

JOURNEY  
to the  J  Y  
of TRUTH



JOURNEY

to the



J  Y

of TRUTH

*A Spiritual Guide to Become  
More of Who You Really Are*

DENISE JOY HART

## **JOURNEY TO THE JOY OF TRUTH**

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“It takes courage to grow up and become  
who you really are.”

*~ e.e. Cummings*

“The only belief which is of any value to anyone  
is a belief that has been put to a test and demonstrated  
to be a fact; it is then no longer a belief, but has become a  
living Faith or Truth.”

*~ The Master Key System*



# DEDICATION

I dedicate the truth I share on these pages to my mom, Donna Jeanne Hart, dad Monroe Hart and son Julian A. Kennedy. Mom I wish you were here but know that you are proud that I am living life on my own terms. I now know for certain that your last words to me “I’ve always been proud of you,” are undeniably true. I still whisper those words and hear the sound of your voice whenever I miss you. Dad, you were absolutely right: people can benefit from the lessons I’ve learned on my journey thus far, and Julian, you are God’s gift of “little love” who inspired me to commit to living a fully actualized life. I hope that I have made each one of you proud.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people to thank and so little space! Ten thousand thank you's to: my dad Monroe Hart, mom Donna Hart, forever step mother Sonja "Joyce" McElwee, sister Monica Hart, brothers Tony and Jelani Hart, son Julian Kennedy, niece Kirsten Treadwell, nephews Xavier and Tremaine Hart, friends: Lysa Ellington, D'Shaun Booker, Michelle Chin, Carl Horne, Yvette Murphy Aidara, and my ever faithful crew of "Omaha Girls."



# FOREWORD

From the time we are born until the time we die we are on a journey. This trip called “life” is taking place whether you go willingly or with much resistance. Thankfully we are given support along the way in the form of earth angels, spirit guides, faith leaders, teachers and lessons learned from previous mishaps or mistakes.

The ultimate goal of this adventure is to master temperance or some refer to it as self control. Every, single thing that happens in our lives is a lesson or a blessing. Each of us gets to choose how we filter our experiences. We would do well being intentional about “growing” from day to day not just “going” through the hours, minutes, seconds, moments of our lives.

Those who become masterful at truly living abundant, compassionate, authentic, visionary, legendary lives are not born that way. It is highly likely that they became “heart-centered” after much struggle or suffering in one form or another. The process of becoming this way occurs in stages. It requires a lot of self-reflection, self introspection and self awareness. People go from breakdown to breakthrough to breaking open to a new normal once they realize that ego is

skillful at distorting reality. Pain is a tremendous equalizer and signal that we must begin to make different choices if we want to feel differently about our lives.

I have had the amazing privilege to meet Denise Hart twice. The first time I met her was in a belly dance class during a weekend retreat for women. I remember her warm smile, open heart and compassionate nature. She left an impression on me that was much deeper than a surface cordiality. Her peace and joy resonated in the room as we danced.

A few years later our paths crossed again. Initially however, I did not make the connection that she was the same woman from the belly dance class a few years earlier. We were both attending a business conference this time in a different city (very different flow at this event) ~ but Denise's energy was the same. I felt like I knew her but I wasn't sure. We began to talk and the more we shared the more genuine the connection became. Before we departed and went our separate way we agreed to keep in touch. We did just that and our relationship has blossomed from a friendship to a sisterhood of mutual admiration and respect.

Denise's words and her infectious smile have a way of disarming whoever is listening to or reading her words. Her transparency is powerful, her creativity is magnificent (she's an Artist too) and her generosity makes others want to mobilize to make a difference for others as well.

In this book “**Journey to the Joy Of Truth**” Denise shares her raw truth. She allows others to observe her journey from pain to the freedom and joy of truth because that is just who Denise Hart has evolved into being. She is fiercely motivated in this book and in her daily practice to create a portal of healing so that people can stop being pretentious and lacking integrity. This book is a call to massive healing beginning with YOU right here, right now!

Masterful! Compelling! Heart-Warming! These are just some of the words that come to mind as I reflect on Denise Hart’s “**Journey to the Joy of Truth!**” As I read the book I began thinking of my own life, my experiences and how I can further maximize the 12 pathways Denise shares in my own manifestation of joy! An absolute must read for those in pursuit of intangible prosperity authentic living, and Soul Wealth!”

Dr. Vikki Johnson, Speaker, Author,  
Creator of Soul Wealth  
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# INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,  
truthfully, I'm stunned by how my life has turned out.

By society's standards, I have done pretty much everything late and many things sub-standard. I have failed far more than I have succeeded. But despite what "society" labels as sub-standard, God creates beauty from ashes. I count it all joy and I am thankful for everything.

I grew up on welfare, living in 13 different homes from the time I was born until I was 17. I graduated from high school with mediocre grades and no real idea of what I would do with my life. No plan and no vision whatsoever. Honestly, I thought I too would one day be on welfare. My father was pretty much non-existent in my life growing up and I craved male attention resulting in multiple poor relationships with men. My saving grace was at the age of 17 I got a job at the public library. I adored books. They were my salvation. As a child, I hid in books as often as I could. Every tale was an escape and I would pretend that I was no longer myself, abandoned by my father and peculiar to my mother, I would become the adventurous characters who had the most amazing courage and ability to overcome obstacles and who lived

in stable homes filled with people who openly cared about them. Working in the public library shelving books in the Biography and Sociology section was my solace. Books with black ink scuttling across white pages gave my life meaning and showed me possibility.

My first conscious step on my spiritual journey happened when I was eighteen. My boyfriend, a martial arts enthusiast, gave me a book about the eastern practice of Hatha yoga and meditation. Mesmerized by the teachings, I immediately started practicing meditation. This was beyond radical for me, a young woman raised in a Baptist thinking home, although we didn't regularly attend church, the teachings invited me to explore a different way of thinking about my existence on the planet.

My relationship didn't last, but my hunger for increased awareness was awakened and unquenchable. Too poor to purchase books, I'd visit the thrift store and buy every spiritual self-help book I could find. One of the books I picked up changed me forever. A slim book with a non-descript cover filled with short poem like chapters, "Notes to Myself" by Hugh Prather was like nothing I'd ever experienced before. The way he shared his personal growth around the most meaningful subjects like forgiveness, love, self-expression, integrity and fear stirred me up and although I didn't have a vision, I began to experience a yearning. A yearning to figure out what I was supposed to do with my life. But I was afraid.



I grew up in a home environment where survival was the primary focus. My mother was raising there kids all by herself and doing the best she could with what she had. Honestly, we never got along. She simply thought I was her strange child. Deeply empathic for as long as I can remember I was painfully aware that I didn't fit in with the world she'd created. Shortly after finding Notes to Myself, I went back to the thrift store and a book title leapt at me from the shelf, "Love is Letting Go of Fear" by Gerald Jampowsky and then, "Love" by Leo Busclagia. These were followed by so many others books that were even more "radical" to me and in conflict with the environment I grew up in. This young woman from the "Little Vietnam" projects in Omaha Nebraska was simultaneously inspired, confused, angered, and uplifted by what I was reading. Mostly I was afraid because I recognized that what I was reading was changing me and there wasn't anyone I could share my awakening with. The more awakened I became the lonelier I felt. I understood that my new thoughts were leading me to a life filled with possibilities that both excited and frightened me. With all of these new ideas fluttering around in my mind, out of fear, I choose to remain stuck. For the next six years I floundered around my home town working odd menial jobs while consuming as many spiritual and self-help books as I could.

Tired of doing nothing of any real value with my life, one day I was watching the television show "A Different World," and I mustered up the courage to acknowledge that I had a deep desire to go to college. To the surprise of everyone

around me I packed my bags and left home. Boarding a plane for the first time in my life, at the age of 24 I enrolled in Howard University. I was the oldest student in my freshman class. I couldn't really afford to attend so I would stop going, work and then return. I finally graduated at the age of 33. Yah me!

My graduation was a reflection of my willingness to lean into the 3 word mantra I create to help me make better choices... Listen, Obey, Prosper. This simple but powerful mantra means listen to the voice of God, obey the voice of God and prosper as abundantly as God says is possible.

Although my conscious spiritual journey began over 30 years ago, during a life defining moment, this book was born on a somber day in 2006.

## LISTEN...

"Of course I would!" I snapped. My brother in law's question smacked against my ears as I unsuccessfully tried to keep my emotions under control.

It was 2006, the eve of my mother's funeral. My brother-in-law asked me if I would take care of my father if he ever became incapacitated. I was incensed. How dare he even raise that question? It was in total conflict with who I knew myself to be.

"But why?" he shot back. "Even after all the years of neglect he showed you and your siblings, why would you take

care of him?” As our debate unfolded, my anger increased. Judgments clamored for a front-row seat in my mind—I told myself, “he’s just uncaring, insensitive and doesn’t understand how to forgive someone.” I was convinced these were my brother-in-law’s limitations and shook my head in smug resignation.

However, a few days later the truth hit me hard. The real reason I got so angry with my brother-in-law was because his question tore at the fabric of the self I held in my mind’s eye. After years of intense personal development and spiritual study, I saw myself as evolved and enlightened. But his inquiry challenged this view. If he could not see what I thought was immediately obvious, then my claim to spiritual renewal was flawed. The only reason my brother-in-law could ask me that question with such boldness was because he sensed a deeper truth; he was not fooled by my superficial posture of forgiveness.

Yes, I had professed to letting go of the past, but if I was honest with myself, I had not truly forgiven my father for his absence. If I had been truly living the spiritual principles I studied so intently, my brother-in-law would have felt my unconditional love for my father. I began to see that I had learned a great deal of theory, but hadn’t really been putting those beloved principles into practice. Every judgment I heaped on my father was actually a reflection of my own limitations. Feeling like a fraud, I broke down. Crying out to God, I asked what can I do? The answer was simple but

made my skin crawl: *Transformational Forgiveness... for real this time*. I had to decide if I was going to continue to hold my father hostage to the transgressions of the past or bless and release that past to make way for the possibility of a miraculous and marvelous future. I knew it wouldn't be easy but I was determined to give it a chance to become my reality.

## OBEY...

A spiritual teacher is someone who helps you to discover who you really are and every person we meet is in some way our spiritual teacher. However, there are also people that I call our “assignment.” This means we are spiritually obligated to be in community with them because we have something very specific to learn. Undoubtedly, my greatest spiritual teachers have been my parents. Deciding to practice transformational forgiveness with my father was a defining moment because I decided to live my life as a reflection of my spiritual principles. I decided to share my truth—a truth that continues to reward me far beyond anything I could have imagined.

In the pages that follow, I, along with a few of my friends, share stories about life-changing moments that have shaped our spiritual journey. Stories that helped me tune into my true nature, embrace and increase conscious awareness, and cultivate humility. This book is a spiritual guide to help you transform your thinking and become more of who you really are—to become completely responsible for your self-worth, self-acceptance, self-love, and joy.

This book shares twelve stories that resonate and reveal the 12 pathways to Joy: *Honesty, Love, Faith, Vulnerability, Courage, Collaboration, Integrity, Creativity, Compassion, Forgiveness, Gratitude and Surrender*, combined with reflection prompts that invite you to transform and embrace the next steps in your spiritual growth.

Each reflection prompt invites you to focus your intention on what you need to do to change your life right now. It's a tool to help you practice increased self-awareness so you can self-correct quicker, sooner, faster.

The stories also offer a glimpse into how my spiritual journey has unfolded. Sometimes when we hear the word spiritual we think of an old wise monk wearing a white robe with his legs crossed in perfect posture with a look of complete bliss on his face. Well, that's not quite how my journey has been. It's been messy, peaceful, sexy, urban, suburban, low income, middle income, single, divorced, painful, filled with joy; perfectly imperfect and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Although I'm at the center of many of the stories, this book isn't about me. It's really about allowing you to see yourself in me, through me and as me. In the circumstances, challenges and the transformation born from each experience. It's my gift to you, an opportunity to access and embrace the joyous benefits of spiritual transformation.

What I know for certain is that change can be easy but transformation is hard. Transformation is change that be-

comes so much a part of you it's like breathing. Change can be momentary, but transformation lasts a lifetime. My hope is that you will choose transformation over and over again.

## PROSPER...

Maya Angelou said that words are things, powerful energy that gets into the very walls and fabric that surround us, and I agree. The thoughts I think eventually give power to the words I speak and shape the manifestation of everything that happens in my life. I didn't always know this to be true and once I realized that it was, I doubted its relevance in my life. I guess I thought I could opt out. But none of us can and now I know none of us should want to.

In 2008, two years after my mother's death, I finally decided enough was enough. I was going to stop coasting through life. I was going to do something that would be an extension of my divine purpose and on my own terms. But what?

For someone like me, who didn't grow up observing entrepreneurship or understand how to create wealth, becoming who I am today was a struggle. I had to be vulnerable to new ways of thinking and taking action. I had to learn, study and take absolute responsibility for the creation of my life going forward. I decided to start speaking and teaching women how to #BeDefiant as they run successful businesses on their own terms. I started to set small goals and take meaningful

consistent action and overtime my life has become completely unrecognizable.

During my journey I read tons of books because that used to be the only “training” I could afford, a \$15 dollar book. Throughout the process I fell down and scraped my knees... a lot! I made mistake after mistake but I began to see them as lessons. I made a promise not to learn the same lesson twice. I’ve succeeded at that most of the time. I’ve felt unworthy, lacked confidence, compared myself to others, copied others, felt unoriginal and uninspired, but through it all I knew there was something God wanted from me and only me and I was determined to find out what that was.

My life has direction led by my mission to teach and be a bridge over which other people cross to their next level of greatness. Every single day I make a meaningful contribution to the world through my sense of self-worth. I now understand that we’re all born into circumstances but we get to determine what course our life will take. I’ve decided that I will create a life that emanates love, wealth, prosperity and joy. I’ve decided I will make a meaningful contribution to help humanity thrive.

This book is my offering to you, a space where evolving your self-growth with a tribe of other like-minded women is encouraged and celebrated. Wherever you are in your journey, be encouraged. It’s my prayer that this book will help you discover what you need next to move forward. Know

that you are not alone because here in my corner of the world I'm rooting for you. I know you have within you the power to transform yourself and become more of who you really are and through this loving act you help to transform the world.

Your sister in unapologetic dopeness  
~ Denise Joy

P.S. please let me know what resonates with you most in the book. You can reach me at [motivationmama@gmail.com](mailto:motivationmama@gmail.com)



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## Chapter 1

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# HONESTY

### *Honesty Heals from the Inside Out*



“The world without is a reflection of the world within.”

*~ The Master Key System*

A few years after my divorce, I found myself in a toxic, soulless relationship. I wanted something different, but still needed/wanted a relationship to be part of my identity. I was determined to let nothing get in my way. Therefore, I convinced myself that I could handle this dry Sahara partnership even though it was completely void of commitment and the well-spring of true love I desired.

During the on again/off again relationship, I grew increasingly depressed but didn't have the courage to end it. Over the years I tried to walk away, but always fell back on

the comfort of the shallow existence I had grown accustomed to. I was emotionally invested and somehow unable to use the spiritual knowledge I acquired to remove myself.

Three years later, I was spiritually depleted and felt that I had been eaten alive. Things had gotten so bad I remember feeling like a complete failure. I thought all the enrichment I'd been pouring into my life: the spiritual, personal development, and self-help books were all a waste. I was a person who had committed to studying and living a spiritual, holistic, and vegetarian lifestyle. I took pride in knowing a lot of theory, but theory alone can't stop us from falling into a hole that has already been dug.

This latest cycle in my history of dry relationships produced a bitter, withered fruit I despised and could no longer tolerate. I turned to my journals, the reflections of work I studied and internalized, and grew frustrated with my contradictions. I was sick—sick of the constant repetition that came with each toxic relationship, even though I knew better. Since my late teens I was reading books like *Love, and Living, Loving & Learning* by Leo F. Buscaglia, *Love is Letting Go of Fear* by Gerald G. Jampolsky and *Notes to Myself* by Hugh Prather which discuss building positive relationships in our lives. However, in this moment, I allowed resentment, anger, and disappointment to win. I lit my fireplace, sat in front of it, and page after page, burned my journals and books. Somehow I wanted to rid myself of the life I knew was possible, but didn't trust I was capable of living.

For me at that time, it was all or nothing: either you're real in all areas of your life or you're a fraud. There was no room for growth or expansion. And because a great portion of my energy was spent living a lie, that meant that my entire life was a lie. I thought I could burn my convictions away. I couldn't be someone people were looking up to, thinking I had it all together, when my love relationships were in shambles. And having a successful male/female relationship was a big area to me. Crying and distraught as the pages burned, I resisted the call of my soul to surrender.

But shortly after I burned all of my journals and many favorite spiritual books, the truth came knocking.

In 2005, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Immediately I knew I had been holding on to energy that had helped cancer to grow inside my body. Even though the books and journals were gone, I still had my memories. Theories and principles flooded my mind. My study of Louise Hay, who tirelessly spread the message that you can heal yourself through thoughts and foods, rushed to the forefront. Research had yet to support this notion, but Louise herself had experienced such healing and I truly believed that my thoughts and feelings, when divinely aligned, could affect and heal me. We're all conduits for a higher power and when we choose consistently to agree with that power, we can positively affect everything around us, including our health.

Unwilling to lose my life, I finally ended my toxic relationship and made a commitment to heal. I sat in a warm bath and sobbed. I remember having complete compassion for myself, and feeling open to the work I needed to do to uncover the source of my dis-ease. I decided to put the theories into action. I evaluated each sector of my life and surprisingly found that I was getting an A in most areas. However, I was failing horribly in male/female bonding. I peeled back the layers and mentally revisited my first male/female bond—my absent father. It wasn't that I was oblivious to the superficial energy that surrounded my romantic relationships; it was just that up until this tragic health crisis, I wasn't willing to truly face the impact it was having on my life.

The house I lived in at the time of my diagnosis felt like a house of magic. It provided a womb-like environment. I cocooned myself from the rest of the world and went into deep self-reflection and introspection. It was during this time I opened up to the potential that I needed to forgive my father. But before I could forgive him, I had to forgive myself. I knew that as I healed, my body would also heal.

As a daily practice I would have healing sessions—a combination of crying and shouting praises—where I'd admit to letting myself down. As I admitted my self-inflicted pain, I would hear God say, "yet I love you still." When God joined the conversation, my thoughts always shifted from disappointment to love. In my darkest moments and in the midst of my most vulnerable thoughts, I felt God's comfort. I start-

ed reading and journaling again. I wrote down the thoughts God would say about me. From our conversations, I formulated the notion that I would agree with whatever God said about me. Yes, at times I would question how this could be true, because I was still battling against the stronghold of my fraudulent past. Yet, I pushed forward.

While I continued to consistently agree with and live the truth that God spoke about me, I saw the error in my thinking. I was looking at perfection from the world's view: all or nothing. The truth was that I lacked the understanding that I am a perfectly imperfect human being. I am a spiritual being having a human experience and that's a complex existence. It's never all or nothing. I gave myself permission to simply be human, complex, perfectly imperfect, and loved just as I am. The circumstances of my life were simply that—circumstances.

This thinking took me to another level. I was finally able to be honest about my behavior and humbled myself, refusing to remain in the self-righteous position I had been in. Love isn't about just the good. It's inclusive. Our call is to accept the good and the bad while still loving one another. But first we must start with unconditionally loving our self.

## TRUTH WALK ....

a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

In your journal write down the title of this chapter and answer these questions:

1. What resonated with you from this chapter?
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4. Do it.



## Chapter 2

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# LOVE

*Love Ain't Never Hurt Nobody*



Lysa A. Turner

“Love liberates.”

*~ Maya Angelou*

Denise stands for truth. Whenever you stand for truth, you will encounter peace as well as opposition. It's how you handle the opposition that sets you apart. Denise, my lifelong friend, has always handled it with love.

We had just walked in the party and as usual Denise made her way around the perimeter of the room. She gave hugs, shared laughs, and greeted everyone in her path with a smile. She had a simple way of making everyone feel welcomed and appreciated. I secretly admired her for that.

In our early 20's, going out dancing was the thing to do. We always had fun and this night was no exception. She was a better dancer than me but I could hold my own. In the middle of one of our favorite songs, Denise noticed someone she knew. It was a girl I didn't know and truthfully someone I wish we had not run into. This girl did not like Denise for whatever reason and it showed on her face. Not phased by her disapproval, Denise walked up to her and asked if she was okay. The girl was staggering all over the place and it was completely obvious to everyone she was sloppy drunk. "Can I give you a ride home?" Denise asked. With a snarl on her face, she quickly replied "no." "Are you sure I can't drop you off somewhere?" Denise asked again. "I said no! Where's your brother? I don't even like you!" the girl shouted back. With a pleasant smile Denise shrugged and walked off and we continued to enjoy our evening.

As the party ended, we decided to go grab a bite to eat. It was a popular after-hour eatery where we often would chill after a night of dancing. The place was packed. Our laughter and good time was underway when the girl from the party showed up at our table. She was dressed in jogging pants and tennis shoes—a complete transformation from the dress and heels she stumbled around in during the party.

Looking up from her meal, Denise said hi. "Where's your brother?" the girl demanded. Chuckling a bit, Denise told her he was probably at home but she really wasn't sure. "What you laughing at? Laugh again and I'm going to slap you." In

that moment it became glaringly apparent to everyone that this girl was trying to pick a fight. With another slight chuckle, Denise started to respond and BAM, the girl slapped her. The buzz in the room grew silent. Everyone was shocked, but none more than me. Immediately I looked at Denise expecting to see humiliation, rage, or at least a face full of tears. Instead, I saw an expression of stillness. Denise didn't speak. She just sat quietly and took a deep breath. Without the response she wanted, the girl walked away and I began venting my disbelief and fury. Denise stayed silent, still processing the moment. Kathy, another friend at our table got up to go to the bathroom. I stayed waiting for Denise to give the green light for us to seek the revenge I felt she deserved. Truthfully, I wanted to kick some butt. I mean seriously, who does this lunatic think she is? Just as I was about to go into another rant, Denise finally spoke up.

“Where’s Kathy? She’s been gone for awhile and I am worried about her.” I was thinking “who cares,” but I could see she was genuinely concerned. Pushing aside my thoughts, I followed Denise towards the bathroom to check on Kathy. Instead of being in the bathroom, we found her outside in a heated exchange with the drunk idiot who had just assaulted my friend. Denise, with boldness and resolve, walked up to the two of them, pulled Kathy away and said “It’s not worth it, let’s go.” I was shocked. This was our chance to settle the score. The surprise of the situation was over and I could see clearly that we had the advantage. I wasn’t the one assaulted, but I seemed more affected than the one who was. In fact,

Denise was too calm—almost as if she was prepared and fully expected what had happened. Did she have some kind of insider information, something she wasn't sharing with us? Why the heck was she so calm?

Later we talked about the incident and Denise was completely transparent about how she felt. She said she was hurt about what happened, but was more concerned about the pain the girl was in. In her eyes, the girl seemed miserable, full of anger, and lacked self control. What a sad place to reside. "What?! I don't care about her sad place. I only care about you," I thought throughout our conversation. Denise continued assuring me that nothing warrants such a self-destructive physical display of action unless something is terribly wrong inside. Again, I didn't care about the girl's insides. I only cared about my friend. I was floored by her disposition and still pissed off. My friend never hurt anyone and didn't deserve this treatment. However, in Denise's eyes this incident had nothing to do with her and everything to do with the torment going on inside this girl. She agreed she didn't deserve it, but she cared more about the girl than getting her rightful revenge.

It was another example of the way Denise lived her life. She understood things like this would occur. Not necessarily physical attacks, but some form of pain and opposition. She lived a life of unconditional love. Not just love that feels all tingly inside, but incredible love. A love that is difficult and unpopular to display. A love that is kind. A love that is not

self-seeking. A love that is not determined by the reactions or actions of others. Her life leaked love and while she's had her share of disappointment, pain, and defeat, she was open to it all. Why? Because she realized that closing off any parts of herself in order to diminish the likelihood of pain, was also cutting off her ability to experience joy. And joy is the rhythm of her heartbeat.

It's the beat that kept her positive when we took the weekend right before her breast cancer surgery, to celebrate her life and our friendship.

It's the beat that she had when she banged on my door and shouted "Merry Christmas!" after arriving in town to surprise me one holiday season.

It's the beat that wiped my tears as she held my hand through my divorce.

It's the beat that brought a smile to my children's face when she would walk in the room.

As I recall our 30 years of friendship, I am overwhelmed by God's goodness and the undeserving lavish gift he gave me when He allowed Denise to enter my life. I love so many things about her, but what I love most is her ability to always meet me where I am. In my anger, she's there. In my sadness, she's there. In my self-sabotage, she's there. She grounds me and inclines me to move forward in my thinking. She is my biggest encouragement and because of how she sees

me when my vision is blurry, I still accomplish more. I am more confident, vulnerable, and courageous because she is my friend.

When she told me she had an aggressive form of breast cancer, I was momentarily afraid I was going to lose her. I had a conversation with God doing my best to convince Him she needed to stay here. I wanted to remind Him how much she meant to me and that I wouldn't be the same without her. He told me that He felt the same about her. She is precious to Him, as we all are.

I'm grateful that Denise is still here to continue God's work, not just for me but for all of you reading this. Her life, and all she's journeyed through, is to serve and help others. She is one of the chosen few who has answered the call and the purpose of her life. She is here not to be right, but to be righteous. At the time, I felt that she would have been right—along with me and Kathy—to seek revenge on the girl from the eatery that night. But what would that have solved? Instead, she chose the road less traveled and stood for truth, righteousness, and ultimately love. A love that transcends fear, disappointment, and pain; but in its totality, a love that leads you to the joy of truth.

## TRUTH WALK ....

a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

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## Chapter 3

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# FAITH

*A Gift Worth Unwrapping*



D'Shaun Booker

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,  
the evidence of things not seen.”

*~ Hebrews 11:1*

As a young girl, I absolutely loved God. I went to church every Sunday with my grandmother and it was there that my affection for God was ignited and grew. Sitting in the pew one Sunday,

I asked my grandmother what all the white crosses on the wall stood for. She told me they represented missionaries and on each one was printed their name and the part of the world they were located in. She went on to explain that missionaries went to other parts of the world to share God's

love. Her words resonated in my heart and I declared that I would be a missionary, because I wanted to share God's love with others too. Little did I know the path I'd take to discover the true missionary in me and the assignment I was created to live out.

As a teen, I joined a mega-church whose ministry foundation was based in faith. I was taught to exercise my faith and the importance of stretching beyond the things I thought were physically possible. Faith was about believing for the impossible, going beyond your ability to make something happen. My most memorable moment of exercising faith occurred the summer between my senior year in high school and my freshman year at Howard University. It was moving day and my family and I boarded the airplane to head to Howard. The only problem was I didn't have housing. In short, if you don't have campus housing early, you aren't getting it. I put my pastor's teaching in action and decided to pray, telling God the specific desire of my heart and then believing the seemingly impossible would happen. I prayed for not only housing, but for a room all by myself. I figured since I was asking for the impossible, I might as well go big. When I arrived on campus, I was stunned to discover that my prayers had been answered. I got the single room I desired and so began my active relationship with faith.

When college ended, I took huge leaps of faith as I pursued my career path and each time I landed on my feet. Still working my full-time job, I stretched myself and pursued my

dreams of writing and producing plays. I faced many significant challenges. But every time, without fail, my faith was rewarded with the solution I needed to move forward. All I had to do was ask, obey, bring my talents to the table, and God would do the rest.

Then abruptly, the faith honeymoon ended and the breakdown occurred. Shortly after keynote speaking at a major corporation, I got the nudge to leave my full-time job. Telling myself it was bad financial timing, I stayed put. Three promotions later, there was a huge weight on my heart to quit. Falling into a depression, I was completely miserable at work. I desperately wanted to leave but couldn't see how that fit into the path I was on. My full-time job financed everything in my life and supported the development of my theater company. My new endeavors had yet to result in much money and leaving now seemed crazy. So I ignored the obvious in my spirit and remained stuck with my plan. Another year passed and I was so miserable that I stopped creating and simply existed. Each morning I rolled out of bed with despair. I got so pitiful that I wore the same pair of black pants to work every day. Everything had come to a halt. But why? I was still believing and having faith that what I asked for would happen, but I was in such a dry place that I doubted everything I once believed. The once bright light from my soul had been turned off and I was surrounded by doubt and disbelief. Maybe my dreams were just foolish.

I woke up one morning and even though I had no idea how I would survive, I was determined to turn in my resignation at my full-time job. I walked into my boss's office and before I could speak, she said let's go to lunch. Curious, I agreed and rode to the café with her. When we arrived, another one of my supervisors was there and smiling from ear to ear. We sat down to order and with a burst of excitement, they offered me yet another promotion. Fighting back the tears, I pretended to be elated and accepted the new position and salary. When we got back to the office, I sat in my car sobbing hysterically. Nothing I really wanted was happening for me. I was overwhelmed and left work for the remainder of the day. At home I fell on my face. I screamed, pouted, and cried out to God asking why and begging for his help. I pleaded my case reminding him of all the times I'd asked, believed, and then got an answer beyond my expectations. Had he abandoned me? Was I doing something wrong? I had come to the end of myself and unknowingly the beginning—the awakening—of who I really was.

I picked myself up off the floor and reached out to Denise, one of my dearest friends. I shared everything that was going on with her and how I was feeling. Listening with care she said, "Shaunie girl, you are not your successes or your failures. You are a powerful amazing being who has come to a moment of breakthrough. This dry season in your life is not to harm you. It's to awaken you to something you need to learn. Keep seeking and listening. Your answer is waiting for you. Just surrender and obey." I agreed with her but had no

real understanding of what she was actually telling me do. I was not grateful for this dry season and learning from it was not on the top of my priority list. I wanted relief from the problem, not realization.

Wrapping up our conversation, Denise said, “I forgot to tell you, I’m joining Lisa Nichols’s Global Leadership program.” Lisa and I had been friends back in the day but since the success of the movie, *The Secret*, she was now a well-known author and international speaker. She had created a world-class training program that brought together emerging business owners to train them to be Global Leaders in the marketplace. It’s an impactful and phenomenal program, but it cost over \$30,000. At that season of my life that seemed more like a million dollar price tag. I was angry. I snapped. “Are you crazy? You’re going to pay how much? There’s no reason to pay that much!” And just like she would sound if she were telling me she was running to the store to grab a bag of chips, Denise calmly said, “Shaunie girl I’m doing this. It’s not about the money. It’s about the greater outcome. This is what I’ve been directed to do.” I grew silent and then told Denise I’d call her back.

How could she be so calm and matter of fact about such an enormous price tag? Even if she had that much in savings to pay—which I knew she didn’t—why would she pay it? I sat with my thoughts and then, as if the light switch turned back on, the answers started to flood my mind.

This is simply who she is. I wanted my opinion and my circumstances to sway her choices, but that was not who my friend was. She lived a life of faith. She was always preaching, “listen, obey, and prosper.” Then I realized it was more than words; it was the lifestyle she exhibited for all of us to see. I thought about all the huge leaps of faith she had taken over the twenty plus years of our friendship. Going to grad school in another state even though she had a young child and a husband at home. Attending grad school meant living in one state during the week and living in another with her family on the weekends. She got divorced against the urging of the staunch Christian community she was surrounded by.

Selling her home, one she renovated and decorated, in order to get out of debt after her divorce was another example of her bold faith. It meant she and her son would be uncomfortable and she was completely turning her back on the American dream of the white picket fence, 2.5 kids, husband, and dog. She'd already done enough by getting a divorce, but selling her home seemed like insanity. She also forgave an absent father when her siblings and friends thought she was wrong and even subtly challenged her for her choice. She did it anyway, always claiming it was for the greater good. She listened and obeyed the spirit within her even when it appeared to be the wrong decision and the odds were against her. She never failed to make the choice to obey because she had established that to obey, even in the face of opposition, was the greatest act of prosperity possible. By obeying what was within, she grew in faith and in identity. Her confidence

in following the path laid out for her, and ultimately fulfilling the highest expression of herself, was a direct result of the faith she lives by. Denise's prosperity in life—mentally, spiritually, and financially—are all a result of her faith. Faith has taught her to celebrate and believe in the being, the gifts, and the calling on her life. Not limiting herself to the plan she's created, but staying open to the pathway and the plans already coded in her being as they reveal themselves.

Reflecting on my life and taking in the lessons modeled by my friend, the light switch was turned back on. I wasn't able to benefit from the prosperity that faith brings because I was operating in fear. I was ignoring the nudges, the call to be obedient to the power within. What I realized by dissecting the example God was providing for me was that I was trying to force prosperity through my talents and not operating in my gifts, the place of anointing. My talent was keeping me small and boxed into specific opportunities and when those opportunities dried up, I was left empty. My heart was also telling me to leave my job, but out of fear I stayed in a place of disobedience to my greater being. That place of disobedience created a buzz that kept me from hearing the next direction on my path to prosperity. My greater being wanted desperately to be unleashed from the chains of my talents and accept the obedience to the call on my life, but it would require a new level of faith, greater than anything I had experienced. It was time to leave my job.

Even though I felt foolish leaving my full-time job, my greatest source of income at the time, I devised an exit plan anyway. But I was too late. My boss called me into her office and with great regret fired me because of an ongoing office relationship I'd been having with one of the employees I was supervising. She was sad, but I was relieved.

I called my mom and told her the good news. She was understandably not on board with my joy. Just as I was explaining my story, my next steps were revealed to me. Although I had always been operating a non-profit, my full-time job I had prevented me from promoting or working on it as intentionally as I could now. Out of that non-profit was birthed my coaching business, a new production company, several sold-out theatrical productions, a life skills training program, and other creative endeavors that have brought me prosperity in my mental, financial, and most importantly spiritual being.

I no longer look for my talents to prosper me. Instead, I listen to the spirit within me—my gift—and obey what it is telling me to create. I am free from titles. I only do what I am being guided to do even when it goes against what seems right to the natural eye. I stay in alignment with my purpose and the original calling I confessed years ago sitting next to my grandmother. I am a missionary—inspiring, touching, and helping others transform through transformational speaking, live performances, and creative engagements all designed to share the love of God. The faith to walk in obedi-



ence to the call of our spirit is the key to unlock every bit of greatness we have inside.

## TRUTH WALK ....

a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

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## Chapter 4

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# VULNERABILITY

*Your Greatest Source of Power*



“All things are lessons that God would have us learn.”

*~ Iyanla Vanzant*

At a young age, I knew I had been called to serve a higher purpose. I was clear that my life was going to be about healing people, but that was the extent of my knowing.

I had always been open to the simplicity and vulnerability of unconditional love. But I was seen as naïve by my mother, who I later discovered, faced her own fears and disappointments around love and the acceptance of her uniquely creative spirit. As a child, I recall always standing out but wanting desperately to just blend in. It wasn't that I didn't want to be unique; I just didn't want the attention and con-

tinual spotlight being placed on me. Standing out as a child, especially in my mid-western surroundings, came with a price that put me in a position of frequently being alone.

Although I was athletically talented while growing up, my first and most intense passion was for creating. By age five, I was writing stories, reading anything I could, and making up songs. As I got older, I sketched everything I saw. While other kids were watching television, I was creating characters and directing stage plays in my mind. I learned early the magnitude of my gift. Creativity gave me permission to love myself and experience the joy of just being me. But being different from those around me left me feeling isolated and exposed. Yet looking back, I experienced some of my greatest growth in those quiet, alone times. I had a favorite outdoor place where I would go to talk with God. This special grove of oak trees in the park became my sanctuary. In special place, I felt ultimate the acceptance, encouragement, and peace to continue on my own path—not the path that others would choose for me.

At age 14, my mother sat me down and said, “Girl, you are just too different. I hope you know God because you’re sure going to need Him.” I felt confused, hurt, and sorry for my mom as I thought to myself, “No mom, *you* need to know God.” Although we rarely went to church, I had come to know God and my own spirit through my nature walks and reading. I knew there was a bigger force at work in the world and it comforted me.

My differences were scary for my mom. She saw my willingness to be vulnerable and wholeheartedly love others and myself as a set-up for heartache. Although she couldn't articulate it, my openness to fully accept and express love scared her because she couldn't contain it. In her world this meant that she couldn't protect me. I viewed her concern as disappointment and disapproval, as well as a lack of love for me. The thing she was trying to save me from—a harsh unloving world—became what she was creating in my life. After that conversation, I encountered problems I hadn't experienced before. Her words influenced me and I subconsciously began to believe in my heart that my differences made me unworthy of real intimacy and love. After all, if my own mother couldn't understand, accept, and love me, then who would?

It was a gradual change, but I went from a young girl who sincerely celebrated vulnerability and her differences to a woman so desperate for acceptance and love that I was willing to abandon myself to get it. Abandoning myself meant suppressing my gifts, my calling, and for a short time in my life, I did exactly that.

As I walked down the aisle to marry my son's father, I knew I shouldn't go through with it. But by this point in my life, I just wanted to blend in. I had joined a community of obedient Christians whose relationship with God was rigidly all about the rules. As a young carefree girl, I knew better because I spent time talking with God and His love always transcended my imperfections. In fact, I never saw them as

imperfections when I was in communion with God. But as I invited life to box me in, and others opinions to overshadow mine, I was convinced that following the rules was what life was all about.

Allowing religious doctrine to be the primary guiding force in my decision-making led me to believe that marrying my son's father was the good Christian thing to do because my son was already a year old. It would create a right-standing penance to God. I could be accepted with my flaws and I could cover my "failure" of having my son out of wedlock. Saying "I do" was the result of my desire to blend and much pain came with blending in. As I yearned for approval, I pushed the my heart's calling further and further away. When full acceptance didn't come with the wedding and the ring, I felt more pain and rejection.

One day, sitting in that same Christian community, I was in bible study barely listening when a woman's voice caught my attention. It wasn't the sound of her voice, but what she was saying that drew me in. The pastor was teaching from a passage of scripture about different gifts. Although I don't remember the exact message, I will never forget one young lady's question. She was finally putting words to what I had been feeling and how I had been behaving for years:

"What if you don't want the gifts you've been given?" she asked.

I wanted to raise my hand in agreement with the emotions curled underneath her question, but all I could do was listen. I hoped the pastor had the perfect answer to quiet my deepest concern. But out poured another dose of rules. Despite my disappointment with his answer, I did receive the revelation I needed. Her question provoked me to embrace an awakening I no longer wanted to deny—a willingness to pursue the road less traveled, a recommitment to my path, and the fulfillment of my calling.

Unable to share my feelings with my husband, I sat quietly with the possibility of fully walking away from my gifts and my calling. I felt a quiver in my stomach, like butterflies playing inside. It was a feeling of peace combined with action birthed from the power of being vulnerable and open to a truth you can no longer deny. From that quiet place I summoned the courage to admit that I'd taken a wrong turn. I needed to do the right and appropriate thing—end my marriage and get back on my path. This was not an easy decision. I considered the push-back that would come from other people's opinions and the stress the decision would create in my life and the lives of those I deeply cared for—mostly my son. However, I realized that focusing on these things would keep me stuck and staying stuck wasn't going to serve me or anyone else.

What I came to understand is that being sidetracked from the path you instinctively know is yours doesn't diminish your calling. It's always there fully formed and patiently

waiting. It will never cease to tug at your heart, nudging you to rise up, stand, and start again.

## TRUTH WALK ....

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## Chapter 5

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# COURAGE

*Brave Enough to Love Myself First*



Ayisha Hayes-Taylor

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

~ *Philippians 4:13*

That morning, I was less than 24 hours from signing a ghost-writing contract that I knew wouldn't pay me my worth. I'd gone back and forth, lowering my prices, until I literally had no financial breathing room. I'd be contracting my talents and gifts for lower than minimum wage. Once again, I'd be selling myself short. My motivation was validation, disguised as an opportunity to get my services out in the marketplace. I desperately wanted to sign my first official contract since launching my full-time business as a ghostwriter and transformational book coach. I knew in my heart that everything about the job was wrong for me, but my hunger for affirma-

tion was causing this Salisbury steak opportunity to resemble the rib eye I truly desired. Aware of my weakness of saying yes when it should be no, I said a short prayer asking God to block this opportunity if it wasn't what He wanted for me. I wanted Him to save me from once again devaluing myself to make someone else happy. For me, seeking validation and people-pleasing, was one of my most crippling weaknesses.

Later that day, I received an email from Denise requesting my services. She outlined the details of her book and was confident I was the only person she wanted to work with. I replied and set up a conference call later that evening. With every word she spoke, I knew hers was the project for me and that I should turn down the other one. Everything she said was in alignment with what my spirit had been calling forth in me. Her authenticity spoke directly to me and exposed the counterfeit motivation in the other project and in my own thoughts. My prayer had been answered. She said she was hopeful that I was ready and prepared to get started right away. I was prepared and somewhat ready, yet, I was still afraid. It was time to put the bat in my hand, get in my stance and swing. I'd been cheering for others my whole life and now the coach was putting me in the game. In retrospect, I've always been in the game just constantly choosing to hand the bat to the person behind me—always too afraid to take my turn at the mound.

During our first coaching call, I realized this book had little to do with the above prayer and everything to do with a

prayer I prayed about a year earlier. That Sunday the sermon was about discipleship and service to others. It was a sermon that resonated with me. During alter-call, there was one particular statement that kept replaying itself in my heart. *May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi* provoked me to get on my knees and pray. I interpreted this statement to have two relevant meanings. The first, that disciples were chosen by a rabbi who determined they had the capacity to learn from the Rabbi; and second, that during this discipleship, they would stay so close to the Rabbi that the dust from his sandals would cause them to be covered in dirt. My prayer was that God would bring me a Rabbi or mentor that would choose to guide me on my entrepreneurial journey—give me a blueprint of their success. I’ve learned many things from my immediate family, but just like graduating college, I would be the first in my family to leave a successful job to start a full-time writing and coaching business. It had taken me over three years to muster the courage to leave my job and now eight months later, I was starving for a mentor and blueprint to make this transition as safe as possible.

My notion of safe was completely turned on its head as Denise went chapter by chapter over her story—her journey to the joy of truth. There was to be no safe passage during this process, because with Denise, vulnerability was the required bridge to the happiness I was longing for. I wanted to have joy but I thought a controlled plan was the best method to get there. I wasn’t really interested in stepping outside of my comfort zone. But, everything about her journey went

against that belief. Trust was the sun that lit her pathway and because I had a serious issue with trust I was grieved to continue working with her. In fact, I felt I had no choice but to quit.

When we turned off the recording and I was alone, the tears boiled over. Through sharing her life story and spiritual journey with me Denise had shined a light on my 30 years of lackluster living. My world was a “controlled” existence but in reality it was no life at all. Just like her, I had experienced a lot of pain and isolation, however she never shied away from it. She often said, vulnerability was her greatest source of power. But before vulnerability, she embraced courage. For me, I’d been hiding myself behind so many walls that control was the only way I could breathe. Hiding from disappointment, pain, and loneliness; boldly cutting myself off from pain. What I didn’t realize is that I was also cutting myself off from joy.

I had a lot of sadness in my life and I blamed God for all of it. But she had not done the same. In fact she took a season of her life inspecting where she needed to change and thanked God for everything she had been through. My tears went on for over an hour but in the end I decided I wanted to be all in. I wanted her kind of joy and truth more than my sadness and walls. I said yes to learning to love myself by being vulnerable and courageous enough to trust the journey of my path. There may be perceived good and bad but it’s all there to strengthen me and cause me to shine brightly. With

God in control and my daily commitment to do the work of staying true to who I really am, I can have the authentic life I so desperately want.

I shared my revelation with Denise during our next call. I could hear the smile in her voice as she celebrated my breakthrough with me. I knew from her excitement that while she understood the fears and reluctance I had been feeling, she was certain, determined, and vigilant about rallying me to continue. She encouraged me to make a sold-out commitment and take the courageous journey. Her words convicted me as she reminded me that it was the best thing she'd ever done. After I hung up I smiled. I knew in that moment that I was helping put together the blueprint I yearned for so deeply three years ago. A blueprint that would help me identify and own the ingredients inside of me and strategically—step by step—mix them together into the unique gift I was born to share.

A blueprint that's been designed to help us create our own journey to the joy of truth. What truth you ask? The truth of who you're really created to be. Muhammad Ali says, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee." But how can you float like a butterfly if you've never taken the time to cocoon? And how can you sting like a bee if you haven't mustered the courage it takes to unleash "who you BE?" I was finally ready to unleash who I really be.

Denise's favorite piece of jewelry is a silver tree necklace and rarely is she seen without it. It's a representation of a place she visited as a young girl to stay rooted and connected to love and peace. That tree reminds her of the beauty that comes from staying true to yourself. It's a beauty we all long for. God says he will trade His beauty for your ashes. Some of you, like me, have blazed a path of useless and worthless ashes. It's time to trade them in. Accept that you are called and chosen for greatness and your best is yet to come.

And know that there is no "safe" voyage, just the guarantee that if you chose to fully trust the process, you will have unexplainable joy through it all. I'm thrilled to be on this journey and even more excited to be holding the hand of the woman who has chosen to cover me with dust.

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## Chapter 6

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# COLLABORATION

### 1, 2, 3, *BIG Step*



“Who you really are is always a present moment situation not a future discovery.”

~ *Mindset Mojo*

Excited about getting together with my Global Leadership training community, I strolled through the Atlanta airport with heightened anticipation. Whenever we all got together, the synergy was unstoppable. There was always so much to learn and the subsequent growth was exponential.

With my carry-on and computer bag in hand, I approached the down escalator that led to the terminal for my San Diego departure. A little girl was standing about 10 feet away from the top of the escalator, visibly terrified. A lady

stood there trying to assist and calm her down. I heard the lady ask, “Do you need any help?” But the little girl immediately shook her head no. Possibly pressed for time, the woman continued down the escalator.

My spirit was instantly drawn to the little girl and I knew I had to help. But how to engage her? The previous lady failed with her questioning, so I knew my approach had to be different. I walked over and said, “Hi sweetie. Are you scared?” She immediately answered, “yes.” I asked “Do you want some help?” She nodded her head, yes. Immediately, my heart went out to her. Although I felt extreme compassion, I innately recognized that she not only needed to acknowledge the truth of how she felt, but she also needed to move through her fear. Acknowledging her truth would empower both of us to move forward.

At the end of a short exchange, she told me that she had fallen and hurt herself on an escalator when she was little. What did she mean “when she was little?” She couldn’t be more than nine. For a split second I chuckled, amused by her statement. I told her I understood how scary it must be to do something that had previously caused her pain. She nodded in agreement. At this point we were causing quite a scene, holding up the line with her grandmother below yelling for her to “COME NOW!” Frustrated travelers wiggled around us and continued on their way.



I kept her focused by communicating a quick plan. We would ride down together. I told her if she agreed to go down the escalator with me, I would stand behind her, so if she fell, I would catch her. Still a little hesitant, she decided to trust me enough to take the ride.

I counted “one, two, three, big step!” and we both got on—together. Still leery, she gripped the side rail. I kept encouraging her, letting her know how well she was doing, hoping to distract her from the panic filled thoughts I could see creeping into her face. As we approached the end, I prepared her for our exit: “When I count to three, we’re going to step off together. You ready? One, two, three, STEP!” We safely hopped off the escalator and she was relieved. I was so proud of her, and the grin on her face let me know that she was proud of herself too. Holding up the line once again, I quickly told her how courageous she was and how happy I was to have met her. I congratulated her on facing her fear, and her relieved grandmother rushed her off to make their flight. I walked away replaying the victory that had just taken place.

“When I was little.” I chuckled again. Then I heard an inner voice asking what I was still holding onto from her self-description and I was suddenly aware of how divine this small moment truly was. I sat with the question. Why was I drawn to that phrase? “When I was little.” How many times had I unconsciously used that same sentence to keep me from moving beyond my fear, my pain, and my past? The cheeky statement from an adorable little girl allowed God to hold

up a mirror to the little girl in me. I started thinking about my own “escalator moments”—the ones I had consistently conquered and the ones still holding me hostage. I acknowledged that I had many still needing to be conquered, but I intentionally focused on the one’s I had overcome. What had been the guiding force that helped me take my own “one, two, three, STEP” journey through many of my fears?

Love.

Love is my main squeeze—always there to collaborate with me, asking the right questions in every moment. It always devises a plan and persuades me to trust just enough to take the first step. Love promises to stand behind me and catch me if I fall. Love came and continues to show up first and foremost as the spirit God placed inside of me. Love also comes in the form of skilled life coaches, my Global Leadership community, family, and close friends. When I trust love, I’m being honest about how I’m feeling and I find that I have just enough faith to take whatever big step is needed. I’ve learned to surrender without knowing the full plan, forgive myself if I stumble, and be grateful for the opportunity to start again.

When I start to feel guilty about failing, I am compassionate with myself and remain honest about my struggle. I stand in my power, refusing to stay stuck, obeying the voice within that nudges me onward. I consciously celebrate each

moment of trying again as a victory. Love creates a safe place for me to learn and flourish, even when I'm unaware.

Many things occurred to me after meeting that little girl, but my biggest revelation was that I—we—never grow alone. Love is the most powerful collaborator and if we're not careful to consciously include and trust it, we might end up remaining like petrified children—frozen and peering at the inevitable escalators bound to show up in our life.

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## Chapter 7

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# INTEGRITY

*The Truth Will Always Make you Free*



“Anybody pretending to be anything other than who they really are, will never ever reach their personal potential.”

~ Oprah Winfrey

In truth, we like to think we know exactly who we are, but we don't truly know until God places us in a situation that reveals it and then we get to choose who we will be in the world.

I had just celebrated my 51<sup>st</sup> birthday and for the past several months I'd been working with a relationship coach and felt like I was finally ready to experience the kind of romantic relationship I'd always wanted, but my own personal 'junk' would get in the way of me creating it.

And then, out of the blue, it happened. Honestly, at first, I wasn't even looking at him in 'that way'. We met at the first home coming party of the weekend. We'd both come with a close friend and initially our friends were chatting it up to see if there was a potential interest. We both stood to the side giving them some privacy.

We struck up a conversation and discovered we'd graduated from Howard University, but in different years. He asked me a question, my answer made him laugh. Then I asked him a question and his answer made me laugh even harder than he had. Next thing you know, we were deep in conversation and evidently the sparks were flying. Later, both of our friends said they turned to find us engrossed in one another and it was evident that it was the two of us that were meant to make a connection.

My girlfriend told him he had to get my phone number because clearly the two of us needed to stay in touch. I gave him my card and went on my way. I remember thinking, "He seems honest. I like that quality in a man." So I nicknamed him, honest guy.

Integrity is one of my top five core values. Along with freedom, creativity, love and family. No matter what, I strive to be honest and truthful with myself and with others.

Years ago, I worked with a woman named Velma and one day she transformed me when she confronted me about how I'd been giving lip service to the principle of integrity in my

life. Back then I was a receptionist at a law firm and every morning I would fill her ears with the grand vision and ideas I had for my future. This went on for a few months until one day she stopped me, telling me that I would never be successful. Stunned, I asked her what did she mean? She said I was more interested in talking about my vision than executing it and making it into a reality.

Her words of truth hit me hard, right in the gut and from that day forward I decided I would make it my intentional focus to be a woman of integrity. I decided that my words and my actions would be congruent and in alignment because that's the only way I would manifest my destiny.

Two days after “honest guy” and I met, we chatted on the phone for a couple of hours and two days after that we had our first date at one of my favorite restaurants. Because of the work I'd done with my relationship coach, I'd already decided that this time I would do things differently. I decided that no matter what, I would take a stand for my needs and desires in a relationship. I would be uncharacteristically bold, forthright and unapologetic.

During our date, the sparks were definitely still there and that amazing quality that one of my girlfriends calls the “in-describable something” was on full throttle. The conversation was multi-layered and bounced between laughter and probing questions from both of us. Then, he said something odd. He said he wasn't looking to get into a relationship and

that he was cool with just being friends. His comment was so out of alignment with all of his behavior over the past several days that it made me pause. But I shrugged my shoulders and said that's fine. However, to be clear I'm not looking for more friends. He asked why we couldn't just be friends. I told him that I'm crystal clear that I am seeking a long-term romantic relationship that includes friendship. I said my piece and our lively probing conversation continued.

Unbeknownst to him, I only lived 5 blocks from the restaurant he'd chosen and he offered to walk me home. At my door he leaned over and gave me a light kiss on the lips. It was a refreshing end to a lovely evening. I remember thinking, "Well, that sure isn't the behavior of someone who only wants to be friends."

The next day he sent me a text message saying he felt there'd been a foul play, that he couldn't believe that I wouldn't want to be friends. I texted him back, saying:

"I'm not denying us as friends, but I was and will always honor who I am, a woman worthy of having a fully available guy in my space absorbing my awesome energy. When two people start in the same 'come from space' the friendship that follows can be breathtaking in its freedom to be authentic and to have a whole lot of fun discovering each other as potential life partners. I only deserve the best and not the crumbs." He responded that he understood and he agreed.



Over the final 3 months of the year we quickly grew very close. We chatted every day, several times a day. We went on dates and discovered that we had tons of things in common and had just enough difference to keep things intriguing. As Christmas drew near, he suggested that we exchange gifts. I said sure. At his request I gave him several pair of quirky socks and he gave me 3 of the 5 items on the list he'd requested from me.

Since things were going so well between us, we agreed to spend New Years Eve together playing Scrabble. We both had an extreme passion and love affair with words. I grew up playing the game weekly with my mom when I was a kid. I thought I was a pro, but he crushed me, beating me by over a hundred points. He was amazingly intelligent, smart and a bit of a brain and that definitely showed up in the words he chose to spell.

As we watched the ball drop in Times Square our conversation flowed effortlessly and he said he had something to tell me.

After a brief pause, he began to describe to me how and why he was different and in that moment my observations over the past few months of his quiriness, peculiarities and subtle differences began to make sense. He was autistic. Although he said he'd never been formally diagnosed he knew it to be true. Actually, about a month earlier it had occurred to me that he might be autistic. I'd even mentioned it to one

of my close girlfriends and told her I was going to ask him if it was true or if he even knew.

In a previous conversation he'd shared with me that his teenage son was autistic and that, coupled with the fact that in my work with youth I had experience with autistic children, led me to think he might be also. As he shared with me, it became apparent that he had Aspergers on the autistic spectrum.

I asked him why was he telling me the truth now. He said he specifically waited to tell me on New Years day because he'd grown to feel comfortable around me and he realized that that I wasn't a judgmental person. I told him that I'd already surmised that he might be autistic. My revelation made him uncomfortable and he started peppering me with questions as to what he'd done that made me consider the possibility. I really didn't have any singularly specific answers. It was more like a hodge podge of observations and information all woven together. He was clearly concerned about appearing normal and not being different. I assured him that a regular lay-person wouldn't even notice the things I'd observed and he seemed relieved.

I asked him why he wouldn't get formally diagnosed. He said, "Why? What difference would it make?" I thought it might make a difference to his son and that surely when his son was diagnosed as a toddler it might have been helpful

to his treatment. He said he would never get formally diagnosed. There was absolutely no point in it.

Although I'd had my suspicions, I was still surprised by the news. I didn't really know much about the intricacies of Aspergers and autistic spectrum so the next day I jumped on Google and began searching. As I read I was confronted with the variety of very real challenges that people with the condition have with maintaining intimate relationships. I remember feeling completely overwhelmed. I vacillated between feeling like I'd been duped into believing that he was someone he wasn't but still understanding exactly why he felt he had to keep the truth a secret.

Up until meeting him, I believed that I was different. In the business circles I travel in, we fondly toss around the word "unicorn," to signify that we're of a different breed; that we're outside the norm of regular people.

Up until meeting him, I believed I was a unicorn. But after researching for hours and reading all of the stories of hundreds of people who'd been labeled, ostracized and misunderstood because they were born on the autistic spectrum, I now felt frivolous using that word.

Furthermore, there was a noticeable absence of black voices in the online autistic space. Their faces were virtually nonexistent. Amongst all of the articles and forums I could only find one black male speaking frankly about his condition. This made me think of him as a double-unicorn. I be-

gan to see that a true unicorn is someone that society scorns and treats like an outcast because they're not a "step-ford-wife" reflection of what society determines to be the norm.

Now that the truth was out in the open, who he had previously presented himself to be began to unravel. The things he had done before he shared that he actually struggled significantly to do. He stopped masking his social aversions. Much to my dismay, he started calling himself 'freakshow.' He said it was his way of debunking his condition. The person I had grown to care for deeply was disappearing right before my eyes. I wavered between remaining compassionate and feeling like I'd been lied to. He was till funny, smart and a caring person so I pressed on with hope and understanding at the center of my heart.

I thought to myself "I've never had a disability. That must be incredibly hard to deal with in the world we live in." I figured if anyone could figure out how to make this work, we could. After all, we were smart, thoughtful, caring people.

Then one day, almost nine months to the day we'd met, he told me he'd let things go too far. That what we had wasn't real because his condition wouldn't support how a real relationship needed to go and he wanted to end it. But by then, I was invested and I tried to persuade him that he was wrong; that together we could create what would work for us.

But he pressed to be free, saying that his social aversion caused him to feel extremely uncomfortable with the social

obligations that came along with a relationship and that he knew he would be unable to fulfill most of those social obligations. I was hurt. I thought back to the beginning and the energy he put into doing all the right things socially to win me over.

Finally, admittedly, I was pissed. First with him, but then I pointed the finger where it mattered the most, at myself.

My culpability in the situation was my decision to believe that there's an exception for deception. Back on New Year's Day when he told me the truth about who he really was, I remember thinking, were the past several months a fabrication. Does this admission of the truth make all of that a lie? Who was he really?

I wanted so badly to believe that our experience wasn't a lie that I told myself I understood why he had to pretend. I told myself under the circumstances of his condition it makes perfect sense. But in the end, no matter the circumstances, lying never makes sense of anything; it only makes a mess of things. I had allowed my compassion and understanding to override what I knew to be right versus wrong. I was out of integrity.

Because of his disability, I told myself he deserves a pass for being deceptive but in truth, I didn't do him any favors. I actually handicapped him further by not standing up for what was right. You see, all along, he knew what I could never know. He knew who he was, what his condition was and

what his limitations were and what he was incapable of. But for 3 months he pretended to be ‘normal.’

He was a true unicorn, but was afraid to tell the world loud and proud who he really was. I challenged him and said why didn't you tell me the truth within the first couple of dates. Around that time, I had shared with him that I was a breast cancer survivor and my mastectomy left me with one breast, which some men are freaked out by. I remember him asking me why had I kept that detail a secret. I said I hadn't. That now was just an appropriate time to share something so intimate. He ended up telling me that history had shown him that women run when they see just how different he really is. But, isn't that the risk we all take in life and love. Telling the truth and holding fast to the faith and courage that can lead to unlimited possibility.

I realized that had to confront my own bias. A bias that I didn't even know I had. The belief that people with disabilities should get a pass in certain situations because after all, their life is so unfair. But holding onto that bias would be like me playing God. Everyone has to abide by the same moral standards, don't they?

At the end he wanted to remain close friends, but I choose to fulfill my personal integrity and stick to what I'd decided from the beginning:

“I’m not denying us as friends, but I was and will always honor who I am, a woman worthy of having a fully available guy in my space absorbing my awesome energy.”

He couldn’t understand why I would (in his words) throw away such a valuable friendship. But over the years what I’ve come to accept is that people come into our lives for a reason, a season or a lifetime.

The decision not to remain friends was a conflicting one, but in the end I choose what was best for me. It was not because he was autistic that I choose not to retain the friendship, it was because he was right, he had gone too far. His choice to withhold the truth of who he was and presenting himself as being someone he could never be long term was too damaging for me to overcome. I only wanted friendships and lovers who built a connection by taking a gamble on telling the truth.

I like to think that had he been honest about his condition within the first few dates and intimate conversations I still would have chosen to date him, get to know him and most importantly been able to make my own choice to move forward based on the truth, but he robbed us both of that opportunity. An opportunity to see who we really are in the midst of a divine situation designed by God.

No matter if we have a designated disability or think of ourselves as part of the ‘unicorn’ tribe, living in a society that

demands conformity yet expects uniqueness is confounding to us all.

Our greatest challenge as human beings is found in one of my favorite e.e. Cummings quotes:

“To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.”

I believe our greatest opportunity is to say ‘eff you’ to society’s limiting standards and to never give up on being our true self because that’s how we make our most meaningful contribution to the world.

## TRUTH WALK ....

a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

In your journal write down the title of this chapter and answer these questions:

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## Chapter 8

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# CREATIVITY

## *Believe in Magical Thinking*



“You are at a choice-point in every moment of each circumstance, each activity, spoken word and thought.”

~ *Michael Beckwith*

The consistent beep and whir of the machines keeping my mother alive comforted me as I walked into the hospital room. It was Christmas day in 2005 and instead of opening presents, while laughing and drinking egg nog, my siblings and I were holding vigil and praying that my mother’s life would be spared.

When I first got the call from my brother, I was wrapping gifts for one of my favorite customers at my part-time job in downtown Washington, DC. “What do you mean she’s in

the hospital?” I asked. I had just spoken with her hours earlier and shared with her the list of ingredients to make one of my famous pound cakes. My brother told me she’d had a heart attack and I needed to get there immediately. Stunned, I hung up the phone and my co-workers who were in earshot of the news, reassured me that everything would be okay. But it was hard to believe them because I had never heard my brother sound so afraid.

Completely overwhelmed and out of sorts, I jostled my way through the holiday travelers clogging the airport. Concern and guilt fought for prominence in my mind. Would she really be okay? Why didn’t I let go of my grudge much earlier? Was she going to die? After 20 years of ups and downs, my mother and I had recently turned a corner in our relationship. Months before, we’d even planned for her to come live in Washington, DC with my son and I. Surely this devastating news would impede on those plans and rob us of the time to reconnect.

I had about 30 minutes before my plane would begin boarding, so I stopped by the bookstore to distract myself. I looked around, and a title caught my eye, essentially shouting my name from the shelf: *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion. Facing the possibility that my mother might die before I even arrived, this provocative title spoke to my need for the power of magical thinking. With no idea about the book’s subject, I bought it and headed to my gate. Once on the plane, I settled into my seat and opened to the first

page: “Life changes fast. Life changes in an instant.” Those first words ignited my thoughts. I started to believe that even though things looked bleak, perhaps I could reassure myself that everything was going to be okay.

I arrived at the hospital only to find my mother in a coma. She had gone for a period of time without oxygen before my brother found her lying on the floor. He performed CPR but the lack of oxygen further damaged her organs and especially her heart. The doctors were reserved when sharing their prognosis. They spoke mostly in technical jargon, but occasionally I’d overhear them mention vegetative state, low survival rate, impaired physical ability, and memory loss.

After a few days passed, my sister and I began researching heart attacks online. I remember thinking that my mom should be taken off the medication that was inducing her coma. But I wasn’t a doctor. Why was I even thinking this? Because the thought wouldn’t leave me, I researched the medication. Reading about the side-effects convinced me that they needed to stop this medication immediately. Hesitant, I spoke with one of her doctors and he warned me that it was too early to bring her out of the coma. I backed off, but the urgency gave me no peace. My mother had once worked as an administrative assistant for one of the top cardiologists at a hospital in Nebraska. I found her telephone book and gave him a call. He cautioned me that if my mother were his patient he’d be doing the same thing as her doctors. But, he said, if my gut was telling me that she should be taken off, I

should tell them that's what the family wanted. Comforted by his words, my courage increased and I decided to go with my gut and make the request.

Against their better judgment, her doctors scaled back the medication and over the next two days we all watched my mother miraculously be reborn. Despite the foreboding mention of vegetative state, impaired speaking and physical abilities, my mother magically defied the odds. Within days, she made tremendous strides, answering every question the doctors asked and walking to and from the bathroom without assistance. When her infectious laugh boomed down the corridors, nurses popped into her room to ask, "What's so funny?" But the most astonishing development of all was what happened inside her heart.

"Arrest" means to stop. A cardiac arrest means the heart muscle shuts down and literally stops pumping all together. Blood carrying vital oxygen ceases to flow and the body's organs quickly shut down. Upon arrival, my mother's organs were essentially shut down and she was "DOA." She was immediately hooked up to life-sustaining equipment and chest x-rays revealed that she had complete blockage in several arteries and would need major surgery. While in the coma she was going to be taken off of her coma medication. In preparation, the day before, her doctors performed a second chest x-ray and discovered a complete transformation. My mother's body had experienced autogenesis—the spontaneous

growth of its own bypass arteries. New arteries had grown where there were none before. Her heart was healed!

Creativity means to bring something new into existence and that's exactly what occurred with my mom. Several members of the medical staff crowded into her room on a daily basis wanting to see the "miracle patient." There were even a few doctors who witnessed this creative miracle, but were reluctant to validate it. Regardless, I didn't need to understand how "He," God had done it to know that it was true.

As a college professor, I nurture and support hundreds of students to consciously embrace their true creative power. My highly sought-after course about the impact creativity has on every aspect of our life, especially our thoughts, teaches students the power of magical thinking and how to develop the tools to transform themselves and the world around them. Everything begins with a thought which then becomes a combination of choices manifested in the physical world. In essence, we're always creating because we're always thinking. The human brain has over 50,000 thoughts a day. When we purposefully take ownership of them, we can create a miraculous life.

We're all made in the image of the creator and we also have the capacity to render miracles on a daily basis. Our thoughts, gifts and talents are the tools we can use to bring something new into existence and create the seemingly impossible.

I am so glad that I listened to the whisper instructing me to take my mom off the medicine. My obedience thrust all of us from the known into the realm of the unknown. When this happens, we leave our comfort zone and are compelled to trust in something we cannot see. Unfortunately not everyone is willing to acknowledge creativity when it's unexplainable. However, when a situation appears bleak, impossible, or improbable, remember that the solution actually begins when we activate our belief that we all have the power within us to create something new.

## TRUTH WALK ....

a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

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## Chapter 9

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# COMPASSION

*Unload Your Baggage Early*



“I have learned not to worry about love; but to honor its coming with all my heart.”

~ *Alice Walker*

I pulled my sweater tight around my shoulders trying to shield myself from the cold. I'd asked about turning up the heat, but one of the nurses told me the rooms were cold on purpose—to kill any germs. Sitting at my mother's side I struggled to understand why she hadn't told us sooner that her breast cancer was incurable. My mom had always been extremely secretive but I never thought she would conceal such a major crisis from my siblings and I.

Just a year and a half earlier the roles were reversed and my mom sat by my side caring for me after my second breast cancer surgery. I was nervous for my mother to come. Although we had somewhat mended our precarious relationship, I didn't feel completely at ease. However, during her visit to DC I saw a very different side of her. While she nursed me back to health, the layers of resentment I had built up towards her began to dissolve. I could finally see the core of her being without past hurts clouding my spiritual perception.

It's funny how the same love she was always afraid for me to freely express came pouring out of her while she was there. Despite her emotional distance during my childhood, she had always been my hero. But now I could actually feel her love and wrap it around me like the warm embrace it really was.

She made all of my favorite foods and we watched our favorite television game shows, yelling out the answers before the contestants and laughing when we got it right. We formed a bond that neither of us thought possible at this time in our lives. We even discussed her moving to DC to live with my son and I.

My mom was there for me during one of the most challenging times in my life. She met my deep heartache and pain, with radical compassion. Our past dysfunction and disconnect did not matter because her daughter needed her. She gave so selflessly and I wondered why I couldn't see this kind



of love in her before. I was in awe of her kindness and it left me feeling repentant. I was sad about the way I had treated her for most of my adult life. Refusing to heal and release the baggage of our past in exchange for a genuine connection.

Around the age of 19, I stopped talking to my mom for more than two years, because of a disagreement I can't even recall. I know it had something to do with a boyfriend I was dating, but the exact details of our disconnection are a blur. It wasn't difficult for me to stay away from her during that time because I had convinced myself that I was nothing more than a disappointment to her. I can remember seeing her in the mall and thinking how strange it was to not celebrate our kinship with shouts of "Hey!" followed by a warm hug. Although our eyes met briefly, we both kept right on walking as if we were strangers. I felt justified in my feelings that I was right and she was wrong. Ironically, I was newly exploring my journey to self-actualization through books I'd come across in my job at the public library. I fluctuated between understanding and vehemently disagreeing with the theories I was exposed to. My expanded consciousness and concepts of love, forgiveness and compassion were sparking radically new thoughts, but I was more interested in self-righteousness. My ego was in control and snuffed out these new thoughts and temporarily gave me the pleasure of feeling powerful and right by paying my mother back in silence. Eventually, we began speaking again, but we never really achieved a mother/daughter bond centered around active love and compassion.

By the time I arrived in Omaha my mother had been in the hospital for three weeks. Feeling lost and bereft I confronted my mother and demanded she explain why, after her surgery just five months after mine, she had not told her children that her cancer was incurable. My mother's face was still and a familiar stubbornness filled the creases around her lips as she insisted that she had told us. We debated for thirty seconds or so until she nipped it in the bud with smug finality: "I don't regret my decision." At first I was angry. How could she be so selfish? But after 20 years of devoted spiritual study, I quickly realized that she was actually teaching me a powerful lesson—that we all have the ability to create regrets or not. Her actions declared that she had the right to live and die on her own terms. She wasn't interested in living her final months with pity as her ever-present companion, so she didn't tell us until it was unavoidable. My anger evaporated and was replaced with compassion. Her willingness to take an unapologetic stand for her life's journey became a healing balm for my soul.

Searching for something meaningful to do, I oiled my mother's scalp, plaited her hair and read to her. Grabbing the complimentary bottle of Johnson's baby lotion from the bin, I sat at my mother's feet and gently massaged them. My intention was to rub every ounce of unexpressed love I had ever held back into her feet. As I gently loved on her, she looked directly in my eyes and told me how much she loved me and that she was proud of me. Her words resonated with the wounded 14-year-old girl I still carried around inside.

At the age of 14 my mother sat me down one day and told me that I needed to be careful because I was so different I would scare people and that I needed to learn to be like other people. That night in the hospital, she said she had always been proud of me. Hearing those words from the mother I belonged to, gave me something I always wanted, her unconditional acceptance.

As I finished the massage, a nurse walked in and my mom's face lit up, filled with joy. "I'm so happy you're here. I thought you weren't coming back until tomorrow," my mom said. "Me too. They needed some extra help tonight, so I get the pleasure of spending time with my favorite patient" the nurse told her. As I watched the exchange between my mother and the nurse it was clear they had developed a bond of trust. The nurse walked over to the bed and my mother grabbed her hand and patted it like they were old friends. I was so glad that this woman, a stranger, was able to bring my mother so much happiness and at that moment a clear undeniable knowing swept over me, that my mother would not live through the night. It was as if this nurse was her assigned angel coming back on duty to help usher my mother to the other side.

About an hour after my siblings and I left we got a phone call. My instinct was right my mom had passed from this life to the next.

Preparing for my mom's funeral I wrote a few words to share. She taught me many things, like, how to be brave and to take care of myself—mind, body and spirit. She taught me to love to read. How to live with dignity, honor and respect for myself and others. How to throw back my head and laugh long and loud until other people start to smile even though they don't know what was so funny in the first place. She taught me how to maintain grace under pressure. How to forgive myself and others because no matter our age—we're all just learning as we go. She taught me to be compassionate and to choose love every chance I can and when I make a mistake or use poor judgment to seek forgiveness and use better judgment. She taught me that life is short so unload your baggage early. Mostly, she taught me to live life fully and at the moment of death to make peace with its inevitability.

Looking back on that time I'm grateful that I took the time to release the resentment and unload the baggage I had carried for so long. I do wish that I'd taken action sooner but choosing to experience the sweet goodness of being intentionally present in every moment with my mom for the 18 months of healing we did have continues to give me peace and comfort.

The most significant thing I learned is, don't wait for a crisis to start healing. If you're holding onto resentment, confront the real reality of losing the person you're resenting. Is it really worth it? Imagine this, you've already lost 22,000 potentially amazing moments because you're holding on to

one. If this is you, I encourage you to trade a single moment for the unfolding of all the joy that awaits you.

## TRUTH WALK ....

a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

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## Chapter 10

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# **FORGIVENESS**

*Forgiveness is Always Worth it*



Monroe Hart

“The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world.”

*~ Marianne Williamson*

Because of the choices I made during my life to neglect my children, to not parent them or show my love and care for them on a daily basis, I never truly believed I deserved forgiveness. However, there came a day when I experienced forgiveness in action and it forever changed my life.

In 2011 I had many conversations with my daughter Denise about the stress and strain I was constantly under from taking care of my third wife who had Alzheimer's. Denise decided it would be great for me to get away for a few days, so

she planned a short trip for she, my grandson, and I to visit my sister in Texas.

I was so grateful for the much-needed moment to recharge. I also looked forward to spending time together and reconnecting with my sister. After a great time with family, we prepared to head to my home in Chicago where Denise planned to stay with my wife and I for a few days.

Fully re-energized, I was eager to get back to taking care of my wife. Shortly before we boarded the plane I got a call from one of my wife's relatives telling me I was no longer welcomed in our home. "She filed for divorce," the voice on the other end said before hanging up. Baffled by the call, we decided to continue to my home anyway. "DO NOT ENTER," read the sign taped on the front door. "What? Do not enter? This is my house, my wife. Why can't I enter?" Furious, I wanted to break down the door, but Denise convinced me otherwise.

My heart was deflated. Why was this happening to me? We had been married for seven years and for the last two, I had dedicated myself to taking care of her. Why the betrayal? Why the abandonment?

My anger and hurt threatened to explode. Everything was gone; my wife, my car, my clothes, and my home. The only thing I had left from the life I had grown accustomed to were the dirty clothes in my suitcase. As I struggled to digest everything, my daughter sprang into action. I'm so glad she



did because I felt completely helpless. Actually, I wanted to die. Denise rented a car and got us a hotel room for the next three days. As we were settling in, she said out of the blue, “We need to get you a car.” Still in a fog, I said okay.

We drove across town to a used car lot she found online. When we pulled up, honestly I was impressed by what I saw but figured we would be leaving empty-handed. These cars were more expensive and much nicer than I expected. “See anything you like?” Denise asked. I had seen something I liked but surely there was no way I would be leaving with it. Amused, I spoke up. “Yeah, I like that one right there,” I joked.

The car I pointed to was a luxury car, well above the hoop-ty I first envisioned I would drive off in. “Okay, take it for a test drive,” Denise replied. I was in disbelief. After the test drive, and before I could rationalize her reaction, my daughter paid cash for a gorgeous black BMW. I was stunned and struck by her generosity. Why? Why would she even consider giving me such a lavish gift? I literally burst into tears. It wasn’t about the car. It was about the wholehearted compassion I felt rush over me after her unselfish act of kindness. In the face of my life unraveling right before my eyes, it was a big gift. However, it was an even bigger act of forgiveness and love.

You see, during Denise’s childhood, I was an absent father. I abandoned my responsibility and left her mother to

raise her and my other children alone. I was busy making the streets my home, looking out mostly for myself. It was a lifestyle script that became the thing I knew how to do. From age 6 to age 13, I worked the cotton fields in Terrell County, Texas from sun-up to sun-down to bring extra money into our home because my father spent most of his money on alcohol. One Christmas, at age 13, I got the chance to visit my aunt in Omaha, Nebraska. It was my first time leaving Texas and after a couple of days when I saw the big buildings, paved roads, and abundant food, I made the easy decision not to return to Texas. My aunt told me if I was going to stay, I had to earn enough money to take care of my school clothes and anything else I wanted, so I began working as a busboy in a luxury hotel and restaurant.

I started high school at 14 and it was there I fell in love with a beautiful girl named Donna. Working up the courage to approach her, I observed how the other fellas in my school did it. I saw them laughing and smiling while walking girls home from school and carrying their books. So, I decided to do the same for Donna. For months, we talked as I walked her home from school happily carrying her books. Eventually she fell in love with me too. After three years of innocent love, she got pregnant with Denise's older brother. I did the honorable thing and married her. Right after we got married, I enrolled in the army and immediately went to fight in the Vietnam War as a part of an airborne unit. When I left Vietnam for good, instead of settling into my role as husband and father, I got heavily into the streets. With street life came

an abundance of money, women, reputation, and status. I quickly became “the man” in the streets. But at home, I was nobody. I didn’t know how to be a husband or a father. It was an existence I did not grow up observing. I had virtually no fond memories of watching my mother and father together.

The streets won my heart from the beginning and eventually, while Denise and my other children were little, I completely left home. There were times throughout the years that I would hear about my children’s successes and while it would hurt me that I wasn’t there, I never went to see about them. Over time I put it out of my mind, fantasizing that eventually I could make it up to them. However, time moved forward, and my children became adults. I was consumed with regret and spent most of their adulthood waiting to become someone big and prosperous so I could make things right. You know, pay them back for all the disappointment and heartache I caused.

During the time I was busy trying to get big or rich enough to make it right, Denise was choosing to forgive me. In 2009, she reached out to me and told me she was forgiving me for everything. She was now open to having a loving relationship with me, but I never thought she would ever completely forgive me.

As we left the car lot that day, Denise spoke a language of love that penetrated my heart. Her big gift let me know she was truly all in. I asked her why would she do this for me. She

replied without hesitation that I was her father and I needed the support. Undone, I burst into tears. My gratitude could not be contained. I was so grateful for this moment. She had fully forgiven me, not just with her words but in action. I tried to tell her that after all the years of neglect I didn't deserve her generosity and she wouldn't hear of it. She stopped me cold and told me to never speak like that again. That to speak from shame and guilt doesn't do anybody any good. She asked me to let go of the past and to move forward in freedom.

This manifested act of radical love was more than my words could describe. A moment that helped me receive the fullness of my daughter's forgiveness. Her unselfish love has spilled over into every part of my life. My other children have begun the journey to forgiving me and I have begun the daily practice of forgiving myself. Whenever I think about where I would be if it weren't for my daughter's act of forgiveness, I am consumed with tears. I know I would not be here now if it weren't for her. She saved my life that day and helped me see that I could go on and start again.

Forgiveness was hard for both of us. But, I think it was hardest for me because I carried so much guilt. Through her example, Denise has helped me to recognize that it's never too late to discover your potential. No matter how bad things may seem, possibility is still alive. She continuously puts a spotlight on my potential and my capacity to do better and

greater things. I am so happy she chose to forgive me and I am forever blessed because God chose her to be my daughter.

## TRUTH WALK ....

a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

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## Chapter 11

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# GRATITUDE

*Hold No Secrets*



Dhakeria Little

“Give thanks for the difficult person or situation that pushed you to become more of who you really are.”

~ *Mindset Mojo*

I’ve always had big dreams, but the consistent follow-through to manifest them frequently evaded me. As a child I wanted to be a superstar—sing, act, and dance. I wanted to be rich and take care of my family, providing for all of our wants and desires. Above that, I wanted to positively impact a ridiculous amount of people. In my mind they would be touched by my voice, my celebrity—me. Young and unaware of purpose, I based my dreams on what I did well and the people I saw on television that looked like they had it all.

One summer I got the chance to participate in a theater arts camp co-directed by Denise and my cousin. Too young to fully comprehend what gratitude was, all I knew was I loved every minute. Each year I looked forward to shining and growing. Finally, a community of peers I could relate to with dreams of gaining fame and fortune through our talents and love of the arts. Outside of the camp, I often felt isolated and would hide out in the pages of my journals. I created characters and plays, but the energy of community is what made me feel truly alive. The camp was my refuge.

When the camp closed, because my cousin and Denise ended their business partnership, I lost contact with Denise and the feeling of community I experienced each summer was gone. I badly wanted it to continue so I could feed my creative spirit and keep my dreams alive. I felt abandoned and uncertain about my future, but I continued to forge ahead.

Fortunately, some years later, I crossed paths with Denise again while attending college at Howard University where she was a professor. Unbeknownst to Denise, I was reluctant to cross a boundary that I had put in place. Uncertain about the details as to why the camp had ended so abruptly, I felt I had to hold an allegiance to my cousin even though no one had asked me to. Instead of seeking her out, I avoided Denise's classes and kept my distance. Secretly I longed to be in her presence and once again receive her tutelage. One day I visited her acting class and was jealous of the students receiving such transformative training. But through divine



intervention, Denise cast me in a production. Just like my experience in summer camp, there was a synergy that ignited a fire within to pursue my dreams of being a superstar. The production was phenomenal and I did some of my best and most intentional work. Despite such a wonderful experience, after the production, I once again decided to remain distant with Denise.

Once I left college I realized I wanted to share my love of performing more than I wanted fame. I married my college sweetheart and together we joined a company of performers to share our gifts with the world. Inspired, we decided to open or own production-company. However, after our plans went awry, I found myself alone again. I temporarily bounced back, producing a successful one-woman show based on a series of poems I'd written, but the birth of my second baby girl shifted my focus and I reluctantly pushed my dreams to the back of my mind. I determined the best thing to do was to be a good wife and mom and the time for my dreams would eventually come.

In the still of the night after my girls were tucked in, I found myself being drawn back through social media to the first person to ignite my dreams, Denise. She had turned her entrepreneurial skills into a training company geared towards helping women just like me, women who had a burning passion to achieve their dreams. Since I had no extra money, I would soak up anything free Denise offered through her online community. After devouring all the freebies, I was still

void of accountability and community—the environment I thrived in most. I needed more but I was nervous to reach out because of the guilt I carried inside. At a breaking point, I decided to share my distress and ask for her help. Denise didn't hesitate. She offered me more support and told me about a program she had created that would be perfect for me. I wanted desperately to participate but with the birth of my new baby girl, the investment would be a financial strain on my family.

I shared my financial woes with Denise and told her I would see what I could do. A couple of weeks later I got an answer to my prayers. Denise sent me an email and told me the program would be her gift to me. Overwhelmed, tears flowed down my face. I must have thanked her 15 times. You see, what I knew, but she didn't, was that I had intentionally kept my distance over the years and I didn't think I deserved her gift. She assured me that she knew it was the right thing to do to support me with achieving my new goals for my life. A few days passed and in the midst of my excitement I felt a gnawing in my gut telling me I needed to come clean, to tell Denise the truth. I debated with myself whether or not it was truly necessary. But, I sat at the computer and wrote Denise the details of what I'd done and why I'd done it. I told her how I purposefully avoided her and that I judged her as guilty of some wrongdoing certainly with my actions if not in my words. I asked her to forgive me.

Within minutes of sending the email, I received her reply. She said of course she would extend the forgiveness I was seeking, but that she never knew that my distance was intentional and never felt that I was thinking ill of her. She said she'd always held me in the highest regard and still did. To have your mentor tell you that all of the time you'd spent secretly desiring to sit at her feet, but you were too busy being caught up in a drama that was a fictitious creation in your own mind, and the whole time she was holding the space of good thoughts about you, who you are, and the boundlessness of your potential frees you.

As I read her response, my heart expanded with deep and expanding sense of gratitude. A feeling, that now as an adult, I can fully understand and appreciate. Her kindness allowed me to see the error in my ways. To stay open to receive the transformative power of gratitude, I could hold no secrets; nor could I allow my circumstances to rule over me. I now speak life into my situations and surrender to the process of truth.

## TRUTH WALK ....

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## Chapter 12

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# SURRENDER

*It's God's Idea, but it's Your Choice*



“The fact that you are here matters.”

~ Oprah Winfrey

I kicked my shoes off, snuggled under my blanket in my favorite chair, and awaited the start of my favorite show—Oprah’s *Super Soul Sunday*. Rich with revelation, the guests always dropped nuggets of wisdom that helped me grow spiritually and expand my consciousness. Turning up the volume, the show’s introduction began:

Today on *Super Soul Sunday*, get ready to have your thinking changed, your soul opened up. We are talking to Brené Brown about vulnerability and not in the way you’ve been conditioned to think about it. Vulnerability

is not about weakness...Brené Brown says it's really about opening yourself up to the *greatest source of power you can live* (emphasis added).

As I listened, I was instantly filled with rage. Brené Brown's smiling face filled the screen, while mine was engulfed in tears. I was hurt and angry.

"She said WHAT?! Vulnerability is your greatest source of power? Heck, I've been saying that for *years*. How dare she? Why is *she* talking about vulnerability?" I turned off the television and tossed the remote. Tears continued to stream down my face as I regressed to having a toddler's tantrum:

She's doing what *I'm* supposed to be doing. She's where *I'm* supposed to be. I have dedicated my life to sharing this message. I've literally been talking about this for years. Ask any of my students at Howard University—they will all tell you the same thing. Vulnerability is your greatest source of power was hammered into them year after year! I champion this daily with my coaching clients and consistently live it.

I momentarily shifted my anger to Oprah, hurling assumptions and insults. "Why does she always have to have White people on *Super Soul Sunday*?...giving them all the shine and the platform to share their message!" My assault continued. "I mean really, what's the deal? Why do White people always get the best and biggest opportunities?" God

allowed me to have this moment and when it was time, He gently brought me back to what I needed—introspection.

“Okay, Denise let’s talk about it. Why are you so mad?”

I sat with that question for a moment and then the work began. I examined all of my angry thoughts, words, and assumptions to question their validity. It was apparent that I bought into several lies. One, Oprah did not know me. Two, she wasn’t conspiring against me. She didn’t do anything strategic to pick Brené Brown to direct the topic of vulnerability towards me. Three, White people were not the only guests offered a platform on her show and they did not get all of the opportunities. So again, why was I really upset? Why was I so mad?

I was mad because I’d been pretending to be comfortable with the smaller version of myself, afraid of showing up bigger. I knew that I was supposed to be helping more people transform their lives, but I hadn’t owned it. I needed to acknowledge what was true. When the greater version of myself would show up, I pushed her aside claiming it was just pride. I knew better. We all know better.

Defeating thoughts flooded my mind, which had absolutely nothing to do with what God was continually prompting me to do. *Show up bigger Denise. I need you. Agree with the greater expression of the woman I uniquely created you to be.* Instead of agreeing with Him in this area, I’d been agreeing with my assumptions. I assumed my expansion would

scare people since my past experiences told me so. One of my recent speaking engagements proved this to be true.

After one of my workshops on vulnerability, a lady walked past me and she was crying. I reached out to console her but she refused. She said my message was too much and she couldn't handle any more of what I had to give. Even though I knew that it she wasn't afraid of me, but instead the power flowing through me, I received her denial as personal rejection and that encouraged the dangerous weeds in my mind to grow taller. I also had my share of stares and peculiar statements about how I processed things and the teachings I believed. "I didn't want that kind of focus," was the excuse I often leaned on when I was too afraid to shine brighter. But Brené Brown was pulling a buried truth up to the surface—the truth surrounding my unwillingness to surrender.

I was having this big reaction because I was actually mad at myself. For some time God had been asking me to play bigger, but I wouldn't step up or give up my free will. But I was ready now. Exhausted, I said out loud "God I will no longer resist you. What is it that you want me to do?"

Now, I'm fully aware that God already knows that we're ready for our next steps and we just have to agree with Him and get rid of the stuff in our way. Our thinking, our past experiences, our comfort, and our fears keep us from rising to the pre-destined position of greatness. But when we surrender to God by accepting and choosing to agree with His



thoughts and His plans, we become a conduit for the power within to be unleashed for the greater good of all.

At this point in my journey, I can laugh at the self-defeating thoughts that surrounded that experience. But believe me, it was not hilarious when I was going through it. Surrendering to what's next for me refreshed the vision God had placed inside—the thing I knew was always there, expanding and reaching out to help more people make a meaningful contribution to the world. I always told myself that I would get to it later. I knew better than that. There is no later. There's only now. This moment. This thought. This decision.

What gifts and greatness are you hiding? What message are you saving for later? Now is the time to acknowledge the truth and surrender to your purpose, God's intended plan for you.

Funny thing is, the very next Sunday after my rant and revelation, I once again sat in my favorite chair ready for my show. And wouldn't you know it—Part Two with Brené Brown came on the screen. Nestled in my blanket, shoes off, I chuckled with God that I couldn't get away from this woman. God laughed and said, “no baby you can't get away from the 'me' I've placed in you.”

After receiving the food for my soul, I received a clear vision. What God showed me brought no fear—just a reminder of how much He loves me.

I was being interviewed sitting on a couch. Shoes off with my feet tucked under me, I was ready to go all the way in. Holding my best-selling book with colored sticky notes on the pages. The interviewer and I laughed and shed a few tears and then came my favorite part. “So Denise, did you ever imagine you would be here?” My vision stopped and with confidence I spoke life to what I had just been shown. I boldly said out loud: “I completely agree and acknowledge this vision is the pathway for what you need to happen next. Thank you God for choosing me to bring your message of joy and truth to the world.”

## TRUTH WALK ....

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# TIPS FOR HOSTING A “JOY OF TRUTH” REFLECTION GATHERING”

There’s just something extra special about gathering with your sister-girls and chatting about where you are and where you’re headed. What you’re letting go of to get there and being bold enough to ask for help along the way. Here’s a few tips to help you get things off the ground with style:

- ▶ **Get the word out.** Email, call up or hit up on social media a few of your sister friends and agree to purchase the book as a group or one person can purchase the book for several of her friends.
- ▶ **Discuss the Details.** Determine where you’ll meet, who’ll serve as the facilitator.
- ▶ **Meet for at least an hour.** Your circle of sister friends may be small or large, but most women have the gift of gab and you’ll need at least an hour to create an authentic community environment.

- ▶ **Consider Light Snacks.** No one has to cook not unless they really want to. You can designate that everyone bring a light snack anything from uber healthy to heavenly desserts!
- ▶ **Reflection.** This is a time for each participant to share which chapter(s) have had the most significant impact on her life. Participants can share their hopes and dreams and also share a goal they are working on and their progress thus far. The idea is to harness the individuals and the group's momentum as a source of support and evidence of growth.
- ▶ **Create Unique Celebrations.** To kick things up a notch you could create a group journal "12 Months of Joy" to capture the growth milestones of each participant and include pictures of each member.
- ▶ **Invite Others to Join.** A good size in-person group is between 10 – 15 women; however, if you'd like your groups larger than that then by all means do so. There's great wisdom in crowds and you'll find that your Joy of Truth group will become a great resource for support and networking of all kinds.

There aren't any real hard and fast rules for the parties, well maybe just these two:

1. Embrace life and your sister friends with compassion and joy.
2. Remember that celebration and assessment always provide far better results than judgment and punishment.

I'm so glad that you'll be joining thousands of other women as they transform their lives with the Joy of Truth experience. Please let me know what kinds of changes you're making to live a life that reflects your deepest desires. You can reach me at [motivationmama@gmail.com](mailto:motivationmama@gmail.com)

Love and many continued blessings,  
Denise Joy

