour of need, I have been blessed to receive love, support, and help from family members and friends. I am extremely grateful!

Another book that came my way at the right time was *Knocking On Heaven’s Door: The Path To A Better Way of Death* by Katy Butler. (See description following this article.) It was eye-opening and helpful to me when my father’s medical care was clearly becoming more traumatic than appropriate. With greater understanding of my dad’s needs, I was fortunate to secure a wonderful hospice team for his last days. They were a blessing to me as well as to him.

Bottom Line

I am temporarily assigned the role of cancer

patient. It takes up much of my time and mental focus, yet I manage to squeeze in some contribution to others in my life. It is an important part of my life that meets my need for meaning and purpose. Sharing some of my thoughts and experiences in this newsletter is one of the ways I contribute to others and is genuinely fulfilling for me.

I cannot prove the existence of God to anyone, yet my own experience of Divinity showing up in many forms might be inspiring to those who may not have had a clear metaphysical experience for themselves. For me, doubt and fear fall away with a growing spiritual connection. I hope to share more about this in a future issue.

My medical journey is an interesting phase of life that brings up issues of vulnerability, aging, and mortality. It also highlights my greater sense of trust in a bigger picture of my life as a thread in the tapestry of Life. May you be blessed by your role in this awesome thing called Life.

Thank you for sharing this journey with me. Blessings and Love!

Your fellow traveler,
Rev. Jill

Knocking On Heaven’s Door: The Path To A Better Way of Death by Katy Butler

Like so many of us, award-winning writer Katy Butler always assumed her aging parents would experience healthy, active retirements before dying peacefully at home. Then her father suffered a stroke that left him incapable of easily finishing a sentence or showering without assistance. Her mother was thrust into full-time caregiving, and Katy became one of the 24 million Americans who help care for aging parents. In an effort to correct a minor and non-life threatening heart arrhythmia, doctors outfitted her father with a pacemaker. The device kept his heart beating but did nothing to prevent his slide into dementia, incontinence, near-muteness, and misery. After several years, he asked his wife for help, telling her, “I am living too long.”

Mother and daughter faced a series of wrenching moral questions: When does death cease being a curse and become a blessing? Where is the line between saving life and prolonging a dying? When is the right time to say to a doctor, “Let my loved one go”?

When doctors refused to disable the pacemaker, sentencing her father to a protracted and agonizing death, Katy set out to understand why. Her quest had

barely begun when her mother faced her own illness, rebelled against her doctors, refused open-heart surgery, and instead met death head-on. *Knocking On Heaven's Door*, a revolutionary blend of memoir and investigative reporting, is the fruit of the Butler family's journey.

With a reporter's skill, a poet's eye, and a daughter's love, Butler explores what happens when our terror of death collides with the technological imperatives of modern medicine. Her provocative thesis is that advanced medicine, in its single-minded pursuit of maximum longevity, often creates more suffering than it prevents. Butler lays bare the tangled web of technology, medicine, and commerce that modern dying has become and chronicles the rise of Slow Medicine – a growing movement that promotes care over cure.

Knocking On Heaven's Door is a visionary map through the labyrinth of a broken and morally adrift medical system. It will inspire the necessary and difficult conversations we all need to have with loved ones as it illuminates a path to a better way of death.

Jacket description of *Knocking On Heaven's Door: The Path To A Better Way of Death* by Katy Butler
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10 Quotes To Help You Accept Endings & Embrace New Beginnings

by Amanda Christian

Do you ever feel like every area of your life is changing so fast and you're just standing in the middle of it all, confused and directionless? Yup, I've been there, but through applying the quotes and tips below, I've been able to feel less anxiety and more peace about the uncertainty that comes along with those inevitable life changes.

1. **"Rejection is protection and redirection."** - Earl Purdy

I find comfort knowing that there's always more than one way of looking at any situation. When we're rejected, we have a tendency to go straight for a fearful idea, such as, "I'm not good enough." But we can just as easily choose the opposite. We can choose to see the rejection as a positive thing.

2. **"Life is simple. Everything happens for you, not to you. Everything happens at exactly the right moment, neither too soon nor too late. You don't have to like it... it's just easier if you do."** – Byron Katie

This is a major perceptual shift from playing the victim card to owning your personal power. When we start to use our power instead of giving it away, we're capable of miracles. Miracles are shifts in perception from fear to love.

3. **"Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars. You have to let go at some point in order to move forward."** – C. S. Lewis

Whenever I know deep in my heart I need to do some forgiveness work, I start with willingness. Willingness to forgive someone or some situation is all it takes to create healing. Start with a simple mantra every morning and night such as, "I am willing to forgive." You can even take it back a step and start with, "I am willing to be willing to forgive."

4. **"It's not about 'what can I accomplish?' but a 'what do I want to accomplish?' paradigm shift."** – Brene Brown

When everything seemingly falls apart, it's more important than ever to get clear on the direction you want to go in as you move forward. Focus on how you want to feel in every area of life and then start doing activities that create those desired feelings. This is about you. What do you want to accomplish?

5. **"The object isn't to make art, it's to be in that wonderful state which makes art inevitable."** – Robert Henri

Any time I've moved homes, started new jobs, ended relationships, joined new activities, or traveled abroad, those feelings of anxiety and doubt seemed to crop up. There's nothing "spiritual" or "positive" about hiding your feelings. Instead, it's very important to feel your feelings in a constructive way. For me that's blogging, mountain biking and creating new yoga classes. The point is to feel your feelings and express yourself as you forgive, set new directions and move forward.

6. “When you dance, your purpose is not to get to a certain place on the floor. It’s to enjoy each step along the way.” - Wayne Dyer

Anytime I feel uncertain about life or want to try something new, my go-to reaction is to immediately try and control everything in an attempt to create some sense of order in my life. I want to see the whole path and know for certain that each decision is "right" before I take action. With this mentality, I spent years thinking about doing things, but never actually taking the necessary steps to create the life I dreamed of. Instead, just try taking one step and trust that when you need it, the next step will be revealed. In truth, there's no certainty.

7. “Expectation is the mother of all frustration.” – Antonio Banderas

When we have tons of expectations for what should happen in the future and how people should act, we set ourselves up for judgment and disappointment. Speaking of judgment...

8. “The highest spiritual practice is self-observation without judgment.” – Swami Kripalu

We tend to be our own worst critic. As you're making life changes, it's more important than ever to be gentle with yourself and not head into fear-land by thinking about all the things you should have and could have done by now. You're exactly where you need to be, remember?

9. “Nobody can give you wiser advice than yourself.” – Cicero

We often let our actions be directed by the opinions of others. We seek approval outside ourselves, and as a result, lose touch of our own likes, dislikes and desires. Each of us has our own internal guidance showing us the way through the confusion. Those buried passions and the strong desire to create something are coming from your Inner Guide.

10. “The more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we have to do it.” – Steven Pressfield

Risk it, because in my opinion, not doing it is often riskier. The “it” in this case might be quitting the job, speaking your mind, finally walking away from an

unhealthy relationship, starting a food blog, saying no, or going all in on your new business plan. You always have an inner guidance system that you can tap into at any moment through prayer, meditation and listening. With that guidance, there's nothing to fear.

One thing I know for sure is that we learn about ourselves through new experiences. So whatever the ending and new beginning is for you right now, allow yourself to be swept away by the sweet freedom that comes with it. Growth is around the corner.

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On the Building and Tearing Down of Walls, Part Two of Two

by Joseph Anthony



We talked last time on building and tearing down inner walls. We spoke of these walls as stemming from the wisdom and creativity of children. What happens though when we feel like we're too cramped or need to make some sort of change? Here is one way of transforming, coming out of, and inviting others into your inner paradise.

Gradually. Begin by clearing out the space of unwanted and unhealthy clutter: thoughts of self-hatred, shame, arrogance; and start bringing in thoughts you want to live with: joy, gratitude, generosity, love. Add a window or two. Open them. Let the fresh air and light in from mentors and friends. Build a door – a beautiful, hand carved, wood-hewn door – perhaps a non-traditional – round-Hobbit door; maybe a triangular door, or one shaped like a star. You pick. Whatever shape you pick, remember this: this door opens from the inside.

Begin adding art work—beautiful visions and pictures

of your dreams and aspirations; vision boards; scenes of nature, mornings, mountains, trees. Keep happy memories tucked away in special places. Add a few knick-knacks – curious, quirky things that will become your unique personality traits. Have a few, well-chosen books (everyone has at least one book in them). Bring in some candles or beautiful lamps, soft blankets, clean bed sheets, flowers, healthy food, clean water. You decide what these symbolize for you. I like to think of healthy food as positive affirmations, clean water as living and bathing in the truth, and so on.

When you're ready, open the windows and let the light in; or open the windows at night and let the fireflies in and the soft gaze of the moon. Either way, let the fresh air of new ideas in. Lean on the sill and breathe, gazing at the beauty—imagining the possibilities.

And when you're ready, open the door. Stand at the threshold for as long as you need to, and then step out. When you're ready invite safe, friendly people inside to talk with (living or dead), host dinner parties, sing-alongs, or reading groups. You get to decide who and when and how. You might even invite people in to make love with.

And yes, you might get hurt. You might open the door, come dancing out, and stub your toe on something someone left lying around outside—a worn-out limited belief or a rusty, old idea. Some one might say something mean, break a promise, and so on. It is difficult to shield ourselves from all pain.

When we get hurt however, we have a safe, healthy, clean, and holy place to go. We will have a well-stocked medicine cabinet filled with the healing balms of mantras, prayers, and songs; we will have ready the elixirs of positive affirmations and creative pursuits; we will have the healing cures of physical movement—tapping, walking, drumming. We will have the secret remedies of the prayers of other people—keep a stash of these treasured somewhere in your space and replenish them often. Keep a supply of the antidote for fear: *actions*. Feel the fear and keep moving. Feel all of your feelings, honor the pain and its messages of healing; honor your feelings by simply knowing them to be what they are—*feelings*—neither mysterious nor the end all and be all of who you are.

So build your walls, create fragrant, holy, beautiful spaces—temples of wisdom and love. Tend the gardens of your body, mind, heart, and soul. Know that you can use any of these as safe places. Each is inherently and irrevocably a paradise. Know too that you get to choose who comes in. You get to open the door. Lots of people might come knocking, but only you have the power of opening the door. And you can stay outside or inside for as long as you like.

Learn that whatever else this wild, complicated life is, it is play – serious sometimes perhaps, tragic, but it is play. It is a dance of wonder and of discovery. It is the play of becoming who you are.

One last thing: remember to honor your inner child for starting the process of building a wall in the first place—a process inspired by play. All wisdom is play, and all play is wisdom. Connect with that

child with gratitude, express that appreciation by affirming him or her; and you can express that appreciation for your inner child (or children) too by appreciating and honoring the children you see around you—your own children, your students, your nieces, nephews, grandchildren, or the children in your neighborhood or on the train. Take a cue from these children: learn to have fun inside and out, and come out and go in when you see fit. Learn that whatever else this wild, complicated life is, it is play—serious sometimes perhaps, tragic, but it is play. It is a dance of wonder and of discovery. It is the play of becoming who you are.

Joseph Anthony, author of "Following Your Heart's Desire" is a teacher, writer, musician, songwriter, storyteller, certified life-coach, certified self-esteem specialist for children, an educational consultant, an ordained minister, and offers healing work with Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). Visit Joseph's blog at <http://blog.thewonderchildblog.com/>



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Daily Word

I move through change with ease and grace.

Life is alive and in motion. Nothing is stationary. Life is like a river: It may appear glossy and still on the surface, while the undercurrents are in constant motion. Moving with the divine flow of life, I focus on being wholly aware in each experience.

Change sometimes happens gently, like a ripple. At other times, I am navigating my way over a waterfall! Yet when I live my life with God in charge, I am able to adjust to shifting waters with ease and grace.

Through the power of God within me, I have an infinite ability to adapt to the changes in my life. I go with the flow and easily allow God to express through me. I am able to thrive through every kind of change.

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