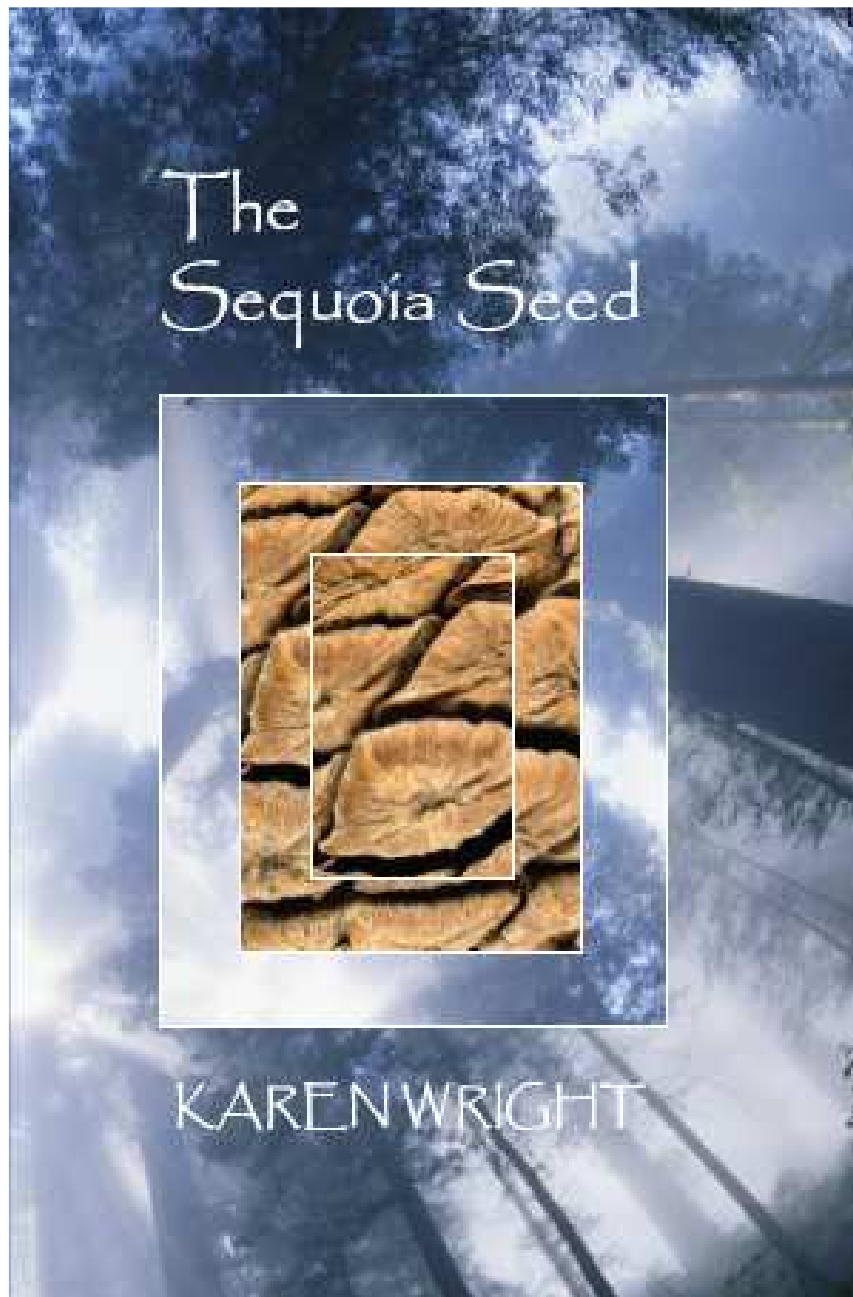


# The Author's Choice

... excerpts from her hot-selling new book



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## Advanced Praise for *The Sequoia Seed*

“Strap yourself in for a deep, provocative, mind-altering, life-enhancing read from the mind and heart of a woman who lives her own life in alignment with the perennial truths she writes about.” – John Scherer, Author, *Work and the Human Spirit*, Washington

“When you’re feeling lost and confused . . . when life stops making sense . . . when you know you can do, be and have more, and you need the practical answers that’ll help you make it happen . . . that’s when you need *The Sequoia Seed*.” –Pat Lynch, Author, *The Five Secrets*, Arizona

“This is FANTASTIC! You sure do have a way with words! I LOVE what you write, the truth and integrity it carries and the provocative, emotive prose you use! You are just MAGIC, Ms. Wright!” – June Hope, Director, Training Consultancy, Australia

“Your writing is like a literary river that slowly, but persistently, wore away my doubts, blame and anger.” - Al Olsen, Financial Planner, Washington

“Your writing is refreshingly frank and you cut through the fluff with laser precision. It feels like I’m sitting across from a good friend at my kitchen table. I use your insight like a close friend’s advice.” – Sonja Meline, Teacher, Minnesota

“Obstacles and frozen moments and frantic overwhelm. You have the antidote to all of those.” – Sandy Kay, Writer, California

“It amazes me that one person can be blessed with such wisdom. You always seem to grab me by the scruff of the coat and give me a little shake.” –Teresa Merryfield, Life Coach, Alberta, Canada

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## Foreword by Jim Warda

Karen Wright understands us, because she has looked deeply into herself, even the darkest places, and wasn't afraid to tell us what she found.

In *The Sequoia Seed*, like a kind and wise friend, Karen takes the time to sit with us, listens to our hopes and fears, and at the same time, gives us a good swift kick in the butt to remind us just how much we have to offer.

She believes in us and our ability to change.

She's an observer. She sees things in us we can't always see. She sees our strength. She sees our truth. She sees the things we want to hide, the sometimes shame, the sometimes regret, the oftentimes feeling that we won't be able to get it done. Yet she sees it all with caring eyes, letting us know there's nothing wrong with us. In fact, there's everything right with us.

She sees what we can be, and won't let us rest until we've become it.

*The Sequoia Seed* is a gift. It's Karen being the friend who calls on the phone at night, wanting to know how our day went, wanting to know what amazing things we accomplished, wanting to know what's been tough, wanting to help us stand up after a particularly hard fall. Then, when we tell her how rough it's been, she understands. When we laugh, she laughs. When we cry, she's just quiet and listens, which is exactly what we need exactly when we need it.

In these pages, you'll find her compassion. She understands we're all going through something, struggling to greatness, trying to be our best, wanting to love and be loved—forever and a day—and even a few minutes after that.

In these pages, you'll find her belief that we create our reality, and that we have the ability to punch holes through the walls of illusion we've also created to hide from the responsibility.

She knows there is dignity in the struggle, divinity in being human, divinity in losing our way and then finding it on a moonstruck night in June.

Her words are a poet's words—"To see truth, you must come from truth."

Her words are inspiring—"You are eternal. You are safe. You are stronger than anything this world visits upon you."

Her words are strong—"Ironically, what you heard was not, 'No.' It was 'Know.'"

Her words are clear—"Life is not in the answer business. It, forever and always, asks questions."

Her words are thoughtful—"Behave yourself into becoming the person you wish to be."

Her words are her words. Yet, they're ours, too. Because, in many ways, Karen speaks for us.

As you read *The Sequoia Seed*, you'll find yourself constantly amazed by how Karen seems to know you, because she does. She knows what we're all going through. She knows it because she's going through it, too. Her gift is that she can take that knowing and put it into words. Glorious, grace-filled words.

Thank you, Karen, for the gift of this book. It came from your heart.

I can tell.

—Jim Warda, Author, *Where Are We Going So Fast?*

## Preface

It can grow taller than the Statue of Liberty and live nearly forty centuries. Ancient fossil remains show that its ancestors date back for 175 million years. The giant of its species is the most massive of all living forms on the planet. It would take twenty adults, holding hands with outstretched arms, to encircle its base. Yet, paradoxically, it begins as a tiny seed smaller than a flake of oatmeal. This is the mighty Sequoia tree.

Its egg-sized cone can lie undisturbed on the forest floor for fifty years before surrendering its seeds. Ironically, the forest fires that destroy other trees are friends to the Sequoia. Its four-foot thick bark chemically repels the flames, and the fire's heat opens the cone, to at last, release its seeds to take root.

Like the dormant Sequoia seed, our destinies are often set in motion by our own personal fires. A health crisis, the loss of a loved one, and the acceptance of a truth not before seen—these are the infernos that reduce our ideologies to ashes and give birth to new sight. These are the precious moments when we can release our grip on old realities and open ourselves up to the budding possibilities of a bountiful life.

This is the purpose of *The Sequoia Seed*: to cast seeds and embrace the fires—for they shall surely come, these struggles that transform our lives. The question is, will we bud or will we burn? Will we trust that life's abundance is our ever-present inheritance, or will we cling to the lie of unworthiness? Will we give this world our sacred gifts of contribution and passion, or will we die with our music still inside us?

Problems, difficult people, tragedies—these are our fires; these are our teachers. When the heat approaches we can choose to release or retreat. And that choice becomes our experience and fashions the fate of our lives. Each day we may choose again—to see with new eyes; to look beyond the illusion of limitation to the magnificence that we are!

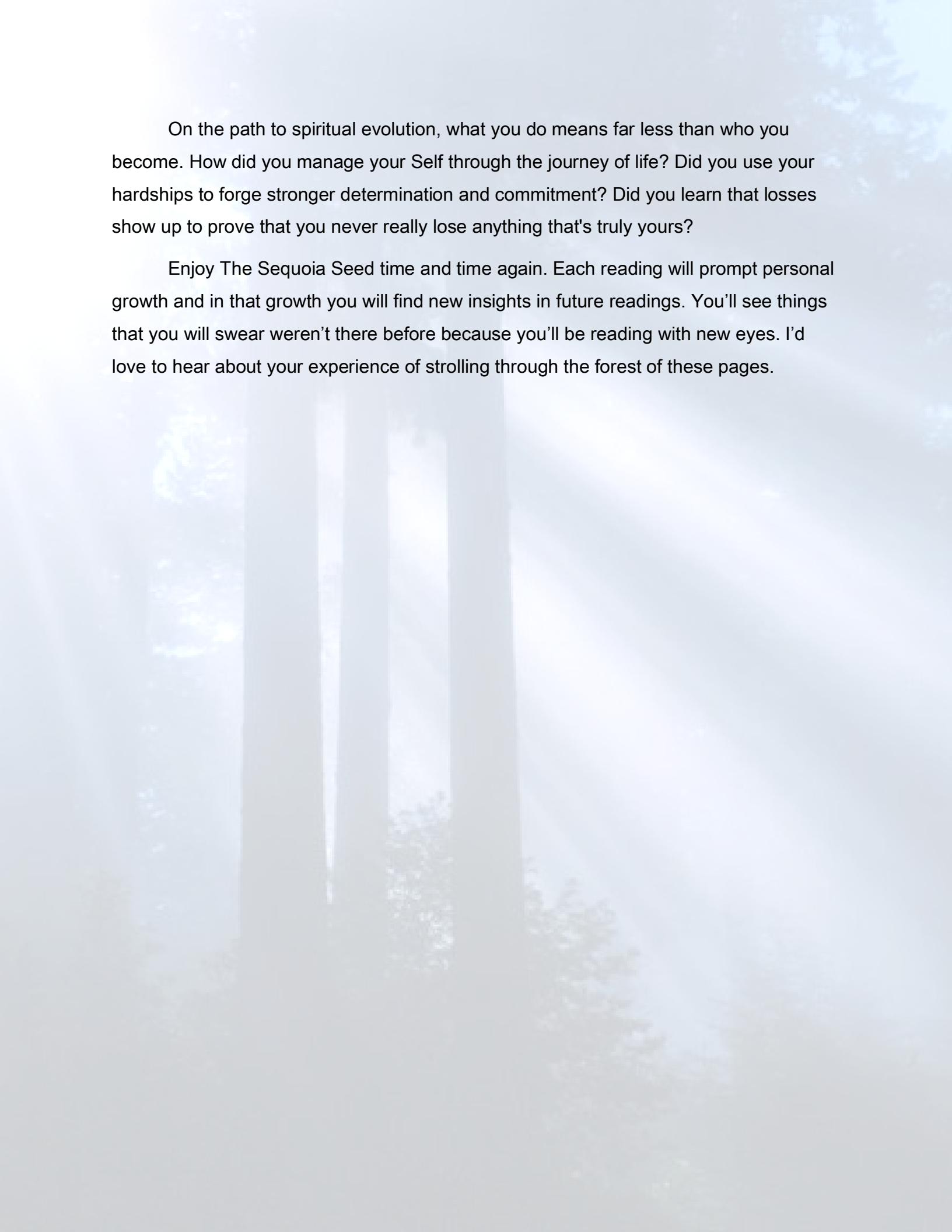
This book's seeds lie in the inspirational and provocative insights of my on-line subscription-based e-zine, "Waking Up." For years, loyal readers throughout the world have received timely messages challenging them to give more, love deeper, and

engage wholeheartedly with life. Hundreds wrote to tell me of their hurdles and their growth. Here, you'll read the stories of real people who've faced real dilemmas. People who have struggled with all the troubles you too may have faced. People who didn't have it all figured out, but kept walking anyway. Those who felt the pain and still got out of bed to take on another day because they learned to listen to their inner voice of wisdom over the barrage of world opinion. Life is not for the weak of spirit. It requires much. My respect and admiration for those who shared their stories with me is endless.

Unlike lighter reading, *The Sequoia Seed* is best enjoyed with time between readings since each chapter is intensely thought provoking. Some chapters will present new ideas to contemplate; others will pose questions that may trigger personal soul searching. It's best to let a chapter ripen for awhile—let it germinate and take root. View your reading as a journey through your mind and life to unearth old forgotten beliefs and discover new insights. Some chapters will ask you to dig in and immerse yourself in exercises. I encourage you to get involved and not skip through these opportunities so that you will have a richer experience. Isn't that what you're after?

*The Sequoia Seed* contains a series of three acts or parts that parallel our process of growth. Act One: *The Cone Awaits*, contains chapters that ask you to notice the self-identity you've created and how you are demonstrating that identity to the world. Act One is the beginning of growth toward wholeness. In Act Two: *The Fires Come*, you dig into how you navigate the journey of your life. Act Two will sharpen your spiritual skills and simplify your daily challenges. With the spiritual skills of Act Two in place, you'll now determine how to follow your heart and resolve your will. This is also a time of celebration and to remember what's most valued in this journey to wholeness. Act Three: *The Mighty Sequoia Grows*, our final section, glimpses destiny and explores the ripening of your purpose and path.

As you read, dare to question and to be accountable for the choices you've made and the life you've lived thus far. Owning your choices is the key to freedom. We can never really release anything until we fully take responsibility for it. This is where you'll begin to create with intention and return to the wholeness of your spirit.



On the path to spiritual evolution, what you do means far less than who you become. How did you manage your Self through the journey of life? Did you use your hardships to forge stronger determination and commitment? Did you learn that losses show up to prove that you never really lose anything that's truly yours?

Enjoy The Sequoia Seed time and time again. Each reading will prompt personal growth and in that growth you will find new insights in future readings. You'll see things that you will swear weren't there before because you'll be reading with new eyes. I'd love to hear about your experience of strolling through the forest of these pages.

A large, textured, golden-brown pine cone is the central focus of the image. The cone's scales are layered and have a wrinkled, organic appearance. It is set against a plain white background, which is itself centered on a larger, semi-transparent image of a pine tree with a blue sky and green foliage.

# Act One

The Cone Awaits  
-assessing your reality



1

## The Balancing Act

*"We are not human beings on a spiritual journey.*

*We are spiritual beings on a human journey."*

*–Stephen R. Covey*

**H**igh above, the tightrope walker gingerly places one foot on the rope, wiggles his foot to find the just-right position before shifting his weight from the platform onto the taut rope. With one foot still firmly planted on the landing, the first step out is the easiest.

Then, when the feel is right, he moves his second foot onto the rope, bobbling slightly as he finds his balance on the slender strand he will walk high above the crowd. Further and further away from the platform he inches; further and further from the steadiness of a securely anchored rope.

As the daredevil makes his way to the middle of the suspended rope, it begins to sway and bounce slightly. The rope is slack. The cable droops beneath his weight and each step of his progress is now uphill. His sole's grip must be firm or he will slide backward. He concentrates hard to keep a single focus of calm and balance. As he makes his way to the distant platform, the rope becomes increasingly steady and sure. Finally, he leaps onto the solid platform and the crowd releases a long-held collective sigh.

If we consider this experience through the lens of metaphor, we might glimpse a few very fundamental truths about our own journey through life—which you might agree can often feel like walking a tightrope.

Let's imagine that the platform represents our spiritual base. It is where we feel confident and secure. It is constant and unchanging, because truth is eternal. For this is a place of truth. Nothing is ambiguous or unstable. There is little risk. We feel self-assured and strong. There is no real reason to ever leave our spiritual home, but we humans often get restless. So, one day we step out onto the rope—toward a new experience.

No longer standing on the solid ground of what we know, we immediately feel a sense of apprehension—even fear. The ground is no longer still and every move we make triggers ripples of increasing turmoil. It is tough to keep our balance, and we often overreact to the swaying rope, causing it to swing even more wildly. If we were not afraid before, we are now.

Imagine that moving away from the steady platform is also moving away from our spiritual base. The further we stray, the more unstable we become. The confidence and strength of living in spirit fades with each step we take. Risks loom large and fear plagues our minds. It takes great focus and concentration to keep our balance and not fall. We can begin to doubt ourselves and forget that we are always safe—no matter what. We forget who we are.

Rachel's courageous experience below illustrates this metaphor with precision and humor. Having done a ropes course myself, I can attest to the authenticity of her fears!

"A friend of mine owns an adventure company that offers outdoor experiences to businesses and organizations looking for unusual team building exercises. I visited his camp one day and he invited me to join a group of high school students who were just beginning their ropes course. A ropes course is a series of outdoor challenges that tests your physical strength as well as your mental and emotional control. Each task is usually very simple, but profoundly difficult.

I had friends who had participated in ropes courses before and they always spoke of it as one of the most powerful and self-revealing experiences they'd ever had. So, when my friend invited me to join in, I agreed enthusiastically.

It didn't take me long to be reminded that these high school students were about thirty years younger than me. Funny how the mind forgets age, isn't it? While they seemed to do each challenge with ease, I struggled to hide my obvious lack in strength and mortal belief in danger.

In one particular experience my fear got the better of me. I don't remember what the task was called. I think panic wiped everything out except the fear. I remember THAT vividly! The goal was to climb a twenty foot vertical pole, stand on a platform at the top and leap six feet out to grab a hoop they called 'The Golden Ring.' What my friend didn't tell me was that the wooden steps hammered into the side of the pole were set in such a way that you couldn't easily climb up or that the platform at the top of the pole swiveled! Or the worst, that when you jumped for the ring, the pole I stood on would sway backwards defeating my push.

It's a good thing I didn't know these things before I began. Oh, I almost forgot—I was wearing a harness around my body that insured I would not fall to my death! This is a little fact that my mind would conveniently forget for the entire length of my ordeal.

The climb up the pole looked like a piece of cake. I wasn't the first one to do this challenge and I watched as kids one-third my age sprinted up like it was no big deal. But, it was a big deal! I got about half way up and found that the foot I was standing on was also the one I needed to reach the next available step. After much jockeying, I reached the platform.

Here was dilemma number two. The platform not only swiveled, but it was bigger around than the pole I clung to. Which meant that I had to let go of the pole and hoist myself over the lip of the platform to get to the top. And I finally did. None too gracefully, I'm afraid.

So, here I was, crouched on the platform with the students telling me to stand up. Remember, the platform swivels . . . and it also rocks. It's not a solid footing. Kind of like standing on a clipboard balanced on a little rock. Try as I might, I could not stand up. Squat was my position of choice. But, you can't jump from a squat!

As I willed my legs to straighten, all they would do was shake. I remember looking down at them and silently saying, stop shaking! They

didn't listen. When I got as upright as I figured I could, I finally took my eyes off my feet to see where the ring was. My God! It looked yards away.

I was exhausted, my legs wouldn't stop shaking, and all I could think of was, I'm going to miss the ring and fall to my death! Yes, I did have a harness on that would prevent that, but my mind wasn't convinced.

I got up the courage—well, it was more like desperation to be done with this—to leap off the quivering platform and grab for the ring. Only one fingertip touched it before I found myself falling to the ground. The harness stopped me, of course, and I was fine. As they lowered me to the blessed ground beneath I imagined all those youngsters thinking, the old lady blew it. Silently, as I crawled out of the harness, I chided myself for the hysterical thoughts of doom I'd had only moments before. It was humbling to realize how little control I had over my emotions, let alone my legs! But, it was exhilarating to have faced my fear and to have done it anyway!" —Rachel J.

Like Rachel knows so well, it is easy to forget we are safe when the world looks dangerous. And when we wander from our spiritual home we often forget that we are safely tethered. We may stray from our spiritual roots, but spirit never leaves us. We may forget our ever-present strength, but it is always there. We only need to remember who we really are—eternal spirits playing in a fantasyland of illusion.

This world is where we learn of our true nature. Through surviving experiences of seeming danger and tragedy, we slowly remember that these challenges are here to stimulate latent memories of our spiritual being. Of all the skills we could possibly acquire to ensure a full and meaningful life, learning to manage our fearful minds is number one. Anxious self talk, doubt, worry, and distrust interfere with our ability to connect to truth. Controlling our thoughts allows us to see through their subtle deception.

We are safe. We are strong. All our frailties are products of our own imaginings. If we stop feeding these fallacies through our blind obedience to fear, they will wither. We are here to remember that we have created all we see, first through spirit, then through human endeavor. But every creation pales beside the wonder of our eternal spirit. Each is merely an illusion constructed by our unmanaged minds.



5

## Start Again

*"The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be the beginning."*

*–Ivy Baker Priest*

Starting over is the moment when one thing ends and another begins; two moments in one reality; the alpha and omega that engender such a confusion of feelings of disappointment, gratitude, fear, and defiance. To a stunning degree, the quality of your life depends upon how you handle the emotional turbulence of a closing door and in which direction you find yourself facing. As in every part of life, it is not what happens to you that determines your fate. It is what you do next.

We each have our own stories—many of them. Those heart-stopping moments when we realized that a dream was not going to come true. When we held shattered plans in our hands and could not make it better. With eyes cast to the ground, it was then that we answered the question we must all face at times like these.

How do I deal with this?

Will I be bitter that I was cheated of my chance? Will I scream to the top of my blistered lungs that it is not fair? Will I envy and begrudge those who have received what I deserved? Will I antacid my rancor and inebriate my rage? Will I clothe myself in resentment and withdraw from life; or bed-down in the arms of self-pity?

Or will I turn my anger inward and condemn myself for not being good enough? Slink back into the land of self-pitying mediocrity where no one expects much of me

anyway? Will I lick my wounds and beseech sympathy from other co-dependent could-have-beens? Will I dare not look up from my shoes for fear of being hurt again? Will I pine in silence for a life I will never have?

Hopefully, I will remember that every door has two sides and that, opened or closed, it is a temporary orientation. Will I remember that it is through resolve that life-forces awaken the primal substance of my dreams? Will I remember that comfort is not a sign of success and unquestioned answers are meaningless?

Life is not in the answer business. It, forever and always, asks questions. And the questions all have the same root. Who are you becoming? Who will you create yourself to be? What will you choose to do with your talents? Will your presence linger in this world once you have gone? How will you deal with defeat? What purpose will consume you—heart and soul?

Life will undoubtedly deliver your fair share of pain and setbacks. And that's not necessarily bad. Hardship is the stone on which we are honed into stronger humans and higher expressions of spirit. It is through our difficulties that we learn patience and humility and compassion. To wish for a life of ease and comfort is pointless. Life is not easy or comfortable. Life just is. Struggle or ease, comfort or pain, are merely judgments we make about our experience. It is not what happens that determines your fate. It is what you do next.

Every day you discover who you are. You bump up against life and determine how you'll respond. And it's in that very response that you forge your character and your fate. It's best you pay more attention to your response than to the event to which you are reacting. The event is just the event. It has no inherent meaning. It is simply an opportunity for self-discovery and choice.

"I'm embarking on a new journey and anything is possible if I don't let the fears get the best of me. The fears of the unknown will always be with me: fear of failure, fear of new experiences, fear of meeting new people, fear of leaving my comfortable space and venturing forth into the world where I am vulnerable and may make mistakes. But it's okay to make mistakes.

Your words have shown me that it is human to question ourselves and change our minds. No one is perfect.

Even at the age of fifty-eight, it's okay to start over. In fact, it is more than okay; it is an imperative for me. I had grown tired of the corporate world and my job. I wasn't excited or inspired anymore. The company's aspirations and goals were not important to me anymore. My life, my goals and my values are important and I'm working toward attaining goals that will enrich my life while still representing my values." –Jennifer Robins

When life gets hard and your world crumbles, ask, "Who will I be now?" With each response to setbacks ask, "Who am I becoming with this choice?"

Every choice and decision you make defines who you are. It reveals your internal thoughts, fears, and ambitions. Each day you write your autobiography one page at a time. You script your life and the script reveals who you are. Is your demonstration of who you are reflecting who you want to be? You might say that you value your family above all else, but how do you treat them? Do you spend time with them? Are they at the top of your priority list? Your actions speak more truthfully than your words.

Your real values are reflected in your choices. And your choices reflect who you are. If you want to really know someone well, stop listening to who they say they are and just watch their choices. You will learn much and quickly.

If you are not happy with your reflection, only you can change it. If you are not happy with who you have become, make a vow to make different choices, choices that the person you would like to become would make. Be an actor. Behave yourself into becoming the person you wish to be. Choose differently, and with each conscious choice you will create yourself anew.

Dennis found his world shattered and questioned who he was when a door closed. He was forced to rediscover his sense of self and find a way to move forward in peace.

"As I write this note it's August, and I'm on vacation with my two sons, thirteen and eleven, and my lovely daughter, age ten. This time is precious because I can fully

enjoy them, and they get ALL of me. I disappeared for three and a half years until I started my life over again on January 3rd.

I had just completed another let's-keep-it-together-for-the-kids'-Christmas. It had actually gone very well. On January 3rd, I again saw my attorney who said the divorce would be final January 13th, unless I wasn't ready. Right then it hit me. I'm ready. It's time to get on with my life, no longer letting things happen to me, but starting a new life outside of what I'd known for eighteen years of marriage. I moved out three days later. It was one of the toughest things I've ever done, but everyone, including the kids, knew it was the right thing to do.

Looking back, I am still not sure how or why it happened. My mid forties wife of fifteen years, who I adored, told me she loved me, but was not in love with me. It was a shot to the head, the stomach, and my ego. I spent a long time trying to be the person she might love. What did I need to change so she would love me? I needed my fairytale life of a beautiful wife, my three beautiful children, a good job, and a good home to be mine again.

I invested too much of the next three years letting how someone else felt about me determine my self-worth. Eventually I realized this was not about me. I was consumed with this to a degree that pieces of me were growing dormant. I had a single focus, avoiding what was inevitable—my divorce. I was not whole to anyone, my kids, family, friends, or to my work. In time I realized it wasn't my wife I was hesitant to divorce, it was my life. Not being able to kiss my kids good night or goodbye before school was going to be tough. But the issues to be solved were out of my control and it was time to move on.

When I left the house that day in January I vowed not to dwell on how we/I got to where we were. Looking forward is what would keep my resolve and bring me back. Is it easy? NO. Within two months my mom died suddenly, and I had to put my dog of fourteen years down. Within sixty days I had lost my wife, my house, my mom, and my dog. Even though these may be great musings for a country music song, they're tough emotions to live through.

I survived it all and continue to move forward because I chose to start again. I have bad memories, and some emotional scars. Some days I feel like I died, and my exwife and kids are moving on without me. I recently flew back from New York to home, got off the plane and realized there was nobody to go home to. I do not expect to float into the future. I'll have setbacks, though they can be self-correcting with enough determination.

But because I have chosen to take control, I am more self-aware and able to understand my emotions and continue to move on to the next phase in my life. I'm BACK, because I choose to make the rest of my life happen, not happen to me.

While going through all of this, I read Karen's e-zine regularly. I was on such a hunt for answers, many of which did not exist. I even read all of the Dr. Phil books, though they basically say the same stuff in different formats. You did this work, your passion to reach and help others find answers. I don't have them all, but I do appreciate your insights." —Dennis J.

Even in the hardest challenges you face, life wants you to succeed. It is not out to defeat you. Life wants you to be spectacular. It has never once told you "No." Certainly, you may have heard "No," but it emanated from your own mind. And, ironically, what you heard was not "No," it was "Know." It was the holiest of wisdoms calling you to remember the Truth of who you are.

When your head is filled with the myth of defeat, remember that nothing is denied you. We don't always know the path we will live. Like children who don't know what's best for them, we are also sometimes blind to the way that will bring us our greatest good. Know that every event, appearing good or bad, is specifically designed to bring you wholeness. Know your power.

In each instance of your past, when it felt like all was falling apart, haven't you now recognized the growth and strength you found from having had that experience? Our lessons are often brought to us cloaked in the disguise of its opposite. We learn to let go by hanging on too tight. We learn to heal when we've been weary with grief. The lessons can be hard, but they are not purposeless. Starting again means believing that there is a light ahead, even if we cannot yet see it.

Whatever difficult moment you are now experiencing, choose to start again. Choose to know now. You can. Choice is the door to the answer you seek. And that door will open to endless others. How do you choose to create your life? Choose that and know the Truth.



# Act Two

The Fires Come  
-sharpening your spiritual skills



## 12 Diving with the Brake On

*"Once we become aware of how much our daily experiences are influenced by our inner programs, the more imperative it becomes to examine our beliefs and be prepared to change those beliefs that are limiting us"*

*—John Kehoe*

In the winter of 1984 I rented a U-Haul truck to move cross-country from Cleveland, Ohio, to San Francisco, California. The incredibly long journey was made even longer by the truck's persistently sluggish speed. No matter how hard I stomped on the gas pedal, the truck would go no faster than forty-five miles per hour.

After miles of frustration, increasingly vile thoughts, and exhausted leg muscles, I pulled into the only town I had seen for hours. I was in Texas. After failing to get help at two gas stations, I learned a new lesson—people who work at gas stations do not repair cars anymore, not even in Texas.

I hoped against hope to find an open mechanic's shop. It was Sunday. Fortune finally smiled on me, and I came upon a tiny shop on the outskirts of town. I pulled in and a robust man with overalls as greasy and black as his filthy floor strolled over to ask how he could help. I told him of my dilemma and my hopes to arrive in California before growing old! He popped the truck's hood and smiled. "U-Haul sometimes installs speed governors on their trucks, and you got one of them."

"What is a speed governor?" I asked.

“It limits how fast you can go, as you found out. The accelerator will only depress enough to reach the speed U-Haul chooses. They figure that most folks moving their own furniture and stuff are not very experienced at driving trucks this size, so they make sure you don’t go faster than you can handle,” he concluded.

“Can you disengage it or whatever you have to do to make it go faster?” I pleaded.

“Nope. Against regulations,” he said, a bit too smugly.

“A mechanic with ethics,” I glibly mumbled to myself. Well, at least I knew why all my efforts to gain speed were fruitless. All the while that I had been stomping on the gas, the truck was applying the brakes!

I once heard a financial consultant say that each of us will only make as much money as we believe we are worth. He warned that our financial futures were limited by a money governor. Just like that governor limited the speed of my trip, a money governor will limit how much financial momentum we achieve.

Each of us operates under a particular standard of personal wealth. That standard was set long ago by our parents’ beliefs about money and the lifestyle we lived as a child. The financial status of the friends we had then, as well as the prevailing influences of our childhood community also helped forge that financial model. Each factor colluded to create a level of normal for us. And for us, normal is reality.

Intellectually we might think we deserve much more money than we have, but deep in our subconscious, we have exactly what we are comfortable having. On those occasions when we earn or have much more than our normal funds, we seem blindly compelled to get rid of it quickly. We either spend it—sometimes frivolously or sometimes unexpectedly—like an expense to replace your vehicle’s transmission or to handle an increase in property taxes, or whatever pops up to siphon off the excess cash. It seems that when we exceed our money comfort zone, the world and we conspire to do whatever it takes to get back to normal.

I can imagine the groans of disbelief now. But, consider this for a moment. When was the last time you made or had money that far surpassed your usual finances? What happened to that excess? Did you use it to secure your future or put it to use making even more money through wise investments?

Did you splurge on something that in hindsight seemed rather foolish? Maybe you took the recommendation of a friend and bought shares of a highly speculative stock. Maybe you just squandered it away and ended up with little to show for it at all. Chances are, if you are like most of us, whatever you did with it, you soon found yourself right back at the same net worth that you had before the windfall.

Ponder this revealing statistic: eight out of ten lottery winners declare bankruptcy within five years of winning the jackpot? Eighty percent! And these are folks who won millions of dollars! The problem was, that instant wealth was being handled by a non-millionaire mind. A mind with non millionaire habits of managing money.

It is much like a typical college student in their freshman year of college. For many, this is the first taste of real independence from the parental restrictions they endured in the past. Suddenly, they can go where they want, when they want, for as long as they want. They can do what they want, whenever they want. And with little to no accountability to anyone in authority, many students spend a great part of their first college year engaging in behaviors that would shock their parents. Kids rebel and flaunt their newly found freedom . . . until one day they wake up to the inevitable reality that their irresponsibility has been personally damaging.

And so it is with many of the instant lottery millionaires created every day. With all that new money, they sometimes go a little crazy and buy incredibly expensive things just because, suddenly, they can. Mesmerized by burgeoning bank accounts, they proceed to spend their windfall like it will last forever. But, pretty soon—sooner than they ever dreamed—the money is gone, the bills are piled up, and their bank balance once again reflects their true money sophistication. It shrinks to their normal level of funds. Back to what is comfortable. And the promise of a life of ease disappears as quickly as the money did.

This notion of a governor started me wondering what other parts of our lives might be limited by unnoticed governing beliefs.

Perhaps we only have as much happiness as we believe we deserve. After all, if we walk around happy all the time, someone or something is sure to take it away. We do not want to invite scrutiny. And why do we merit such happiness when the world around us is filled with so much unhappiness? Maybe being that happy, especially for no logical reason, is just being naive. And God knows, with all the wrongs we have committed in our lives, we don't really deserve to be feeling so good.

Maybe we get only as much love as we believe we are due. Again, we're nothing special, just one person making it through life. With all our faults, and we know them well, why would anyone truly love us? So, we end up suspicious of those who care, knowing that we do not deserve it. We might not even let that love in, since we know it will likely end badly anyway. Many folks just decide to avoid the whole issue of love altogether thinking that there's too much vulnerability—too many chances to get hurt.

Do we have a worthiness governor that limits our level of confidence or self-worth to a paltry level that someone like us ought to have? After all, it's wise to know your place.

We could go on and on. In just about every aspect of our lives, we have developed a comfort with a certain quality of existence. Too much less than that level causes pain and too much more causes anxiety. So, we stay within our self defined boundaries of normality and make adjustments when we stray too far away.

Consequently, your life, for better or worse, is a diary of who you have believed you are. No point in disagreeing. If you truly believed you could be and have more, you would. There is no judgment in that. Not really. It is just factual. You have become the version of you that you have chosen to be. You have become the you that you are comfortable with, as one of my "Waking Up" readers woke up to.

"Why am I spinning my wheels? Why does this constantly happen to me? What is going on that I can't press forward? I read your message about the governor and I said, 'She's absolutely correct!' In the job I have right now, I'm taking on a lot of responsibilities and not getting the

recognition for it. When I read your governor message, what that said to me was, 'I'm doing it.' The reason that this is constantly happening to me is because my mental governor is saying I have to do a lot for everyone, to keep on taking on more and more and more. And don't expect, or don't even ask for the recognition. I need to move out of the governor thing where I'm going 45 miles an hour, and I'm pressing my foot to the accelerator. I need to . . . I want to go faster.

I have, this week, consciously been setting limits for myself where I'm saying no. To me, that is actually moving my governor, because I'd never say no before and I'm starting to do that. It's a little scary for me, but I'm actually getting a reaction to it where they're saying, 'Gee, we should have recognized you. Yes, you are doing the work of three people.' So, I'm liking that part." —Toni D.

Do you really want more money, more love, and more happiness? Then stop chasing after a new job, a new romance or greater thrills. The thrill of something new will lift your spirits for a moment or two. But, newness wears off and your life will once again look remarkably the same as it did before. Remember the governor. Without changing its limiting settings, getting more money, love or happiness will be temporary at best.

Your beliefs about who you really are are much stronger than the circumstances you find yourself in. Just changing your surroundings isn't enough to experience a new life. You need to change how you think of yourself and what you believe is possible.

Work on the governor, not the world. Find out why you have chosen to have what you have and not what you say you want. What is holding you back? What sabotaging beliefs limit your choices? Why don't you believe you deserve more?

The good news is that all of your limiting beliefs and your habitual comfort zones are merely safe choices you once made and kept making. They were just choices, like what to wear today.

But, for you, tomorrow can be a very different day from today. You can choose to let more love, more happiness, and more money in. You can choose to believe you are

worth all of it—and even more. Or, instead, you can choose to believe that even if you did, by some fluke, get what you really wanted, it wouldn't last anyway, so why bother.

In this lifetime, on this planet, experience is all we have. What are you choosing to experience? Why? Figure that out and you will advance to a higher order of will—a stronger discipline to choose according to your values. You won't long for the healing of a strained relationship, yet continue to behave distant and angry. You won't wish for an end to your money worries, but continue to spend excessively. You will make conscious choices and stop unwittingly sabotaging your results.

There is so much of everything in this life. You are as deserving as the next soul. Being happy, being rich, having a rewarding life—these are not evil. You are not taking anything away from anyone else. Quite the contrary, in a state of abundance, you will be a wonderful gift of an example to the world. One that will hopefully inspire others to break free from their self-limiting governors too, and contribute greatness to the world, governed by conscious will, not mindless comfort.



# Act Three

The Mighty Sequoia Grows  
-fulfilling your promise



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## Chance the Rapids

*"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sale away from the safe harbor.*

*Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."*

*-Mark Twain*

**Y**ears ago, one of country singer Garth Brook's songs reached into a secreted place within me and touched a yearning that I didn't realize existed. It was something primal and compelling. The song was The River. It speaks of living deliberately and fighting the pull to just drift along. My heart responded in one frightful leap to his prophetic words: "choose to chance the rapids, dare to dance the tides." It's funny how truth reaches out and grabs you. As a reminder to stay conscious, I emblazoned the sentiment on a license plate holder and mounted it on the rear bumper of my 4Runner. Whenever I saw it, time and again, I remembered, "Don't slide through life. Make this day count."

Occasionally I noticed drivers in cars stopped behind me at traffic lights, straining to read the message. Some looked confused, but others smiled, getting its metaphoric meaning. Secretly I hoped that the sting of those words would strike at the hearts of all who saw them.

In a life where one day tends to blend seamlessly into the next, it's easy to just drift along, to go with the flow, not make waves, and to leave little trace of our existence. We can get hypnotized by the endlessness of minutes and hours and days. Time seems

eternal. Another tomorrow follows this day like clockwork. It is so easy to sleep through life . . . so comfortable to slip into habit and routine. Soft, warm, familiar . . .

## WAKE UP!

“The sun will come out tomorrow . . .” is not a promise, it’s simply an expectation, and expectations are shattered all the time. At some point, when it’s too late for you to do anything about it, tomorrow won’t come. Time will run out. The last thing you did will forever be the last thing you did.

Truly, today is all you have—this minute—this moment. Don’t fall asleep and miss out on your life. To assume that you will have tomorrow to do what you did not do today is to, one day, miss your chance. Today is all you can count on.

Keep what’s most important in your life front and center. The so-called urgent tasks and niggling to-dos will not fulfill you, no matter how long your list. Yet, we tend to measure our productivity by checking those tasks off of our list. Ironically, it seems that the more insignificant the task, the greater the chance that it will get done. Why? Because it is easy and doesn’t require much of us. It also doesn’t usually add up to much either, but hey . . . it got checked off.

It’s the non-urgent stuff that most often gets postponed. Telling your loved ones how fortunate you are to have them in your life. Saying “I’m sorry” for the stupid thoughtless thing you said that upset a friend. Calling the company you’d really like to work for, to see if there is an opening. Visiting your lonely grandfather in his retirement community. Taking time to stroll around the park, even once, to remember what it feels like to have the warm sun on your face. Stopping, for a moment, to remember the passion you harbor for an almost forgotten dream.

What truly matters most in our lives seems to go unattended, day after day, year after year. We immerse ourselves in the quantity of our days and neglect the quality of our lives. But, it’s not too late to stop the neglect, and it’s never too early to make up for lost time. Today can be different. It only takes a different decision.

Teresa looked at her life and realized that she was living her days doing work that meant less and less to her, while her family and passions took a backseat. So she decided to resurrect a childhood passion and focus her life on her real values.

“Growing up with six other brothers and sisters in a three bedroom home was delightful, most of the time, and cozy to say the least. I often found myself in need of space—a retreat. In the summer months this was not a problem for there was lots of outdoors in which to get away. In the winter months I designed the perfect spaces in corners of rooms or in our unfinished basement. One winter I claimed the space under the stairs as my territory and it became my personal haven.

Since that time long ago, I have consistently found myself recreating space, especially neglected space, like the historic homes I now restore.

The first home I purchased was an old school house in Logan, Utah. After much labor, it was a beautiful home with unmatched character. I fell in love with the whole process of taking something so neglected and turning it into something so special. The process of renewing hidden wood flooring is likely the most emotionally impressive. After that, I was hooked and decided to make this my full time profession.

I'd worked in the corporate world in Human Resources and Training. My job gave me limited time for my family and social life, let alone my many projects. Aching to do restorations full time and create a way to sustain our family financially through my passion became a constant in my life. After much hesitation I went under, over, and through! I now restore, at minimum, two historic homes or properties per year and have managed to spend the majority of my time with my family. What a blessing vision is, what an illusion ego is.

Several old homes later I found myself on my hands and knees listening, as I would rip away layers of floor covering (carpet, linoleum, paint), and it was as though I could feel the wood breathe. And as I revealed the wood floor beneath, I felt as though I was also de-layering. There was such a sense of gratitude on both ends at that very moment.

As much as I love this, I have moments where it's completely exhausting and I wonder if I'm nuts doing this. It's been scary at times along the way because sometimes I don't know how the finances are going to work and how it's going to turn out. There have been several times when I've contemplated going back to work, even in order to make something happen and it just seems like the more faith I put into this work and the more I let go, the more I'm given what I need to make it happen. So, I'm encouraged.

This is where my heart is. And it serves a great purpose. I see the people that come into these homes and they just absolutely love them! The home that we just sold was so hard for me to let go of emotionally. My husband has wanted me to sell it for a long time and I really, for some reason, emotionally connected with this home. I finally let go emotionally and, of course, we sold it that week. I could feel the energy of the home in gratitude to me. I knew that it was my time to go. It was fabulous, the people that came forth. It was just like a happy ending even though it involves a house! It's the simplicity of a house. I just feel that energy there and it's wonderful to experience that."

—Teresa Nelson

Just for today resurrect your dream. Do one thing that breathes life into its parched lungs. Call your friend and mend the fence. Be sure that the last words you say to a loved one before you part are, "I love you." It may be the last words they ever hear you speak.

Choose to chance the rapids—it is in the churn of life where dreams are born. Dare to dance the tides—be bold in your actions. Savor the sour and the sweet. Live the highs and lows. Feel it all. That is what your senses are for! Take it in, in huge gulps and give it back in armloads. Feel the flow of life rushing through your veins.

On my birthday several years back, I felt disturbingly disconnected from life when I realized that too many of my years had been spent drifting. I didn't have what I had thought I would have had by that point. I hadn't had the adventures I'd always dreamed of. I wasn't yet the person I'd hoped to become. Looking back, I didn't like the meager existence I had chosen. Looking ahead, I realized that I had less time than I'd already wasted. A sobering thought.

I wondered how much time I might still have left to turn my life around. Many, many years, I hoped. But, we do not live in years, we live in days. So, I calculated how many days I might yet live. The life expectancy for a healthy white woman living in the United States at that time was seventy-eight years. I was forty at the time. More than halfway there. So, I subtracted forty from seventy-eight and multiplied that number by three hundred sixty-five days in a year.

I expected to see a really large number. I stared in disbelief at the calculator and at the frighteningly small number of my potentially remaining days—only 13,870!

I looked back on how I had spent the day before and could not really remember anything I did of worth. I thought about the half year that had just passed and realized that it had slipped by almost without notice. I thought about the years of my past where I could not recall even one memory. I had lived 14,600 days and it seemed to add up to very little. I had to wake up! The day was almost gone; the year was half gone. I had to pay attention and live my life as if it mattered!

Fight the deadness of inertia with all your might. Do not fall asleep! Not even for a minute. It may be your last. You wouldn't want to miss it, would you? Listen to your heart. Is it suffocating as you go about business as usual?

Right now, this minute, break the chains of your routine and do something totally out of character, totally life affirming. Dare to live deliberately on this planet. Will yourself to live fully. Make this day the only one you have and a day of triumph over monotony. The moment you do, the spell will be broken and you will wonder why you ever settled for less. And you will never settle for less again.

Each of us in life will receive a chance to do something truly remarkable. Will you be ready? Will your resolve to chance the rapids give you the strength to meet the challenge?



21

## The Faces of Love

*"Where there is love there is life."*

*–Mohandas K. Gandhi*

Six bags of liquid dripped into six plastic tubes draining into the needle in her neck. The breathing tube invading her throat often caused her to gag and gasp for air. You could see the panic on her face when she thought she was suffocating.

This is how I found my aunt in the early hours of a solemn winter morning. Three hours earlier, Mom had called. She said her sister had relapsed and had been re-admitted to the hospital. Aunt Myrna might be dying. Although it was late at night, Mom was making the drive to Yakima immediately. Living an hour further away, I said I would be right behind her.

Only three weeks earlier, I had heard that Aunt Myrna was feeling ill and her skin was yellowing. The lab tests confirmed autoimmune hepatitis. Her body was rejecting her liver and was shutting down. The natural wastes from digestion and bodily processes could not be removed from her system, and she was slowly being poisoned. She had begun to swell from water retention, but medicines seemed to be working to alleviate her pain.

Just recently she had seemed to be getting much better and was home and getting back to her old life. Two days after being released from the hospital, Myrna

relapsed and was rushed to the emergency room unconscious. When Mom called, Myrna was in a coma.

My four-hour drive, in the black of night, felt ominously disengaged from reality. The moonless sky shrouded the land around me in indiscernible shadows and my mind raced with questions I could not answer. Mile upon mile, I was alone on the highway: no headlights coming toward me, no city lights in the distance, and no signs of life. The symbolism didn't go unnoticed.

Occasionally, an 18-wheeler barreled by, jolting my anxious thoughts back from imagining what might happen that day. Most of all, my mind was flooded with worry for my mom. She and Myrna were very close. More than just sisters, they shared a love of quilting that fed their insatiable creativity as well as their special friendship. I knew Mom was panicked, and I could only imagine the dreadful thoughts accompanying her on her solitary drive.

When I arrived at the Critical Care Unit, Mom was alone with her unconscious sister. It was 2:30 a.m. I did not recognize my aunt. A ventilator violently pumped her chest up and down like a lifeless doll. Her arms were a mass of purple and yellow bruises from countless needles. The nurses had resorted to using her neck for the IV's. The overused veins in her arms were too sunken for a needle to penetrate. Her hands were cold and limp. Her vacant eyes a milky yellow.

At seven o'clock family and friends began to arrive. Soon there were over twenty of us. The nurses only allowed two at a time in Myrna's room, so we filled the corridor . . . sitting on the few available chairs and crouching together along the walls of the narrow hallway. Myrna was the only one in the CCU and the nurses did their best to accommodate our growing numbers.

With each passing hour we rode a roller coaster of good news that turned bad, then good again. Two by two we kept vigil: holding her hand, or stroking her hair, speaking our love. Two by two we left sobbing.

The only time Myrna moved was when, in her unconsciousness, she felt the tube down her throat. She would gag, panic, and try to pull the invasive tube from her mouth.

But, her arms were strapped to the bed. We tried to reassure her and encourage her to not fight the machine breathing for her. Then the morphine in her system would take hold and she would drift away . . . lifeless again.

At one point I looked at my extended family crowding the halls of the CCU. They were holding each other, talking quietly, and sharing their despair and their love. I have a big family. Mom had twelve siblings and the aunts, uncles, cousins and second cousins were everywhere. Some relatives I didn't recognize; some I had not seen in ten years; some even twenty. Old reminiscences revealed how we each remembered the other. Funny things, odd memories.

What struck me the most was that even though we were practically strangers, we found a common bond in our love for the woman in room 443. Those who had barely spoken to each other before this day exchanged sadness and hope, differences faded, petty bickering and judgments ceased. None of that was important here. What was important was sharing our love and support. Nothing else mattered.

My aunt stabilized enough for the doctors to transport her to Seattle. They said that the hospital there was better equipped to treat Myrna's illness. The medics kept us away while they detached all of her tubing and prepped her for the gurney waiting in the hall. When they wheeled her out, however, the nurse asked if we would like to say goodbye. That simple caring gesture spoke volumes about the fragile human connection we all find in grief.

Forming a line, we approached Myrna's tightly wrapped body, kissed her forehead or cheek and said we loved her. The words good-bye just seemed too forbidding to utter. Then she was gone. Off to what we all prayed was only a brief pause in her continued life with us.

A few days later, I heard Myrna was more responsive. The doctors had been unable to stop the bleeding ulcer in her stomach, though. She had received eight units of blood since being readmitted to the hospital. I was not convinced that being more aware was necessarily a good thing for her. Perhaps not knowing what was going on

would allow her body to do the healing it needed to do without the worry her mind might cause.

My aunt did not survive more than a few days. Her body simply surrendered. She died with her husband and her children at her side in those final moments of her life. She had lived long enough for so many of her family to be with her one last time and to speak our last words of love. Each of us was reminded that life is fragile and fleeting. We only have each other for a brief time. We cannot allow ourselves to waste that time with anything but love and gratitude and respect.

There were times that early morning while stroking her hair that I saw Myrna open one eye slightly. Even though the opening was tiny, I could feel the enormous connection between us. It was like an electrical surge. I knew she saw me, and I smiled through my tears.

Now and then a lone tear would roll down her cheek. I could only imagine her thoughts. I wanted to hold her and tell her it would be all right. This poked and prodded, swollen-bodied woman was my blood, my mother's sister. Though her body lay lifeless, through the glimmer of a partially opened eye, I could see her invincible spirit.

Promise me this . . . when you finish this story call someone you love and tell them how much they mean to you. You will make two hearts sing.

No matter whom you are angry at, upset at, or holding a grudge against . . . none of that matters if there is one ounce of love between you. Love is not conditional. It cannot just be shut off like a faucet. That heart-wrenching night in the CCU, I witnessed love's power in my family. Selfish attitudes and petty criticisms dissolved in tears and hugs that healed old wounds. Love healed it all.

Think seriously about how damaging your quarrel with a loved one can be. Consider how much precious love you are wasting by letting a difference come between you. Believe me, nothing they have done, or you think they have done, will matter one second if they died right now.

Love is the most precious gift we give or receive. Give and receive as much as your heart can hold. Do not wait a moment. That moment may be too long.

Love isn't just an outwardly directed offering. It is also the most priceless gift you can give yourself. Not to be confused with ego, self-love is nurturing and healthy. It is honoring your being and your contributions to the world. It is recognizing that you are a unique presence on the planet and without your contribution, we would all be less.



23

## It Is Enough

*"The great teachings unanimously emphasize that all the peace, wisdom, and you in the universe are already within us; we don't have to gain, develop, or attain them. We're like a child standing in a beautiful park with his eyes shut tight. We don't need to imagine trees, flowers, deer, birds, and sky; we merely need to open our eyes and realize what is already here, who we really are – as soon as we quit pretending we're small or unholy." –Unknown*

**T**oday is a day for celebration, for no reason really. I haven't won the lottery or made a new friend. It's just that the sun is shining brightly on my potted daisies; the breeze is running its fingers through the swaying pine trees; and I am upright and breathing. Sometimes it doesn't take much to sink into the arms of blissful gratitude.

We too easily overlook some of the most wondrous things that make living such a miraculous phenomenon. Every day we are presented with endless reasons to be joyful, if we simply notice.

I invite you to join me and take a moment to thank life for the marvels in your day.

You have all the air you can breathe and nourishing food to keep your body healthy.

You have people who believe you are their dream come true.

You have a quick mind that gets you through the obstacle course of your day, every day.

You have keen senses to witness the wondrous miracle of nature.

You have warmth to give to another and arms to receive it in return.

You have an imagination that weaves wispy threads of fantasy to endlessly entertain you.

You have language to whisper sweet nothings in a loved one's ear.

You have laughter to lift the spirits of the lonely and tickle the funny bone of a child.

You have a burning passion to make a difference in the lives of others; some you may have never met.

You have wealth surpassing most of the world's comprehension.

You have the Creator's masterpiece spread generously before your eyes at sunset.

You have quiet in which to find yourself.

You have choices to make and things to decide. Not all have these blessings.

You have today.

When your hectic pace and problem riddled life feels like too much to bear, remember the special gifts that always surround you. Stop and notice. Life is full. You won't know that unless you open your eyes and slow your pace.

Your life is precious.

It is beautiful

It is a miracle.

It is enough.

"The true appreciation of my blessings comes in the quiet moments: taking an evening walk with my husband; sharing a cup of tea with a

friend; or chuckling at the silly grin of contentment on the cat's face as she lies purring in my lap. Things click into place and I am filled with a glow of gratitude that whatever else is going on in my life that I will have to deal with again later, in this moment, for this little while, all is well and I am all right. I haven't yet mastered the ability to call that feeling up at will when I need it most, but I'm working on it, and perhaps with God's help I'll manage it eventually."

—Tracy H.

## About the Author

Karen Wright's life is summed up in her favorite Marcel Proust quote, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."



Her nomadic search for Self, seeking numerous careers and locales, became her soul's curriculum. Her many paths led to lessons in letting go of fear, listening to inner guidance, and coming home to her own spirit. It was an inner journey—a shift in perspective—that prepared her to help others navigate that rocky course to spirit. "It is the longest journey and the shortest distance," she confides. "With a shift in thought, entire lives can change."

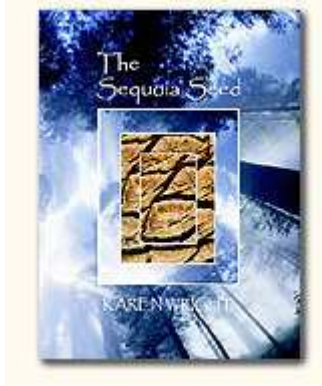
An acclaimed inspirational speaker and consultant to leaders, Karen opens new doors of possibility and partnership when confusion and stagnation threaten to demoralize teams and destroy personal lives. She teaches leaders how to earn employees' discretionary effort—the available, but rarely accessed, wealth of talent, creativity, and passion that all individuals possess.

Karen is the author of the internationally read "Waking Up," an inspirational and life changing, on-line e-zine with a fiercely loyal following. Her writing speaks of everyday challenges with self-worth, fear, and life purpose—encouraging us to embrace the unknown and recognize the greatness in us all.

Karen's study of chaos theory, quantum physics, and brain physiology led her to see that the fulfillment of our individual lives is inextricably connected to humanity's spiritual evolution. Her position is succinctly profound. "Whether we speak of countries or families, all life is one."

Karen resides in the Pacific Northwest—close to family and the nurturing sustenance of undisturbed natural beauty. You may contact her at: karen@wrightminded.com or visit her website at <http://www.wrightminded.com>.

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### WAKING UP!

...TO YOUR LIFE, YOUR POTENTIAL, YOUR FUTURE

It's easy to get lost in life. Distracted from what's real by what's urgent. With all the noise of your day, wouldn't it be wise to consciously choose an antidote to the insanity?

Touted as a *Cyber Oprah*, Karen will challenge you to live a more conscious life. Her writing will inspire your passions and expose your procrastinations. This spiritual kick-in-the-butt will buzz you better than a double espresso. What a way to start your week!

Life is flying by; there is no time to lose. Sign up and hold on - as Karen asks you to live up to your dreams and make your mark. Subscribe and get a coach that believes in you and won't let you sell out. Subscribe at: [http://www.wrightminded.com/free\\_ezine.html](http://www.wrightminded.com/free_ezine.html).