

Living Creatively: Courage Part II

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"When someone makes a decision he is really diving into a strong current that will carry him places he has never dreamed of when he first made that decision."

– Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist



Often we are faced with decisions and the answers that speak from your core of being defy all logic. The day I began listening to that voice was the day I began living creatively and with courage. It took the first forty years of my life to

discover the magic in doing just that. Today I'd like to share two connected stories of decisions I made on the spot. The first no doubt carried me into the stream of an entirely new life. The second has yet to play out.

Eight years ago, on the advice of my physician, I walked in the Austin Shambhala Center for the first time. The entire left side of my face was still immobile, frozen in pain from recent reconstructive surgery, and bandaged with gauze and tape from the corner of my eye to my chin. I was there in search of a path that might circumvent the full-body fear that beckoned me daily to run with all my heart and soul from own life, the one which involved recurring cancer.

There in the entry way table lay a beautifully designed brochure advertising the Shambhala Mountain Center in Colorado. Four words jumped out at me: Courageous Women Facing Cancer. Feeling qualified for two out of three of the prerequisites, I picked it up to read further.

It was scheduled for two months away, coincided with the first days of the school year, and at the time I had a very reluctant soon to be second grader. My logic screamed at me to put it down, but my heart said otherwise. Once home, I discussed the possibility with Joachim who said he would agree for me to go to all the way to Tibet if I could just stop weeping! And so, with the click of a mouse I was registered and before long I would dive into this current, having not the least idea where I might be carried.

A dear friend also facing recurring cancer agreed to join me. To give you a clear picture of my emotional and mental state at the time I asked her what was to become a classic question, "You don't think we are going to have to sit in a circle and talk about our cancer do you?" Wiser than me by leaps and bounds, she smiled a knowing smile and said, "Surely not."

Well, in case you have any doubt, we did talk about cancer and

so much more. It was there in that week that I could finally look cancer straight in the eye and recognize I had several choices as to how I would live out all my days to come, whether they be short in number or stretch on for years. It was there that I committed to thriving rather than surviving. And while I could not even begin to imagine where this journey would lead, I knew my heart must serve as my guide.



Fast forward eight richly textured years and I'm in the Pyrenees, spending a week restoring and preparing for a full year of projects and work that lie ahead. Each day I would walk the ridge and watch the sunrise and ask for a path that would allow me to be as productive as possible, but also kind and gentle to myself and those around me. There was now a new fear I had produced in my life of late and that fear was that if I wasn't hard enough on myself, driving myself to ultimate productivity each day, then I would not be able to achieve all I was called to create in this lifetime.

The good thing was, I had discovered I did not particularly care for this driven person and likely those around me felt the same. □ But how could I do things differently? How could I open my heart of loving kindness to myself and still share what I knew needed to be delivered?

On the last morning of our time in the Pyrenees, I committed to make this change with no road map in sight, only a request to the Universe for guidance. The next morning in my email inbox was an invitation to join meditation teacher extraordinaire Susan Piver for an Open Heart Project five day retreat at the Shambhala Mountain Center. I read these opening lines,

So, you're a spiritual seeker. A creative person. Someone who wants to bring more goodness into the world.

But the path, it often seems unclear. Solitary. A little uncertain.

How are you supposed to find the time to explore your spirituality, creativity, and destiny when you have so much to do?

How is it that we spend so much time working and so little time rejoicing?

What if you could put daily life on hold, let go of to-do lists, responsibilities, and electronic devices, and gather in a beautiful spot with friends to explore and celebrate your true self? Turns out, you can.

Done. Decision made.

And so I joined 30 others from across the country for five full days of meditation and spiritual talks. The common wish was to gain the tools needed to move through this world of suffering with stabilized open hearts. For those five days I truly, and probably for my first time as an adult, completely disconnected, knowing all would be well. Showing up and not being responsible for anything but sitting on my cushion at 7am was pretty gosh darn freeing. Each day, I was able to allow myself to rest deeper in the vastness of being, rather than doing.



Hiking to the stupa with this beautiful group of beings brought to mind the frightened and fragmented person I was eight years ago. This time, rather than seeking the courage to face cancer, I sought the courage to move through life with self-compassion and kindness and still bring forward the work I am called to do, with joy.



I'll be keeping you posted on how this goes!

In parting let me share the words of my meditation instructor, retreat leader, and NYT Bestselling author, Susan Piver,

"The more I was able to own and proclaim my tenderness, the more badass I became."