

The Sequoia Seed

KAREN WRIGHT

Acknowledgements

None of us makes it through this life alone. I was not alone in the creation of this book. It would take a whole other book to thank everyone who made this dream come true. My loyal “Waking Up” subscribers are the reason you’re holding this volume now. It is their partnership and encouragement that has let this seed sprout.

I am blessed to have had many partners in this amazing journey. By sharing their own stories of challenge and triumph, these courageous souls will forever be in my heart.

I humbly thank Toni Dianne Holm, my Editor extraordinaire, and her fabulous team of passionate author-makers, Heather Scott, Art Director and Rose Kernan, Production Editor, and George E. Tice, Copy Editor, for holding the hand of a novice writer and making the process lighter for their presence. I extend endless gratitude to Lonnie Sue Sutton for being the bridge that brought Toni and me together. It was providential, my dear friend.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the friends and family members who bore the weight of my alternating agony and elation throughout the creation of this book. Your unwavering belief in my success was a crutch that kept me going. You’re the best.

About the Author

Karen Wright is a woman whose life can be summed up in her favorite Marcel Proust quote, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” And boy, did she ever seek new landscapes! Her numerous interests, careers, and residences reflect a life driven by the search for Self. One perfect example was when she lived aboard a sailboat. She asked her friends for assistance in naming the boat, and they revealingly suggested “The Seeker.”

Karen now sees that her nomadic life has been 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. More than just an array of experiences, it was an inner journey – a shift in perspective – in which she found herself. Through the trials of facing her own fear and doubt, she began to realize (real eyes) that the difficulties in her life were preparing 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. Frequently called on to mediate conflicts, Karen helps old wounds heal by opening new channels of understanding and personal discovery. “I’ve seen it happen over and over. When people feel safe enough to tell the truth, and have felt heard enough to really listen, misunderstandings evaporate and honest cooperation has a chance,” she says.

Whether for a start-up company or for a Fortune 500 corporation, Karen has taught leaders to improve productivity by learning to tap into what she calls “discretionary effort” – the available, but rarely accessed, wealth of talent, creativity, and passion that all individuals possess. It can’t be bought or coerced. This high level of contribution is freely offered by individuals who are truly engaged in viewing their work as an expression of themselves. Karen shows leaders how to earn that treasure of contribution, while also elevating morale and accountability to staggering heights.

Karen is the author of the internationally read “Waking Up,” an inspiring and life-changing online e-zine (Internet Web page of contemplative stories offered weekly to subscribers) with a fiercely loyal following. Passed from friend to friend, family member to family member, her writing speaks of everyday challenges with self-worth, fear, and life purpose. Her encouragement to embrace the unknown and recognize the greatness in us

all has enriched lives all over the world.

She's a black & white photographer whose work has been shown in galleries in Idaho and California. Reflective of her passion for new perspectives, her work is pure abstraction. When asked what the obscure photograph consists of, you'll hear her say, "To answer that question is to close the door to your own imagination. What you see in my work is for you to determine. My gift to you is the question, so that you may have no boundaries."

Karen's passion and exploration are the fundamental one-ness of life. Studying chaos theory, quantum physics, and brain physiology, she has come to recognize 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>.

Table of Contents

Foreword

Preface

Chapter 1: Greatness

What will your legacy be? Learn to break through personal boundaries to discover your own greatness.

Chapter 2: Driving with the Brake On

Do you get stuck and can't figure out why? Find out how to release the "governor" brake and achieve what you really want.

Chapter 3: The Power of the Question

Asking "why" is often a dead-end. Ask the right question and guarantee your own progress.

Chapter 4: The Faces of Love

Family squabbles? See how love makes all else meaningless.

Chapter 5: One Day at a Time

Tried to change, but failed? Learn how to harness the power of your subconscious to overcome inertia, minimize the reliance on sheer discipline, and make change finally stick.

Chapter 6: Personal Inventories

Overcome limiting habits and make easy, small steps that add up to huge wins every time.

Chapter 7: Dancing with Destiny

Know how to identify the sound of your inner voice and recognize the divine clues that you've been missing.

Chapter 8: Rocks, Paths, and Destinations

Is your life heading in the wrong direction? It's never too late to change directions.

Chapter 9: Surrender?

Chasing happiness? Find out how your approach may be defeating you.

Chapter 10: Happy All Over the Place

No reason to be happy? Learn how to be truly happy even when there's every reason to not be.

Chapter 11: The Great Illusion

Life may appear complex and ever-changing, but truth is simple and constant. Learning how truth feels will keep you on your path.

Chapter 12: I Hope You Dance

Don't sell out on your dreams. Find real happiness in life by making decisions that say, "This is who I am!"

Chapter 13: The Three-Headed Monster

Discover how fear, doubt, and confusion are actually some of your best friends.

Chapter 14: Out of the Land of Lack

Got abundance? If lack is getting the better of you, rejoice! Manifesting lack or abundance uses the same skill—manifesting. Now learn how to adjust your aim.

Chapter 15: It's Enough

In our desire to have more, we can too easily forget all that we already have. It's good to remember that gratitude attracts more.

Chapter 16: It's What You Give

Is work a snooze? Find out how to turn even a boring job into a personal joy.

Chapter 17: Start Again

When the dream dies, regain your footing and soar even higher.

Chapter 18: Choose to Chance the Rapids

Are your days filled with empty details while your dream withers? Don't miss out on your life. It's not too late and it's never too soon to wake up.

Chapter 19: A Simple Thank You

Want to make a difference? Use these two simple words to transform you and the world.

Chapter 20: Decidophobia

Should you—shouldn't you? Overcome indecision and learn a new way of making life-enriching decisions.

Chapter 21: Run for the Roses

What if everything you want, wants you too? How might that transform your life?

Foreword by John J. Scherer

In reading Karen Wright, you may feel as I always do, "I knew that!" Thank you, Karen, for reminding us what lies just beneath the surface awareness to a deeper consciousness of our hearts and minds.

Karen gives her stories flesh and bone infused with candid and truthful insights. In connecting her own experiences with perennial truths, she connects us, her readers, with our own stories, our own awakenings in the marrow-of-the-bone knowing.

And that kind of knowing changes things.

There is light around this woman, a lightness that suggests a certain amount of enlightenment. Yet, she is no ivory-towered academic, disconnected from the real world. She wears—and learns—from her foibles, failures and fears like the simple realities they are. You will surely identify with her, maybe even find yourself—your Self—in her words, and come away with a greater compassion for the way in which you have been scratching out your own life.

Karen writes the way she lives: first comes an experience, and then comes reflection of that experience. She sharpens and deepens the reflections through her past life's work experience, managing in the corporate trenches. She tenders that experience with the simple acts of meditation and spiritual practices like the teachings of Zen and the practices of yoga.

In a profound and disarming way, she embraces polarity and paradox. She follows the wisdom of Niels Bohr, the great nuclear physicist, who said, "The opposite of every great truth—is another great truth." In this age of sound bites and the hunger for simplistic solutions, Karen refuses to slide into those clichéd options. Instead, she shows us a possible "other side" of what we assume to be the truth.

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.

October 16, 2004
Seattle, Washington

John Scherer is the author of "Work and the Human Spirit."

Preface

It can grow taller than the Statue of Liberty and live nearly forty centuries. Fossil remains show that its ancestors date back at least 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 circle its base. Yet, paradoxically, it began as a tiny seed smaller than a flake of oatmeal secreted in a cone the size of a chicken's egg. This is the sequoia tree.

Its cone might lie on the forest floor for fifty years before it releases its seeds. Ironically, forest fires are the sequoia's midwife. Its two-foot thick bark chemically repels the fire's flames, but the fire's heat opens the cone so its seeds can, at last, take root.

And, so it is with us. Like the dormant sequoia seed, our destinies are sometimes not set in motion until we experience our own life's heat. A health crisis, the loss of a loved one, the recognition of a truth not seen—these are the infernos that reduce our realities to ashes and give birth to new sight. These are the precious moments when we can surrender our outgrown self-definitions and open ourselves up to the dormant possibilities of new life.

This is the purpose of this book: to cast seeds and embrace the fires—for they shall surely come, these fires that transform our lives. The question is, will we bud or will we burn? Will we trust that life's abundance is our 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?

Fires are our teachers—be they difficult people or disasters. When the heat approaches we can choose to release or retreat. And that choice becomes our experience and the fate of our lives. We are the sum total of all the choices we've made. We define who we are by our decisions. Each day we get to choose again—to have new eyes; to see beyond the illusion of limitation to the magnificence that we are!

This book's roots lie in my online e-zine, my Internet Web site subscription called "Waking Up." Each week, loyal readers throughout the world have logged-on and challenged themselves to give more, love deeper, and engage wholeheartedly with life. I've always encouraged my subscribers to respond when they felt so moved. Many have written of changed lives and heartwarming victories. Many have confessed to hopelessness and suffering. Life is not for the weak of spirit. It requires much. My respect and admiration for those who shared their lives with me

is endless. Some felt I was saving them, but it was they who saved me.

In *The Sequoia Seed*, as in "Waking Up," I've endeavored to invite others to join me in discovering a more conscious life—to see with new eyes. Awareness of the Self is the first step in growth. But, awareness is not sufficient. You must embrace change fervently.

So, I provoke you to question, to dare and to become accountable for the choices you make and the life you live. Owning your choices is the key to your freedom. It is where you begin to create with the intention to return to the wholeness of your spirit.

Greatness

You have powers you never dreamed of.
 You can do things you never thought you could do.
 There are no limitations in what you can do
 except the limitations of your own mind.
 —Darwin P. Kingsley

My city just celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of its 1974 World's Fair & Expo. A little-known town of 150,000 railroad workers, miners, ranchers and farmers rose from obscurity to put Spokane, Washington, in the world's spotlight. Competing against prominent cities from all over the globe, the improbable victory of little Spokane was remarkable.

PBS-TV recently featured a documentary of the construction of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge: *The Symphony in Steel*. Conceived in the 1920s by Joseph Strauss, the international orange, not golden, bridge met with instant resistance from the local ferry system, the Department of Defense, environmental groups, and lords of commerce. Each threw their enormous weight against this change. Because of the massive resistance and the country's economic depression, the bonds offered to raise the millions it would take to build the bridge would not sell. The bridge's completion seemed doomed, yet the bridge majestically stands today. I've crossed it dozens of times.

Astonishing achievements like these renew my faith in man's enduring will. It lifts my heart and strengthens my own resolve to be more. We too easily forget, in the smallness of our daily tasks and obligations, that humanity is meant for such daring and greatness.

As our race has evolved, we have cured diseases that otherwise would have ended millions of human lives. Not only has man broken the bonds of gravity, he's flown to other planets. Nations enduring a lineage of dictators have ended generations of brutal oppression, to accept the rights and responsibilities of freedom. We've created the technology by which a rice paddy farmer in China can speak to an ice fisherman in Norway.

To forget our true greatness, is to remain small. But, small is not our divine destiny. We possess the largest brains on the planet so we may participate in our own evolution. As we grow, we develop values, ethics, and consciousness to transform our very world. We have the gifts of creativity, imagination and courage. We can see beyond what is to what

can be. We can dream—and dream big!

There is much to do in this world. Each day the demands of an accelerating pace of life grow exponentially with more and more responsibilities. Some days we're running like a blur from one commitment to another. But, though we can be inundated with the mundane, somewhere along the way, we must remember that we are capable of extraordinary things.

Globally, diseases still kill millions. Ninety percent of the continent of Africa is suffering from AIDS. People are still oppressed. Many third world countries still have no elected governments, nor rights and freedoms for their peoples. Technology is still only a new-fangled gadget that's not yet reached its ultimate potential.

What will be our legacy? What will we leave behind that proclaims to the world that we have lived? Will we be the ones to discover a new cure? Will we become the leaders of tomorrow, walking a path toward freedom for all humankind? Will our research in the field of biotechnology free the human body to regenerate needed organs or missing limbs? These are not impossible legacies, but a defiance of mediocrity that echoes the longing of our souls to matter—to make a difference—to be the magnificence we are meant to be.

Pause for a moment and envision your legacy. Will this world be a better place because of your life? Will you have given more than you took? Did your contribution lighten the burden of another? In the final moments, will you close your eyes knowing your life had truly mattered?

I too forget the astonishing blessing that is my life: to breathe and think and do—to love and forgive and trust. But, this gift of life we've each received isn't ours alone. How pointless to be born and die and in between only serve our little egos. Magnificence! That's why we're here. Doesn't the word itself make you sit taller and breathe deeper? Be magnificent and do wondrous things. The seeds of that being and that doing already lie within you in the essence of energy that makes you alive. It is inherent within you.

This is how Sonja Meline chose to act on what she knew to be the magnificence inherent within one of her students. Here's her story:

I'm a School and Home Interventionist on a Native American Reservation in North Dakota. It's a hard job, but I love every one of these

“Karen's given me the vision to go out and challenge myself to see what I may be missing. I make myself go beyond what I think I'm able to do and color outside the lines. I would not have done this before I found Karen's heart in every word. Now I move toward the unknown with a passion for growth I've never had before. I've made the choice to face what it is that I fear, love, hate—and pay attention to it and do something about it.” —Shari Penhall

kids. I can understand them, because I was raised to be a victim myself. Don't rock the boat. Don't make anybody angry. Everybody else is more important. These are the voices I heard for forty years of living in fear, because I was raised as a wimp. I married somebody who was constantly beating me down. But, I eventually found out that I'm not a wimp—I am a warrior! I finally broke out of the victim box. And it's been an interesting ride.

Poverty is horrible on this reservation. Drugs and alcohol are real problems, as is physical and sexual abuse. It's tough. It's hard for these kids. They aren't told that they're wonderful. A lot of times they come to school without breakfast. They might not have eaten the night before either, or they had a bag of chips or something. One kid hid out in the woods all night because his dad came home drunk and beat his mom. This is their reality—neglect.

In working with these kids, I was very honest about my fears and my feelings. They were surprised that they weren't alone in feeling like they did. Everyone needs encouragement. You need the pat on the back or kick in the butt just to know that you're not the only one out there having trouble. You're not the only person that is misunderstood.

I taught in a psych hospital and one of my students was a sixth grade kid. He was depressed and had just tried to commit suicide. He'd been higher than a kite when they did a psychological test on him, and he came up as mildly retarded. When he came into my classroom I started with the obvious. He's a sixth grader, so I tried sixth grade math.

He took the math book and threw it at my head! He said, "I can do that in my f— sleep."

I said, "Okay, if you know all that, let's try pre-algebra." The kid was amazing. He went through pre-algebra, algebra I and II in four months. He was a genius! He was just bored out of his mind in school. He was depressed, not stupid. And he wasn't retarded.

He drew a picture for me that looked like it was coming right out at me off the paper. I said, "Ooh, this is really cool. How did you do this?"

He wrote down a mathematical equation and said, "This is my formula."

I asked him if he realized his drawing looked like a time warp going into a black hole. He had no idea what I was talking about, so I took him to my office to find my college science book. I opened up the page and said, "This is your picture, isn't it?"

He was dumbfounded. His picture was looking back at him from a college science textbook. Right after that he made a fairly functional black hole for the science fair. Considering he was a sixth grader, taking second place was quite an achievement.

I administered an aptitude test on him myself. This time he tested off the chart. I collected all kinds of things he'd done and my test results and went back to the administration to tell them he needed to be retested. The mildly retarded label was wrong, and the school needed to make it right.

They told me that in a perfect world one could get whatever one wanted, but not here. He'd already been tested and the score would stand as is.

I was livid! I left the meeting and went straight to the boy. I told him what had happened in the meeting. "Do you want to know who I think you are?"

He looked up and stared straight into my eyes.

I said, "You are Michelangelo. You are Leonardo da Vinci. You are Albert Einstein. You are Galileo. Do you know what these guys were?"

He replied, "What?"

"These guys were original thinkers. These men were made fun of. These men didn't quite fit in. They were so far out of the norm that regular people just couldn't figure out what was going on with these guys! But, where would we be without them? You are in that category. You belong there. The ball is in your court. You can just sink right down to the depths of despair and you can become a bum in the street, or you can take your God-given right and your God-given brains and do something with them."

Well, the kid graduated. The last I heard he was in a highly accelerated program in Wyoming.

Karen, I keep going back to your e-zines. That's what happens. That's what you provide. It's a touchstone. It's a foot up. It's an, "I'm not crazy. I'm not alone." We are all capable of so much, if we just believe in ourselves and stop deferring to everyone else's opinions.—Sonja Meline

Sonja saw her student's greatness when everyone else was willing to write him off as a lost cause. She teaches us that there's often much more to each of us than our circumstances or behavior might indicate.

Look up from the details of your life occasionally and see life with new eyes—find your place in the world's symphony and play your instrument loudly and passionately. You are not superfluous; you don't sit second chair to anyone. The world needs your song desperately. Don't be whom Oliver Wendell Holmes spoke of in his famous quote, "Many of us go to our graves with our music still inside us."

You are here. It is your time. It is your responsibility to play magnificently!

The Power of the Question

Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart.
 Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books
 written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers.
 They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them.
 It is a question of experiencing everything.
 At present you need to live the question.
 Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself
 experiencing the answer, some distant day.
 —Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

Unanswered questions threaten our finely groomed realities. Especially questions of true importance, like the purpose of our lives, or who we really are. When confused or uncertain, we tend to seek the relief of a quick answer. Not particularly for the sake of finding the right answer, but to end the discomfort of not knowing. We'll do almost anything to get out of the purgatory of the unknown.

But, momentous questions don't come with tidy answers. Fundamental life questions like 1) where did I come from? 2) who am I? or 3) what's my purpose? require room to breathe and develop. They herald pivotal change that draws a line between the past and the future—where life irreversibly shifts. This is not the time to hurry or get impatient. Much is at stake.

Before we habitually seek comfort, perhaps we should explore the value of purposeful discomfort. If you can be with the question and not resist its inherent murkiness, then you might gain the clarity to truly understand what life is asking of you before you rush to an answer.

The question that causes us most pain is the question to which there is often no satisfactory answer. And that query always begins with one word: why. King among these questions is, "Why is this happening to me?" This heart-wrenching plea doesn't really seek an answer; it simply wants justification.

You may have muttered it before. Hoping for whatever "this" represents to stop. This question is often unanswerable, and even if answered, provides no relief. Asking this question only serves to reinforce victim-hood. It leaves us feeling hopeless, indignant, judgmental, or angry. Not the most empowering feelings, are they?

But, there is a question at moments like this, which does have a real possibility of being answered. All it requires is replacing one word. Rather than asking, "Why is this happening to me?" instead ask, "Why is this

happening for me?" Notice how different you feel asking this question. You move from judgment and resistance to curiosity and exploration. You look at circumstances with a different eye. You explore, not resist. Changing one word has changed your entire relationship with the unknown. And it has brought you strength, not fed your fear.

The quality of the question you ask yourself is inseparably linked to the quality of the answer available to you. Read these questions to yourself and notice how each makes you feel.

Why am I unhappy? or How can I become happy?

Why don't I know my calling? or How can I become aware of my calling?

Why don't I have more money? or How can I make more money?

Why don't they understand me? or How can I be better understood?

Notice that each of the why questions above reflects a current condition. But, that current reality is, in truth, a summary of the past. "Why am I unhappy" is an assessment of now based upon all that's led to now. You didn't suddenly become unhappy today. Unhappiness has been building for a long time. Why questions focus you on the past. They keep you stuck in unhappiness, not exploring a way out.

When you stop asking why and begin to ask how, you'll move toward new possibilities and solutions. You won't agonize over what's already irreversibly done. We cannot change the past, no matter how much we want to. We can only change the present and, therefore, the future.

Why can be a rhetorical question that merely cycles you into a closed loop.

Explaining the past doesn't move you toward real solutions. It just conjures up possible justifications for your predicament. Unfortunately, none of those reasons, even when known, will make you any happier.

How questions lead toward possible change in the situation. They ask your brain to think of options and solutions. They focus you on what you can do *now* to change the future.

One of my "Waking Up" readers faced a situation that could have easily made her the victim, had she focused on why. Instead, she chose to take control and employed a more powerful how to deal with her dilemma. This is her story:

I come from a logic-oriented family. Both of my parents were computer pioneers. Mathematics was always my favorite subject in school because there was one right answer and you could prove it. I wasn't really exposed to any "spirituality" growing up, so I never understood the

"When you said to stop asking why something bad is happening TO me and ask why it's happening FOR me, a very, very, very large BONG went off in my head. It was a life changing statement. I was so into 'WHY ME?' that when the bong sounded, my whole body SHOOK as if an earthquake were occurring. Thank you for the opportunity to be released from THAT bondage. You are wonderful."

—Barbara Reynolds

concepts of faith or trusting your gut. What was real for me was something I could see and touch.

I followed in my parents' footsteps and got my college degree in Computer Science. I began my professional life as a systems programmer, then a software developer, then a technical trainer, and finally a technical marketer. Each job was progressively less logic oriented. I began to embrace faith in a reality I couldn't see, prove, or touch. My life experiences were shaping me to see that there was more to life than accepting only what I could prove.

About this time "Waking Up" also became a perfect element in my personal growth. I can see how instrumental it has been in shaping my character and preparing me for the next phase of my life. I liken "Waking Up" to my character work out. On a weekly basis I've been challenged to look at life differently and to continually grow. I'm still logical, but now I pause during a life experience and reflect on it rather than just accepting it or not even noticing it. I now truly experience and direct my life.

I've recently left my job of 18 years to mother our daughters full-time. We also moved 1,200 miles from the area I lived in for 40 years to a place where I know no one. Once we were unpacked in our new home, we had hundreds of cardboard boxes on our front porch. My kids asked why we didn't just throw them away. I explained to them about recycling and how each of us can make a difference to save our environment.

Unfortunately, we moved to an area that isn't very environmentally conscious. A year ago I would have gotten very disappointed with this town's lack of vision, and I would have just put those boxes out for the trash. Instead, I spent hours finding a place that recycles cardboard. My children and I drove 20 minutes to the recycling drop and unloaded all of the cardboard boxes.

All the while, I was cognizant of the fact that my kids were watching me, but also being taught by what I value. Those were the best few hours of my life! I've gone on now to start recycling centers here in Colorado. I contacted a recycling company who was willing to set up their recycle bins. They'll even pay \$10.00 towards a charity for every time they get it picked up. I contacted a gal this morning about her local charity here. If we set up 20 drop off stations in the area, we believe we can get about \$500.00 a month for her charity!

Just the other day, my 6-year-old gave me a birthday card that said, "Thank you for your help in saving our environment." I was so touched to know my daughter had been so profoundly affected by how I'd dealt with an obstacle thrown in my path. Now I will forever be grateful for that obstacle and how my response reflected so positively on someone I love.

You've told us before that our thoughts and actions define who we become. I just absolutely loved that! Now I think of that every day. Everything I come across, every thought that I'm thinking, seeing, doing; I'm just defining who I am! It's extremely self-empowering. And it makes me realize that my effort to live according to my ethics and to recycle those cardboard boxes also showed my children who I am.

Parents are such important role models to their kids. It's not what we

say but what we do that makes the biggest impression. Recycling was my thing, but I included my kids in something that was important to me by talking about it and sharing the opportunity with them to participate in it with me. I think in focusing on how my decisions form who I am, I'm also teaching my children how to be ethical and responsible adults. Rather than complain about what isn't, I hope I'm showing them how to be the change they want to see—to take responsibility for what they believe in and to show the world who they are.—Sue Hoffman

Pay close attention to the type of questions you ask when your expectations aren't met. When you catch yourself asking *why*, immediately transform the question into a more powerful opportunity for discovery. Make achieving what you desire a higher priority than your need to be right about your past.

Do you hang on to being right?

Once, after listening to me endlessly grumble about how I'd been wronged, a friend asked me, "Would you rather be right or happy?" Of course, I answered that I wanted to be right! It took me a few days to appreciate the full weight of his question. My need to have my way was making me miserable. I was choosing to righteously wallow in my indignation instead of dealing with my reality. His question let me see that my happiness and peace were more important than a past I couldn't change.

As you find yourself asking why questions, notice where you may be choosing to have your way at the price of having your peace. *Why* will perpetuate upset; *how* will end it. This isn't about giving up or giving in, it's about prioritizing your happiness. What is it that you really want? What choice right now would best achieve happiness? Is this momentary issue more important than your sanity and peace?

Now, choose again. Choose sanity, not resentment. Choose possibility, not regret. The power of your question is your power to choose the life you want.

Dancing with Destiny

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

Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails.

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

Life is a journey, and sometimes you come to a crossroads where one decision will change the rest of your life. This was that day for me. A friend asked if I could give her a ride to work. Her car was in the shop and I was glad for the company on my normally solitary commute. As we crossed the infamous Golden Gate Bridge, my friend declared that her sister had “up and quit her job.” Seemed she and a friend decided to start a tour company, of all things.

The fact that they had no experience was evidently not a showstopper. My friend was astonished at such a rash decision, but I was enchanted by the guts it took to do something so unexpected.

All that morning my thoughts drifted back to that conversation. Something about the oh-my-God-ness of it all haunted me. Lunchtime found me walking to the library without a real plan of any kind. I just felt a need to explore.

It seemed perfectly logical to start with the A's at the card catalog. My flipping fingers stopped when they reached East Africa. I stared at the card and the sub-titles of Kenya and Tanzania. I had no idea where Kenya was or what it was like, but somewhere deep in my belly a hole began to open up. One of those black holes that threatens to swallow up everything comfortable and normal.

In that moment I began an obsession with Africa that defied logic. I read all of Isak Dinesen's books. Meryl Streep played her character in the movie *Out of Africa*; a single woman pitting herself and her fortune as a coffee farmer against the hardships of early twentieth century Africa. Of course, I bought and memorized that movie!

I discovered and fell in love with Beryl Markham in her autobiography “West with the Night.” Beryl was born in 1902 and emigrated to East Africa with her father. He chose East Africa because, “It was new and you could feel the future of it under your feet.” Evidently adventure coursed through Beryl's veins as well because in 1936 she became the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic from east to west, crash-landing in Nova Scotia twenty-one hours and twenty-five minutes after take off.

I immersed myself in all things Kenyan. I studied Swahili. I researched

the politics of the region, its culture, its struggles as a third world country. I read about the wildlife and was mesmerized by the romance of living so close to such raw beauty. I was hopelessly obsessed and I didn't know why.

It is hard to articulate the overpowering pull of this kind of internal magnetic urge. I knew I must move to East Africa. Not visit, not dream about—MOVE THERE! Every cell in my body screamed this at me every day for months. But, rather than follow this calling, I questioned it. How could I just leave? I knew no one in Africa. I didn't have enough money. What would I do there? How would I live? Where would I live? How would I make money? What if I didn't like it? What if . . . what if . . . what if?

Slowly and methodically I killed the dream inside me. Its death came at the hands of doubts, fears, and my unwillingness to trust the voice within me. Never before that time had I felt a hunger so powerful and so incomprehensible pulling me like a magnet toward the unknown. But, I didn't go.

There's a part of me, when I let it have a voice, which knows beyond doubt that I was being urged to play in a reality bigger than my solitary life. Although I wasn't privy to it at the time, there was something there—in Kenya—that I was supposed to do. A destiny that I was meant to fulfill. And I didn't.

I may never know the course my life might have taken had I possessed the courage of Isak or Beryl to follow a dream. And part of me mourns that cowardice. I wonder if I will ever again have the chance to be directed in such a profound manner. A chance to ride the wind . . . and trust.

Perhaps you too have stopped momentarily at a crossroads. Perhaps you have been drawn toward the obscure path and wrestled with your own doubts. Maybe you're there right now. Will you have the courage to step forward? Will you trust divine direction? And how might that make all the difference in the life you live?