



THE POWER OF US

EVOLVING WOMAN
ONE AT A TIME

NORMA CASAS

***To my grandmother; the spirit of the Sacred Circles, and to all
the women who crafted my journey; past, present, and
future.***

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We are interconnected. We all need each other. While playing with blank pages since I was an adolescent, many were those coming to my life as messengers; some for a long time, others for a brief period. To all those who supported my dream over the years, to those who were charged to deliver a message, to those who decided to stay, and those who even wanting to stay, made the choice to walk in parallel directions. We are the sum of our experiences and the encounters we share in many places through time. To all of them, Thanks for adding to my life and helping me in recovering my power.

Men themselves have wondered
what they see in me.

They try so much
but they can't touch
my inner mystery.

When I try to show them
they say they still can't see.

I say,

It's in the arch of my back,

The sun of my smile,

The ride of my breasts,

The grace of my style.

I'm a woman

~ From Phenomenal Woman- Maya Angelou~

The Story of Us

Being born and raised in a Hispanic country, for a long time led me to believe in the same illusion most men grew up with; the men rule, macho concept that has destroyed so many potential good men and broken so many women along the way.

As a little girl, I used to watch my grandmother and aunts as perfect housewives; house sparkling, cloth ironed, dinner ready no later than six. My mother was one of the pioneers in getting a job that didn't involve washing dishes three times a day and folding socks in impeccable round shapes. At the same time I would observe the men in the family; hard workers and good providers who would spend their nights boasting about their ability to make and set the house rules, always in charge of signing the final approvals.

It wasn't until I began sneaking down the hallways and hiding behind the wood doors that I started getting the feeling of it, understanding how all this battle for power really worked. Light descended over me and I discovered one of the purposes of what I came to call the sacred circles; the crafting and refinement of feminine skills and strategies; feminine essence at its best!

However, we don't need to belong to any specific country. As women, we all share the same history, the one imposed on us thousands of years ago from the time Eve supposedly tempted Adam, Mary Magdalene was declared a prostitute, Joan of Arc accused as a sorcerer, and Bridget Bishop hung for witchcrafting.

At some point in our evolution process we were submerged under the debris of all those lies. Our original agreements were thwarted and our souls reduced to images of faraway memories. We were methodically induced into the trance of forgetfulness. We did.

Through the following pages, I am sharing my personal journey toward the recovery of my long lost memories and the often painful process that led me back to my essence; our essence. This is not a self-help book. I would rather call it a journal; stories told through many voices. You can see it as a memoir aiming to inspire and empower. Here you will find the sincere words of a woman who was literally born in a golden crib, decided to take the rocky road, hitting the ground, and rising up to finally discover that what really matters in life is not what you have but who you are and who you have in your life. In connecting with each of you, it is my aim to serve. I hope we would be able to re-write and re-establish our agreements as

women and create collaborative feminine communities that would embrace the reality of who we are. I hope that through these pages you find that missing link that has been keeping you apart from that successful life you have been wishing for; not the society, money founded success but that which emanates from inner wisdom and highest inspiration. Only when we are free from our past we are able to connect with our selves. Only by accepting our divine nature we can fully accept our responsibility as creators of our present. Only by coming together again, stripping from false egos we will be able to remember those original sisterhood agreements. Only then we would recognize, embrace, and practice the beauty we possess and the power of us.

And a poet said, **“Speak to us of Beauty.”**

Where shall you seek beauty, and how shall you find her unless she herself is your way and your guide?

And how shall you speak of her except she be the weaver of your speech?

The aggrieved and the injured say, “Beauty is kind and gentle.

Like a young mother half-shy of her own glory she walks among us.”

And the passionate say, “Nay, beauty is a thing of might and dread.

Like the tempest she shakes the earth beneath us and the sky above us.”

The tired and the weary say, “beauty is of soft whisperings. She speaks in our spirit.

Her voice yields to our silences like a faint light that quivers in fear of the shadow.”

But the restless say, “We have heard her shouting among the mountains,

And with her cries came the sound of hoofs, and the beating of wings and the roaring of lions.”

At night the watchmen of the city say, “Beauty shall rise with the dawn from the east.”

And at noontide the toilers and the wayfarers say, “We have seen her leaning over the earth from the windows of the sunset.”

In winter say the snow-bound, “She shall come with the spring leaping upon the hills.”

And in the summer heat the reapers say, “We have seen her dancing with the autumn leaves, and we saw a drift of snow in her hair.”

All these things have you said of beauty.

Yet in truth you spoke not of her but of needs unsatisfied,

And beauty is not a need but an ecstasy.

It is not a mouth thirsting nor an empty hand stretched forth,

But rather a heart enflamed and a soul enchanted.

It is neither the image you would see nor the song you would hear,

But rather an image you see though you close your eyes and a song you hear though you shut your ears.

It is not the sap within the furrowed bark, nor a wing attached to a claw,

But, rather a garden, forever in bloom and a flock of angels forever in flight.

People of Orphalese; beauty is life when life unveils her holy face.

But you are life and you are the veil.

Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.

But you are eternity and you are the mirror.

~Khalil Gibran~

The Bits and Pieces

“Life is about breathing in every experience, overcoming those with which we struggle, and finally create the sacred space where we celebrate the discovery of our divinity and true self.”

In the Beginning...

The wild me still resides in the sugar cane plantation. That was and still is my perfect world where I am able to run free among the green, breathe the air of times past, hide from the rules and expectations, and shower under the waterfalls of clear water. The plantation has long disappeared under layers of concrete but I am still there, my steps could still be felt and my voice still heard.

When I first started writing the manuscript for this book, I did not know that I would still need to embark in a longer journey. I thought I was prepared to spread the message I had been holding for so long. Professionally I have always been clear on my goals. From the beginning I knew what my path would be, to teach. There is something magical in standing in front of an audience, interacting with young and eager souls. I knew exactly what to do to get there. I knew that I would be a visionary teacher, opening new doors of possibilities to my students. I knew it and I did it.

After twenty plus years into my career, all in a sudden, a change took over. It wasn't that teaching wasn't my passion anymore but something more powerful has taken charge of

what I thought it was totally under control; of course controlled by me. Something inside of me was transforming.

There is a blessing in disguise, a lesson to be learned, and a purpose to be unveiled behind what we call problems, incomprehensible and unexpected situations. There was in fact a missing link, something murmuring to my ear that there was a lot more, that my purpose wasn't limited to the classroom or a specific group of people. After all, over the years, looking at the success of my former students, I could feel proud of a job well done. A mission was accomplished and another one was being created.

This insight poured on me after a broken foot sent me to seclusion; a mandatory attachment to my bed for a month. It is in times like that, when we are denied of the simplest pleasures and silence consumes, when we think about how much we take life for granted. A series of events came upon me after that night.

The first week in bed was unbearable, spent among tears and anxiousness. For someone like me, described by others as an "always on the go woman", stillness and solitude were heavy plates to digest. My room became the center of all my very limited activities. My bed was transformed into my office, living room, and kitchen. My only view was my beloved, tall trees and even they seemed to be laughing at me with their wise

“we told you so”. The desperate look and loving care of my daughter was the punch bringing me back to reality. And then, my senses were finally able to stand still.

What I discovered was that it is precisely in silence when we are given the opportunity of listening to our inner nature, the voice of wisdom. What if all the pain was necessary? What if my alleged tragedy was the chosen vehicle that would lead me to a halt so I could finally pay attention to what really mattered? Were my broken bones the bearers of the time I deserved but never gave me? With very limited choices at hand, I committed myself to give my mind, body, and spirit the chance to allow that voice to speak to me. Every day I would simply observe. It would be the first time I would let something or someone truly guide me. I thought about it as a process; a major task life has vested over me.

I can still remember one morning, while looking through the window, one of the few things I could do from my bed, a butterfly landing on one corner of the glass window bragging about her freedom. Enjoying her maneuvers from the distance, I said to myself, “Feel your transformation into a colorful butterfly. Butterflies are free.” I got it. After so many years in the constant rush of getting, achieving, giving, and always thriving, I was not free. It looked like the more I have the more

imprisoned I felt. I had built my own cell. I had totally lost the awareness of who I was and what was the true purpose I was following. In reality, at that point there was no purpose except to keep doing what I have already mastered. So, I asked. I went back to my childhood days when I used to stare at the mirror and talk to imaginary friends. I asked but there was no response.

A day after my encounter with the butterfly, the image of this man popped up in the TV screen.” Inner freedom, he said, is attained when we become aware of our true self, when we work with our universal presence, when we listen to the teachings of those women who came before us, and when we shift to our center of power, which is known by many names. I rather call it the Divine energy of the universe.” Yes, a man was uttering these words! There was my answer. I had to remember. I had to reach out to that woman, to the other women who were my source. I had to take the risk of embarking in a different kind of journey. I would have never imagined what was in store for me. The first stop... a trip back to a past that came to me in many unexpected ways.

Sacred Circle-The Beginning

I remember a group of women sitting in the kitchen. That was the sacred circle where they would chat, laugh, cry, mix, cut, taste, and watch time pass by. Within their fraternity of sisters, they managed to speak without words. Their hands would come together to create anything from simple recipes to complicated tinctures, salves, and prayers to cure the wounds of the soul. The sky blue, rustic kitchen was the center, where the fire would be lighted and rising flames felt in their bodies transformed. Hidden in the corner and hoping not to be caught, I witnessed, wondering if one day I would be welcome in their world of rituals; finally allowed in that magic kitchen.

They represented the power of the wise women. They knew who they were. They wore the awareness of their mission. They felt the drive within and in their own way, revealed it to the world. They celebrated their essence.

Playing the roles...

Have you ever stop to think about all the roles we play? We are mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, girlfriends, friends, teachers, counselors, nurses, and cooks...handy women we are. Some of these roles are inherited. They are stamped on our birth certificates and released the day we are no longer breathing. Many others are chosen, self-imposed without much thinking, just for the heck of it, to fill out our agendas. Immerse in all our chores, roles, and responsibilities, how often we give ourselves the gift of quality time alone? How often do we take the time to pamper the woman within? How many times we look at our reflection, rejoicing and fully accepting that image? In the midst of all these questions come the realization of acceptance and self-love.

As mothers, we thrive to become the perfect image of motherhood. We want the best, battle to be the best, accept no mistakes. No sacrifice is enough for the sake of the sacred agreement of raising our children. Could you recall how many times have you hurt yourself in times when something has gone wrong? Even though motherhood doesn't come with a step by step manual, nothing in life does, we cannot accept that every learning process involves mistakes. One of most difficult things to accept is that, in fact, as mothers we do make

mistakes but there is no need to spend the rest of our lives blaming ourselves for it. My experienced truth taught me that, as a natural law, in the end your little lambs will abandon the flock. They will follow their own trails and will not ask you which path to go. Our responsibility rests in becoming compassionate and loving observers, be there if we are needed, and keep our distance when we are not.

Acceptance is the first step towards transformation. We must accept, love, and embrace who we are on every one of the roles we fulfill, just the way we are. We also need to become aware of our strengths and weaknesses to be able to focus on the positive thus seen our flaws disappear. We need to be devoted to honor our sacred being. This was the first waking thought in my journey. I decided then that the first day of my new path would be all about me. Blank paper has always been my best friend. With him as my ally, I wrote a list of all my good qualities; those aspects that make me so special to my eyes, not the eyes of others. Then I went to the not so good. How were these supposed flaws getting in the way of my fulfillment? The fun part, because we should always find the funny side of everything we do, was visualizing how my life would turn around without them. Sometimes we pay too much attention to our flaws instead of focusing on our positive

attributes missing the opportunity of improving the former. Moving to our strengths, focusing on them minimize the weaknesses we might perceive.

For most of my life, I have been known as stubborn to the core. This behavior has served me very well when pursuing a goal but it hasn't work in all scenarios. It has also gotten me in trouble. The problem is that determination and stubbornness are not the same. They don't match. This was the enlighten moment number 1, when awareness jumped in! And, I welcomed awareness into my life.

By allowing awareness to step in, we are given the key of clear vision. Awareness prompts us to face our own true self, giving us the tools we need to learn how to exalt to our best. I know there are times when some "inadequate" behaviors and attitudes will try to break out. After all, the world sometimes pounds us with unexpected challenges but, by knowing ourselves and focusing on our best, we are taking control of these behaviors. We are aware of the causes that trigger every challenge and know how to handle it.

By setting time aside to see, accept, love, and fully embrace the whole you, you are moving to that part of your body where the power of the feminine resides. You are grounded. Your lower body, which is the center that connects you to your creativity and your roots, is that place where you can re-

connect with yourself; where you are linked to the world. You start feeling a sense of belonging. From that center, define who you are, clarify your goals, and learn to love yourself. Be concise and real. Align your goals to your best qualities. Pay attention to those areas in need of nurturing.

I had never been skilled in my ability to stay centered. Instead I would always resemble the pieces of a puzzle, scattered everywhere, waiting for a patient hand to put it together. Of course, that hand wasn't mine. I needed to learn how to manage my emotions in the midst of struggle, especially when dealing with situations that didn't belong to me. It happens that many times we let others drag us into their tribulations. For the sake of love, empathy, or compassion, we end up carrying a heavy foreign load. Acceptance, self-awareness, and the ability of staying grounded clear the path to understanding.

As you begin your own journey, devote a day, two, or whatever time is necessary to enjoy being with yourself. Acknowledge your many virtues. Find your power center and reconnect with it. Treat yourself to something you like. Honor your inner and outer beauty. Feel how your power grows and travel through your body. Let awareness guide you through a rebirthing process. Ignite your inner fire, celebrate and affirm;

“I am grateful for all my strengths and for working with my divine power center. I give thanks for the opportunity life gives me to show my best and through my best been able to make positive changes for me and the world.”

Sacred Circle-Forgiveness

Crying in pain; yelling and crying. Crying and wanting to smash that black predator entering my territory, threatening, and biting on me. No mercy. Punish him for your tears.

Those were my thoughts while living the traumatic event of facing my first scorpion, smart animal who managed to crawl up the water pipes. That was the end of a refreshing shower. I was eight.

“You see my dear, fear has many faces. Have you stopped to think that maybe it was you the one responsible for your own pain? Have you in any way crossed his line? Fear of the unknown makes us react unconsciously. You felt threaten, wanting to get rid of the attacker. You show no compassion.

He defends himself in the only way he knows. Always remember, you were granted a wise mind. Use it mindfully in every one of your reactions. Now, is your wise mind able to forgive what fear overlooked?

Your Pain is....

Your pain is the breaking of the shell
that encloses your understanding.

Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its
heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.

And could you keep your heart in wonder
at the daily miracles of your life, your pain
would not seem less wondrous than your joy;
and you would accept the seasons of your
heart, even as you have always accepted
the seasons that pass over your fields.

And you would watch with serenity
through the winters of your grief.

Much of your pain is self-chosen.

It is the bitter potion by which the
physician within you heals your sick self.

Therefore trust the physician, and drink
his remedy in silence and tranquility:

For his hand, though heavy and hard, is guided
by the tender hand of the Unseen,

And the cup he brings, though it burn your lips,
has been fashioned of the clay which the Potter

has moistened with His own sacred tears. ~ Khalil Gibran~

Move and Let Go

Fear drives most of our feelings, actions, and thoughts. We have stored a wide variety of preconceived ideas, assumptions, and old programs ingrained in our mind. We are afraid of hurt, abuse, not being good enough or face betrayal, especially from those we love. We wear deep scars hard to heal. As a natural reaction, we build walls all around us, strong fortresses that would keep us safe. So we believe. Truth is that, in keeping resentment, these wounds just grow bigger to the extent of making pain unbearable. Unless we take the first step towards forgiveness, there is no way out, no safe place to go. Old painful memories always walk with us no matter where we go.

Catherine Ponder once said: *“When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.”* Now, think about it. Can you feel the ties that still bind you to those who caused you pain?

Forgiveness turned into my second task. There is something magical in the way trees dance carelessly. It was me, a warm cup of coffee and my personal green forest outside my window. In order to forgive others we must first forgive ourselves. Time passed and images came to my mind; the

images of those who I felt hurt me at some point in my life. My father hurt me through his absence, lack of love and attention, and his silence. My ex-husband joined the list for hurting me physically, emotionally, and mentally. With them I have always had some kind of unfinished business that would disturb my sleep from time to time. Who is on your list? Who is still keeping you stuck?

The sudden death of my father was a turning point. I could not cry for weeks, consumed in anger. In my mind, life had given him an easy way out while I was the one still here with too many questions unanswered. I would never be able to use the detailed script I had elaborated and practiced for years. After many speechless weeks, I was finally able to break down. In a final attempt to reach him, I played the script in silence.

Amazingly I received a response. In the end, it was through his departure that I came to understand him, his ways, and what he in fact had done for me. In the end I realized that “his way” was needed for me to experience pain and the healing that comes with it. Just then I was able to forgive him and let him go in peace with the same silent love I had always felt.

You might think, well it is totally different to forgive someone who is alive and well. Yes, it could and that was the case with my ex-husband but, inner and honest self-reflection is a very useful tool in these cases. As I thought about him I realized that

I had failed to follow the same advice I had been preaching to other women for years;” no one can hurt you unless you allow them.” Only if we open the door, the shadow can get in. So I played the old movie again. We were young, inexperienced, different in every aspect. There was no deep connection we could use to sustain a life together, not even our children. I saw how my grudges had kept me stuck in a circle of fake congeniality for the sake of fairness to our sons. The reality was a regurgitating feeling in my stomach at every encounter. Those are the damaging ties Ponder refers to. We remain their slaves until we find our way to forgiveness and break free.

Stepping back in old hurtful scenes, help us to explain the cause that led to them. It is like replaying the movie but this time as observers; watching a scene from the past brought back, felt, and analyzed in the present. The moment forgiveness touched me; I understood how those wounds had helped me grow, as human and as a woman. I had become strong, determined, and soul centered thanks to them. They became the fuel I needed to get in touch with my inner self. New doors opened. I felt the courage needed to better my life and that of those around me. Failures, which I rather call simple mistakes, must be welcome as opportunities. Call it second chances. For them be grateful and let go. An act of

sincere forgiveness and a phone call concluded twenty years of disturbing memories. The relief was indescribable. No more bad signals from my stomach.

What is hurting you? Who do you need to forgive? Could you imagine how amazing your life would be when you finally let those shadows go? Sometimes it takes courage to replay old scary movies. Scare fear away! See what happened. Feel your reactions and those of that person. Open your mind to the lessons behind the scene. Focus on the positive things you have been able to bring to your life. If you have the opportunity, get in touch with that person and express what you feel now, not in the past. Release your feelings into the hands of the higher spirit, where everything is healed and transformed. Give yourself the gift of being reborn into a fear free and compassionate child.

Many scorpions will try to crawl to you. It is up to you to fear them and be bitten or to face them consciously, knowing that they don't have the power to harm you. Move on and let go.

Forgiveness is the power to yield to love...

Forgive yourself and you'll be free...

Sacred Circles-The Initiation

After many years as a mere observer secluded in my corner, I was finally allowed in the outer circle. The kitchen was still a mystery for grown up women. Green pigeons peas would come to me in big bowls after a long harvest session among the wild nature, hundreds of them to be extracted from their protective shell. Green and sticky nails were all that was left in the beginning and silence, hours or silence. The white, iron rocking chairs became my throne. The soft breeze would keep me awoken. Silence would torture my ears.

“Can you feel the life in your hands?” Finally! Silence was broken! I was relieved but totally confused with the question. Life in my hands when all I could see were tons of little green and shiny circles and their empty shells hurting my still small fingers? I guess my innocent expression said it all and a laugh busted.

“Green pigeon peas grow from seeds just like you. The seed is deposited in the womb of mother earth. With love and nourishment it starts growing, first into a tiny branch. This branch keeps growing until a beautiful shrub is formed, flowers appear and they are ready to harvest. Peas come in different colors and all are welcome. They know how to give back. They feed the human, attract bees and help them in producing the honey you so much like, and, as mulch, they

nurture the earth that allow them to be born in the first place. They grow together but take different paths. Each one of them has their own plate to go to. Still, they always remember their essence and never stop loving each other. That's the circle of life. Be like the green pigeon peas. Grow and expand. Nurture yourself. Accept all the other shrubs for they all belong to the same family. Be grateful and give back with love. Remember, there's no difference between you and the shrub. We all come from the same source."

That was my first lesson when silence was finally broken. I realized right there that the journey to the kitchen would be long and that to enter that sacred circle I would have to earn the admission ticket by remembering. *Only when we remember we learn.*

Is it all about love?

Relationships seem to be a hard bone to chew. At times, they could turn into the worst nightmare. There are so many distorted ideas about what relationships should be as leaves on a tree. When cohabitating with someone it is often assumed that a contract has been signed. There is a tendency to look at our relationships like acquired objects we actually buy, warranties and all. Expectations grow. Demands must be fulfilled. We ask for more attention, love, understanding, companionship, support, faithfulness. When those high standards are not met, frustration takes over. We have failed or someone failed us. We blame us and others for what we weren't able to see from the beginning. Disappointment turn into hatred and love is dumped into the deepest bluff.

Like many other behaviors, the relationships requirements, have been learned as myths passed from generation to generation. These myths are tattooed to our skin. Generally, these intimate connections are also based on experience, ours and others. See, when my parents divorced I was devastated. I promised myself not to ever repeat such a thing. I did. After an exasperating short marriage, my subconscious mind received the blatant message to never fall into the claws of matrimony again. I haven't. When life brought me the gift of a fairy tale, I

opened my senses to the possibility of shared love again. I'm there now.

This is what I have gathered. In their majority, both men and women would give you the same answer when inquired about their vision on relationships. They all hope for honest communication, commitment, and understanding, a shoulder to rest in times of trouble, and shared values and dreams.

Now, when asked what they are bringing to that partnership, they stammer, not very sure about giving the same back. They dream in a stagnant love story where the characters remain the same, no changes at all, forever. This is the kind of dream not bound to come true, one of the causes of unhappiness and break ups. Why? We all belong to different worlds even if we have been sharing the same bed for a long time. People inevitably change. Their dreams and priorities change as they evolve. Who are we to get in their way in the name of love? Why should love die because of our broken expectations? Isn't that selfish?

Unconditional love sounds simple but it isn't. There are many definitions but it must be felt to be understood. Unfortunately, this is not the kind of love we are taught even it is referred to in many sacred texts. Remember this?

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails.”- 1Corinthians 13

How many of us live and deliver this kind of love? Instead, we have been programmed to love if we are loved back, if our needs are met, if our checklist passes a perfect review.

Unconditional love is not about a mere exchange but about the willingness to love someone no matter what. You still see the faults but continue loving in spite of them. It doesn't require anything back. It accepts the fact that we all change but love persists. This is one of those lessons that we either learn on our own or life finds the way to confront us with the truths we refuse to see. This was the lesson from my short but meaningful fairy tale.

I have learned that each person we meet serves a purpose. They either come as teachers or pupils. They bring the missing pieces of the puzzle. Some of them stay forever while others make a short stop, deliver their message, and quickly move on.

The message is simple. To love someone does not mean belonging to. Learning to love unconditionally frees us from the drama that consumes; the panic to the “loneliness factor”, the fear of not meeting expectations. Everyone one is free to change, to grow, and to walk their own chosen path, with or without you. Attachment limits our possibilities of growth, the same that we could share if we could only give some room to breathe. This is not to say do whatever and I wait for you at the end of the road. Instead, it means to show respect for our individuality. It means to support each other’s dreams without restrains, to trust.

Unconditional love begins with us and it expands to all our relationships. Do you love yourself unconditionally or are you constantly judging every single one of your actions? Do you blame yourself for all the apparent wrongs in your life? How do you show self-love? We cannot give what we don’t have! To reveal our own power we must call upon that unconditional love.

The times of extreme feminism are gone. There is no one to fight against but a balance to re-establish like the wise women of the sacred circles when gathering to plan delicate but powerful strategies. They didn’t battle against but subtlety collaborated with their male partners, so subtle that they

couldn't even recognize it and, I am sure you have heard the saying: "behind a great man, there's always a greater woman." These women knew their worth, their talents, and the original teachings of love.

Paulo Coelho says: "No one loses anyone because no one owns anyone." This is the core and should be the mantra of every relationship. This is the time to reevaluate our relationships starting with your relationship with yourself and then ask what love truly has to do with it.

"Love's greatest gift is its ability to make everything it touches **sacred.**" ~ Barbara De Angelis

Sacred Circles- Weaving Your Path

It was knitting morning. Colored threads and long needles covered the round table. Chairs perfectly arranged. Mine was the last one, destined for the novices. Colors were chosen. The first knot was done. That was the easier step, the only one I ever learned. Once done, my mind would start traveling somewhere else, to the place where the girl would be graciously climbing the mango tree book in hand. Hours would pass by up there, visiting foreign lands and meeting new imaginary friends.

“Are you in your mango tree again? Why are you here if your heart is somewhere else? What you choose to do in life must be felt in your blood. Never enter a world you know you don’t belong to. That would only make your life miserable and senseless. We have been sent here to follow the calling of the heart, our passion. Only in following your true passion you would be free, fulfilling your purpose, and giving back to the world.”

Needles gave way to waving leaves, robust branches, and a wide and strong trunk to support my daily escapades. That was my tree. It was there for a reason. My best memories where engraved there, where my passion still resides.

In Search of Your Passion

Are you waking up every morning joyous and excited or do you drag thinking that soon you will be heading to that place you call work but feels like a jail cell? The answer to this question will give you a clear signal. It tells you if you are following your passion and true life purpose or if you are merely getting by and filling the blanks.

There have been many generations of Marias in my family. Maria the unknown, Maria who perished embraced to her husband, Maria the faithful and strong willed, and Maria of the new revelation. I skipped the named but retained many of their stories and, of course some of the inherited traits; that's what my mother used to say. My mother was a dedicated secretary. I came to crush her dreams of following her footsteps when I announced I would go for a degree in psychology. The idea of seeing my days passing by in front of a typewriter, sitting on a desk, and typing memos would give me goose bumps. Instead, I was constantly dreaming in daily interactions with people just like me, with dreams, fears, and hopes for a better tomorrow. I envisioned long conversations trying to help them achieve their goals of happiness and liberation. Humans were my passion.

Absolutely everything in life happens for a reason. My mother got over it and my path as a psychologist was interrupted for a

very good reason, the arrival of my first born son. The final outcome had changed but not my journey towards my purpose. Then, I became a teacher and within those classroom walls I discovered the many ways we are offered to make a meaningful difference in the world. As an educator I have fulfilled many roles; counselor, mentor, coach, foster parent. I have had the blessing of touching many lives. For twenty years I found true joy through my student's smiles, struggles, and hopes. However, as we evolve, our passions also spread their wings. Remember, there are many venues to arrive to the place we have been longing for.

October 5, 2010 marked the end of an era; my independence day. Tired of the webs of bureaucracy, personal interests, and politics that surround education these days, I took my life back and abandoned the comfort zone that had been my cushion. If when doing what you love you are constantly questioning your presence there, it is time for a change. My background as a risk taker, known for making drastic decisions, didn't surprise those who really knew me. However, there were always those skeptics reminding me about responsibilities, bills to pay, and all the "buts" we so much like to use as an excuse to block our own progress. Against all odds, I declared my freedom shutting

my ears to those forecasters of bad weather; those you will always encounter.

Once again I became the living proof of what Maria Roberson said: *“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”* Walking out of the labyrinth instantly filled my life with a divine peace of mind; a heavy weight was lifted from my soul. Somehow I knew that, no matter what, from that moment on everything would be absolutely fine and wonderful things would be waiting for me.

Following our dreams could be risky. It takes strength and a solid faith in divine guidance, our capacity to follow it, and the ability to read the signs posted for us everywhere. We must develop a steel shield to protect us from the incredulous looks; the looks of those who would love to have the courage to do the same but are held back by fear and insecurity. After all, we have been trained to follow the flock and fly in the direction of the wind, not against it. We hold on to old beliefs that have directed our lives from the day we were born. We have been shaped to fit in the one size fits all mold, jeopardizing our growth and expansion. We have been educated to follow the rules with the false assumption that if we break them, we will be rejected and expelled from the world of normality. Living under those preconceptions we get used to live empty lives,

moving like robots, and casting away any feelings of fulfillment, creativity, and contentment. We turn off all our internal lights to follow the lights others turn on for us.

The good news are that with every new day comes a vibrant opportunity and it is never too late to re-take our lives and live under our terms. Clean your waters from any poison. Add some fresh fragrance, and see how you begin receiving the rewards of a clear stream.

This newly found freedom took me to India; a short but insightful stay, which contributed to my decision to be sitting here today. This country with its mystique opened my eyes but it was a small person who really taught me that the road to follow will always be that one of the heart.

And he looked at me and said: *“Never look back because if you do, you are risking putting yourself in the zone of regrets and running back to the very same you wanted to escape from in the first place.”*

Sacred Circles-Living in Spirit

He was my first puppy; a little black and spotty white bundle of love. We shared the sunrise, the long walks through the sugar plantation, and the cozy sheets in bed. He was my very first connection to the nature of the wild, where humans have no room. He also loved to sleep under my grandfather's car, running scare at the first noise of the engine.

That morning was different. He went deaf to his wake up call and not even my pleas were enough to make him come out. His small body was lying there. His spirit was gone. I had lost my best friend.

“Crying is good for your soul. Tears connect you with the spirit, where everything is perfect; where everything is healed. He will always be present in your life. Even as you grow older, his spirit will be your companion because you were united as one spirit. When you forget who you truly are, as it usually happens, he will bring you back to your essence as you remember the days you both shared. That's what spirit does. It guides you, taking you back to the road you left behind, giving you strength when you feel your world is falling apart. Live your life in spirit my child.”

When Spirit Speaks

For most of us, something happens as we grow up. We become entangled with the ways of the world and forget our true self; the spirit that has been sustaining us since the day we were born. In the beginning, there is no fear, no doubt, no resistance, no false beliefs or judgment. That fearless spirit has held me through the different stages of my life, from the primitive plantation to the comfortable life in the city, from having it all to not knowing if I would have something to eat the next day, from leaving my country and family behind carrying my four children as my only, most treasured luggage, from starting all over from scratches, forcing myself to adopt a new lifestyle to being here, writing these words hoping humbly to inspire women around the world. The journey has been one of allowing the spirit to live within and guide me. Now I know it.

The truth is that as the years pass by, we grow apart from everything that was first nature letting ourselves go with the flow of all that is contrary to it. We start mingling with what we think is real, building a long bridge between our spirit and the dense body that carry us through the illusion we create or let others create for us day by day. And then a good day comes

when we finally remember that most of our lives have been just that, a false illusion of what we thought real.

My first day in India was filled with excitement. There I was in a land that has always attracted me for so many unknown reasons. Like a baby with a new toy I didn't want to miss any detail. It was a long ride avoiding hundreds of people walking in the middle of the streets. Cars, bikes, cows, and trucks would come in every direction, framed by the never ending honk of the horns as background music. No picture or movie compares with what it's lived there. After a long sixteen hours flight I still couldn't sleep, eager to see the sun rising in that ancient land. The air on the hill smelled liked old honeysuckle, the smiles of the people felt like sunshine. However, reality was waiting for me behind the tall walls that surrounded me.

India was the step I had to take. I was meant to greet an unknown compassion through the eyes of a little girl. I didn't know her, never found out her name but her sad look reflected on the most beautiful gray eyes I've ever seen, will live with me forever. In her face she carried a thousand years of pain, desperation, need, and hope. You see, this country with all its natural beauty still holds the idea of women as heavy loads, a disgrace for the family. Hundreds of girls are literally killed every year, some of them before birth, some others before age five, and those who "survive" are neglected of the basic

medical treatments or preventive care. Thousands of them live in the streets, spending long days begging for food or money. Amazingly, these girls, if given the opportunity, grow to create and be the leaders of amazing, nurturing communities. They have established their own sacred circles and their teachings are passed along from one generation to the other.

As her hands were holding mine like a blessing, a circle of transmutation in a brief alchemical ritual emerged and we became one. Tears rolled down my cheeks and a feeling of pain, anger, and joy took hold of me. The encounter lasted less than ten minutes, trying to understand what language could not describe. She changed everything. It was through her light that I was finally able to bring back the sacred circles where all the Maria's had previously gathered. Her presence made me recover the girl and the woman I had lost and then I remembered.

The sacred circle of wise women was the vehicle life intentionally used to connect me with the real world of the unknown. They gave me the tools needed to embark in this journey; life itself. When facing challenges, their memories and the murmurs of their voices in the old kitchen, reminded me of my origin and the answers came along with each lesson. The recollections of those days, when I was blessed with their

physical presence were possible through the kind touch of an Indian girl starving for hope and transmitting it to me. All of the women who gathered in the kitchen inhabit different worlds now but their teachings remain and their spirits still dance around, keeping me grounded and true to me.

There were strict codes among them. These codes serve to preserve wisdom and cultivate awareness. What looked like informal gatherings, were presided by intention. Each intention was designed to honor respect, common good, and the desire to attract higher energies and love. Training was based on life experiences since life must be experienced in order to be truly understood. Wisdom then was acquired through life itself.

Women pledged to protect each other accepting each one the way they were, serving as counselors, mentors, and spiritual guides. These women were the ones guiding me in spirit, teaching self-reliance, knowledge, and connection to everything there is. They made me realize that spirit has many ways to become visible to our eyes but we must be wide awakened. When we need it most and sometimes feel knocked down to the floor, Spirit makes its way to hold us and help us rise from our own ashes. We just have to stay still, remember, and let Spirit in.

On Becoming Me...Life Excerpts

“You've got to take the good with the bad, smile with the sad, love what you've got, and remember what you had. Always forgive. Learn from mistakes, but never regret.”

Changes

So I have been asked many times in my life, what I would change about it. Surprisingly, the answer has always been the same; nothing, absolutely nothing. You see, every single experience, good or bad, has taught me valuable lessons I wouldn't have learned otherwise.

By listening to my heart I have traveled long roads in pursue of my destiny. I have been a co-creator of every single scene. I have chosen to be the main character with all its flaws and qualities. I have taken advantage of every opportunity, every opened door without paying attention to other people opinions in many occasions. In the end my passion has won, my instincts have guided me.

In loving, I have been closer to the true spiritual experience that many have missed through their lives; always searching for love means nothing if we are not capable of giving it freely.

In accepting my defeats I know I am in no way defeated but just in need of a new strategy because wars are made of many battles. My enemy is not my enemy but his own and there is when my strength is tested; when it grows stronger.

In dreaming I have learned the language of the soul which ultimately is the language of God and my best guide.

So, what about changes? I have made many through the years. Fear of change? No. Every transformation comes with a reward. It is necessary to get to know me better and get to that final destination. Every day, somehow, the little bee of change comes back to bite me. Like any grandfather clock when it strokes twelve, changes occur and it's time to move on and evolve. Where I would go? I don't know. I ignore the why or the when. What would the purpose be this time? I do not have a clue and I am not looking for it. I am not escaping; I do not want to leave something or someone behind. Changes are about swirling with life and its many mysteries and welcoming each new view with new eyes.

Lessons in Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of those feelings that we must learn whether we want it or not; if not learned by choice, life herself makes sure the lesson is delivered at some point. Our free will does not work here.

Every time I touch this topic the face of my father's mother come to my mind. My grandmother waited for a lifetime to get even with her husband. Stories were told that in his youth he was everything but a faithful man, jumping from one side to the other. Every dropped load was a different adventure. I never witnessed those events. By the time I really had time to share with him, he was a transformed man, calm, quiet, and somehow loving. I could not understand the harsh treatment he was receiving from my grandmother. I could not conceive that kind of life where there was not one nice word; most of the times no words at all. And then I discovered her grief and the intentions she had been elaborating for years; her revenge, her inability to forgive and start over with or without him. She wanted him to pay at any cost.

The end of this sad story from my ancestors is as sad and ironic as the events that constructed it. My grandfather passed while staying at a senior's housing complex. He was alone but in peace. He never denied his actions neither accepted them but he

had found peace in his heart. A year after his death, lonely as she wanted to be, my grandmother passed too. Her heart, still filled with anger and resentment, could not keep beating. The ghosts of the past always haunted her.

The day she was buried, on the same tombstone with her late husband, I could not help thinking on the fairness of life. There they were, together again, eight feet underground. From then on, time would be limitless for then to speak for the first time maybe and finally forgive their past and rest in peace forever.

Wise Women within- A Special Treat

WISE WOMEN KNOW WHERE THEY STAND, NO NEED FOR APPROVAL. THEY KNOW WHEN TO BE SILENT AND WHEN TO SUMMON THE WORLD TO HEAR THEIR WORDS. WISE WOMEN AVOID DRAMA AND GOSSIP, KNOWING THAT THESE WOULD ONLY WEAKEN THEIR SPIRIT. WISE WOMEN KNOW THAT FREEDOM OF THE SELF IS THE ULTIMATE DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE. THEY DON'T HOLD ON TO TIES NOR TIE OTHERS. WISE WOMEN WALK THEIR TALK AND LIVE IN A STATE OF SURPRISE AND AMAZEMENT. THEY KNOW THAT THEIR INDEPENDENCE DEPENDS ON THEIR ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO STAY CONNECTED WITH THEIR SURROUNDINGS. THEY ARE ONE WITH THE ALL. WISE WOMEN NURTURE, HEAL, AND CARE IN MANY INVISIBLE WAYS. WISE WOMEN TEACH HOW TO TURN TO OUR HEARTS TO LOOK FOR ANSWERS INSTEAD OF TOTALLY TRUSTING A SOMETIMES CONFUSED MIND. THEY KNOW THE BALANCE, THE STILLNESS, AND FLOW. THEY TAKE CHANCES AND RISKS TO FOLLOW THEIR DREAMS AND MAKE EACH DAY COUNT. THEY KNOW ABOUT THE PERFECT TIMING TO USE THEIR STRENGTH OR MERE INTUITION. A WISE WOMAN BUILDS HER HOME, HER WORLD, AND THE WORLD OF THOSE SHE CARES FOR OVER THE SOLID BASE OF

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, TRUST, COMPASSION,
FREEDOM, AND UNSHAKABLE FAITH.

“And then, one day, you stop battling your inner and outer demons. You flow in the clear waters of serenity. You are one with the flow. You realize your power, passed on to you from many generations. Then, you become a wise and loving woman.”

In the Middle of the Storm

We learn how to appreciate life to the fullest.

Days seem longer, nights shorter but life endless if we know where to look at.

We are forced to search inside, where all the answers reside. We are struck by the lightning of wisdom and discover who we truly are.

We learn to sit still, and be patient; to listen in quietness and reach out to the many ways the Universe has to disclose its messages.

We learn that miracles do exist, that they are an integral part of our lives, and that we must be aware of their presence.

We become the center, the observers, and the transformers.

And then we realized that the storm has passed, that we survived triumphantly, and heaven is giving way to bright, clear skies and you are sitting right in the middle.

Everything is forgotten, lessons have been learned, and the real you is stronger, wiser, and divinely empowered.

Storms are there to remind us that life must not be taken for granted, that each day should be fully embraced and lived

thoughtfully, that we are a perfect creation, and that we are never, never alone in our battles.

On Being a Mother

When I look back at all the criticism and self-inflicted guilt I put myself through when I had my first child at tender eighteen, all I could do is laugh and be grateful for those moments. Over the years of steep hills and unknown roads, I have discovered that one on my noblest missions in life was just that; to be a mother. I will never have all the right answers but I do have four wonderful grown up kids who are a faithful testimony of my own growing process as a mother, woman, and a better spiritual being.

My children have taught me many lessons, not all have come to me the easy way. **Mothering** is a long process of trial and error. It is made up of tears of joy and pain. Challenges are always there and when it comes to make the right decision, there's always a hint of doubt, especially when raising more than one child all with completely different personalities. What could work fine with one of them would be a catastrophe for the other. There's no psychology book able to provide with the right answers. Mothering is about been able to risk, reflect, take action, show compassion, be flexible, be able to admit our own mistakes, listen, be patient, and feel and unconditional but detached and tough love. These are the lessons my children taught me:

1. Been a mother does not mean that we know it all. Yes, we have been there, where they probably are now, but the fact that

we are all different means that the outcomes might not be the same. **Guide them**, be there for them, but allow them to walk their own path even if it hurts.

2. **Honor** their individuality. Do not pretend for them to be your clone. We all come to this world with a mission and it is their unique task to find it. Embrace them just the way they are.

3. **Listen** closely not just with your ears but with your heart. Mothers have a special instinct. Listen to their gestures. Their silence can tell you a lot more than their words.

4. **Communicate** with them honestly. Let them know that you are human with strengths and weaknesses. They will appreciate you as the person to whom they can turn and talk about anything in their minds knowing that you will be there to listen without judging.

5. Always and I mean always tell them how much you **love them**. Show them how special they are to you. Your children are a blessing; the sacred entities life brings to your life to help you and give a special purpose to each of your days.

6. **Learn** how to say no along with a valid explanation; a no without reason causes confusion and in some cases resentment. If they can't understand they will not be able to learn.

7. **Celebrate** life with them. Encourage them to be their best, to dream and make those dreams real. True happiness comes with the simple things in life.

8. **Teach** them to feel, to give in silence, and to be proud of whom they are validating the qualities and feelings of those around them.

My road along my children is not finished. We still have many memories to write together and many more lessons to learn from each other. My initial criticism turned into praise; my guilt into innocence. They became the engine moving me towards all my dreams and goals. Today we enjoy a loving family where **respect** and acceptance are cherished, and love is the powerful bond that keeps us together.

Some Miracle Words

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Albert Einstein

The kitchen was their sacred space. Creating your sacred space is the main venue by which you reclaim your divinity. There, you get in touch with your guides. No matter how busy you think you are, take the time to nourish the most valuable treasure you could ever find, YOU!

Our limited time and overflow of chores and responsibilities have led us to often feel frustrated and overwhelmed. We wish for more than twenty four hours to fulfill our daily long list of things to do. By the end of each day, we go to bed still thinking about all the things we have scheduled for the next day. This scene becomes repetitive and obsessive. There is limited if not, no time at all to shut the doors and spend some well-deserved and necessary time feeding our inner system. How then could we make time to create and enter that sacred space?

Start by prioritizing. What are the events or responsibilities that are serving your higher purpose? What are the ones that instead of adding to the life you desire are dragging and draining your energies? Those could and must be eliminated from your list. Delegate or simply say no to them. Only when we learn to say no, we can start saying yes to what really matters. Whatever is not supporting your dreams needs to be cut off from your life.

It is time to create your own physical space. If at home, take time to arrange a room, a corner that would become your

sanctuary and personal territory. Find it. Do it with love. Bring objects that represent you, your goals, and your unique spirit. Make of this place, where no interruptions are allowed, a place of mindful self-expression, where you heightened your best virtues, where you dream and craft your action plans to become the best of who you are and will become.

Outdoors is the best scenario to get in contact with the very nature of you. Wise women knew this and practiced it daily. Nature possesses the magic of opening our senses and bringing us the messages we need to pay attention to in order to improve all areas of our lives. Take time to walk, feel the air and even the rain is you don't mind getting soaked from time to time. Follow the seasons. Play in the dirt. Don't worry; contrary to what modern doctors say, you won't get sick. Make a habit of enjoying the gifts of nature and give back to her. Use this time to ask meaningful questions and wait for the responses. I can assure you that they will come.

By taking the time to enter your sacred space you are entering the world of self-knowledge by becoming your best friend. This is the time to reconnect with your true being.

Women have been blessed with a unique inner guidance system. Every organ, every cell has the ability to speak to our senses and we can learn how to understand their messages if

we just give ourselves the time to listen. Use this time to balance your world and find the inspiration to make a better place for you and those who surround you.

Finding that sacred place brought me to, what I consider now miracle words which, when applied and fully internalized, serve to open the gates to a new frame of life lived with intention; acceptance, commitment, and transformation. Together, they will give you the tools to literally act upon those every day feelings, thoughts, events, and situations. They will guide you into those changes necessary for your personal and spiritual growth. They represent the key to live compassionately, balanced, and happier; living from the heart.

Acceptance requires self-discipline. It could be a lonely journey at times. To accept yourself you must look at the plain reality in a conscious way and accept it as it is; where you stand right now, who you are and how you are, embracing the possibilities and feeling totally content with it, even those aspects you would eventually like to change.

The practice of acceptance involves signing an agreement with your inner self where you pledge to fully appreciate, validate, and support who you are at the present moment. You are giving permission to be yourself and to welcome the realities you would like to re-create. Possibilities are infinite. Do not set boundaries. This is the time to stop judging every one of your

acts, to stop being so hard on yourself, to stop blaming and punishing yourself. Ultimately, we all came here to learn not to lock ourselves inside vicious cycles of regrets and self-induced sanctions. Stop it! Allow yourself the possibility of change, of reaching your goals, celebrating your uniqueness, loving what it is, and expressing yourself freely. You don't need to be perfect. You are not bound to become a copy of the general population. It is precisely your individuality what brings an invaluable addition to the world. Have you ever heard "God's perfect secret weapon is women"? Yes, we are! Acceptance is your nature, your default status.

Our ancestors were exceptionally wise. One of the Toltec's teachings involves what they called "life story". These are the stories we have grown up with, told by others time after time. After so many repetitions, we end up believing that these stories are set in stone; that we are actually the story personified. We go from one stage to the other believing in them and afraid of making any changes. Acceptance is the first step in revising your personal story. Write it down. Give details. Add your characters and the events that set a landmark in your life. What did you hear? How were you portrait by those around you?

My personal story started like this..."I was a little girl, born in a good and lovely family but my father never showed me love, never pay attention to the person I was. That hurt me really bad...Through acceptance, I realized how blessed I was to have that kind of family, that my father had his own issues, his own story to deal with, that his actions and feeling were not personally directed to me; it wasn't about me, and that it was precisely his actions my guidance towards many of the good qualities and strengths I had always try to acquire. This was my tune in point, accepting that I wasn't my father nor his actions or the story he wrote about me.

What about writing your story? It could be hard to remember certain things but only when we face the uncomfortable we are able to release and feel relieved.

1. Do you really know yourself and the core of your beliefs?
2. Could you be totally honest with yourself without feeling shame of guilt?
3. What are you willing to do today in order to create a life of loving acceptance?

"She is empowered to live a joyful life at her true and fullest potential."

We keep walking down the yellow brick road into the street of commitment with a perfectly clear mind and knowing what we

want. Before heading that way remember that some realities can't be changed. It would be hopeless, stressful, and incapacitating. We would end up feeling frustrated and depressed. The simple solution to what we usually oversee is to stop arguing with what is. If it can't be changed don't fight against it. Let's do commitment, not with those situations or people you can't do anything about but with whom matters the most at this present moment, you.

And so the main commitment begins with you because only you have the control over your actions, thoughts, feelings, and desires. Here is where everything begins; the gate from where you set your departure. Now that you have accepted what is, that your mind is clear, and that you know exactly what you want, write that agreement and be faithful to your words. Words of caution: commitment could be scary, especially when you are making a contract addressed to you, your beliefs, and values. It involves taking chances, closing your ears to the crowd, following your intuition, and living through your faith.

When I walked out the classroom which had been my house for the last ten years of my life, I could feel the silent murmurs of the skeptics. I knew exactly what they were thinking; "the world headlines point at a massive recession and she is turning her back to a stable job." There was no need for words. Body

language always speaks louder. However, I was decided to stop feeding a system that was literally consuming my energy and passion. It was them or me.

Your own decisions might not be that drastic but there's always certain level of risk in any chance we take. It is our fear and resistance to it what usually keeps us stuck to our old habits, lifestyles, and behaviors even when we are fully aware that they are not meeting our needs anymore. It could work for a while but, believe me, at some point your inner voice will declare war, so strong, so loud that you would have no option but to pay attention and take the first step. Either you risk it all for the sake of a fulfilled life, breathing through your true passion or you stay right there, consumed, miserable, seeing through the glass of the mere observer whose favorite phrase will always be what if...Your life is what you decide it to be. How would you paint it?

Remember the Toltec's life story process? You wrote your detailed story as told and perceived by others. You accepted your realities, those you were prompted to believe. Now it is the time to get rid of it. That life story does not belong to you anymore. You are about to commit to re-write it as it truly is, from your point of view, and under your own terms.

From the beginning of times, fire has symbolized destruction and chaos but also means cleansing and purification. Today,

you are setting your old life story on fire; reducing it to ashes swirling in the wind into far away from you places. You are breaking the chains of domestication. You are reclaiming your ability to remember without being emotionally attached anymore. You are reaching out to your commitment of living fully in the richness of each moment of the life you are creating.

“She moves through the world with no resistance to it or from it because she is free to flow with it.” ~ Allan Hardman

And we step into the last brick of an amazing journey; the step of transformation.

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, proclaimed that ‘the world will be saved by the Western woman.’ I would respectfully change it to say that “women will save the world.” This is not a feminist statement but a hopeful wish and a humble forecast. Through history we have been the silent mediators and saviors of many battles. We have also been agents of change. Imagine.

Christopher Columbus traveled to the New World thanks to the patronage of Queen Isabella of Spain. Boudicca led the Britons against the Roman Empire. Hildegard was the preferred advisor of Popes and Kings. Joan of Arc led the French to victory. Mother Theresa became a global icon for selfless service to others. All these women had something in common;

they were passionate, strong in their beliefs, determined in their actions, and compassionate in their hearts. They literally turned the world around.

Transformation is inevitable and you are in charge of it. We are living in a new paradigm of life where collaboration is the order of the day. These are the times to recover and rejoin the sacred circles, working together to create what we envision. We must block our egos, beginning our healing process and spreading it together as a community. Like in the old times when neighbors would take care of each other, sharing their crops or simply their presence, we all need each other, although we have forgotten this truth over the years. This reconnection is part of our mission and we can't turn our backs to it. This is the time to live a purposeful life from the heart. What would you be offering to yourself and the world? How would you be serving? How would you be communicating and reaching out to others? What kind of message would you deliver? It is time to take the final step into the new you. Today, you are taking the first step in reclaiming your power; you are writing your life story, the way you have always imagined it. Unleash your spirit. Leave behind everything that is not serving your purpose; what is not contributing to your life as an evolving woman. It is simple. Think about what you are gaining or losing by keeping or ending these attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. If the loss is bigger than the gain, you

know exactly what you need to do. Write down your action plan. Be honest when deciding those aspects that need to be redefined or redirected and be clear and concise on how you are going to make it happen. Reach out. Remember we are not alone!

Awareness is the engine that would move you into the new you. It is not about your effort, will power, or goal setting. Awareness occurs when we realize that our old patterns are outmoded, reason why it is necessary to re-write your personal story. Awareness moves you into irresistible action, the flow and flux needed to modify and transform. Remember that your past have taken you this far but it cannot take you any deeper. Allow your mind to open, your thoughts to be cleaned from any dust. Kick up your positive thoughts. You are not your fears, thoughts, or emotions. Your essence remains intact no matter what. You are the healer of your own life. So, it is time. Get out of the place you don't belong anymore. This is the day! You are creating from your heart, where all your divinity resides.

Living through Your P's

“There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that’s your own self.”

~Aldous Huxley~

At the end of this journey, I realized that I had had to re-encounter my PURPOSE in order to follow my PASSION to develop my PRESENCE and share my POWER. Purpose, passion, presence, and power are ultimately the skills we must cultivate as evolving women in a world that is shifting at the speed of the light. It is in strengthening these attributes that we will be able to craft our legacy and promote the changes we want to see.

What exactly then is my life purpose? Like many of you, I battled with this question for years trying to consolidate my inherited purposes, imposed by others, with the notion that if I was here there must have been a powerful reason. I struggled, felt frustrated, and blamed myself for my inability to hit the target; to discover my mission.

Today, it is a different story. I know now that my sole purpose in life is to be me as I was divinely created, embracing and loving who I am, the way I am, and recognizing how blessed I am as a creation and extension of that divine energy that birth us all. Just like you, I was designed with unique talents and abilities. My purpose is to become aware of them, polish them like precious diamonds, and share them with the world. You see, there was a reason why specifically you were given those talents. Somewhere, someone needs you. They need what you

have to offer. This is the miracle of interconnection we have been missing; the first principle we must remember.

The purpose search had made me feel incomplete and damaged. Through a quest, that could last a lifetime, we have seen ourselves as an imperfect creation, wasting precious moments inquiring, scrutinizing our lives and motives. Know that you were born perfect! Know that all you need, and I mean all you need, is to remember who you really are and the many gifts you were endowed with from the instant your eyes were opened to this world. You don't need to become because you already are. You don't need to look for because you already have what is needed to shine. Your gifts are there to be handed out to others with love, gratitude, and compassion. There is nothing for you to acquire. You have it all! Your sacred mission is to give from what you possess, to understand that there is nothing wrong with you or your world. Everything is the way it should be as long as you learn how to see the perfection of each moment, in and around you. The whole world has been waiting for you to manifest the perfection you are.

As women, we were created with heart centered abilities. When allowed to flourish in balance with all that is, our compassion and life giving intelligence surpass the unimaginable. Imagine what we could be able to do if we all

wake up to the truth of our divine origin; if we could all welcome our talents, our ways; if we would collectively share them with those who need them the most.

In writing these words, I am living through my purpose; to be me, using my experiences to empower others, sharing my life stories, serving and planting a seed that I know will flourish, giving from my God given talents to bring a message.

So now that we have reframed and cleared up the life purpose conflict, ask yourself the question again from this new perspective. What is your life purpose?

“At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received how much money we have made, how many great things we have done.

We will be judged by “I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.” ~ Mother Theresa~

Your Purpose to serve...

“She decided to start living, to stop praying for grace but living through it.”

I love herbs. Every year I took the time to gather the best seeds and shrubs, fertilize the soil, plant them in a ritual of love, and feed them diligently to enjoy seeing them grow and flourish. The supreme joy comes when I can share the crops with others through exquisite meals or beautifully arranged bunches in glass vases that bring fresh aromas to any room. Herbs are one of my passions. My talent to patiently put them in the ground, care for them, and see them grow, represents a flame, a drive that would sometimes takes me to unexpected adventures.

Your talents are the vehicle through which you fully express your purpose. That is the “Work” the alchemist referred to; the process of refining your raw materials, going through the process of toning, and setting them in motion. This is the explosion of your given gifts reflected in everything you do, feel, and think. This is the spiritual calling, something you can’t refuse to listen to and follow.

Many of us feel fragmented. At some point we have many things we like, some others we would like to do, and some more we are asked to do as part of our social responsibilities. I

have discovered that there's nothing wrong with it as long as we manage to prioritize and balance each one in a way that allow us to be able to enrich and express our deepest desires. If, on the contrary, we begin feeling overwhelmed and forced to do something that makes us miserable and incomplete, then it is time to stop, listen to our inner voice, and take the time to re-arrange the pieces of our life. Fragmented is fine. We are all multi-talented individuals. Scattered needs revision. We must stay focused and set our sails towards the journey we truly want to undertake.

Over the years, I have asked smart and beautiful women about their passion and how they have revealed it in their lives. Many of them have problems in defining the word. Some others see it as a distant dream, a risk they were too afraid to take. The reasons, in their own words, were varied: "I never seemed to find the time", "I let other priorities take over", "I am not good enough", "I never thought I had something meaningful to offer", "I didn't think people would be interested", "I never knew how or didn't have the resources." It goes on and on...

Your passion is not to be feared or tamed; not be overcome. It is to be understood and fully expressed. Let it flow. Let it drive you into the achievement of your goals and your quest for self-love, confidence, and fulfillment. Never doubt. Never limit it.

Trust it as you would trust yourself because your passion is the essence of who you are; the best and brightest of your divine spark.

“She stands tall at the top of the highest mountain, shining her light to the world above and below. She radiates her divine presence.”

It has been described as a state of being when you are fully aware of your own truth, love, courage, compassion, and authenticity. It is through it that you have access to your sense of worth and greatness; the venue used to support your dreams and inspire others to make their real. Your purpose lived through your passion is what creates your presence, unique and astounding.

Your presence is not limited to your physical body. It encompasses your all, from the way you breath, ease and calm, to the tone of your voice, the way you direct your thoughts, how you learn to live from the heart in a state of caring and love for the moment as it is. Your presence is you.

Developing a powerful presence will open the gates to confidence, helping in building honest and meaningful relationships. Your feminine presence is ultimately the main tool to clearly communicate your message, sparking creativity,

and strengthening your personal vision. How you use it could change you, the world around you, and that of others.

My grandmother was a petite, 4'11" woman with a huge presence. I often found myself speechless at her ability to influencing others, making tough decisions, and facing challenges with the skin of an amazon warrior. She would always say; "As a woman, it is your responsibility to take the lead. Your presence comes embedded in your DNA but it is up to you to cultivate it and make it visible." With this belief, she learned how to master her inner and exterior environment, dealing courageously with the unexpected and sometimes unavoidable moments of life. She learned how to look at each and every of these situations as one, seeing the many possibilities each event could bring; engaging on the "learn as you go through process". Most of all, she used her presence to empower other women, passing it along, showing them their own abilities, the myriad of opportunities, and how in taking advantage of them they could achieve their fullest potential. This is our innate wisdom eager to be re-discovered.

What does it takes then to cultivate your feminine presence and how does it looks like? As mentioned before, the first step is to become aware of the amazing being you are, grateful for your talents, and willing to grow them to the service of others

and your own fulfillment; no fear, no doubts. Your presence will reflect a woman filled with energy, living in total ecstasy and love for life and what it has to offer. This woman is empowered and confident. She attracts the right experiences and the right people effortlessly, like a magnet. She knows how to use her inner beauty, her perceptions, and activated intuition in every one of the events life presents. She is a woman of faith, knowing that a Divine Source carries and supports her path. Her presence gains her the respect and attention she wants and deserves. She feels comfortable and safe in her own skin and this makes her glow and spread the light unto those around her. You are this woman!

“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture, and transform.”

~Diane Mariechild~

The Power Challenge

History has regrettably taught us the erroneous meaning of power, leading humanity to where we stand now; abhorrent wars, inequality, dominance of the underprivileged, human trafficking, and a deep sense of separateness. Power has been synonym of control, imposed authority, physical and mental abuse, and wicked influence over others. At the heart of this power misconception we have missed two important concepts that distinguish what true power represents: the power over and the power within.

So far, we have been practicing the power over game as a fear based weapon to dominate people, environment, situations, and beliefs we don't agree with. This has been the preferred shield to escape our own fears. This kind of power catapults us in a constant state of terror, always questioning. What if I lose my power? What if I am not in control anymore? The power over mentality will always lead to separation; the "me against the others" syndrome. It is precisely this sense of disconnection that leave us powerless.

Shifting to the power within mindset is all you would ever need to open the gates to your most precious treasure, your Spirit. This kind of power grows from the seeds of Divine creativity, loving collaboration, reverence for life, harmony with its cycles,

and holy acceptance and respect for each person's differences, what makes us so unique. In a world that is showing all the signs of chaos, you might think it is impossible to shift gears but it is exactly that change what we critically need to recover our humanity. This is not a choice but a duty.

How to practice the power within when we have been taught to live through the power over as our main survival skill?

Surrender! If you don't do it voluntarily, life will find the way.

Hopefully it won't be three broken bones like in my case.

Surrendering is the key to begin breathing your true power. In surrendering you are welcoming that superior force in charge of every one of your living moments. It really doesn't matter the name you use for this supreme energy, as long as you realize its presence in your life.

Your power within will take you from a state of doing to a blissful state of being, when all the false veils are dropped, where you finally realize that you are not alone in this journey, that there is absolutely nothing to lose, nothing that could be taken away from you. Using your inner strength without fear will make you feel safe, knowing that you are living in harmony with yourself. You are not a stranger anymore. You are giving yourself, maybe for the first time, the opportunity, which is your birth right, of living the human experience instead of the "me alone" illusion.

This is your time to become powerful by expressing your ability to share yourself, your purpose, passion, and presence with the world around you; when every action, word, and thought comes from your heart, easing the way you reach out and connect with others. Only by practicing your power within love happens, not as something that you feel but as something you live by. This is your true power!

“The women of today are the thoughts of their mothers and grandmothers, embodied and made alive. They are active, capable, determined, and bound to win. They have one thousand generations back of them...Millions of women; dead and gone are speaking through us today.”

~Matilda Juslyn Gage~

As the Journey Continues...

I am here, living my dream. I won't lie to you. It hasn't been exactly a bed of roses. I have had to walk through some rocky patches. I had to acknowledge that my cast and crutches, although painful, were an impending need for my growing process. However, there have been plenty of rewards and lessons learned. I have learned to make peace with my silence, listening to its voice and enjoying what solitude has to offer. I have developed a six pack of strength, exercising my spirit and prioritizing those things truly important to me. I have finally learned that letting go is one of the best skills I can adopt. There's no point in trying to control what evidently we can't, bringing more stress and exhaustion to our every day. I let go of my old stories, my useless beliefs, and the influence of others in my life; especially if it wasn't for the best, and all the feelings that would keep me stuck in the merry-go-round of nowhere. I unchained the ghost of karma by realizing that my fate is not attached to a series of past lives actions but to the actions, feelings, and thoughts I choose every day. Changing my attitude towards them, changes my so called karma, not in the past but in the right now. Living a life where I harm none, being realistically optimistic and releasing positivism, and allowing the power house of my heart to express only love and compassion is all I needed to reverse any old karma and start anew. Believe me, it works! In the end, like I heard someone

saying some time ago, it is all between you and God, and this Universal Divine Energy accepts you and loves you unconditionally just the way you are.

Today, I feel stronger and happier than ever knowing that I was able to remember, to walk back through my memories, face the tears, meet the smiles, and find the courage I had been holding back to leave everything behind and finally share these words with you. It is my wholehearted wish that you continue this story with your own thoughts and experiences; coming together in our own sacred circles to re-write the paths of every woman. It is my wish that you pass along your own stories with the sole purpose of inspiring and strengthening the lives of others like you. Every story has a teaching. We just need to cast them loose and let them be known. It is my deepest desire that you realize the potential you each possess and express it freely, becoming the evolved women that we are all called to be.

Because I am the first and last,

I am the venerated and the despised,

I am the wife and the virgin

I am the mother and daughter

I am my mother's arms,

I am the barren and many are my children

While I am married and unmarried,

I am the one who gives birth and never bore,

I am the consolation for the pain of childbirth,

I am the wife and husband

and was my man who created me,

I am the mother of my father

I am the sister of my husband,

[lxxxv]

and he is my rejected son.

Respect ME always. I am the outrageous and wonderful.

~ Isis Anthem~

Firing Up Your Evolving Path

Everything in life takes practice. Life itself is an experiential path that must be lived to the core. Like osmosis, every second must be absorbed. In ten simple steps, these are my daily mantras as I walk through the best of me.

1. Make peace with your past, living and cherishing your present, and positively embracing your future.
2. Commit to inner joy and use it as your most powerful healing tool; your magic wand.
3. Do not believe in foreign words but live through your own experiences. Get rid of old beliefs and misconceptions.
4. Never settle for less than you deserve. Never quit on your dreams.
5. Nurture your body, mind, and spirit. Find time for silence and engage in activities that make you smile. Treat yourself as the queen you are.
6. Support your loved ones and the causes you believe in maintaining a healthy sense of detachment.
7. Confront challenges with strength and faith. Remember, everything in life is temporary.
8. Work diligently on accepting yourself the way you are. Celebrate your strengths and improve your weaknesses without judgment; make them work for you.
9. Honor those who came before you. Study their teachings and pass them on to the generations to come.

10. Live fearless! You are always guided, protected, and most of all
Blessed!

The end to this journey is in your hands; our hands intertwined.
We are all in charge of reviving the sacred circles to create a
new reality for future generations.

Crafting your Path...

“It is all about living to the heights and depths of life, with love, excitement, and compassion as a way of worship.”

I have found out that to feel truly alive, we must be embedded in the threads of life, all of them, as they are. As chaotic as it might look at times, it is precisely in troublesome moments when the best of us awakens and I honestly believe we are here today to fulfill our mission of reawakening our divine nature and lend a hand to those who need to remember. Yes, we do need to remember!

Our path is like an intimate dance inside an unpredictable spiral. The purpose is to raise, bottom to top, absorbing every lesson that comes with the wind. It involves many stages and we must be willing to perfect the craft on each one of them.

The time will come when you would feel lost, that everything you have previously identified as real has been reduced to ashes; our egos, past attachments, and beliefs. You find yourself in the middles of a crossroads, not knowing where to go or what to do. This is the sign of the warrior trying to birth out from you. You are dissolved into ashes. You are breaking down into the unknown beginning to let go, allowing the flow of what is to take over, opening up to the recharging effects that would change the illusions you have been living through so far.

Totally dissolved, you feel separated but urged towards a rediscovery process you can't control; the way back to your

essence. This is the tipping point when you decide what to discard, what to keep, and what to integrate to the new self you are crafting. You feel empowered and balance, observing how a new belief system which is your unique brand is rising based on your personal experiences and intuition. You are using all your energy for your higher purpose. You are reconnecting with your power and that which reanimates and enlightens from within.

Like any fine element after being distilled from impurities, you are now ready to rise to your highest level, free from everything that had held you captive. Now you know who you truly are and can be. All you need has been perfectly added and mixed in your inner cauldron. The final product is a newborn you, filled with confidence, renewed consciousness, high aspirations, and a clear mind; what I call the “ambrosia effect.”

Like any craft, the path through the spiral needs practice and commitment to the most important person, you. Blinded as we are most of the time, I was pushed to enter the spiral. In sharing my own journey with you I am hoping to motivate you to enter voluntarily. The spiral of life is an amazing adventure where all the sacred circles merge but that is another story.

As for now, I invite you to embrace your uniqueness and move through the world honoring the women who brought you here and carving your own path as an evolved woman.

Evolved Women We Are....

Because our tears have carved the path of hundreds of generations; past, present, and future and they have shaped the course of societies...

Because we have the ability to cry while smiling and heal with our joy...

Because we can see beyond the illusion of what others have tried to sell us as real...

We have the inner light brightening the darkest shadows and the wings to fly high achieving each and every one of our dreams.

We have common determination, an unbreakable faith, enduring resiliency, and powerful stories to leave as our legacy.

We have defied the enemies, protecting our honor and worth, sheltering our loved ones, nurturing our beliefs and values, nursing those in need, and fighting the battles.

We have supported our families and our neighbor's families.

We have faced life challenges and changes, pains and hardships, keeping the poise of a queen.

We have developed the survival skills of a warrior, the devotion of saints, and the spiritual strength of master teachers.

As evolving women, we choose to love, to live from the heart and through our soul connections. We choose to become devoted to sacred relationships with ourselves and those around us. We agree to create a harmonious feminine-masculine balance, grounded on divinity and service to the greatest good in attunement with both polarities.

As evolving women we make a pact to care our bodies, minds, and souls.

We respect, acknowledge, and accept the darkness of our shadows, thriving to bring the light without self-blame or shame.

We listen to our inner voice, intuition. We hear the outer voices without judgment. We collaborate as integral members of a global community, no sense of competition or desire for power. Our truth and emotions are validated and healthy boundaries respected.

Evolving women you are when you fully engage in the threads of life; all forms of life.

This is an awakening call. We are here to celebrate all the Sophia's, Maria's, Eve's, Hathor's, Lilith's, and Tara's of the world. We are here to gather into our Sacred Circles. We are here to re-claim the Power of Us!

“A sister is a gift to the heart, a friend to the spirit, a golden thread to the meaning of life.”

~Isadora James~

The Power of Us

Daily Affirmations

1. I am grateful for another day; another opportunity to make a difference.
2. I am in peace with my past, living in the now, and embracing tomorrow.
3. I am committed to live in inner joy.
4. I am experiencing and accepting life as it is.
5. I am not settling for less than I deserve.
6. I am nurturing my body, mind, and spirit through self-love.
7. I am supporting my loved ones and my community while detaching from that which doesn't belong to the reality I want to create.
8. I am facing life challenges with unbreakable faith and inner strength.
9. I totally accept myself the way I am.
10. I honor my ancestors, those who paved the way for me.
11. I live a fearless life knowing that I am always guided, protected, and blessed.

About The Author

A native from Puerto Rico, Norma Casas has been a high school and college educator for over twenty years. She holds a Masters in Spanish, an out masters in English as a Second Language, an Ed.S. in Administrative Leadership. She is also a certified life coach. Since 2008 she has been a contributing writer to several online magazines and conducting an expert page in the Self Growth community. Ms. Casas manages her own website; <http://www.normacasas.com> where she shares inspirational writing, life skills, and empowering strategies. Her passion for education, people, and cultural exchanges has taken her to far and diverse places. The Power of Us is the author's life time dream where she gathers her transformative experiences after a series of events unfolded and she was able to re-connect with her roots and the women who have shaped her life. These events led her to rediscover her mission of inspiring and empowering women of all ages helping them to unleash their potential to create a better place for them and future generations. Ms. Casas currently resides in the state of Georgia where she moved in 1997. For personal presentations in English or Spanish, she can be contacted at norma.casas20@gmail.com

