

JUST BE YOU...

What if a magazine communicated with you???

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Rita stood at the check out stand with her cart full of groceries. She felt the ache in her shoulders, the tightness in her lower back and the throb in her feet. As she patiently stood there waiting for her turn, she reflected on the long day at work. She felt fortunate, in that she did not hate her job, however, she definitely did not love her work. Like most people she knew, it paid the bills and kept her health insurance affordable. As she adjusted her weight to shuffle back and forth between feet, she glanced up at the magazines lining the rack near the conveyor belt which awaited her food items.

Reading the headlines, she chuckled quietly to herself, it was always the same, so and so ended their relationship, cheated on their partner or got married, 7 ways to achieve the perfect abs, 21 days to lose the unwanted pounds, blah..blah...blah....
“*Sensationalism at its best,*” she thought. They all marketed to the change people hoped for or gifted people with escapism by getting wrapped up in a celebrities personal life. Rarely did Rita pull one of the magazines off the shelf, for she knew it was a waste of money and none of the silly stories truly intrigued her. Sometimes the travel magazine, or People’s magazine would catch her eye.

Only two more people in front of her, she was joyfully almost there. Soon she would be heading home to make dinner for herself and two teenagers. It had been ten years since her divorce, the weeks the kids were with her it was busy, yet she loved it, for she knew that in a few short years she would be experiencing what people called, “*empty nest syndrome.*” Thus, she embraced all the

time she could get with them, even though at their ages spending time with their peers was way more important than mom and dad.

Interrupting her thoughts she looked back up at the magazines, casually glancing across the bold words on the covers. Just as she was about to look away, a headline caught her eye, she did not recall seeing it before - "*Are You Content? Why Not?.*" The question hit her, what was her true answer? "*I don't know,*" she thought. Curious she picked up the magazine. Opening the front cover with the intention to find the contents page, so she could go directly to the article which had intrigued her, she was shocked as the page before her blurred. It was like a fog slid across the page, wiping it clean. Before her eyes big bold words wrote themselves across the top of the blank page - "*Are you happy?*"

She gasped in reaction, calling the attention of the people near her. Quickly she pretended to cough, smiling politely at the glances, flipping the pages of the magazine, so as to look normal. As soon as everyone went back to what they were doing, she opened the front cover again. Just like before the page washed out and the bold words -

"Are you happy?" appeared again.

"Not really" she responded quietly in her head.

"Why not?" typed itself across the next line.

Rita almost dropped the magazine, again all eyes looked her way. Closing the magazine and smiling she moved ahead as the front person completed their transaction.

Appearing "normal," Rita looked at the front cover of the magazine, now stunned by the title which was completely different - "***The BEingness Project, Your Personal Journey Home....***" What was happening?! Transfixed she stared at the cover, almost afraid to open it again. Looking around she searched for a hidden camera or someone watching her, was this a joke? Was a YouTube

celebrity filming unsuspecting people? How could anyone make words appear and disappear like she was experiencing? It was almost her turn with the cashier, quickly she opened the cover again. The last question stared at her from the blank page -

“Why not?”

“I’m not sure why. I guess there are lots of reasons why” she replied.

“Are they truly the cause for your unhappiness” appeared instantaneously underneath the last question.

“How are you today,” queried the cashier, breaking into Rita’s suspended disbelief. Jolted out of her shock, she shut the magazine quickly, responded kindly to the cashier and finished putting her groceries on the conveyor belt. Trying hard to act normal, she placed the magazine as the last item she would purchase that day. She made sure it was upside down, the title hidden from the person behind her. Oddly enough the back of the magazine was completely blank, except for the light blue color which seemed to gently wash the page. She could not find the price for the magazine on the front or back cover. The cashier picked up the magazine, sliding it across the automatic scanner, a normal beep rang out, then *“free publication”* lit up the cashier’s scanned item screen. The cashier who was just going through the motions of her job did not even hesitate about the magazine being free, she placed it in the bag and turned to Rita to finish the payment process. Rita found herself grateful for once that the cashier and the people around her were in their “self-absorbed detached robotic go through the motions of life” space.

Rita thanked the cashier and quickly walked her cart out to the car. She couldn’t wait to load the car, so she could pull the magazine out to verify she was not crazy. Glancing at the cover again, she was comforted to see the same title **“*The BEingness Project, Your Personal Journey Home...*”** Flipping the page she secured the truth of this experience by rereading the three

questions already asked, recalling her inner two replies. Looking at the last question -

“Are they truly the cause for your unhappiness,” she responded out loud this time.

“Well, yes, for if I had more money I could have more freedom. I could start exploring what I really enjoy, have time to start dating, do more for my children, travel, pay off bills, maybe even buy a house that we really like. Then I would be happy.”

“So, you need money to be happy” lit up the page as the fourth question.

“Well, not just money, I need more time too” she stated quickly.

“So, if you had more money and more time, you would be happy,” the page responded.

“Okay,” she stated, *“maybe not just money and time, I also want to lose 15-20 pounds, have more time to myself, work a job I really enjoy and find someone who really loves me as I am”* she rattled off, as though she was talking to a friend in an empty car.

“Ding,” her cell phone chimed, pulling her back into the cold reality of the car. Looking at the text message from her son she realized she better get home, it was getting late fast and he was hungry. Reluctantly, she closed the magazine and put it back in the bag. As she drove home, she found herself anxious to be alone, for then she could continue her *“conversation”* with the magazine. Shaking her head, she laughed out loud as she hit the gas to turn the corner onto her street. *“Crazy, this is absolutely NUTS! Magazines don’t write themselves and definitely do not have conversations with people! No one would believe her,”* the inner dialogue rambled on and on as she turned into the driveway of their rental home.

To be continued... 1

After the dinner clean up and making sure everything was set for the next day, Rita hugged her kids goodnight and headed off to her bedroom. When she unpacked the groceries earlier, she had quickly put the magazine on her night stand by her bed. Upon entering the bedroom, she passed it with a jumble of emotions, heading to the bathroom to brush her teeth and wash her face. Standing at the sink, she stared at her reflection while the sonic toothbrush buzzed and vibrated throughout her mouth. Quietly she stared, noticing the fine lines around her eyes, feeling the dryness of her skin, assessing and contemplating her looks, her happiness, and the questions presented by the magazine. As the warm water rinsed off the cleansing cream and makeup from the day, her mind wandered, “*Was she crazy?*” “*Did this magazine really hear her?*” Drying off her face gently, she decided it didn’t matter, no one had to know and maybe miracles do happen, after all, anything is possible.

Climbing into bed she situated her pillows, making it comfortable for her to sit up while she interacted with the magazine. Carefully, she opened it to the first page, the previously asked questions stood in a neat little row along with the next question in response to her long answer before the phone interrupted her.

Are you happy?

Why not?

Are they truly the cause for your unhappiness?

So, you need money to be happy?

So, if you had more money and more time, you would be happy?

What I hear you saying, is that if you had more money, more time, lost weight, found a job you enjoy and met someone who loved you, you would then be happy. Is that correct?

“*Yes, that’s what I am saying,*” she stated out loud, while shaking her head in agreement.

“*Are you waiting for these things to happen in your life, so you can then be happy,*” inquired the magazine

“Well no, I’m kind of happy now, some days are better than others,” she whispered.

“Why, are some days better than another,” quipped the magazine
“Because some days I like who I am, or I feel good about what I do, or my kids share something special, or I’m not worried about money, it all depends on what is happening and how I feel,” she responded in exasperation.

“Do our questions upset you,” asked the magazine

Now she really began to feel uncomfortable for the magazine could not only hear her responses, it could also feel her emotions. This was getting really bizarre! A part of her wanted to shut the magazine and pretend none of this happened. However, the other part of her just couldn’t, she felt pulled to the page, fixated with what it might say next.

“No, your questions don’t upset me. Well, maybe just a bit. I’m confused by all of this and well honestly, I can’t believe this is happening. Who are you anyways,” she asked.

“You,” answered the magazine

“What? I’m not asking myself these crazy questions. You are!” She almost yelled in reply.

“Mom, are you calling me,” her son yelled out to her.

“No, I’m sorry, just blabbing to myself,” she embarrassedly responded.

“Yes, it is you, it is your Inner Being, your interconnection, to that which is and always has been,” typed the magazine.

“How is that possible,” she quietly asked.

“It just is, why do you question it being possible,” inquired the magazine

“Because why would my Inner Being not just speak within me, how could it possibly type words upon a blank page that I found in a store,” she stated with deep questioning and a desire to understand.

“Your Inner Being is always sharing, you do not listen and anything is possible,” the magazine gently presented.

“I’m so confused, uncertain, struggling to believe,” Rita responded in tired humbleness.

“Close your human eyes and sleep, allow yourself to feel and remember the truth from within,” the words softly landed on the page, like a soft caress that beckoned her to sleep deeply.

A loud ringing jolted Rita out of a very deep peaceful sleep. Recognizing her alarm, Rita rolled over to turn it off. Stretching delightedly beneath the warm soft covers she replayed the unbelievable experience from the day before. *Did it all really happen? Was it possible? Did her Inner Being always share and she didn’t listen? If that was true, then what guidance had she missed out on?* The bathroom door shut downstairs, that meant her son was likely in the shower to begin getting ready for school, she better get out of bed. No time to waste in such meanderings. As she passed the magazine on her way to the toilet, it was all she could do not to pick it up to see if all the writing was still there or if it had all been a silly dream.

As the coffee dripped into the pot, Rita’s thoughts drifted to childhood. She smiled as she remembered pretending to be a famous artist. When was the last time she played with her paints, opened her sketch pad, took out her camera? Pouring her coffee she tried to recall where she had put her art supplies, they must be in a box someplace buried in the garage. Heading back to her bedroom for a shower, she peaked in her daughter’s room to make sure she was up and getting ready. She knew better than to say anything, for her daughter was not a morning person.

As the shampoo lathered in her hair, Rita played through her mind all the art shows, the pieces she had spent hours creating, the immense joy she had felt watching her art come to life. Art wasn’t a practical way to make a living her dad told her over and over

again. “*You can’t make money as an artist,*” he said. She listened and believed him, giving up on her dream as the years ticked by.

Looking in the mirror to put on her mascara, she froze. Staring intensely into her emerald eyes, the best feature she had, a sadness floated into her heart, for in that moment she realized, it was her, she was the one who had given up on her dreams. Allowing someone else to tell her what was and was not possible.

Passing the magazine she raced downstairs to help the kids prepare their lunches and get out the door to school. Thankfully her son drove them both to school, which freed her up to have a few moments before she headed off to work. Hugging the kids goodbye, she dashed to the bedroom to grab the magazine, placing it in her purse she headed off to work. Thank goodness it was Friday, she could relax this weekend and if the magazine was real, continue to investigate her happiness. Maybe she could find her art supplies.

To be continued... 2

Rita found herself completely distracted, driving to work like a robot, oblivious to the traffic around her, the time or anything else. She felt exposed, raw and vulnerable, as though someone had taken a can opener to her life and pulled back the lid. Squirming physically in her seat, she looked at the other drivers around her, were they looking at her, could they see, did they know? Shaking her head and laughing out loud at herself, she wiggled her body back into the present moment. “*Okay Rita, let’s get back into the game. Remember, you are on your way to work, time to turn on the brain to the here and now,*” she stated out loud to herself.

Turning on her blinker, she waited in the turning lane to pull into the parking lot of the nine story business building. Her thoughts drifted to her boss and the day before her. A rush of emotions

gurgled up as she momentarily reflected on her discontent with her job.

Rita actually felt really good about the company she worked for, it was a budding international agricultural commodities business that focused on safe, fresh, year round healthy vegetables and eventually fruit. It was definitely a company in line with her values and beliefs around the availability of organic sustainable agriculture. YouXin (sounds like Yoe - Shin in English) was based in Hong Kong, with offices in Europe and the United States. Her office was very small, her boss, a project manager and herself. Her desk sat strategically in the center of it all, the hub which kept the flow going. What was her title, oh yeah, “Administrative Assistant”, four years in college to answer phones, make travel arrangements, handle accounts receivable and payables, etc... If she was honest, she could not complain, they treated her well and it was a schedule that worked good with the kids needs.

Putting her car in park, she climbed out, gathering her packed lunch and purse, hitting lock on the door. She marveled at how funny she felt today, how had such a silly thing as a magazine upset her so? Why was it eating away at her mind and heart?

“Hello Rita,” her boss called as she passed his office door. *“Good morning Ken,”* Rita responded. Rita went directly to the break room where she put her lunch in the fridge and then returned to her desk. Placing her purse in the large bottom drawer to the right of her chair, she turned on her computer, to let it warm up while she went to check in with Ken. Sharon, the project manager was presently on a trip to visit some possible farm sources.

The morning dragged on, for Rita was anxious to get to lunch, she couldn't wait to see if the magazine still worked. It felt alive down in the drawer, like a living breathing entity. She chuckled at herself for thinking about if it could breathe or not. *“Oh my, she really was losing her mind,”* she thought.

It was a beautiful Spring day, so Rita grabbed her lunch from the fridge and went out on the patio to find a quiet spot that sat away from anyone else who might come outside. There were other businesses in the building, so sometimes the patio space could get quite full. Today she really hoped it would stay quiet. Since it was Friday, there was a good chance it would, for most people seemed to go out to eat on Friday.

Organizing her lunch in front of her and placing a napkin in her lap, she pulled out the magazine. Delighted the cover still looked the same, ***“The BEingness Project, Your Personal Journey Home....”*** Inhaling, she opened the cover, quickly looking around to see if anyone had come outside. Looking down, she gasped, for the page was blank. Just as she was about to shut the magazine in shock and confusion, new words, floated across the page.

“Hello Rita, it’s a brand new day,” flowed the black ink.

“Where did yesterday’s conversation go,” she asked out loud, surprising herself.

“That’s the beauty of a good nights sleep, everyday is a fresh start, a blank canvas, a new opportunity,” responded the magazine.

“So, let me get this straight, everything we share today, will be gone tomorrow,” she said in her head, remembering to not talk out loud.

“Yes,” came the simple reply.

Then, *“you seem upset,”* inquired the page.

“No, yes, well a little. I guess I’m actually a bit sad, for I am not sure that I remember everything we talked about yesterday. I don’t want to forget,” she exhaled.

“It’s okay, your inner being, or soul as humans like to call it, always remembers,” responded the magazine.

Rita took a couple of bites of her salad while she pondered this new information. In some ways she was grateful, yet, she also was

upset. What a strange paradoxical sensation to feel. The page interrupted her thoughts.

“Are you happy,” appeared in bold letters across the page. *“We discussed that yesterday, why are you asking me again today?”* she retorted.

“See, you do remember. We ask again because that’s what everyone is seeking, that’s why you are here, that’s what life is all about,” typed the page.

“Then why do I feel like such a mumble jumble of emotions all the time,” she exhaled in sad thought.

“Because you forgot how to choose the things that bring you joy. You forgot to please you, to do things you want to do, to create, to dream, to play, to be,” floated the response.

“No one can live life that way,” she exclaimed out loud, forgetting where she was. Frantically she looked around the patio to make sure no one heard her. Damn, I must remember to do this in my head!

“Yes they can,” lit the page.

“How,” she asked

“By listening to your heart and soul. Living from that space instead of from your programmed mind,” replied the magazine.

Rita glanced at her phone to check the time. Whew, she still have fifteen minutes. She set her timer to go off in ten minutes, so that she could go to the bathroom before returning to her desk. While she had been looking away from the page, new words had floated across the clear white space.

“Tell me about a time that you were really happy,” asked the words

Rita inhaled quietly, closed her eyes for a moment to feel a time when she was really happy. Moments with her children floated across her mind. She loved watching them engage in life, they truly filled her with such love and joy. However, that was their

journey. Searching still, she traveled back across her life. Landing at a time in her mid-twenties when she was working on a large art piece for a competition.

To be continued... 3

With her eyes still closed, she shared the story in her head, smiling with pure delight at the sensations the scene stirred within her.

“I was in my mid-twenties in a small apartment I rented in Seattle. I had just finished my bachelors degree in business and was looking for a job. A friend of mine convinced me to enter an art piece in a local art museum competition. I promised I would do it. I had music blaring, the window was open with a nice gentle breeze blowing in, carrying sounds from the street below. I was so caught in a time warp, purely in the zone of creating. Oh my, it was heaven. The paint brushes floated across the canvas as though they guided themselves. The colors burst forth, inspiring me, infusing me with their joy and effervescent play. It was heaven,” she trailed off, sitting quietly in the memory, stuck between passionate joy and deep sadness.

The alarm vibrated the table, shocking her into the present day. Reaching down, she quietly turned it off, glancing at the page quickly before she closed it. She did not want to give the magazine time to respond, she didn't want to know why she had given up on that path in her life. The scene had stirred such a longing, almost an ache in her belly.

Standing up, she packed up what was left of her lunch. She had not eaten much, too engrossed in the conversation and all the emotions it stirred up. Placing the magazine in her bag, she headed back up to the third floor. Stopping at the bathroom on her way to her desk, she passed the mirror glancing sideways at her reflection, *“where had the young spirited woman gone, when did she let the passion in her die,”* she mournfully contemplated.

Rita was quite relieved when the clock finally presented quitting time. The afternoon had been very long and she found it extremely challenging to focus on her work. Shutting down her computer, she grabbed her purse, making sure the magazine was tucked in place. Quickly she snagged her lunch container and headed to the parking lot. It was uplifting to walk out into the sunshine, to feel the gentle breeze on her face, it seemed to clear the day's disgruntled sensation.

While driving home she thought about what excuse she could give the kids for going to bed early. Chiding herself with guilt, for she always held the time with them precious, not wanting to waste a single moment. However, today was different, her ability to truly be present with them was going to be a real challenge and she definitely could not tell them why she was distracted. They would really think she was crazy!

Going to bed early was going to be easy after all, Francine, her daughter was working on a big project for school and Frank, her son asked if he could excuse himself after dinner to play video games with friends. Normally Rita would balk at Frank's request, but tonight she welcomed it. Putting the last left overs in the fridge, Rita kissed them both goodnight, making them promise to go to sleep at a reasonable time.

Shutting her bedroom door, she walked quickly to the sink, so she could brush her teeth and wash her face. The magazine seemed to vibrate an invitation for more as it sat quietly on the night stand. Settling in under the covers, Rita picked up the magazine, noticing that she held her breath while opening it.

"Hello Rita, it's a brand new day."

"That's the beauty of a good nights sleep, everyday is a fresh start, a blank canvas, a new opportunity."

"Yes."

“You seem upset.”

“It’s okay, your inner being, or soul as humans like to call it, always remembers.”

“Are you happy.”

“See, you do remember. We ask again because that’s what everyone is seeking, that’s why you are here, that’s what life is all about.”

“Because you forgot how to choose the things that bring you joy. You forgot to please you, to do things you want to do, to create, to dream, to play, to be.”

“Yes they can.”

“By listening to your heart and soul. Living from that space versus your programmed mind.”

“Tell me about a time that you were really happy.”

There they were, the magazines words from earlier in the day, minus her responses. No wait, supposedly they were actually words from her inner self, she still found that hard to believe.

“Good evening,” freshly showed up on the page.

“Hello,” she replied, pleased that she remembered to talk inside herself.

“It was very fun to remember with you today. The memory you shared of your art creating was happy, vibrant and contagiously alive,” shared the page.

“I’m not sure I like this exploration or discussion,” she quipped at the magazine

“Why,” it asked.

“Because it is stirring up a lot of forgotten feelings, lost dreams, and unfulfilled desires,” she sadly shared.

“Why are you choosing for this to feel bad,” inquired the fresh words.

“I’m not choosing, its just what I feel when I think about the dreams I had when I was younger,” she retorted.

“Yes, you are choosing,” floated the words.

“I am not,” she exclaimed out loud. Sucking in air as she realized how loud she had spoken. Thankfully her daughter had on music and she was sure her son had on his headphones. A relieved sigh escaped her lips.

“Okay, how would you have me see and feel it,” she asked.

“Every day is a new day, every breath is fresh, it is never too late and anything is possible,” came the gentle response.

“Even as you read the words upon this page, you choose how you will feel about what is expressed,” continued the magazine.

“I am too old now, I have too many responsibilities, debts, people to answer to, children to care for, the list goes on and on. I can’t just run away and be an artist,” she replied, not even digesting the words just offered by the page.

“Who told you that? Why do you believe it? What is life without dreams, adventure, exploring, learning, growing, becoming,” inquired the words.

To be continued... 4

Rita grew quiet, sinking into deep examination. She remembered yesterday that she had given up on her dream when her dad told her she could not succeed. Ugh.., that still stung! Why in the world had she ever allowed anyone, even if it was her dad whom she loved and adored, control her life. Her thoughts were interrupted by the emergence of words.

“Be patient with yourself, be kind, loving, compassionate, supportive and encouraging. You would never be so harsh with your children if they were sitting in your shoes. You would tell them to go for it, to not give up, that it is never too late. Right,” presented the magazine

“Yes, that is true,” she quietly relaxed.

“Rest now. Let yourself release the need to fix, change, or understand why. It has all happened perfectly. Tomorrow is a brand new day, with a beautiful fresh start. You are worthy, you are enough and you are perfect, right here, right now and always. Good night,” floated the words.

“Good night. Thank you,” she replied as she closed the magazine, a wee bit sad that tomorrow all the words from today would be gone. At the same time she found herself excited to see what came up next. It had been a long day full of emotions and confusion, sleep quickly overtook her conscious meandering.

Rita loved Saturday mornings. The pure joy of waking up slowly, letting herself linger in bed, stretching as she listened to the silence of the house interrupted by the outside sounds. The small back yard had a stunning maple tree, it was just starting to bud with new fragile leaves. Today it seemed to be the perch for many singing birds, she loved hearing that sound, it was like they were inviting her to come and play.

As she relaxed into the warmth of her covers, listening to the melody of the morning, her thoughts drifted off to the previous couple of days and her interactions with the magazine. There were definitely moments when she expected to open the cover to merely see a page size ad with brief articles spattered throughout the rest of the pages. Magazines had really become quite the joke, for people’s attention span had shrunk to a point that anything longer than a half page seemed to be too much to read.

Today she had brunch plans with a friend. It would be fun to catch up with Maria, for it had almost been a month since they last got together. Maria was a long time friend, they first met when Rita moved to Seattle after college. Ironically, it had been Maria who convinced her to create the art piece she shared with the magazine yesterday. Unlike Rita, Maria did not have kids, she had decided

that while she enjoyed children, she did not want any. Her career, hobbies, boyfriend and dog seemed to be enough for Maria to have in her life. Rita smiled as she thought about how important “Aunt Maria” had been to her and the kids through the years, especially during the divorce.

Stretching one last time, Rita climbed out of bed to go to the bathroom and then make a cup of tea while she got ready to go out. The kids were still in their bedrooms, neither of them early risers. They used to be when they were younger, but like most youth, that changed when they hit their teens. Now, they could be awake, but sucked into some video on their phones. Rita had given up a long time ago trying to limit and control their technology devices, she decided that eventually they had to figure out that balance for themselves.

Walking quietly to the kitchen she put the kettle on to boil. Placing her favorite loose leaf tea into the wire mesh strainer with some honey, she stared out the window while she waited. Scanning the room, her gaze got caught by a painting that hung in the living room. It was a large canvas, filled to the very edges with bright colors and playful form. Stepping into the living room, she walked to the painting, “RS 1992” sat in black acrylic on the bottom right corner. Reaching out her hand, she felt the painting. Running her fingers over the bumps and curves that brought the abstract piece to life. It was one of the few paintings she had actually hung up for people to see, one of the last pieces she had completed just for fun. Then she got her first job out of college, started to date and “do what people do” in this world, settle down in a relationship, buy a house and accumulate stuff. Staring at the painting, she could feel how free and alive she felt during that time in her life. It seemed so long ago, as though it was someone else's art piece, she didn't even know that woman anymore.

Behind her she heard the door to the bathroom shut. One of the kids was awake. Stepping away from the painting she walked back

into the kitchen to pour the water over her tea leaves. Taking her tea to her bedroom she let it steep while she made her bed and got ready to shower. Gratefully this house had two bathrooms, so she did not have to share with the kids, which was such a gift. Every time she passed the magazine she was tempted to open it, but she kept herself away from it until she was ready to go out. She had decided when she woke that she would give herself ten to fifteen minutes with it prior to leaving, otherwise she knew it could suck her in for a long time.

Sitting down on the edge of her bed, she picked up the magazine. Inhaling she opened to the inside page. Blank white greeted her, “*yep, a fresh new day and page,*” she thought.

“*Good morning, how are you,*” typed the magazine.

“*I am good, quiet and still in deep thought about all that you have stirred up the past couple of days,*” she gently stated.

“*That is wonderful, you are waking up to the inner self,*” shared the page.

“*I’m not sure I like it, for it makes me question things and intensifies my unhappiness with what is,*” she replied.

“*Discomfort is not a bad thing, it is just helping you to see what you would like to change, shining a light on the parts of your heart and soul that wish to be felt and experienced,*” replied the magazine.

“*Yeah but, it makes me feel like I have to change things. That I did something wrong, that I made mistakes,*” she exhaled with deep sadness.

“*Why,*” was the quick response.

“*Because I’m obviously not happy. That means something is wrong and the only one who can change that is me. I don’t even know how to begin that process, unclear what I truly want, it just confuses me and stirs up such intense emotions,*” exclaimed Rita.

“*Relax, the answers are within you, however, if you are battling yourself, or trying to force it, you will just feel more and more*

frustrated. In the quiet, peaceful, accepting space you can hear your heart and soul more clearly,” cooed the page.

Glancing down at her phone, Rita realized that she needed to go. The conversation would have to wait until later today.

“Thank you, for visiting. I have to go meet a friend,” she told the magazine.

“Have a wonderful time,” came the reply.

Closing the magazine Rita gathered her jacket, for it was still a bit chilly in the mornings. She stopped at the kids bedrooms to see who was awake, so she could tell them where she was going. Francine was sitting in her bed staring at her phone.

“I’m going to meet Maria for brunch. I’ll be back this afternoon sometime, you know how we can talk,” she smiled at her daughter.

Walking in she kissed Francine good morning on the head, reminding her what was in the fridge to eat.

“Have a good morning sweetie. Your brother is still asleep, so please let him know where I am when he gets up, thank you. I love you,” stated Rita as she left the bedroom.

“Thanks mom, you have fun with Maria, tell her I said Hi,” called her daughter

To be continued... 5

2

Francine waited to hear her mom's car go down the street before she got out of bed to make some breakfast. She wanted to enjoy her solitude before her brother woke up. Staring in the fridge she tried to remember what leftovers her mom had told her about. The cool temperatures floating out from the fridge made her decide quickly to create an egg and cheese quesadilla. Her cotton nightgown was not exactly keeping the morning chill away. She placed the egg carton, quesadilla shells and cheese on the counter, so she could quickly jaunt to her bedroom for a sweater. On the way she checked to see if the heater was on, yep, set at seventy degrees.

Sitting in her favorite chair in the living room, eating her breakfast while watching a YouTube video Francine heard her brother get up. As usual he headed straight to the bathroom and would likely be in there until he had taken a shower. Francine was enjoying a video from one of her favorite makeup girls, while she waited for her friends to wake, so they could start chatting via the airwaves. Maybe someone would want to go to the mall later, if her mom could give her a ride or maybe Frank could take her.

Francine had just celebrated her fifteenth birthday. Her mom and dad had booked a hotel room downtown for her and her friends to celebrate. It had been a fun day, starting out with shopping, then pizza and cake before heading to the hotel pool. She had lots of friends, well, I guess they were friends. Francine was a popular sophomore at her high school. She naturally excelled with her studies without too much work, which was good because she juggled playing basketball and singing in the choir. Fortunately both of her parents lived fairly close to the school, so if she had to,

she could ride her bike back and forth. It became much easier once her brother got his driver's license and mom gave him her old car.

Sitting in the chair, Francine's black hair rested upon her shoulders. She had inherited her dad's dark hair and her mom's emerald eyes, it was a striking combination. Playing sports helped to keep her in shape, while all her social activities kept her more than busy. So far, she felt really lucky that her skin was still clear, maybe it was her dad's Italian roots, giving her a slight olive complexion. Her brother took more after her mom with lighter skin and brunette hair.

Agitated that her brother was still in the bathroom, she decided she would use her mom's bathroom instead of waiting on him. "Whew.." she felt relieved as she headed back to the living room. Passing her mom's bed the cover of a magazine caught her attention, "***The BEingness Project, Your Personal Journey Home...***". Stopping she thought, "*that's odd, mom never reads magazines. Books yes, lots of books, too many books, but, not magazines.*" While the title did not intrigue her the fact that it was a magazine in her mom's room did. Picking it up, she opened it.

Her face screwed up in a puzzled look, there was nothing on the page. It was totally blank. "*Well, that's stupid,*" she thought. She was just about to close it when right before her eyes words appeared on the page.

"Are you happy," asked the words.

Francine jumped with a squeal, dropping the magazine to the floor.

"What the heck was happening? There was no way she actually just saw words appear on that page. This was crazy!!" she screamed in her head while staring down at the magazine.

Standing there she listened for her brother, thankful he was in the shower, so he had not heard her yell. Looking at the glossy blank

back cover, she wondered if she should open it again to see if it was real. Slowly, she leaned down, picked up the magazine and held it, trying to decide if she wanted to open it or not. Curiosity won out. Pulling the front cover back she glanced at the white page. There it was, "*Are you happy?*" Nothing else, just those three simple words.

Laughing out loud, she said, "*yeah, I'm happy, I think.*" "*What do you mean by, I think,*" typed the letters.

"*OMG, what the hell is happening?*" she blurted out.

"*Are you yelling at me,*" shouted her brother from the hallway. "*No, just singing to myself,*" she quickly lied.

The words on the stark page stared at her, waiting for an answer.

"*Well, I don't know if I am really happy. I think I am. I'm not unhappy, just not sure how I really feel most of the time,*" she genuinely responded.

"*What do you like to feel,*" appeared upon the page.

"*I like to feel happy, but, not the pretend fake happy, the kind I always feel like I have to be when I am at school or with my friends. There are some friends, where it is okay for me to be unhappy, even sad and quiet, but not many,*" she shared, as she sat down on the edge of the bed.

"*Why do you pretend to be happy,*" inquired the magazine.

"*Because that's what you're supposed to do, especially when you are popular like I am. We're never supposed to be sad or down. So, you learn to pretend,*" came her response before she really thought about it.

Talking with the magazine was weird, for she found herself being way more honest than she normally was, for some reason it felt safe, comfortable and easy to be her real self. Sitting on the edge of her mom's bed she found herself feeling like she should put the

magazine down and run, for this was crazy, yet, she was completely compelled to stay in the conversation.

“What would happen if you were your real self all the time,” asked the page.

“People might not like me,” she quipped

“Why? Don’t they have different feelings and emotions too,” flowed the response.

“Yeah, but, I’m the popular girl, I can’t be like the others. I have to be fun, always happy, cool and ready to be the good time. I have to be good at everything,” she sighed.

“Hey, where’s the Chai tea,” yelled her brother.

The interruption jolted Francine. She could hear him coming down the hall to mom’s room. Quickly she closed the magazine, put it back on the night stand and stood up, pretending like she was headed towards the hallway.

To be continued... 6

“What are you doing in here,” he asked as he entered the room.

“I was just using mom’s bathroom while you were hogging the other one,” she quickly stated, hoping he would not notice her fidgety shame at being caught.

“Did you use the last of the Chai tea,” he repeated, keen on his own desire for food and a cup of tea.

“No, mom has a new one down in the bottom cupboard,” she retorted.

“Okay, thanks,” he mumbled as he left the room.

She wanted to read more of the magazine, however, she knew she could not stay in her mom’s room, or her brother would become curious. Standing there she had an idea. Running to her bedroom, she picked up an old copy of a *“Seventeen”* magazine. Quickly she bolted back to her mom’s room, snatched up the magazine and put

it inside hers. Walking past Frank in the kitchen she headed to her bedroom, sure that once he had breakfast, he would go to his room to play on his computer.

Once she was inside her pale yellow bedroom with posters and pictures all over the wall, she flopped down onto her bed. Picking up the magazines she realized that she better come up with an idea to get a warning from her mom before she got home. *“What excuse could she use,”* she thought. Picking up her phone, she texted her mom.

“Hey mom, can you let me know when you are on your way home? I want to make sure the dishes are done before you get here,” pushing send, she waited.

“Sure,” came the quick response with a smiley face emoji.

Relaxing back on her pillows, she opened the magazine again, wondering if she would actually see the same words, or discover she was absolutely crazy. There they were, all the black and white letters that the magazine had typed to her.

“Are you happy?”

“What do you mean by, I think?”

“What do you like to feel?”

“Why do you pretend to be happy?”

“What would happen if you were your real self all the time?”

“Why? Don't they have different feeling and emotions too?”

Looking at the sentences she realized that they were all questions. Time for her to ask the questions. One of the things Francine had learned that she found really helpful was that if she asked questions, then no one would have time to ask her questions. This allowed her to remain unknown, except with those she wanted to share things with. It was a way to control while looking like the caring nice person.

“Who are you?” she asked the magazine.

“I’m you,” came the short reply.

“No, you’re not. I’m not typing the words on this page. That makes no sense at all,” came her almost disgusted response. “Seriously,” she thought. “Who did the magazine think they were fooling, she wasn’t stupid!”

“Yes, I am you. I am what you truly feel and think, your inner self, the part of you that you forgot how to hear,” came the gentle reply.

“But, why can’t I hear it myself. I don’t get it! What does that really mean,” she asked with a true desire to understand.

“When you were born and even before you were born, you had a complete connection to your inner self, your heart and soul. Listening to them you started your journey to discover and experience this new world. You were curious, adventurous, willing to try new things, watching and listening to others, while staying connected to your true self,” came the somewhat confusing response.

“I’m not sure I totally get it,” flowed her confused reply.

“Do you remember when you were a little girl and you would sing and dance for hours,” asked the page.

“Yes,” I remember replied Francine. As she responded, she could feel a smile and warm happiness fill her as she quietly remembered the free feeling of singing and dancing with no concern for anyone else. She didn’t care if anyone heard or saw it. Actually liking it if they did, because she felt beautiful and talented.

“Nice, you not only remember, you can still feel how good it felt when you let yourself dance and sing in great joy,” merrily typed the magazine.

Francine all of a sudden felt vulnerable and exposed. The magazine was not only having a discussion with her, it could feel her emotions with her. She was not sure she liked that, it meant she could not pretend, or lie.

“It’s okay, do not feel frightened of me. I am you, remember. I am your real truth, the inner self that only wants for you what brings you joy, love, contentment, passion. I am not here to judge you, the taught brain part of you already does that way too much. I am here to help you remember, to wake you back up to yourself,” came the comforting response.

Francine’s phone dinged. Glancing at it she quickly read her mom’s text, *“On my way,”*.

“Shit,” Francine exclaimed, feeling guilty for having her mom’s magazine. She had to quickly put it back, which made her really sad, for when would she ever get the chance to look at it again. Then when she went back to her dad’s it would be a couple of weeks before she could share a conversation with it again.

Closing the magazine quickly to run it back to her mom’s bedroom. Placing it on the night stand, she touched it one more time, saying, *“thank you.”* as she headed to the kitchen to wash dishes, for she only partially lied about that. Standing at the sink, the water ran, frozen with the soapy sponge in her hand, she found herself completely confused and not sure what she was really feeling. In her mind she replayed the correspondence with the magazine. Had that really happened? Was this some crazy dream? No one would believe her if she shared that a magazine had talked to her. The deeper she thought about it, the more she realized that even telling her mom was out of the question.

“But, wait, what did her mom see when she opened the magazine? Where had her mom found the magazine? Did she buy it from a store? Which store? Wow, maybe I can buy one of my own,” she thought. How could she find out without letting her mom know she had picked up the magazine in her room.

To be continued... 7

Rita pulled into the driveway, waiting for the garage door to finish opening. Pulling into the garage she put it in park and turned the key to off. Sitting there silently, she replayed the brunch conversation with Maria.

They had followed their normal routine of filling up their plates with the smorgasbord of food from the buffet and sat down to enjoy the over due conversation. The beginning was all about the daily stuff, catching up on the kids, work, Randy her boyfriend, Frisky their dog and tidbits about mutual friends. Out of nowhere, Maria earnestly looked at Rita and asked, “*Are you okay?*”

“*Yeah, I’m fine. Why do ask?*” She had responded with some trepidation. Her stomach did a flip flop, was it written on her forehead that she was talking to a magazine? She was purposefully staying away from that conversation, after all, how do you tell someone such a wild story?

Unaware that she had drifted off into her own quiet reflections, Rita was jerked back into the present moment by Maria’s concerned words.

“*See that’s why I asked. You are not all here. What is going on? Are you dating someone? Are the kids okay? Work*” spewed Maria

Rita looked at her dearest friend, they had journeyed so much together. Smiling she thought to herself, “*if I can’t tell her then who can I tell.*” Smiling, she opened up to share the truth of what was going on inside of her. Careful to not actually tell about the magazine, for she was not ready to share the instigator, privately she wanted to keep it all to herself.

Maria was very excited about what she was hearing from Rita, for it had been forever since her friend had talked about anything that centered on her own personal happiness. She had watched Rita give up everything that she was passionate about, choosing instead

her boyfriend, who became her husband, then it was a job she didn't enjoy, and of course when the kids were born that became the center of her friend's whole world.

Sitting silently in the car, Rita smiled as she replayed the excitement Maria expressed about her looking at her life and wondering why she had given up on her art. Delving into the deeper truth that she didn't hate her job, but, she was definitely not happy. Then she had gotten emotional when she started to discuss the role model she was being for Frank and Francine, this made her very sad. How could she expect her children to dream and go for it in life, if she herself was "going through the motions."

Gathering her purse, she opened the car door to head into the house. All of a sudden it struck her, the art supplies! Yes, let's find the box or was it boxes of her love, her passion, paints, pencils, canvases..., oh how her heart started skipping as she thought about the fun of creating.

Setting her purse down on the step to the house, she began the search.

"Mom, what are you doing?" called out her daughter from the doorway.

Startled out of her search, she responded, "*I'm searching for my art supplies. Do you, by chance, know where the boxes are?*"

"No, I don't, I've never seen your art supplies. I'm going back in, just wanted to make sure you were okay," stated Francine.

"I'll be in soon," came the muffled response as she continued the hunt.

Francine quickly ran down the hallway, hoping to get one last look at the magazine before her mom came into the house. She wanted to check and see if it was real. Picking up the publication, she opened the front cover, there it was, the words written to her from

earlier. *“Oh no,”* she panicked, *“if mom sees these words, she will know that I looked at her magazine. What should she do?”* Darting back and forth with the magazine in her hands, she quickly realized that there was nothing she could do. She would have to face the truth and own her snooping curiosity.

The door to the garage opened and shut. Hurriedly she placed the magical magazine back on the night stand and ran to her room, trying to act normal. She would wait to see if what happened, not quite ready to own her actions.

Rita brought in a large tattered box, placing it in the middle of the living room, caressing the top of it as she headed out for the other boxes. She had been amazed by how many boxes of supplies she discovered. There were four boxes with the words “Art supplies” written on them. It had not gone unnoticed to her, how her insides seemed to dance as she read those words and then opened each box to gaze at the contents inside. It was like discovering a buried treasure.

Unable to stand the suspense, Francine joined her mom in the living room to see what she was doing. As she approached her mom, she was shocked to see a tear slide down her cheek. Transfixed she was not certain if she should enter the space or not. Standing in the hallway, she watched her mom.

Rita didn't know what was happening, but, she couldn't fight it. The emotions had bubbled up, bursting forth like a cork from a champagne bottle. Warm tears dripped onto the boxes and its precious cargo. Gently she pulled out paintbrushes, tubes of paint, graphite pencils, sketch pads full of etches, partially filled canvases and other ones that were an open invitation to play. Sitting crosslegged on the floor, surrounded by the diverse objects, she became overwhelmed by the depth of her feelings, weeping, she allowed herself to absorb it all.

Francine came out of her frozen observation and went quickly to her mom, “*are you okay mom,*” she asked. Putting her arm around her daughter, she answered quietly between the unchecked tears, “*I’m okay sweetie, I never realized how much I missed and loved the artist in me.*”

Making heartfelt eye contact with her daughter, she smiled at the mirror she witnessed in her daughter’s beautiful eyes. “*Francine, please always be true to yourself. Do not ever give up on what you love to do, share, and create. Keep what makes you happy from the inside out alive and present in your life. I gave up on art, believing what your grandpa said years ago, that I could not make a living as an artist. Then after I met your dad, I packed up all my art supplies and buried that part of myself. No one asked me to do this, it is just what I thought I was supposed to do. Listening to what others said, what society told me, buying into the game of find someone to marry, settle down, have kids, buy a house... you know what I mean. Please, listen to your heart, follow your passions and desires.*”

Releasing her daughter she started to share the items from the boxes. Francine was surprised by how talented her mom was, all she had ever seen of her mom’s artwork was the two paintings that were hung up in the house. It was fun to feel her mom’s joy and genuine excitement as they continued to explore.

“*What are you two doing,*” asked Frank, entering the room.

“*Mom brought in her boxes of art and supplies. Come and see,*” exclaimed Francine.

Frank joined the two on the floor and they all got lost in the stories that rose up out of the paraphernalia lifted from the tattered boxes.

To be continued... 8

Before they knew it the afternoon had disappeared. Frank and Francine witnessed a part of their mom they did not know existed. Her vivid stories, infused with her re-awakened passion was contagious. Rita looked at them both with deep gratitude and complete presence, *“before we get up I want to share something really important with you both. Please, always be true to your heart and soul. Live your lives from a place of passion, following what brings you joy. I didn’t do that. I literally put my dreams in a box and closed it. Following what others told me I should do, what society preached at me to go after. Looking back I spent a life time pretending in the professional arena, spent thousands of dollars attending college for something I did not like. If you only learn one thing from me, may it be this - be true to you. Listen to your heart and what fills it up with joy, excites it and makes you curious. I sit here today as an example of someone who did not do that, thankfully it is not too late, I can and will become the artist I always believed I could be,”* fresh tears slid unchecked down her face, both Francine and Frank were transfixed by the vulnerable truthful sharing from their mom.

They sat for a moment silent. Rita wiped the wetness from her face, reaching over she hugged them both with such raw gratitude. *“I love you both more than you can ever imagine, so proud of you and excited for all that you shall explore as you journey forth,”* she lovingly shared.

Standing up, Rita took her emotional self to her bedroom, wishing to splash her face with cold water and sit quiet for a few moments, before making dinner. Maybe she could enjoy a few minutes with her life changing magazine.

Frank at seventeen sauntered to the kitchen for some bubble water, he was even more confused now than ever before. In his senior year of high school many decisions loomed before him. Now, his mom was telling him to follow his passions, do what he loved.

Closing the door to his bedroom, he sat down on his bed, stared at his blank computer screen and struggled to feel what brought him joy. Life so far had been this journey of doing what you were told, following the rules, going to school, mimicking what others before you did, basically checking off the boxes to what was next. No one ever told him along the way to explore what you enjoy doing.

Francine, like her brother, headed to her bedroom. She too closed the door. Sitting in her low comfy chair she began to think, *“what in the world just happened? Why had her mom never shared that before? How would life have been different if her mom had actually chosen to follow her dreams? Probably, she never would have met their dad, geez, that means they would not be here. Did mom wish that she had never gotten married? Had kids? No wait, she said that she loved us more than we could imagine.”* Taking in a relaxed breath, the lightbulb went on, *“mom is changing because she found that magazine.”*

The realization churned up fear, *“what if mom could tell that she had been looking at the magazine?”* As she thought about the magazine, it stirred up questions, *“if her mom had been this impacted by the self-typing page, what would happen to her?”* Her craving to read more, to discuss more, intensified. As her thoughts fumbled around, Francine realized that she had not looked at her phone all day. She had thought this morning that she might go to the mall with friends. Then she found the magazine, after which her mom came home and the whole day disappeared. Searching for her phone she found herself feeling really confused, uncertain about her life, friends, all of it. What did she do in her life that she actually wanted to do, what were the things she loved. What friends did she really enjoy and want to spend time with, who could she trust. Her mind spiraled down too many jumbled paths.

Meanwhile, Rita had decided she wanted to give herself at least ten minutes with the miraculous publication before going out to make dinner, after all it was Saturday, so they could relax and sleep in

tomorrow. Sitting down on her bed, so she could look outside and feel the light on her face, she picked it up from the night stand. Opening it, she glanced down at the page, waiting for it to show the conversation from this morning before she left to meet with Maria. *“Why was it taking so long,”* she curiously thought. Closing it and opening it again, she waited. Nothing. Then,

“Are you happy,” appeared on the glossy space.

“Yes, actually I am happy. I feel strangely alive, excited and scared,” she replied.

“That is wonderful!! How does it feel in your body, heart and mind,” inquired the magazine.

“Wait,” Rita stated, *“what happened to this mornings conversation,”* she asked.

“Every time we are viewed by a different person the page clears, starting a fresh exchange,” responded the page.

The truth of this struck Rita, shifting her feelings to worry and a wee bit of delight at the same time. This meant that the magazine worked for others. She could share it and then people would know she was not crazy. But, then every time someone looked at it, her conversation for the day would be lost. Part of her was not sure she wanted to share. She wanted time to feel, process, make decisions, create change in her life.

Stunned, she sat digesting this new information, exploring the impacts from many angles. Then it hit her, one of the kids must have picked up the magazine, which one? *“Of course,”* she remembered, Francine had text her, asking her to let her know when she was on the way home. She had said it was so she could wash the dishes, but, what if it was because she had found the magazine. *“It was getting late, should she go ask Francine now, or wait,”* she contemplated.

To be continued... 9

Rita decided to wait. She headed to the kitchen to create some dinner for them, it gave her time to feel into all the racing emotions. They seemed to zoom from all directions. *“What had the magazine and Francine discussed? How was Francine feeling, worried that she would figure it out. Confused by the experience, just as she often felt? Maybe this would bond them closer together? Should they share it with Frank or not?”* Then there was the deep exploration of her own personal life. *The art supplies were now out, what now? How does she even begin to open back up that part of herself?”* Her brain, heart and soul were whirling out of control.

Meanwhile Francine sat quietly in her bedroom. Caught between the worry of her mom being mad at her for looking at the magazine, to confusion about what had happened with the publication. *“Was it real? She couldn’t tell any of her friends, for they would laugh and say she was crazy. Should she tell her mom, so that they could at least talk about it? Knowing about the magazine helped her to understand the difference she had noticed in her mom. She had seemed distracted and was very quiet. Now all the art stuff, wow, she never knew her mom was that talented or passionate about art. Then there was the big conversation they just had about following your dreams, being true to yourself.... That made her even more lost and confused, for she had no idea what she was passionate about, she had never thought about her dreams, she just did what everyone around her did, isn’t that what you’re supposed to do?”*

She began to replay the conversation she had with the magazine. *“Why did she pretend to always be happy, especially at school?”* A sense of sadness seeped into her body, *“Did she have any true friends that she could be real with?”* Bringing her friends into visual perspective in her mind she thought about each one, quickly going through them, sadness bubbled up, for when she was done,

there was only one friend she could think of that actually felt safe, Jennifer.

Jennifer played on the basketball team with her, they had become close last year, for Jennifer moved to Seattle with her parents two years ago. Jennifer was Francine's only black friend, she wished she had more colored friends, but they seemed to have their own click. Jennifer was not a part of that group because she was too new to the school and so far did not seem to want to be friends with those girls. Francine wondered if part of the reason she did not fit in with that group was because she was adopted and her parents were white. Jennifer seemed real, she didn't seem to care what others thought of her, she didn't like school and was just doing what she had to do to get to college. Unlike most of Francine's friends, Jennifer knew what she wanted to be when she grew up, a veterinarian. She told Francine once that school was a waste of time, that most of what they studied didn't make any difference for living in the real world.

Francine thought about that, "*what did she think of school?*" It was okay, thankfully she did not have to work too hard to get good grades, school came easy for her. Thinking about her different classes, she could see and understand how Jennifer was right. How did studying history and math help her in the real world? Unlike Jennifer, Francine had no clue what she wanted to "do when she grew up." She hated that question, "*What do you want to do when you graduate from High School?*" How in the hell was she supposed to know.

The only things she really loved at school were basketball and choir. She was not good enough at basketball to go anywhere with that, she wouldn't even qualify for a college scholarship, Jennifer would, she was really good. As she thought about choir, her heart smiled. She loved to sing. Singing was just a part of who she was. Secretly, she had always wanted to learn to play the piano and truly learn to dance. Yes, the magazine had reminded her of her love for

dancing and singing. Because she went back and forth between her mom and dad's house, she had never asked about taking piano lessons or going to dance classes. How could she ever be good enough to make a living doing either of those anyway?

"Dinners ready" beckoned her mom.

Oh boy, time to sit at the table with her mom and brother pretending that nothing had happened. This made Francine laugh, pretending, yep, that's what she told the magazine she always did. Maybe tonight, she could start practicing being real, after all, it was just her family.

"It was strangely quiet at the table tonight," thought Frank.

Finally his mom broke the silence, *"How was your day,"* she asked them both.

"Mine was good," replied Frank. *"I played video games with Ollie and Joe. Joe wondered if I can come over tomorrow, we need to rehearse for the play."*

"It's totally fine with me," his mom replied. *"What time do you think you'll be home, so I can plan accordingly,"* she asked.

"What time do you need me home," he asked.

"By 6:00pm would be great, you know me, I don't like to eat too late on a school, work, night," she replied.

"Okay," he agreed, while putting a bite of food into his mouth.

"What did you do today Francine," asked Rita.

"I listened to music in my room and watched some videos. I was going to go to the mall with friends, but, we couldn't agree on

time,” responded Francine, who felt like her mom could see right through the lies.

“How could she bring up at the dinner table that she had been communicating all afternoon with her mom’s magazine that she had taken from her room,” justified Francine to herself.

Rita could tell that her daughter was processing deeper thoughts. Normally the two of them would be picking on each other, filling the space with banter intermixed with laughter. Often it was inside jokes about some YouTuber, Tic Toc personality or a show that she knew nothing about. Now, was not the time to question her daughter, besides she wasn’t even sure how to start the discussion.

To be continued... 10

It’s a Family Affair

3

Rita laid in bed listening to the birds, it was nice to hear the sounds of Spring, for she desperately craved some sunshine. Today however, it looked to be another typical rainy cloudy Seattle day. Lying there she thought about all that had happened since she discovered the magazine. The living room was full of art supplies and old creations from a distant past. *“What now,”* she thought. Then there was Francine, she knew it was time to have that conversation, maybe today while Frank was at his friends house.

Unbeknown to Rita, Francine was also lying in her bed deep in thought. She had not had the courage last night to tell her mom about looking at her magazine. Thankfully after dinner, they had chosen to watch a movie together. This had been a relief, for she was not yet wanting to share what the page had made her think about. Thankfully all of her friends slept in, so she knew there would be no texts for awhile. Yesterday’s unexpected bizarre experience had her not wanting to talk to anyone. She felt weird.

First, she felt vulnerable because she couldn't pretend with the magazine, which made her aware of how she was not real with her friends. This made her sad and somewhat depressed, realizing that she really did not have close friendships, they were mostly for show. All part of being the popular girl, which she was terrified to mess up.

As she tossed and turned, her mind went to the time in the living room with her mom and brother going through the art supplies and seeing some of her mom's art. Replaying the scene in her mind, she recalled how excited her mom was to share stories, to relive past moments. It had been fun. It was a side of her mom she had never seen before.

Looking at her phone, she opened up Facebook to see what her friends had posted. Snapchat was where she typically spent most of her time, but not right now. Sounds trickled into her bedroom from the kitchen. It had to be her mom, for her brother would not be up this early on a Sunday. Glancing around her room she looked at all her pictures on the walls. Favorite singers and bands, places she wanted to visit and a few pictures of her with friends. Her shelves held trinkets that she did not really care about anymore. The only one that mattered and represented who she was, was the award she had received from the school for her choir performance. What made it so special was that peers voted, no teachers or administration, just fellow students. When she was on the stage her nerves would dissipate the minute she began to sing, it filled her with great joy to let her voice rise and fall, imbuing a song with meaning through her interaction with it. Yes, singing was definitely one of her passions, but everyone wanted to sing, how could she ever compete in that world. *"Who was she, to ever think she could be successful as a singer,"* drifted her thoughts.

The house had grown quiet while she tossed and turned in her bed. Her mom must have gone back to her bedroom with her cup of tea. She always did that, every morning her mom journaled, she had

done that all of Francine's life, it was a time she liked to be left alone. When she was little, her mom was always awake early so she could write. It struck Francine, *"did her mom just write or were there sketches in her journals too?"*

Maybe she did not know her mom as well as she thought she did."

Getting out of bed she headed to the bathroom down the hall. It was in between her room and her brother's. Her stomach was growling, time to get some breakfast. She always thought it was strange that most of her friends did not eat breakfast. *"Hmmm..., she wondered, did Jennifer eat breakfast?"* They had never talked about that. She had never gone over to her house for an overnight, nor had she invited her to stay with her. *"Why,"* she questioned herself, *"I don't know. Maybe I should do that."*

Rita was in her bedroom with her cup of tea, she had tried to journal, but kept finding herself fidgety. The magazine called her from the nightstand where she had left it since she got home yesterday. She needed time, time to digest, to feel, to think. If she opened it, she would have to face whatever it brought up, she wasn't sure she was ready for that today. Maybe later. *"Then what should she do,"* her thoughts darted everywhere all at once.

Following an internal tug, she headed to the living room.

Rummaging through her supplies she found her favorite soft pastels. As she searched for her sketch pad, she admired some of her completed works, filling her arms with her favorites to take to her room. As she walked to her room juggling the full load, she felt pure joy in anticipation of squishing the soft colors onto the paper, letting her muse guide and direct.

Picking up her phone, she selected her favorite Pandora station, one that was music only, no words, for songs with words distracted her. Standing her pillows up, she placed the "husband" back rest in place, so she could sit upon her bed, allowing her to spread everything out. Staring down at the blank colorless paper she inhaled deeply, calming her mind to connect with her

innermost self. Inquisitively she browsed the pastels, what color beckoned her touch. The rich hues made her smile. She had forgotten how much she loved color, creating something from nothing, and just purely being in the flow, timelessness with infinite freedom.

Staring at the food in the fridge, Francine decided she would have yogurt with granola and some fruit, since the strawberries looked good. As she cut up a banana and stirred her breakfast, she was curious, what was her mom doing? They had missed each other in passing, for she heard her in the living room while she explored the food choices in the kitchen. It was getting harder and harder to keep the secret. She wanted to interact with the magazine, she wanted one of her very own.

Rita had heard her daughter in the kitchen, grateful that she could scurry to the living room without coming into contact, she wasn't ready to interrupt her creative contemplation yet. Sliding the soft Burnt Sienna pigment down the thick white sheet felt exciting. Rising from within her the spark ignited. Letting herself be called, she selected gooey colors to express upon the blank space a new beginning. The scene below her came alive as the hues wove into a vibrant art piece.

A soft knock startled Rita into the space. Standing at her open bedroom door stood her daughter. Smiling at Francine, she invited her to come sit on the bed with her. Francine was relieved to see the smile on her mom's face and couldn't wait to see what she was creating. This was the first time she had ever witnessed her mom creating for herself. When she and her brother were little, her mom would color with them, but it was not like this, this was different. There was a fun feeling in the room, as though it had come alive.

To be continued... 11

Sitting on the bed next to her mom she found herself surprised by the compelling image her mom was creating. She was immediately drawn to the naked woman who stood slightly to the lower left side of the paper. The colors infused the woman with movement, as though she was dancing. Bold blossoms encircled the naked image, bringing the whole scene to life, vibrancy, beauty, celebration. *“Wow mom, that’s amazing,”* exclaimed Francine.

“Thank you sweetie. I’m having a lot of fun! I forgot how much I love to create and play with art,” Rita joyfully stated. *“Would you like to join me,”* she invited Francine.

Together they got Francine all set up to start her own art piece. The music lyrically filled the space while they quietly squished color onto the white space. The desire to share the truth was caught in both their throats, how do they discuss such a bizarre “not possible,” yet, it does exist situation? As Rita rounded out one of the new blossoms on her page, she broke the silence, *“Francine, were you in my bedroom yesterday?”*

Francine kept her eyes glued to the paper below her, as she inhaled and answered honestly, *“yes, I came in to use the bathroom, because Frank was in the other one.”*

“Did you pick up that magazine,” asked Rita, pointing to the glossy publication on her night stand.

“Yes, I did,” slid out of Francine’s mouth in a barely audible sound.

“It’s okay Francine, I’m not mad, I just wondered what you saw in the magazine when you opened it,” inquired Rita in a calm tone.

Francine finally popped. She dropped her art and turned to her mom with confused eagerness and vulnerability. *“Mom, it talked to me. Am I crazy,”* she screeched at her.

A smile spread across Rita's face as she pulled her daughter in for a hug and kissed her forehead. "No, you are not crazy, I don't think," she laughed. "It happens to me too. That's why I bought it."

"I can't stop thinking about it, but, I was afraid to tell you I had looked at it, since it was in your room and not mine to look at," Francine genuinely shared.

"You know I don't keep secrets or hide things from you and Frank, we all deserve privacy and to have our space respected as we've all talked about. However, the magazine was sitting out in the open, I can totally see why you were curious. It caught my attention at the store, so I get it," Rita stated with a light chuckle.

"Did it talk to you in the store," Francine asked with excited curiosity.

"Yes, I almost dropped it on the floor when I first opened it. Everyone in line stared at me, because I gasped when it first typed a question to me. It was crazy! I thought I was losing my mind. By the time I got to the cashier, it had asked me another question. I couldn't believe it," she elaborated with joy. It was exciting to have someone else know.

Francine giggled, "I bet that was really freaky! How long have you had it mom? Is it why you searched for your art boxes and have now started to do art again? What does it ask you?" She had so many questions gurgling up.

"Whoa, slow down, I can only answer one question at a time. Plus, I am really curious what it said to you as well," Rita chuckled, going into a full response. "To answer your questions, yes, it is why I dug out my art supplies and presently sit here doing art which I haven't done since before your brother was born. It has me really thinking about my life, who I am, what I love to do, what makes me happy, and too many things to even list."

“That’s what it did to me too,” exclaimed Francine. *“It first asked me if I was happy, then it went into my friendships and what I like to do. Mom, it was so weird. I felt like it knew what I was feeling, not just what I was saying,”* exploded Francine, her voice rising in volume and intensity. A part of her wanted her mom to make it all better, to ease the internal struggle she felt, to tell her what to do. Inside she knew that her mom could not do any of that, but, the little girl in her did not want to deal with the confusion the magazine stirred up emotionally.

Rita softly replied to her daughter’s ramble, hoping to calm her unsettled emotional state, *“I know, the magazine doesn't hold any punches, it digs right into the heart and soul. It has me all twisted up as well. Making me really look at my life, explore why I have chosen to give up on things, why I just go through the motions of everyday, waiting for things to change, versus going for it. It is truly bizarre how it not only hears your responses, it feels your emotions. I agree that it makes you feel exposed and vulnerable, like you can't hide.”*

Francine leaned her head onto her mom’s shoulder, wanting to just feel safe and okay for a few minutes. The magazine had really rocked her world, for it was making her look at everything, especially how she acted with friends. *“Mom, it questioned me about my friendships. Making me realize that I don't truly show my friends who I am for real. It also has me thinking about what I truly like to do, questioning all the stuff I now do, because I think I have to. I am so lost and confused right now.”*

“I understand sweetie. me too,” replied Rita as she gently caressed her daughters head. *“One of the things that has helped me is to write about it in my journal and today to let myself do some art. As I do these things it gives me time to process all that the magazine and I have talked about. I am actually so glad you picked it up,*

cause now I know it works for other people too. Makes me feel a little less crazy.”

“Hey mom, I wonder what the magazine will do if we look at it together,” asked Francine.

“Hmmm..., that’s a good question,” responded Rita. *“Let’s try it out.”*

Picking it up off the nightstand, Rita had her daughter hold one side, while she held the other. Gently they lifted back the cover. Unbeknownst to the other, they were both holding their breath in anticipation.

“Hello you two,” quipped the magazine.

“Hi,” they responded in duo harmony.

“Yes, we can talk with two of you at a time, however, that is the maximum we can do. If there are more, it becomes too many voices, emotions and thoughts,” typed the magazine.

Rita and Francine looked at each other with big smiles and happy hearts, they were not alone anymore.

To be continued... 12

“While we can communicate with two of you at a time, it only works, if you take turns,” shared the page.

“Do you want to go first Francine? Or would you like me to go,” asked Rita.

“You go first mom, I’m not ready yet,” replied Francine.

“Okay,” responded Rita as she looked down at the almost blank page.

“What do I do now that I have all of my art supplies out and have started to get back in touch with that part of myself,” she inquired out loud to the page. It felt funny to talk to a magazine with her daughter sitting beside her, yet, she wanted to role model that being authentically honest and vulnerable was safe.

“What do you want to do? What feels good,” typed the words.

“Well I would love to just quietly do art, or actually maybe help others to get in touch with their artistic side, while I do my own art. But, I’m not qualified to do that. My degree is in business, not art,” Rita’s thoughts just seemed to tumble out of her mouth without her knowing it.

Before the page could even respond, she added on more, *“I don’t even know where to begin. Isn’t it crazy to think about such a big life change at this stage of my life,”* her confused frustrated heart just seemed to vomit on the page.

“Slow down,” the page responded.

“The most important thing for you to focus upon is how you feel. Choose the next step by what feels good. If you think about something and feel into it, does it feel fun or like work? Does it feel a good kind of scary or a yucky kind of scary. It is all about following your heart and soul, which communicates through your emotions and what you humans have labeled as feelings,” continued the magazine.

“All kinds of ideas storm at me,” exclaimed Rita with an edge of frustrated overwhelm and fear.

“Well, write down all of your ideas, next to the ideas write down how they feel. Take your time with this, let yourself really play with how your internal self responds. Does it get so excited that you feel like dancing or does it feel like a heavy weight that drags you down. As you explore each idea, you will begin to notice the ones that resonate with you. Rita, it is about baby steps, one decision at a time, it is a journey, not a race,” the publication replied in calm flow.

Rita took a long deep, slow breath. She could feel her body relax as she read the words before her. A smile stretched across her face as she acknowledged the wisdom on the page, *“I can do that. Thank you magazine for helping me to relax and remember that it is a process and I don’t have to change everything right now.”*

“You are welcome, it is wonderful to experience you as you open up to investigate what brings you joy,” danced the words upon the space.

Rita looked at her daughter, *“your turn,”* she smiled.

“Okay, I’m not sure what to say or ask,” Francine nervously responded.

Rita started to respond, but then noticed the page was typing, *“Just say or ask whatever comes up, this is a free flow space, no right or wrong. We’re here to have fun together,”* stated the magazine with encouragement.

Francine stared at the page, trying to sort through all the befuddled emotions and uncertainty that zoomed through her mind and body. *“It’s okay,”* appeared on the page. *“Take a long deep breath and just feel for a minute. Your inner self will sort through what’s real and what’s programmed.”*

Rita reached over and put her hand on her daughters leg, smiling into her daughter’s emerald eyes she said, *“Let’s close our eyes*

together and just breathe for a few minutes to let it all relax and slow down.”

“Okay, thanks mom,” replied Francine as she felt tears bubbling up from inside. She placed her hand on top of her mom’s and closed her eyes. Together they sat silently, letting their bodies relax, slowing their breath down, while holding hands. The magazine sat patiently present.

Blinking her eyes open, while squeezing her mom’s hand, Francine looked down at the half blank page and asked, *“Can I be my real self and still be popular?”*

“Of course. Actually when you are your real self, being popular becomes unimportant and the funny thing about that is, once you don’t care what others think of you, they want to be around you even more. People sense without knowing if someone actually likes themselves and is being authentic. It’s what everyone really wants, to be their true selves and to be seen completely,” came the long reply from the magazine.

Francine sat quiet, absorbing what the page had said. She thought she understood, but didn’t even know how to begin. Her whole life she had been doing and acting the way she thought others wanted her to be. With her parents, teachers and other adults it was all about doing what was right, being a good girl. With friends it was about doing what was cool without being bad or getting in trouble. She wasn’t sure what she really felt or wanted for herself, had she ever known?

“It’s good to sift and sort through all those different chaotic thoughts and feelings. Take your time to remember who you are from inside. Be patient and kind to yourself. It might help for you to look at pictures of yourself as a little girl. Close your eyes, go back in time to experience what you found joyful when you were young. Go through your belongings, see what emotions and

memories get stirred, what do they tell you about yourself. Like we told your mom, this is a journey, not a race. Have fun with it. You are already perfect just the way you are right here, right now," the magazine shared with a soft outpouring.

Francine's body relaxed as she read the words and felt into their meaning. She looked up at her mom, who smiled and said, "*I guess we both have our homework.*" With that statement they giggled together.

"*Hey, what are you two doing,*" came Frank's voice from the hallway. He was walking towards the bedroom. In rapid response they both slammed the magazine shut. Then in union they both apologized in a whisper to the glossy publication in their lap. Quickly Rita placed it gently back on the night stand, just as Frank entered the room.

"*Hi awesome son,*" cheered Rita. "*We are just enjoying some art time together, care to join us.*"

To be continued... 13

Ken

4

As Rita pulled up to work she was grateful that her boss Ken was out of town this week and Sharon was gone until Wednesday, this gave her two days by herself. She was still processing all that had happened yesterday with Francine. It was awesome to not be the only one who knew about the magical magazine, plus it had really created a special bond between her and Francine. After Frank came bounding into the room they had all three visited for awhile then Frank left to fix himself some breakfast. There was a lot going on

for Frank since it was his senior year of high school, college applications, trying to even decide if he wanted to go to college, school work, graduation stuff, prom coming up, the list just seemed to grow everyday. Rita was glad he still played computer games with his friends, for it allowed him some carefree time. He was good about keeping things balanced which she had learned was unusual when she talked with other parents.

Parking the car, Rita grabbed her stuff and headed into the office. It was a gorgeous day, lunch outside for sure today. It had been a tough decision, but Rita had left the magazine at home so that Francine could look at it if she wanted. At the end of the week they went back to their dad's so she wanted to give her daughter as much time as possible to explore with it. Besides she was still making her list of ideas and feeling into them as the magical page had suggested.

Before she could sit down at her desk the phone lit up. Looking at the caller identification she noticed it was Ken her boss. "*Better get that,*" she thought as she reached down for the phone, no time to put on the headset.

"Hello, YouXin Fresh Foods, Rita speaking," she answered. *"Good morning Rita, sorry to call so early, just getting ready to board the plane and wanted to check in before I took off,"* stated Ken.

"I was just turning the computer on," responded Rita, *"Is there something you need me to check or do,"* she asked.

"When you get a chance can you email me the copies of the agreements with the two new farms Sharon signed on last week. I want to share them with the Chinese office," Ken asked.

“Sure, I’ll email as soon as the computer is up and ready. They will be there and waiting when you land in San Francisco,” stated Rita.

“Thank you Rita, I really appreciate it. Have a fabulous day, I will check in after I get to Hong Kong if it is not too late. As always, let me know if you need anything or have any questions, you know the drill” he chuckled as he prepared to hang up.

“Sounds good Ken, have a safe and relaxing flight. Bye,” she kindly concluded the call.

Ken placed his phone in the side pocket of his brief case and went up to the security officer in the dedicated line for pre-checked passengers. As a frequent business and first class flyer he rarely had to mess with the lines in the standard check-in. He appreciated this immensely for he always had a tendency to be late, thank goodness today for a speedy and efficient Uber driver.

Ken was not the most organized man. It drove his OCD wife crazy. They were definitely opposites in this area of life. Jesse his wife was extremely organized and punctual. It was a good thing, since she had her own business, a fashion entrepreneur who was always up to date on what was going on in the world with regard to attire and the latest big news in the celeb world. She was why Ken always looked very cosmopolitan. If he had his way, he would wear worn out jeans with a sport coat, simple fun shirt and docker shoes.

He was aware that people noticed him, for he was a good looking man according to the desires of society. He had so far lived his life within the boxes expected of him, graduating with his MBA from University of California, Berkley, Bachelors from Oregon State in International Business, the list went on and on. He had loved his time at Berkley, he definitely lived on the edge, trying to keep up the GPA, while partying most nights of the week. During that time

he finally let go, far enough away from family and old friends, he let loose. The eldest of five, he had always had to be responsible, help out and take care of his younger siblings. Getting his undergraduate degree at an in-state nearby university had meant he was still under the watchful and demanding eye of his mom. She had been the belle of her daddy's eye, a man who owned two of the main businesses in Missoula, Montana.

Ken was jolted out of his reverie by the loud speaker announcing the pre-boarding for his flight. That was his cue to stand up and get ready to go. He was glad to be leaving Seattle for a week, he was struggling lately with a restlessness he could not figure out. He had a great life, but, for some reason he was not completely happy.

Sitting down in his assigned seat he asked for coffee with cream and a bottle of water. The flight attendant placed his items on the tray stating, *"I'll gather your coffee cup when we get ready to take off."*

"Thank you," Ken smiled at the young man, as he took his first sip of the warm liquid. Quickly he returned to his meandering thoughts. Being on the plane ironically allowed him to view his life from a birds eye view. He had a beautiful successful wife, who he had met at a restaurant downtown, during a wine dinner for one of his favorite Walla Walla Wineries, Dunham Cellars. Jesse, his wife was a thriving entrepreneur in the fashion world. Her focus was with young woman jetting into the business world, how to dress for success in the man's world, while still hanging onto elegance and sass. She also consulted with airlines and businesses to streamline the challenges of business travel, focusing intensely on easy to wear and care for clothing.

Recently they had purchased an amazing downtown condominium that put them within easy walking distance of the Pike Place Market, the vibrant marketplace hub of Seattle. After being together for eight years it was time to make such a move,

especially since discussion about children had started to pop up. Ken, felt himself constrict inside, he was not sure he was ready to plunge into being a dad. There had not been enough time for him to enjoy life without caring for his siblings and trying to please his “never happy” mom. That may be why Jesse had been so attractive to him, she loved her career, was almost always happy and instead of him taking care of her, she took care of him, a refreshing change in the beginning, now it was wearing out its charm.

Lately Ken had been struggling with feeling claustrophobic and tied down. There was a huge part of him that was not ready to be tied down with children, much less the noose of the present mortgage. The latter at least was a good investment. Shaking his head, he tried to rattle the discontent from his weary brain. Where was the passion he used to feel for life? The fun? The excitement of running toward a new horizon?

“Can I take that from you now sir? We are about to take off,” asked the flight attendant.

“Oh sure, sorry, guess I was lost in my own thoughts,” replied Ken appreciatively.

“I will bring you a fresh cup as soon as we are airborne,” smiled the attendant.

To be continued... 14

Fortunately for Ken, the flight was not packed, at least not in business class. Typically, the early flight around six in the morning was the full flight out of Seattle to San Francisco, it was the best one to catch for an international flight. Thankfully, Ken’s flight to Hong Kong was later in the day, which meant he could catch a subsequent plane. With no one sitting beside him, he closed his

eyes and leaned his head back, while the plane prepared for take off.

Thoughts ping ponged in his head like firecrackers on the fourth of July. “Ugh...,” he exhaled loudly. He wanted to shut it all off. Would someone please put a vice grip on his head and squeeze, pushing out all the tormenting thoughts like a tube of toothpaste. It had been weeks since he had slept well, every night found him tossing and turning. Eventually he would just get up, so as not to wake Jesse.

Pacing the kitchen while he waited for the coffee to brew he would try to figure out why he was so restless. Again he came back to how good his life looked from the outside, he had everything going for him, most people would love to be in his shoes. He knew this intimately, for when his dad left his mom for another woman when he was twelve, everything crumbled around him. His mom, who had never been a happy loving woman, became even more bitter, unavailable and mean. Often leaving Ken to care for the others and to keep up what there was around the house. They lived off what child support they got from his dad, welfare checks and what odd jobs he could squeak in around school. He had carried this burden until he got into the MBA program at Berkley, then something snapped in him. Graduating from Oregon State University, in Corvallis, Oregon, he climbed into his beat up Ford Focus and drove nonstop to Berkley, never looking in the rearview mirror. Today the only person he maintained regular contact with was his sister Shannon, the second youngest of the five. She lived in Portland, Oregon, happy to be far away from the others too. Opening his eyes, he stared out the plane window.

“Would you like another cup of coffee with cream sir,” asked the flight attendant, who’s name badge said Brian.

“No thanks Brian, I’ve probably had enough coffee for this morning, Thank you for asking,” he smiled in reply.

Maybe he could distract himself with one of the airplane magazines. He knew he should prep for his meetings with John in Hong Kong, but the thought of work made his brain hurt. There were two glossy covered magazines to choose from in the chair sleeve before him. Scanning the headlines he waited for his curiosity to click on something. There it was, "*Are You Happy With Your Life,*" really he thought to himself. "*What an odd title for an airplane magazine.*" He did have to concede that it was the bottom offering of the second publication in his hands. Opening the page up, he found himself completely confused, "*What the heck,*" he almost spoke the words out loud. Before him was a completely shiny blank white page. Closing it to look at the cover again, he confirmed that there was a picture and title on the outside. Scrolling down he found the title again for the article he was interested in, "*Yep, it was still there.*"

Pulling back the cover page, he again stared at a blank page. Then out of nowhere black ink started to form words. "*Oh my,*" he gasped, dropping the magazine in his lap, realizing he had stated his shock out loud. Looking around he checked to see if anyone had caught his vocal reaction. All the people in business class were either asleep or had headphones in while they worked on laptops. Carefully, he picked the magazine back up, gently opening to the first page again. Before him suspended in space was the sentence that had started to type when he dropped it.

"*Are you happy,*" stared blankly at him.

In his mind he heard himself say, "*No, not really.*"

"*Why,*" scurried onto the page.

What was happening? He quickly looked around again, to make sure no one was looking at him, certain he would look like he was losing it.

“Don’t worry, they can’t see this page and besides why are you worried about what they might think,” typed the words.

Now Ken was really getting uncomfortable, for it was clear that the magazine could read his thoughts and feel his feelings, holy shit, this was crazy.

“Why are you unhappy,” the page asked again.

“I don’t know, truly, it confuses me. I have accomplished everything I set out to do. I have a beautiful, smart, successful wife, fabulous home, great job, but...,” his sentence faded off as he felt into his words.

“Are you saying that those things should make you happy,” inquired the magazine.

“Well, yeah, shouldn’t they,” he retorted quickly.

“I don’t know, why did you want them, go after them, work for them? What inside you wanted them? Why did you believe they were the path to happiness,” replied the page inquisitively.

“Isn’t that what everyone does? Go to school, then college, work towards a great career, make lots of money, find a partner to settle down with, buy a home and then settle into family life,” as he stated the last words, he realized powerfully that the recent discussions with Jesse about having children was disturbing him. He wasn’t sure he wanted kids. After all he had raised his siblings, worked so hard to get where he was and now he just wanted to be for a little while. Having their dog Jax was enough responsibility.

“It’s okay to not want children,” the magazine gently offered.

Ken, couldn’t take it, he closed the magazine quickly, taking a huge breath, then holding it. Shaking his head, he looked around

again, “*Am I going nuts,*” he asked himself. Glad the front cover was closed, for he did not want to read the response to that internal question. “*Shit,*” he stated almost audibly. On his lap sat what looked like a normal glossy magazine, it was supposed to be full of brief articles and too many advertisements to count. He had picked it up to take his mind off things, instead, he now found himself deep in the hole of heartfelt exploration.

He couldn’t open it back up, already there was so much for him to digest with what had already been expressed. There it was in simple black and white, “*he was not happy.*” He had rattled off to the paper all the things he had been thinking about for months now, the “why,” he should be happy. The guilt trip he kept barraging himself with for not feeling good about his life. “*Ugh..,*” he had not up until now realized how much talking about children had stirred up feelings for him. Intense reactions that he had buried when he drove away from it all many years ago. Tears started to rise. Shaking his head, he took in another long breath, pushing the tears away.

“What was happening to him? Was he having a mental break down? Why couldn’t he pull himself together,” the frustrated, confused questions flowed forth like a burst spigot.

To be continued... 15

“The seatbelt sign has been turned on. Please return to your seats, put your chairs in the upright position...” the airplane recording broke into his delirium.

Looking up at the flight attendant he realized that they were preparing to land in San Francisco. It was a quick flight from Seattle to San Fran, it had gone extra fast since he was completely self absorbed in his own spiraling confusion. Quickly he looked

around to make sure no one was looking at him, he stealthily slid the magazine into his briefcase and prepared himself to deplane.

Staring out his window, Ken watched the ground get closer and closer. With a little jerk the planes wheels made contact with the tarmac. Resting his head on the seat in front of him, he consciously worked to relax, taking in slow deep breaths, convincing himself that all was okay, he just needed time to think and be. He was thankful that he had a couple of hours in San Fran before he caught the flight to Hong Kong. Picking up his phone, he turned the airplane mode off and waited for any messages to come in. Ding, ding, ding...three of them quickly chimed into his world. Glancing at the face of his phone he saw that one was Rita from the office, one from John in Hong Kong and the last one was from Jesse. The first two he knew would be simple easy things to answer and take care of. John was just probably messaging to wish him a good flight and to confirm the meeting tomorrow afternoon, Hong Kong time. Rita likely had a simple question she needed a response to, for she was not one to bug him, he really appreciated her self sufficiency and work ethic. When he left Seattle he knew that the office was in good hands. Sharon, the company project manager was a whole other story. Ken did not trust her at all. He never would have hired her, but he didn't get a choice, she was John's niece, the figurehead of the YouXin. He was sure that when she was on "business travel" she was partying and spending company money to entertain and play. He worried about the image she presented to potential clients. She was just too young, inexperienced and frankly a spoiled brat.

Ken quickly scanned the closest departure screen to make sure that his flight for Hong Kong was on time. Confirming that all was status quo, he headed for the closest Starbucks to get a breakfast sandwich and a latte. He had left the house in a rush, running late as usual, although this morning it was not just his fault, Jesse was quick to start the day with more intense conversation carried over from the night before. This is why he did not want to listen to her

message, he knew it would be more about the argument they had been having over and over and over again. She wanted to start trying to have children, he did not. He could totally understand where she was coming from, for she was already thirty-five, two years older than he was and as she said, *“her physical time clock was ticking.”* He got it. However, it did not change the fact that he immediately felt suffocated and caged when he thought about having a baby. Even now as he walked towards the coffee shop, he shuddered internally and externally at the thought. He knew from experience how demanding and life changing a child was. While he had not been a parent yet, he had played that role for his siblings, literally being the man of the house when his dad ran away.

Ken, felt his mind drift off to his dad. He had fond memories of his dad, he was loving, affectionate, and they had done a lot together. As swiftly as the warm thoughts came in they left as the hurt rose to wash them away. *“How could his dad leave and not look back? Not fight to have time with his kids? He totally understood why he left, being married to his mom had to be a living hell. She was such an angry, unhappy, bitter, vindictive woman, how did his dad ever fall in love with her to begin with? He had a feeling that if his mom had not accidentally gotten pregnant with him, there never would have been a marriage,”* his pondering thoughts trailed off as he stood before the barista to place his order.

“Hi, what can we get for you today,” he politely asked Ken.

“I’d like a soy milk hazelnut latte, grande size. Also a sausage, cheddar and egg sandwich, please,” replied Ken.

“I have a grande, soy, hazelnut latte with an egg, cheddar, sausage breakfast sandwich, is that all for you today,” recited back the young male barista.

“Yes, that will be it, thank you,” replied Ken.

Moving to the side he waited for his order. Putting the phone up to his ear, he listened first to John's message which was totally what he expected. No response necessary, since all was on time and in flow with the schedule. Next he listened to Rita's message, she had called to confirm his dates for his trip to South Africa next month. He was very excited about this trip, Africa, specifically South Africa had always intrigued him. He had fallen in love with South African wines three years ago when he was on a business trip to Amsterdam. At a dinner out with clients they ordered a South African Cabernet Sauvignon, not his favorite varietal, but when you are entertaining clients it's about what they want. He had been completely surprised by the incredible mouth feel, soft structure, and lingering spice. Unlike most Cabernets, it did not overpower the meal, it actually complimented it. Later in his hotel room, he researched that winery and the South Africa wine region. He became so engrossed that he did not get to bed until two in the morning.

He quickly called Rita confirming the dates and asking how everything was. He inquired if she had heard from Sharon who was supposed to be back in the office on Wednesday. "No," she had not yet heard from Sharon. Unbeknownst to each other, they both rolled their eyes in unison, for they were thinking the same thing with regard to Sharon, she was sleeping off another night on the town. This time in Lincoln, Nebraska, where she was supposedly meeting with new potential suppliers of organic produce.

"Breakfast sandwich and latte for Ken," broke into his conversation with Rita. Walking up he shook his head with a silent *"Thank you,"* picked up his items and searched for an open table.

Ending his conversation with Rita he sat down to organize himself for the next half hour, then he would need to get off to his next flight. The international flights took longer to board and get settled. However, once in the air it was wonderful. Business class on

international flights were especially spacious and he could tuck away in his own little world for the next fifteen hours without the outside world impinging on his thoughts.

He felt the magazine calling him from its hidden place in his briefcase. *“Not yet,”* he thought loudly, *I have to listen to Jesse’s message whether I want to or not.”*

“Hi hun, I am sorry that our discussion made you late this morning, also feel bad that we parted ways in such a distant state. I know that this is a huge decision for us both, one that could be very exciting and wonderful. I hope the week in Hong Kong gives you some time to feel into it and explore more deeply your concerns and fears,” played Jesse’s compassionate voice message.

Quickly he softened. He knew she was trying to understand his hesitation. When they were first dating it had been easy to say he wanted to have children. He wasn’t sure what had changed, he just did not feel ready yet.

Hitting the phone icon he called her back.

“Hi hun,” she answered.

“Hi babe,” he replied. *“Thank you for the understanding message, it means a lot.”*

“Of course, I felt really bad that you had to leave under such tumultuous conditions,” she shared in a tender tone.

“I know how important having children is to you Jesse, and I truly understand that you feel your age pushes the conversation, especially if we want more than one child. I’m sorting through my feelings, trying to understand more deeply why I am struggling,” he shared. *“I love you so much, I just need some time to become clear in myself,”* he continued.

“I know, I’m sorry I keep pushing. I can’t explain it, but sometimes it feels like it’s not me, as though I’m possessed by a want to be mom or something. I love you to hun,” she replied.

“We’ll talk more when I get back and I’ll message you once I am settled into my hotel room. Thank you for leaving me the message, I feel much better now about leaving for the business trip. Good luck with your new potential client tomorrow. I have no doubt you will knock their socks off with your ideas and presentation,” he smiled as he began to end the call.

“Have a safe trip hun, I love you,” she stated as she ended her conversation.

“Love you, talk to you soon babe,” he hung up the call.

To be continued... 16

Taking a sip of his latte, Ken felt himself relax a bit, the conversation with Jesse had eased some of his tension. He really did love his wife, she was an amazing person, they had a lot of fun together. He knew his struggle was within himself, yet, he seemed unable to figure out what was pestering his psyche, after all, just like he told the magazine, he achieved everything he had set his mind on. According to society, he was a very successful man, who should be incredibly happy. But, he was not.

It was tempting to pull out the magazine, however, he was afraid that it would be seen, or worse yet, he would discover that he really was crazy and the magazine would be a normal stupid publication. Eating his sandwich, he looked around at the people quickly rushing to and fro. The energy at airports was incredibly exhausting to him. People were always in a rush, no one looked you in the eye and it was a powerful example of how detached everyone was as they stared at their devices.

He loved the places he got to visit, but he had to admit that he grew weary of the game. He felt like he was on a treadmill that kept speeding up. There was always pressure to get more buying and supplying clients. He liked his boss and founder of the company John Adams. He was an American man who had become involved in the grocery industry while he was going to college. After he had finished his Bachelors degree in marketing, he had stayed on in the same grocery store, working his way up the ladder. Eventually he ran out of rungs to climb. On a trip to China he had met and fallen in love with his wife, Li Na, the daughter of one of John's biggest clients in Hong Kong. This changed everything for John, according to his telling of the story. He sold everything and moved to China, marrying Li Na and starting a business with her father as his partner. As Ken played the story out in his mind, he cringed at the thought of being so entangled with family. Due to his unhappy youth, he could not imagine working that closely with anyone he was related to.

Finishing the last bite of his sandwich, he looked at his watch, time to head for the gate. Placing his wrapper in the trash, he gathered his briefcase and rolled his small carry on bag towards the masses of people. Once swallowed by the throng of people, he focused on getting to the right gate and finding a restroom along the way. He took in the shops as he passed by, noticed the different people scurrying past, allowing himself to just be in the present moment. He felt like a tiny ant caught in a torrential down pour, barely clinging to the space he occupied, while people stormed all around him.

Settling into an open seat by the window, he closed his eyes, allowing himself to settle the buzz that encircled him. Again he found himself very grateful that he did not have to stand in the long line like another sheep to board the flight. His frequent flying gave him some very nice perks. Resting his eyes, he just focused on slowly breathing, allowing himself to not care who looked at

him funny. He desperately needed the quiet, a part of him wanted to run away, make a mad dash for the door and not tell anyone where he was. Playing with that thought he caught himself smiling at how free that felt. No one to answer to, nothing to do, he could just be.

As his mind relaxed, he felt his body respond in kind. Ken did not have many memories of his childhood, but, for some reason the ones he did have seemed to be haunting him today. They had a common theme, his dad. Opening his eyes, he glanced around the gate area, taking in the people who would be on this plane with him. Most of them were business people, yet there were a couple of families and some young people who looked like they were off to explore. He found himself intrigued by a young family, the man was interacting with a toddler, the child seemed to be around three, Ken thought. The woman was holding a baby who seemed quite mesmerized by her big brother who was giggling and having fun with the dad.

Ken replayed the recent conversation with Jesse. What was it about having children that unsettled him so? It felt like someone was cutting off his oxygen when he imagined having the responsibility of a child. He continued to watch the family, the man leaned over to give his wife, he assumed, a gentle kiss, the scene warmed Ken's heart. The relationship his parent's had left a negative image in his mind and heart. He totally understood why his dad had left, he wanted to be loved, appreciated, valued and not attacked all the time. His mom was such an unhappy mean person, what made her that way, he wondered.

"Now boarding our first class and business class passengers," chimed over the airways, breaking Ken's reverie. Taking one last look at the family, he stood up, gathered his luggage and went to board the plane. Passing close to the family he listened to the man and woman as they discussed who would take which child, it was nice to hear such a cooperative communication. *"It was possible to*

have a loving relationship that celebrated the addition of children,” he thought as he went through the gate.

Unlike his first flight he had someone in the seat next to him, a middle aged woman in business attire. He really hoped she was not a talker, for he wanted to be quiet with his own thoughts and hoped he could pull out the magazine he had stowed away to see if it was all a dream. Thankfully on these long flights the planes were big, allowing for lots of space especially in the business and first class sections. The flight attendant handed them each bottled water, sneaking her arm in between the people now boarding for the economy section of the plane.

The woman next to Ken put her head back and closed her eyes, *whew..*, she was going to be a quiet flight partner. He observed her face, noticing that her jaw looked tight, her brow was still slightly furrowed even though she was supposedly resting. As he turned to the window he questioned, *“Why, why do we breed a society of stress? What is that all about? It doesn’t make us happier and ultimately it kills us.”*

Jesse loved her business, that was part of what attracted him to her. She was passionate, dynamic, vibrantly alive and engaged with her life and career. They interwove with one another, you really couldn’t separate her as a woman from the business she had created. Whereas Ken left his job at the door of his office, often wishing he never had to open it again. He actually felt good about what the company was doing, why they were formed, etc.... It was just that it was not his passion. While there were aspects to it that he loved, like going out to the farms to meet the independent organic growers, the number crunching and constant quest for more suppliers and buyers corrupted the positive aspects.

To be continued... 17

The plane began to pull away from the gate, navigating the other planes and people on the tarmac. Ken always selected a window seat if he could, it was the only way he could sleep, resting his head against the window, feeling the constant vibration of the plane. Often he would put on his headset, creating a bubble for himself. He needed to get some sleep on this flight, for he arrived in Hong Kong tomorrow morning and had meetings in the afternoon. That was the hardest part about international travel, the time change.

The woman next to him continued to rest or sleep, he wasn't sure exactly, so he decided it was a good time to pull out the magazine. Reaching down into the side pocket of his briefcase he felt the glossy smooth surface, grabbing it, he pulled it up into his lap. Looking around quickly to verify that he was not being watched, he opened the cover in anticipation. There before him sat all the words previously written by the magazine. His words and thoughts were not there, his memory easily filled in his part of the conversation.

Are you happy.

Why?

Don't worry, they can't see this page and besides why are you worried about what they might think.

Why are you unhappy?

Are you saying that those things should make you happy?

I don't know, why did you want them, go after them, work for them? What inside you wanted them? Why did you believe they were the path to happiness?

It's okay to not want children.

"Welcome back," initiated the magazine.

"Hi," Ken replied, not as shocked as the first time and quite relieved to know he wasn't losing his mind.

“How are you feeling,” asked the page.

“Super confused, sad, lost, uncertain. Shit, I am feeling a lot of things, it is all so jumbled up inside of me,” exhaled Ken with vulnerable honesty. He continued, *“I feel so alone. Today has been full of thoughts, first about my life and then lots of memories about my dad. What’s that about? I haven’t thought of him in years.”*

“You are exploring thoughts about becoming a parent. This has made you reflect on your own childhood. Do you have fears about being a dad,” responded the words.

“No, yes, well I guess I have some,” came his honest response.

“Why,” beseeched the paper in his hands.

“Well, I didn’t have good role models for parents and I never want to hurt my children the way both of my parents have hurt all of us. More than half of my siblings are still messed up and unhappy. I understand why my dad left my mom, but, I don’t understand how he could have left us, me,” he let his mind completely flow freely. *“Have you asked your dad,”* inquired the words.

“How do I do that, I don’t even know where he lives,” he replied angrily, what a stupid question.

“Is it a stupid question? Don’t you want to know from him, why? Only he can explain, no one else can know his true journey,” calmly responded the magazine.

Ken had to admit the page had a valid point. One of the things he learned more profoundly every day was that no one can understand how you feel, why you do something, nothing, for they are not living inside your body or mind.

“That is correct. It’s the gift and the curse for the human, you have free will,” chimed in the publication, reading all of Ken’s thoughts.

“How do I even go about finding him,” asked Ken

“Isn’t it easier these days to search for people, using all your new technology,” replied the magazine.

“Yeah, I guess I am afraid to find him. What if he refuses to see me or talk to me? What if he’s dead? What if he gets really mad that I searched for him...,” his thoughts began to spin out. It was not the first time he had thought about trying to find his dad. In the past it would come up, but, he would quickly push the idea away, slamming the door on the thought.

“Fear is not always a bad feeling, sometimes it means you are opening up to a new unknown, thus it could be experienced as excitement, not fear,” shared the page.

Ken absorbed the meaning of those words. He had never looked at it that way before. It was true as he reflected on some things from his past - college graduation, moving to Berkley all on his own, marrying Jesse... Yes, fear could be a positive feeling, viewed instead as excitement or anticipation.

“What if your dad has thought about finding you, but, like you was afraid? What if he has felt bad all these years and wanted to reach out to you,” queried the words.

“Hmmm..,” thought Ken. That had never occurred to him. *“Wow,”* he realized that there were a lot of unknowns, all this time he had just stayed stuck in his judgments and limited perspective.

“Would you like anything to drink or eat sir,” asked the young flight attendant.

Pulled from his engrossed conversation with the magazine, Ken, looked up. “*Ummm, yes, can I get a bottle of water and a cup of coffee with cream,*” he requested, still feeling full from his breakfast sandwich.

“*Yes, I will bring those right over to you,*” smiled the young woman.

“*Thank you,*” Ken smiled in return.

Closing the magazine without even looking down at it, Ken slid it into the side pocket of his briefcase and searched for his earbuds and notebook paper. He wanted time to think and explore all the new feelings. Thankfully he had a long time in the air to just be. Once he landed in Hong Kong it would be a busy schedule, so he wanted to appreciate the time he had.

The flight attendant, Marissa, handed Ken his bottled water and coffee. Opening his notebook to a blank page, he started write. Letting whatever came to his mind flow unto the page. When his dad left, Ken had turned to writing to let go, rage, explore, dream, it was the only safe place he could totally be himself.

It was shocking to him how intense the feelings were about his dad. He had thought after all these years he would be less reactive. After all his dad left his life twenty-one years ago. Doing the math he realized that he was now around the same age his dad was when he left. It had never occurred to him how young his dad had really been at that time. That meant his dad was only twenty-one when he became a dad for the first time. Then over the next twelve years he had four more children, that’s a heavy burden, especially when your wife is so angry and unhappy. That made Ken wonder how they ever had more children, but, it was part of the Catholic thinking to have large families and you did not take birth control.

Ken tried to imagine how his dad must have felt. It had to be wildly overwhelming, feeling like there was no way out. Replaying in his mind some of the arguments he heard his parents have, he noticed for the first time some of the things his dad said that were actually quite supportive and full of desire to make things better. One of the conversations he recalled, his dad was imploring that they go to counseling. His mom had refused, stating that she would never go to counseling, only crazy people did that, and she was not crazy. Ken almost laughed out loud, for he felt like his mom was crazy, not as much now, she had finally gone to a counselor discovering that she struggled with traumatic buried issues from her past. By that time Ken was already seventeen, a senior in high school, so he was already planning his escape to college.

He found himself relaxing, for as he let go of the resentment, hurt and anger, he was able to view his parents from a different perspective. Being a grown man now, he was keenly aware that life was not simple, it came with lots of pressure. His heart seemed to open, like a blossom opening to the warmth of the sun's rays, his parents had done the best they could. Yes, they made a lot of decisions that he did not agree with, but, there was no way he could completely understand why they did what they did.

To be continued... 18

Authenticity Breeds Passion

5

Rita, Francine and Frank spent a spontaneous morning creating art together. It was so fun to just be present in the moment, letting the rest of the world slip away. They giggled as they shared tidbits about present day life and fun memories from childhood.

Frank was pulled from this connected time when his phone dinged at him, reminding him that he was supposed to be at his friends house to practice their roles for the upcoming Spring production. It would be his last high school performance, he couldn't believe it. *"Oh geez, I forgot what time it was. I was supposed to leave fifteen minutes ago for Joe's,"* spurted Frank. Closing the sketch pad he was doodling on, he jumped up, saying a quick goodbye to his mom and sister.

"That was really fun mom, thank you for sharing your art stuff. I'll be home by dinner time," he yelled from the hallway as he closed the door behind him.

Francine looked up from her art to gaze at her mom. Rita was smiling at her daughter with a soft openness that Francine had not witnessed before. Something had changed with her mom. *"Was it the art, the magazine, their shared secret?"* she contemplated.

Smiling at her mom, Francine closed her sketch pad and placed all the pastel sticks back in the box. Sliding the cover into place she stated, *"Thank you mom for sharing all of this with me. I had a lot of fun. I'm really confused and lost right now, but, like the magazine said, it's okay. I'm going to go to my room for awhile to sort through my stuff, think and be by myself."*

"I totally understand sweetie. I feel the same way. The magazine has definitely stirred up a lot of emotions and questions. I'm going to continue to do art until I am guided to do something else. I will be putting some laundry in, do you have anything you want to throw in the pile?" she asked her daughter.

"Yeah, I have some stuff on my floor that needs to be washed. I'll go get them. Thanks again mom, it's nice to not be alone," she shared as she stood up to leave.

Rita opened her arms for her daughter to lean in, so she could kiss her on the head before she left the room. *“Thank you, it is so special to share all of this with you. To know that the magazine is real and I’m not completely crazy. Guess we have lots to explore and share. Please know I am here for you, we can talk about anything you want. I love you more than you can imagine.”* Rita kissed her daughter, then watched her leave the room.

Looking down at her picture, Rita smiled. The time with her children today was so special. It was real, authentic, fun, easy. *“Why did she not create more times like this? What stopped her from just letting herself be, opening the space for creating, sharing, exploring and connecting. Instead she often filled the time with busyness, allowing the “to do” list to dictate the day. Letting self-judgment and feelings of inadequacy make her buzz about, thinking that somehow she could make things better by doing more,”* her thoughts bubbled like boiling water.

The magazine was awakening her to the lie that doing and busyness were just fancy forms of avoidance and sabotage. It was her way of buying into societies measurements for success. *“What did she believe success was? Who did she admire? What kind of life did she truly want? If she had all the money in the world, what would she do, create, share? Oh boy, these were big questions. Ones she had not thought about since she was a teenager. Why did she stop questioning? When did she stop believing in herself and that life can be whatever you want it to be?”* Placing her head in her hands, she felt tears of confusion well up. The emotions swirled and spiraled from deep within her. She found herself feeling like a bowl of pudding, a soft vulnerable mixture of emotions smashed together - joy, sadness, excitement, fear, anticipation, frustration, confused, hopeful...

Rita heard music flowing from her daughters room down the hall. Smiling she encouraged herself to breathe deeply, letting the emotions just flow freely. Gently she let her hand slide over the

soft colors embossed upon her canvas paper. It felt so beautiful, full of invitation, celebration, unrequited love. Staring at the image beneath her hand she could feel the wildness, the raw authenticity of the naked woman. The woman on the page was not afraid to be herself. She celebrated her curves, blemishes, imperfections. Wearing her truth with unabashed courage, delight, wonder and curious joy. In the sparkle of her eye, mischievousness danced with invitation. Staring in awe at how she had created her true self upon the page, a gasp of internal love escaped Rita's lips.

Whispering to herself and the page, *"You are home again, I shall not forsake you, forget you, or hide you, ever again. Today I promise that we begin the journey to live a life of passion, truth, vibrancy and raw expression. No apologies to anyone,"* picking up the art piece, she kissed the page, tore it off the pad and placed it directly in full sight on her dresser. It would be the first thing she to greet her as she woke and the last image to caress her at night.

Looking around her room, she leaned down to clean up the art supplies, smiling in tender happiness. After she put the load of laundry on, she wanted to come back to write about the special morning with Francine and Frank. She did not want to lose this precious memory. Then it was time to dream a wee bit, exploring how she would bring art back into her life.

Walking down the hall with her dirty clothes, she listened to Francine's music. *"Oh how she wished she could help Francine navigate all the challenges before her. Being a teenager was such a tumultuous time. Ugh..., memories of her own teenage journey flooded her mind. She definitely had no desire to return to that stage of life, yuck! As much as she wanted to smooth out the journey for her daughter and son, she was keenly aware that every person has their own unique path in life, even if they are your children, it's their expedition."*

To be continued... 19