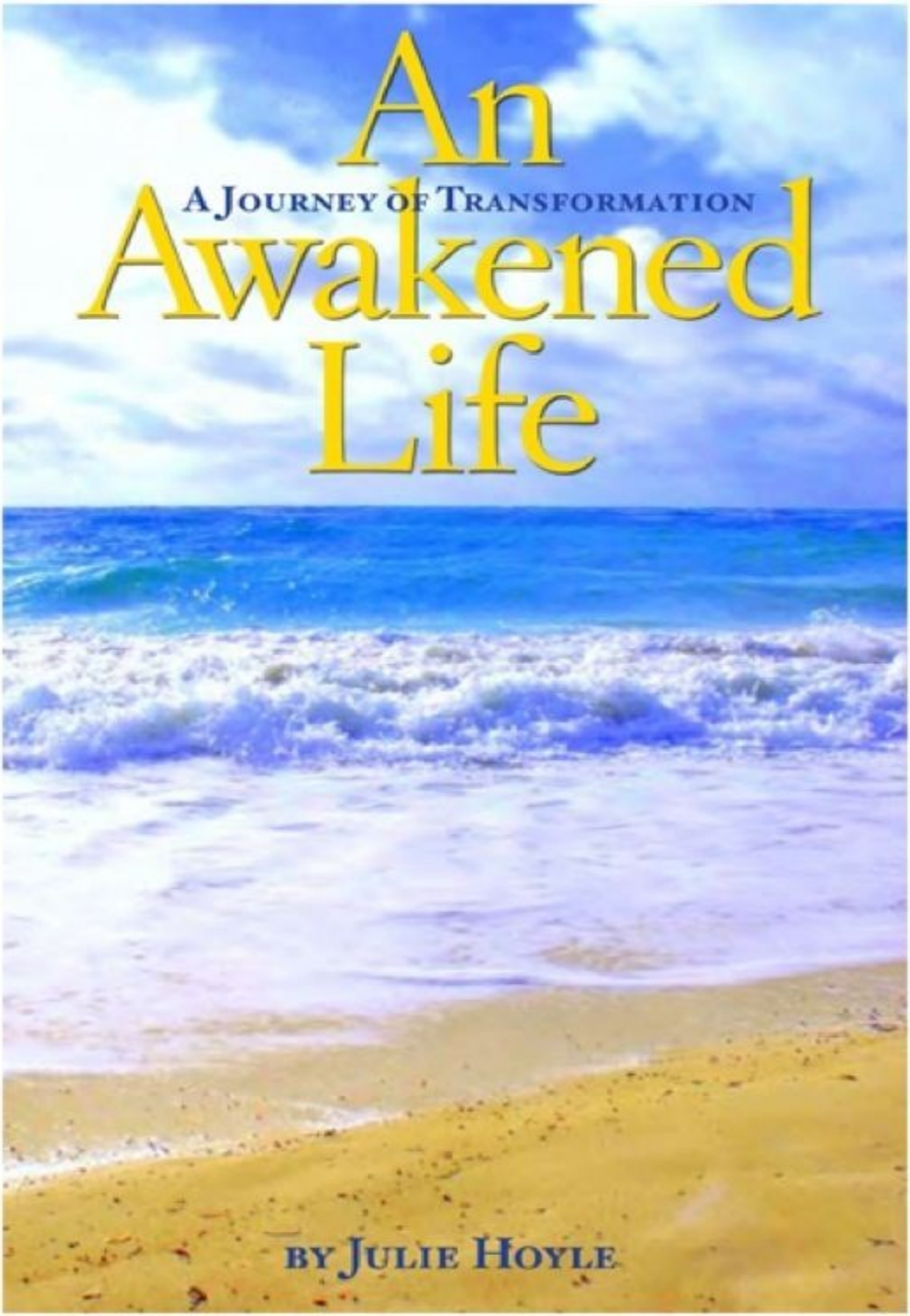
An Awakened Life

A Journey of Transformation



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PREFACE

The book you are about to read is a true account of a dramatic spiritual awakening and profound unfolding of consciousness that came crashing into my life in early 1989. Like an enormous tidal wave, grace arrived on the shores of my life completely unannounced and swept through my exterior and interior worlds, affecting everything in its path.

Over time, like a flimsy, wooden shack, the structure of *who I believed I myself to be* was torn down. No matter how hard I tried, there was no way of putting things back in place. Everything was changed, reordered, or thrown out completely. And it happened without much input on my part, it just simply happened.

The source of that awakening was an extraordinary Indian Yogi, robed only in a white loin-cloth who was known as, 'Baba.' For a young, western, Catholic woman, who at the time was unaware of being a 'spiritual seeker,' this event was so firmly rooted outside the spectrum of my life experiences, it had the imprint of a miracle, yet it also felt *completely natural.*

Following this dramatic awakening, I quietly continued with the meditation, contemplation and self-inquiry practices as prescribed by Baba, until in October, 2007 in a lucid dream, I was sweetly asked, *"When are you writing the book?"*

At the time I responded, “But what am I supposed to write about?” However, doorways to insight come in all shapes and sizes and one sweet doorway appeared a few weeks later, in the form of Max, a mixed-breed dog with a serene air of wisdom, who simply needed people to take care of him.

It started with a question. “Would you like to stay in our home and look after Max while we’re touring Italy and Slovakia?” our friends Terri and Dave asked my husband Tony and I, one late afternoon in November 2007. Without missing a beat we replied, “Absolutely.” Although Tony and I had never met Max, we had heard he was a sweet soul, rarely agitated enough to bark. And we knew our friends’ home was expansive and elegant, set in an idyllic location overlooking the sweeping vista of Banana Bay, on Grand Bahama Island.

Soon after daybreak, a few days into our stay, I decided to let Max run free. Watching him plod toward the coral rock, I padded upstairs, made coffee and eased into a chair on the wide balcony. Gazing over the translucent water, I was in awe. Palm fronds clicked gently in the soft breeze. The sun, a disc of radiant yellow-orange floated effortlessly above the horizon, and everything appeared to be dancing and shimmering in the exquisite light of a new day. It was stunning.

Then they came into view: an older couple, walking along the sand, right at the edge where water meets shore. Dressed for a day of lying in the sun, she revealed a trim figure in her tiny pink and white bikini. Soft belly-folds bulging, he was squeezed into long blue shorts. Puffing silently behind his wife, he struggled under the weight of two brimming bags, one in each hand, while she forged ahead, arms swinging military style, punching the air in front of her.

In the few seconds it took for the couple to appear in my field of vision, the stillness of my mind was shaken by an epiphany: in this woman, I knew I was seeing a former version of myself. Watching, I understood that her body was moving through the idyllic setting but her thoughts were bouncing ahead like a rubber ball, while she raced to catch up. She was not present to the fullness of the moment. She was running from herself.

Watching the woman striding the beach, I understood. I was being asked to write about the spiritual awakening and dramatic unfolding of consciousness that had come crashing into my life. This book is an attempt

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to chronicle the story of that flood. The story of how a transformational energy poured into my life and began waking me up, moment by moment, day by day, sometimes gradually in drips, and at other times with such ferocity it felt like a drowning death. This is the story of a life transformed, which is the story of the descent of grace.

INTRODUCTION

Life also finds a way of proving it comes full circle. At the age of eighteen, before leaving home and heading to a college near London, I heard about a Romany woman who lived in a caravan, set amidst a family of fellow gypsies. According to my source, this woman read the Tarot cards and charged five pounds a 'reading.' I was assured she was worth a visit. So feeling oddly compelled to go, I set off alone clutching vague directions scrawled on a scrappy piece of lined paper.

The encampment was a long, winding bus ride away, with the open countryside becoming less populated as we drove on. Gazing out at the passing scenery, I remember wondering whether the few passengers traveling toward the outskirts of town, guessed my intention. Filled with both excitement and trepidation, I eventually stepped off the bus to face a barren, windswept field.

Caravans were thrown out across the land, twenty or so, as if huddling for shelter along a right angle strip of tall bushes and stringy trees. Otherwise, the scene was deserted as far as the eye could see. It felt a sad and removed place, and I wondered how it must be to always live life on the move and be an unwelcome sight wherever you go.

Stepping gingerly into the rough atmosphere of the settlement, I watched as three semi-naked children played in the dirt. They were filthy with dust matted in their dark, curly hair, and despite a quick glance, disinterested in the stranger amongst them. They played happily, scratching their names in the earth, using bits of broken wood, while several under-nourished, mangy dogs lay howling and gnawing on old scraps of bone. Litter, thrown here

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and there was arcing on the breeze and for a moment I was startled by the rawness of it all. I stood still, wondering, “What am I doing in this wild place?”

Following that self-inquiry, a flicker of fear flashed across my heart. However, an inner voice told me, “Don’t worry, you are safe.” So I walked on. In the next instant, a door of one of the smaller dwellings flew open, and without murmuring a sound, an old woman hobbled forward. Dark and wizened, she was bent over with age and wearing a long, faded blue dress, covered with a floral apron. A multi-colored headscarf was tied around her head revealing gold jangling earrings, and the flashing depth of her eyes reflected a powerful presence. Pointing to a caravan further on, she nodded as if understanding my quest and then stepped back, swallowed by the darkness.

Somehow receiving a message that ‘a visitor was coming’; the Tarot woman appeared in the doorway, of her caravan. She ushered me in and I sat opposite her as she began to shuffle and fold cards on a small table. Turning them over to reveal strange images, I stared mesmerized. “How are these unusual symbols able to reveal messages about my life and future?” I pondered while waiting for her response.

Most of what the gypsy told me all those years ago has since been lost to memory, but what I muse over now, is my lack of doubt. I never once questioned the *authenticity* of this strange practice. I simply knew, deep down that the Tarot was a valid tool for self-exploration and I accepted it completely.

Later that same summer, to save money toward my student grant, I worked at a food store. The hours were long. From 8.30 in the morning until 9 at night, I sat at a checkout till, ringing up bill after bill, and watching each slow minute turn into the next, until day’s end.

It was there that I met Pat. She was a blond, bubbly, attractive forty-something woman, a mother of two children and seemingly locked into a marriage that no longer held much excitement for her. On some level, I understood that she was seeking too and during our breaks, we fell into long conversations about the mysteries and disappointments of life. One day, she breathlessly sat down telling me, “I’ve heard about a clairvoyant who is meant to be good. On my day off, I’m going for a reading. Do you want to come?” Without hesitating, I answered, “Yes, of course!”

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The clairvoyant was very different to my gypsy friend. She appeared to be a 'normal' woman, reminding me in her manner, of an aunt. In her mid to late forties, she lived in a modest terraced house on a housing estate, in a suburb of Stoke-upon-Trent, an hour's drive from my parent's home.

After welcoming us in, and chatting over a cup of tea, the lady asked if we could give her a personal item to hold. Pat went first and handed over her wristwatch. Gently moving it between her fingers, the woman closed her eyes and proceeded to give detailed information about the state of Pat's health, her financial affairs and her marriage.

When my time came, what I remember of it was the clairvoyant repeatedly saying, "I don't know what this means, but all I keep seeing are palm trees, sand and the most beautiful water." Turning to me, eyes sparkling, she asked, "Are you going on holiday?"

With no clue that just a few years later I would marry and spend most of my working life in the Bahamas, I remember fantasizing over a tropical-island visit as being a happy dream. However, both encounters led me to recognize that I was possessed with a desire to seek spiritual truth. I had an impulse to find something or someone who could reveal the deeper meaning of life and prove I was not just imagining it; there really was 'something more.' At the time my search was just beginning. I was barely eighteen and the year was 1974.

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Chapter One
SAYING GOOD-BYE

The mysteries of yoga and meditation entered my life unexpectedly and intriguingly one cold, damp November evening. I remember the exact moment. I was eight years old and sitting with my father watching a National Geographic documentary highlighting the extraordinary feats advanced, Indian yogis could perform. Staring in awe, we saw old men with matted hair and long grey beards contorting their unbelievably supple bodies. And mesmerized, we witnessed an ancient looking yogi sitting in lotus posture, sealed in an airless glass box, submerged underwater. An

hour later he surfaced, stood up nimbly and walked away gracefully as though oxygen deprivation was nothing out of the ordinary.

On viewing one amazing scene after another, my father turned and asked me, “Do you believe it? Do you think it’s really true?” Without hesitation I answered simply, “Yes. Yes, it’s true.” At that young age, I knew the practices of meditation and yoga were the key to unlocking mysteries beyond those accepted as defining ‘normal’ parameters of human existence. And though I did not know it at the time, it was here my inner journey began.

By then, I had already figured out I was ‘different’ from other kids. For one thing, I could sense when people were not feeling well or were unhappy, even when they cheerily stated otherwise. I also received ‘inner messages,’ giving specific information about events that were going to happen in the future. Then there were those strange dreams…

They would go something like this: after quickly falling asleep, my attention would be drawn to the heart with an awareness of my energy, very alive and alert, pushing through a small opening in the chest. Experiencing a dramatic ‘whoosh’, I would be released, feeling free and elated, floating around outside my body. At the time, it seemed like a perfectly normal thing to do. I remember looking back to check my physical form lying very still in bed and then I would float through the bedroom window.

Hovering outside in the street, just above lamplight level, I would survey the scene before deciding where to go. One of my favorite places to visit was a small grocery store across the street from where we lived. Owned by Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, they had converted the front room of a small terraced house into a ‘one-stop shop’ catering to every need. In those days, we could order paper-thin slices of freshly cut ham, buy bread and cheese of all descriptions, and make a selection from rows of canned goods, useful for families with no refrigerator.

Jars of hard-boiled candy stood, like silent soldiers, on the front counter. Brandy balls, Everton mints, rock candy, liquorice and wine gums, could be had for sixpence, carefully weighed and dropped into small, white paper bags. Higher up on shelves behind the counter, away from fast hands, were my personal favorite, fruit and nut chocolate bars.

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Looking back, I believe it was the temptation of sweets that drew me so powerfully on my nightly travels, but once inside the store, there was merely an attitude of witnessing everything, with no desire to attempt to touch, taste or smell. Often, after moving through the shop and going up to the second level to watch the Macs and their two children, dreaming their dreams, I would travel on, visiting other friends or going as far as the bottom of the street.

These adventures had been a part of my life for as long as I could remember, and so I naturally assumed were a part of everyone else's life too. However, after describing a particular episode of roaming to a couple of friends, their looks of baffled surprise told me otherwise. It was at that point I made a silent vow to keep the secret to myself. Secrecy was a pity I later realized, because life is much more difficult if all you ever experience are the limitations of the physical senses.

This lesson imprinted itself strongly when, early one morning, I floated out of my body and through the bedroom window to see my grandfather standing between what looked like two angels. As I approached, I began to cry and my grandfather said, "Shhh, don't be upset, I'm not taking you with me, I've come to say goodbye." Speaking tenderly, he whispered, "Be a good girl and take care of your brothers and sister," then he slowly began floating upward, angels either side of him, before disappearing into radiant light.

Arriving back in my body, I woke with a start and looked at the alarm clock. It was a few minutes after 5 a.m. Still dark and too early to get out of bed and start the day, I lay thinking of my grandfather and began crying gently, understanding what the experience meant.

All day at school, I felt the energy of my grandfather's presence but told no one what had happened. Later, walking through the door at home that afternoon, I immediately knew what I was about to hear. My mother was there to meet me. She whispered, "Be quiet, your father is very upset. Your grandfather died at 5 a.m. this morning. It was unexpected and your Dad is in shock." I crept into the lounge and stared at my father who was sitting, hunched over, staring into the flames of the open fire. Lost in the depths of grief, I quietly tiptoed over and placed my hand on his arm but could not find the courage to share my experience with him. I was afraid of getting into trouble, or of facing a wall of disbelief.

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For more than thirty years I held that secret tight and when I finally told my father, he looked deeply into my eyes and said, “I wish you’d told me. I wish you’d told me. I wish you’d told me.”

Chapter Two
I CAN’T DO THIS ANYMORE

My mother has often said that for the first two and a half years of my life, all I did was cry constantly night and day. In one of the few photographs taken when I was around two, I see myself, sitting on a low step next to my brother Paul. We are at my grandmother’s house, in the garden on a bright, summer’s day where Paul and I had apparently been playing together just before the picture was taken. Paul is staring into the camera, looking at ease with the world as young children are. His eyes are filled with joy and he is grinning happily. Seated next to him, I tell a different story. My hands are clasped in my lap and my round, chubby face is held in a grimace as if I am about to burst into tears.

The truth is, from the earliest age, I felt like an outsider in the world. I was like someone who had wandered onto an odd movie set by accident and had been pushed into playing a strange role. I remember always having a feeling of anticipation, as if I was waiting for the truth to be discovered and then being ordered off the set. This feeling of being at odds with the world was also enhanced by an urge to look for someone who would be able to help me. What I did know was that this ‘someone’ was not among the people I currently knew, and as a consequence, I was aware of a level of sadness within me.

Our household was chaotic. With six children and two adults squeezed into a small, terraced house, there were few quiet moments and privacy was a luxury. However, with my four brothers and my baby sister in tow, at weekends, and on long summer evenings, we would run through the fields

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of the local park, play tag, football and cricket and create as many adventures outdoors that we could think of.

At night, when my mother went to work at a nearby hospital and my father walked to the Conservative Club, we would organize more secretive escapades. For years, we practiced levitation. Inviting friends to join in, we sat around one person lying on the floor and going around the circle chanting: “She looks pale. She is pale. She looks ill. She is ill. She looks dead. She is dead.” Completing the ritual by counting from one to seven, we would then lift the child with the tips of our fingers.

More often than not, we were always able to raise the body above our heads and would laugh in surprise and wonder, though we never thought to question *how* it was possible. We simply knew it worked, though we did observe that if we thought too hard or cracked jokes, the body was impossible to move. However, when we followed the ritual seriously, with focus, the results were astonishing.

Another of our games was to hold séances. We would set the scene by turning lights off, burning candles and placing hand-made letters around the table. There was also a YES and a NO, and an upturned wine or sherry glass acted as our ‘telephone’ to the spirit world. With our little fingers held lightly on the perimeter, the glass would whiz around the table with such ferocity we’d gasp and argue, pointing at who we thought was pushing. This accusation was always strongly denied and after a few moments of disagreement, we’d start again calling in another spirit to answer our childish questions.

At around the time I was seventeen, my Aunt Nancy died. It was a huge shock for my grandmother. She had already lost her husband in his early fifties. Now, to suddenly lose her only daughter at the relatively young age of forty-seven, was too much for her to bear. According to my grandmother, Nancy had come home from a day at work and they were sitting together, enjoying a glass of dark, brown beer, “Good for iron,” she used to say. In the next instant, Nancy gasped, clutched at her chest, shook a little, and then slumped forward. In a matter of seconds she was gone, leaving Annie, my grandmother inconsolable.

Since I was studying for Cambridge exams in the hope of being accepted at Teacher’s Training College, I suggested to my father that it would be good for me to stay with my grandmother for six months. I thought it would offer

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her some companionship and help her move through the grief. I was also desperate for a quiet space to study and decided this arrangement would be beneficial for us both.

My father gratefully agreed and after moving in, I was happy to be in a serene place. I was given Nancy's bedroom. It was a small, charming space. There was a large window overlooking the back garden, plenty of closet space and a Victorian style full-length mirror, standing on a hinged base, offering an oval view of myself whenever I wanted.

My grandmother and I enjoyed one another's company. We soon settled into a steady rhythm of cooking and eating meals together. I sat and listened, my heart aching as Annie cried and talked about the pain of losing of her daughter. And on Sunday mornings, I joined the ritual of walking to the cemetery to visit Nancy's grave in order to lay fresh flowers.

Raised a Catholic and devoted to the church, Annie went to St. Peter's two or three times a week, getting down on her seventy two year old hands and knees to scrub the floors. With a metal bucket and a bar of carbolic soap, she lathered up a rag and rubbed away at the huge stone slabs until they glistened. After two or three hours, she would drag her-self home exhausted, her frail bones aching, but feeling she had given something of her heart in service to God.

I did not agree that this method of worship would work, let alone earn anyone merit. I always felt that priests and nuns did not necessarily have a direct line to God, particularly as I had witnessed fiery tempers, lack of patience and a few too many sips of the 'Blood of Christ.' So, I respectfully listened when my grandmother spoke about the need for prayer life and confession, but I chose not to attend Sunday Mass.

One of my high school friends, Lesley, was my polar opposite. Fiery and impetuous, she was gregarious, outgoing and always up for a laugh, whereas I was usually the voice of reason. We would often go to pubs and nightclubs together, and with her chatty exuberance, long eyelashes and habit of sensually drawing on mint-flavored cigarettes, she would attract men to her effortlessly. She had a pretty, round face, framed by a mop of the glossiest red hair I have ever seen and she was utterly charming. My grandmother loved her.

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It was Lesley who decided we should have a séance at my grandmother's house. Knowing that Annie went to mass on a Tuesday evening from seven 'til around nine, Lesley enthused it would be the perfect time. "*And,*" she said, grinning widely, "With Nancy gone and all, we might get some REALLY good messages, because, you know, she might just come through."

I wasn't convinced, particularly as I knew that my grandmother would not only disapprove, she would be horrified. I also knew that my grandfather would turn in his Catholic grave. Each time I contemplated the idea, I felt awkward and guilty and somehow disloyal. However, I did what any normal teen would do in that kind of situation; I agreed.

Lesley invited her friend Denise, who appeared at the door chuckling enthusiastically, and stating that she was looking forward to a good scare. Since we didn't have the usual stash of letters, we scribbled them quickly on scraps of paper, barely visible enough for us to read, let alone a spirit. I had to search for a 'telephone' and decided on a delicate sherry glass, etched with flowers and a fleur-de-lis motif. Lesley brought along a candle and soon we were sitting in breathless anticipation calling in the "Spirit of the Glass."

It wasn't long before we received a response and Lesley began with, "Can the spirit of the glass please tell me if I'll get married?" The glass slid slowly to YES. Another question followed, asking the spirit to spell out the name of the man she would marry. Again the glass began to slide around the table spelling P-E-T-E-R. Excited by this information, Lesley leaned forward and pursed her lips to formulate yet another question, but at that moment, an intense energy appeared in the room. It felt to me like an enraged Nancy. With that, the glass began to violently push back and forth against 'NO.' Again and again, the message, "NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!" was hit until the glass shot so rapidly across the table, it leapt from under our hands and crashed to the floor.

While this was happening, it was as if a wind inside the room had begun to circulate, becoming so strong the table began to shake and, in a dramatic gust, the candle was blown out. We felt as if we were in the middle of a storm, sitting in darkness, shaking in our seats, surrounded by a howling gale. Terrified and afraid to move, all we could do was stare at one another wide eyed, hardly able to believe what was happening. Then ever so slowly,

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I ventured, “I am sorry Nancy, for doing this in your home. Please forgive me.”

As soon as the apology was offered, the frantic energy swept out as dramatically as it had entered. With that, we collectively breathed out and then burst out laughing nervously. I ran to the light and threw the switch and quickly began picking up the letters attempting to remove all evidence of the séance. Silently, I swore to myself that I would never do this again and told my friends it would be best if they left, before my grandmother arrived and somehow sensed what we had been up to.

That night, I dreamed I looked into the oval mirror and saw Nancy looking back at me. She told me, “I forgive you. But you must promise you’ll never have a séance in this house again.” I answered, “I promise.”

Afterward, I never spoke of the experience with my friends, it felt better left unsaid. Then a short time later I woke up one morning, contemplating the ‘gifts of the spirit’ becoming keenly aware that something needed to be done about them. They felt burdensome. I decided that I was happy to seek others out for answers, but I wanted to be a normal teen, I did not want to be ‘different’.

Later that day, I took a long walk through the park. As the winter sun began to peek through the clouds, I suddenly knew exactly what to do. Looking up to the sky, I clearly stated, “I can’t do this. It’s too much responsibility.” Walking on, I quickly moved to thoughts of term papers, college applications and funding issues without giving my plea a second thought. In fact, it wasn’t until many years later I quietly realized, in that short, seemingly ordinary moment, my prayer had been answered.

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Chapter Three
ISLAND LIFE

“Hello, is that Mr. Anthony Hoyle? Good afternoon, this is Ms. Newbold from the Bahamas High Commission. I’m calling with reference to your application for a teaching position with the Bahamas Ministry of Education.

Would you be able to come for an interview next Tuesday morning at 10 a.m.? If you are, can you also bring your fiancée, Miss Julie Doughty? We are interested in her application too…"

Less than a week after that unexpected call, in March 1980, Tony and I presented our-selves to the Bahamas High Commission offices in London, to meet a panel of Ministry of Education officials who had flown all the way from Nassau. We were among a group of other young hopefuls; fifty-four in total, praying we'd be offered jobs and then able to embark on exciting, sub-tropical adventures.

What I remember most about the interview is being asked if we had hobbies and if we could swim and fish. One of the team also leaned forward and inquired of me, "Can you sew? If you can it would be useful. You might be posted to a remote 'family island' and you would probably need to sew curtains!"

Following the interview, Tony and I decided that Nassau would be the best option for us. Being the capital, we figured it would have more to offer and would probably be a bit livelier. So, we indicated our preferences and waited in anticipation for a letter that decided our fate.

In the meantime, Tony and I were busy fantasizing over the idea of a tropical island location and enthusing about the proximity of the islands to the United States. We also nurtured visions of touring North, Central and South America. Beyond those general ideas, we had no clue that we were about to step into a situation that would change the course of our lives in ways we could not begin to imagine.

My years at college had been fairly uneventful. I had made friends, settled into my studies and traveled, but behind everything there was always a feeling of disinterest in the usual teen, early twenties activities. I was fascinated by more contemplative pursuits and at weekends, had a habit of locking my door and spending two or three hours at a time, practicing yoga and meditation.

It was obvious to me that I was the odd one in a group that liked to drink and party and spend hours chatting about topics that held little appeal for me. I was happy with my own company and had a need for solitude and introspection. At times, I wondered what was wrong. Why couldn't I

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engage myself fully in the usual college activities and be like everyone else?

However, one bright moment was meeting Tony, who at the time, was about to graduate. Three years older, Tony was tall, had a mop of dark curly hair, a droopy handle bar moustache and brown eyes that flashed and sparkled with merriment. When we were first introduced, he was standing alongside the college bar about to throw a dart. He casually grinned, ambled over and said, “Hi,” before turning back to aim. In those few seconds, everything appeared to slow down and I became aware of a strange feeling. It was as if I was trying to recall having met him before.

After our first meeting, we spoke on a few other occasions. I noted after each exchange Tony’s easy laughter and enthusiasm for life was contagious. It was evident he had the gift of being able to put everyone around him at ease in an instant. From the beginning, I became aware that Tony made me feel comfortable and more relaxed in a way that no one else was able to.

One day, almost two years after I had left college and was living in South London, Tony turned up on the doorstep. He stood there grinning, and holding up a pair of shiny, black tap shoes. He ventured, “Oh, hi! I’ve just been to have new taps put on my shoes. Since I was in the area, I came by to see if Karen was at home. Is she in?”

She wasn’t. In fact my former housemate had recently moved in with her boyfriend. Tentatively relaying this information in a way that would cause as little hurt as possible, Tony merely responded with a cheery, “Oh, that’s great for Karen. In that case, would you like to come for a drink?” I agreed, smiling to myself. An hour or so earlier, I had cancelled a date. For some strange reason, I had felt compelled to stay at home. It was as if I was expecting someone, but didn’t know who it could be. Now, here was Tony.

Over that first drink, we laughed hysterically. I was so comfortable and at ease with Tony that I called a few days later inviting him to come to a concert with me. He agreed enthusiastically, and from that point on, we became inseparable. Less than eight weeks later, on New Year’s Eve 1979, Tony proposed unexpectedly, and I happily accepted.

Before moving to London and after graduating from college, I had gone with my friend Karen to teach English as a Foreign Language in Naples,

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Italy. It had been a fun and inspiring few months and once back in the UK, I quickly realized that for the time being, I did not want to settle there. I felt an impulse to travel and work abroad. Meeting Tony during that period of transition was perfectly timed. In perfect agreement, we decided to plan our wedding, and combine our energies in securing work abroad.

With that focused intention, by the spring of 1980, Tony and I had sent out a wide number of applications for teaching positions in places as diverse as the Falkland Islands, Abu Dhabi and Japan. However, when we were eventually offered positions in the Bahamas, we both agreed the location was the most appealing. With little hesitation we gleefully accepted. So it was that only six weeks after marrying that in late August, Tony and I sold up, packed whatever we could carry and flew to Nassau to begin our new lives.

Initially, we threw ourselves into island life, enjoying opportunities to learn how to dive and swim among the multi-colored fish that played on the coral reefs. We bought a boat and spent weekend's water skiing, snorkeling and fishing, and enjoyed being with new friends, often taking picnic lunches to isolated beaches looking out over the vast expanse of water.

It was an exciting time. Our lives were full and busy with work, travel and settling into the nuances of being in a different culture. The warmth and openness of the Bahamian people was delightful. It quickly became apparent that locals knew how to take life lightly. They taught me how to relax and let go of things that would normally have created tension. In the Bahamian mindset, I discovered a willingness to celebrate life and to include as many people as possible in that celebration. Honoring and giving thanks for even the most arduous of life's challenges was part of the cultural psyche and though new to me, I began to embrace this approach. It felt authentic and alive, rather than the more conservative style of living I had been accustomed to in the U.K.

However, while this way of being was pressing into my awareness, deep down there continued to be a longing for something indefinable that left an imprint of unhappiness. I kept having a distinct feeling that there was something more, which I was unable to touch. Looking into friends' eyes and listening carefully to their words, I hoped for a hint, anything that would speak to that yearning, but nothing was obviously forthcoming.

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I recall getting ready with anticipation before going out to parties and evening events knowing I would be meeting new people. Filled with the hope of some kind of insight or discovery, I would invariably come home feeling a sense of disappointment. Conversations usually revolved around island news or gossip. It was frustrating. I instinctively knew that whatever I was looking for was close at hand, but it was somehow hidden and could not be found in mundane observations or the endless activities of the world.

Life continued in this way for a number of years. I was working hard, an active member of a gym, busily engaged socially and had learned to paint on silk. Exhibiting two or three times a year and working on private commissions, I was selling a large number of my designs. Tony and I also had a wide circle of friends and were involved with a dive club, the National Trust and other civic organizations, yet there continued to be a deep level of disinterest and detachment within me.

Then in 1988, one afternoon as I picked up snorkeling gear to head down to the beach and wash away the heat of working under a metal roof in 90 degrees, I heard the words*, "You can't go on like this."* The voice was so insistent and so loud; I turned to see who was there. There was no one. I was completely alone. Turning back, the voice spoke again, repeating the same message. Standing frozen, alert to everything around me and with every hair on my body standing on end, I was completely unnerved.

I had heard this message before, many times and in different situations. It always provoked two distinct sensations, one was a resonance of absolute truth and the second was a quality of disturbance. Deep inside, I knew this message was true, yet I was unable to grasp the meaning behind the words. In a torrent of thoughts, I always wondered, was something going to happen to me or to one of my loved ones? Was someone going to die suddenly? Would my new way of life be taken from me?

Contemplating the only possibilities I could relate to, there was a shiver of fear. I knew something *was* going to happen, but I couldn't quite grasp what possible form that could take. Something was about to change my life completely and irrevocably and all I could do was wait…

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