

A person in a teal shirt and blue shorts is walking away from the camera on a dirt path that leads into a field of tall, dry grass. The path is flanked by trees and shrubs. The overall scene is bright and natural.

A Path for Wanderers & Edge-walkers

**A 12 Lesson Journey
into your
Wanderer's Heart**

**with interviews, stories,
tips, and journal prompts**

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*photos taken by Heather Plett
(and her daughters)*



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Lesson #1

Permission to be a Wanderer



Permission.

Let's get one thing straight.

You are a wanderer. Pure and simple.

You wouldn't be on this page if you weren't.

Let's get another thing straight. There will be NO MORE apologies for your restless spirit. No more need to justify your burning drive to travel to a new country every year or explore a new walking path in your own city every week. Got that? We're done with making up excuses. We are OWNING this. We are CELEBRATING. That's what this course is all about.

You used to try to analyze yourself to death, didn't you? And you were forever wondering when you'd find the ONE THING - the right job, the right relationship, the house with the perfect verandah on the front - that would finally give you that settled feeling that everyone else around you seemed to have, right?

I know your type. (I AM your type.) You probably went on spiritual quests hoping that would be the answer to your restless heart. You got a new job that included business travel, hoping that would satisfy your endless longing. You changed schools thinking THAT must be the answer. You volunteered at an orphanage in Africa expecting that would get it out of your system for once and for all. You might have even had a child or two thinking surely parenthood would make you feel settled.



And yet still... you need to wander. Your feet are forever restless. Your heart does a little pitter-pat every time you look at travel photos. And it almost kills you to go a month without leaving the bounds of your city.

I have news for you - **the wanderer in you will never go away.** NEVER. It is in your blood. It's written in your DNA. Get used to it because it is here to stay.

I started my wandering early, on my parents' farm. We never traveled anywhere outside our province and yet I wandered in every possible way I could. I wandered to every corner of our farm, found the coolest boulders to sit and dream on, and knew which country roadside had the best crop of wild raspberries. I wandered by foot, on horseback and by bicycle. Every chance I got, even when I was quite small, I walked the mile to my best friend's house. When I was six years old I shocked everyone by completing a 22 mile walk-a-thon. Nobody expected me to make it to the end, but I proved them wrong.

I wandered in my head too, read books about gypsies and dreamed of being one, and devoured every book and magazine I could get my hands on that might give me a glimpse of another world.

I just turned 45 and I have never stopped wandering, even though I am now a wife and mother living in a pretty settled suburban neighbourhood. Oh, I've had to curtail it now and then when kids and jobs kept me close to home, but I never did it very happily. I still wander relentlessly, traveling every chance I get, taking jobs that offer travel to the remotest parts of the world, and (when I can't get away) wandering through my neighbourhood and city.

Right now, in fact, I'm sitting at a picnic table in a park I recently discovered in my wandering. Spotting some unfamiliar green space on Google Maps, I hopped on my bike and headed off to a place I'd never been. Happily, I found a magical untamed greenbelt less than a mile from my home. I have just watched deer scamper through the woods by the river and tried to capture an illusive bluejay with my camera. My heart did that little skippy-beat it does when I've made a new discovery.



I expect that, **until the day I die, I will be a wanderer.** I can't help myself. (And, since my mom spends nearly half of every year on road trips all across the continent, even though she's now 73 and battling cancer, I've got a pretty good role model.)

You are a wanderer too, or else you wouldn't have signed up to get this email. We are all part of the same tribe, cut from the same cloth.

This is the best advice I can give you: Stop fighting it. Embrace your inner wanderer. Don't expect to change. Don't expect to be like those other people who are still in the same job you left years ago when your restless feet took you to new adventures. Don't expect to be forever content in your suburban neighbourhood doing what the neighbours do every weekend.

Embrace it. Stop apologizing. And start celebrating it. Begin NOW.


Here is something you've probably never been told before...

Your restlessness is part of your beauty.

It's true. You were created this way for a reason. It's what makes you unique. It's what makes you strong. It is one of your gifts to the world.

"But how can this restlessness be a gift?" you ask. "It feels more like a curse. An achille's heel."

Well, for starters, wanderers are explorers and inventors. My ancestors (and possibly yours) wouldn't be on this continent if there hadn't been a few wanderers in my family tree. We NEED wanderers. We'd never have discovered new lands or flown to the moon if at least a few people didn't let their restless hearts guide them into new places. We wouldn't have cars or airplanes if inventive wanderers didn't feel the need to get to other places than where they were.



That's only the beginning. In the coming weeks, we'll be exploring the many beauties and gifts of being a wanderer. We'll also explore some of the responsibilities that come along with this gift.

According to Barbara Sher, the wandering tendencies that you have too often found yourself apologizing for or even beating yourself up for place you in the category of "Scanner".

"To Scanners," she says, "the world is like a big candy store full of fascinating opportunities, and all they want is to reach out and stuff their pockets." Scanners can never settle on one hobby, one career, or one vacation destination to head to every single year. Scanners have a deep driving need for variety and change.

"As kids, most Scanners had been having a great time! At school no one objected to their many interests, because every hour of every student's school day is devoted to a different subject. But at some point in high school or soon after, everyone was expected to make a choice, and that's when Scanners ran into trouble. While some people happily narrowed down to one subject, Scanners simply couldn't."

Sound familiar? Did choosing a college major send you into a major tailspin? Did your first post-college job - the one you were supposed to take great delight in because it was your "career path" make you feel trapped? Did a two week vacation feel like NOT NEARLY ENOUGH for all the traveling you wanted to do? I suspect so. If you're a wanderer, chances are you're also a scanner.

The good news is THERE IS HOPE! You can find a way to delight in your many interests, wander to your heart's content, AND make a living while you're at it. Not only that, but **you can find a way to use your wandering gifts for good.**

During the course of "A Path for Happy Wanderers" you'll get a chance to meet many wanderers who've learned to incorporate their wandering tendencies into their career paths, use their wandering to increase their knowledge and understanding of the world, incorporate wandering into their spiritual quests, wander with purpose... etc., etc.. Imagine that! You don't have to feel trapped for the rest of your life and assume



you must be flawed because you just can't settle down. You have permission to embrace it!

"Here's the first and most important surprise:" says Barbara Sher, "If Scanners didn't think they should limit themselves to one field (or, I would add, one destination), 90 percent of their problems would cease to exist!"

Start today. Go look in the mirror. Smile at yourself and say, **"I am a wanderer. There is beauty and strength in my wandering. I own it. I love it. I don't want to change it."**



Interview with Nora Dunn

In 2006, [Nora Dunn](#) sold her financial planning practice in Toronto Canada, and got rid of all of her belongings in order to free herself up for the adventure of a lifetime. Since early 2007, she's been on the road, traveling slowly through over 20 countries and five continents. She has lived a variety of lifestyles by working in trade for her accommodation. Her [location independent writing career](#) takes care of the rest of the expenses. As such, she can travel in a financially sustainable manner like this for as long as she wishes.



* * * *

1. A few years ago, you gave up your day job and became a "professional hobo". Can you tell us a bit about that story and why you did it?

I was running a successful financial planning practice in Toronto Canada, when the ball dropped. Until that time, I'd spent a fair bit of energy filling the ever-growing void in my life (ie: that little voice saying there was something else out there for me) with activities; I was a member of Toastmasters, Rotary International, I regularly performed in musical theatre productions, and performed as an actor in various tv shows and films.

But when I got sick and was forced to stop everything for a spell, **I had to reexamine my life.** That was when I realized in all my busy-ness I



had neglected a nagging dream of mine; one of travel. And vacations (even as long as month in duration) didn't seem to cut it; in order to get under the surface of a culture and country, I needed to travel for much longer than any typical career would allow.

So I decided to sell everything and travel the world!

That was in 2006, and [I've been on the road ever since](#), having traveled through and/or lived in 15 countries.

Since selling the lot, I've also developed a [career as a writer](#) (on the topics of travel, personal finance, and lifestyle design), which allows me to earn a living from wherever I am. This, in conjunction with keeping my expenses low by doing things like volunteering in trade for my accommodation, allows me to travel full-time in a financially-sustainable manner.

2. What is it about wandering that makes your heart sing?

My dream of travel was borne of a desire to live around the world, gaining an understanding of how other people live. It started when I was 9 years old, watching a documentary in school about European culture. I was fascinated with these people who dressed differently, spoke a foreign language, ate foods I couldn't recognize, and walked through streets so very different-looking from the Canadian ones I grew up in.

To this day, I get a surge of excitement in wandering through a local market, discovering fruits I've never seen before, studying how locals shop and converse, and learning what makes a culture tick.

Try as I may have, I couldn't seem to do this with standard vacations. When I visited South Africa for a month (while I was still a financial planner), I returned home with more questions than answers about what life was like in South



Africa. It was an excellent vacation, but it was also a confirmation of sorts that **I couldn't truly accomplish my travel goals without doing something a little more intense.**

3. What advice would you have for people interested in doing longer term wandering as you have done?

Before taking on long-term travel as a lifestyle, I would recommend having your financial house in order, and/or have a career that can sustain you along the way. Although I managed to develop a writing career that now sustains me, it took a couple of years to generate a viable income. I was lucky in that I had income from the sale of my financial planning business to cover me during that period, and didn't have a burden of debt to maintain.

I would suggest having at least enough money saved to cover your expenses for a spell and give you an emergency buffer. If you want to stay on the road beyond that, be prepared to work as you go (with a [location independent career](#) or jobs along the way), or to keep your trip to a limited time frame, so you can return home to work some more (then maybe hit the road again)!

4. Any other advice for wanderers?

Oh, there's so much I could say! For starters, here's an article I wrote with [some useful travel websites](#) to get your creative travel planning juices flowing.

Beyond that, it's all about your specific travel style, which is so different for everybody. Just check out the [week-in-the-life profiles of over 50 of my fellow long-term travelers](#) to see for yourself how different long-term travel can be!

Feel free to connect with me through [Facebook](#) or [my website](#) and I'll be happy to answer any questions you have.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story. Happy travels!



Journal prompts #1

When I think about my wandering tendencies I feel...



Other people define me as...

I define myself as...

I feel happiest when I...



Lesson #2

What does Your Wandering say about You?



Identity.

Where do you wander?

In your neighbourhood? Close to your home? To the furthest country you can find on the map?

How do you wander? Alone? In large groups? On foot? By bicycle?

Do you tend to follow the road less traveled, or the freeways? Do you follow people's advice or go your own way?

Spend a little time doing a wandering assessment (there's a list of questions at the bottom of this post to help you with that). **And then consider what your wandering says about you.** It might be your best guide to who you are and how you interact with the world.

Here are some of the things I've learned about myself through my wandering. (This is not to suggest any of these things are good or bad - it's simply to help you examine your own tendencies.)

Although I enjoy traveling in groups, I am often at the fringe of the group - part of it but with the flexibility to wander off on my own when I need to. I have a healthy dose of BOTH introvert and extrovert tendencies and so I need companionship but also



need lots of time on my own. The older I get, the more it seems I prefer solitary travel.

Along with that tendency to live on the edge of the circle is a tendency toward being a witness to the action rather than the life of the party. In every group trip I've ever been on, I end up as photographer and scribe/storycatcher. While my travel companions dive deep into conversations with the locals, I skirt around the edges taking pictures of the shy kids in the corners, or catching the obscure photo op that everyone else is too busy to notice.

That does not, however, mean that I am reluctant to jump into new activities. Quite the opposite, in fact. When something seems fun and adventurous, I often dive in with both feet before many people have had the chance to contemplate the risk. I'll be the first in line to go sky-diving, para-sailing, or canoeing into the wilderness. I may not be the biggest risk-taker (I wouldn't go cliff-diving, and I'm a little too claustrophobic for spelunking, for example), but **I love adventure and challenge.**

I prefer out-of-the-way places to tourist destinations and my best trips have been to some of the poorest regions of the world. I don't mind sleeping on a grass mat in a mud hut and I'll climb on a rickety boat if it will take me to a remote island few outsiders have been to before. When I do go to tourist destinations, I like visiting them when it's raining or too cold for other tourists.

I don't break rules just for the sake of breaking rules, but I do challenge those things that seem silly or overly bureaucratic. I can work within difficult bureaucracies (and have had to do so to get film permits in more than one difficult country) and am usually a peacekeeper in those situations, but when there is little risk or harm involved, I will step outside the boundaries that seem arbitrarily imposed.

All of these things tell me that I am adventurous (to a point), I am both introverted and extraverted, I am mostly a non-conformist, I am a witness and a scribe, and I don't like to let fear get in the way of my wandering. They also tell me that I do not fit well within the boundaries of bureaucracy (don't ask me why I suffered through



thirteen years as a federal public servant) and that I need change and adventure to keep me happy.

But enough about me. **What do your wandering tendencies tell you about yourself?**

Perhaps you're content to be a weekend-wanderer, spending your week in a steady job and feeding your wandering spirit by going camping on the weekends.

Maybe you're a danger-loving wanderer, an adrenalin junkie who's only happy when risk is part of the equation

Or you could be a connecting wanderer, someone who wanders mostly for the sake of meeting new people and making connections all over the world.

Perhaps you're a foodie wanderer, trying new restaurants every chance you get and wandering mostly to those places which offer culinary delights.

Maybe you're a justice-seeking wanderer, taking your passion for all things justice-related to the ends of the earth (or the end of your block) and committing your life to helping good causes.

Wandering can take many shapes and forms. At the core, we all have some similarities in that we love to wander, but we don't all have the same motivations or drives for the wandering we do.

Interview with Marianne Elliott

Marianne Elliott has combined her love of wandering with her passion for justice, peacekeeping, and yoga. She blogs under the name [Zen Peacekeeper](#) and will soon be releasing her first book, a memoir about her time spent in Afghanistan. In this interview, she shares stories and advice about all of these passions, and about learning to live peacefully in conflict zones.



* * * *

1. What is it about wandering to other parts of the world that makes your heart sing?

Everything! Seeing the way women circle together everywhere, reading poetry in the setting in which it was written, learning to dance to all the world's beats. The joy of meeting people who see the world so differently to me and then discovering what we share along with our beautiful differences. I'll never forget when I was living in Gaza having a deep conversation with a friend, a young Palestinian man whose life had been so different to mine in so many ways, and sharing with each other the heartbreak we had each experienced at the end of our first real love affairs. Also, **I meet myself in new ways when I take myself off to distant corners of the world.** I see myself out of my own context, without the trappings of home, friends, family. It's a sometimes confronting and always illuminating meeting!



2. Can you share a story or two of when you were in a dangerous part of the world and had to learn to trust the people you met there?

About fifteen years ago I was backpacking in Syria. I had met up with a Canadian girl on the road and we were travelling together for a little while. In Aleppo we found a cheap hotel to stay in. In the middle of the night when I got up to go to the shared bathroom I was groped by the guard who was supposed to be keeping us all safe. My friend and I stayed awake until morning, and then checked out immediately. The hotel owner asked us why we were leaving so we told him that we didn't feel safe. He insisted that we come and stay at his family home, assuring us that his mother and sisters would take care of us. In that instant we knew we needed to either choose to trust or to remain fearful. We chose to trust, and as a result we met a circle of young people who opposed the regime in Syria. As I sat in a clandestine cafe talking with young Syrian human rights activists, the seed of my future career was sown.

Trust is essential to the wanderers path.

Above all else, you need to trust yourself. Trust your instincts, trust the hairs when they stand up on the back of your arms and trust the voice that tells you "It's okay, he's okay."

3. What advice would you have for people who feel drawn to parts of the world where there might be conflict or insecurity?

First, inform yourself. What is the conflict about? Who are the parties? What territory is affected by the conflict? Who controls the territory? Is this a conflict between a repressive government and people fighting for their freedom? Is this a battle for power between warring tribal factions? The lines may well be a little bit blurred and different perspectives may draw quite different conclusions. But make it your business to be as informed as you can possibly be. Find out what the actual risks might be. Perhaps most importantly, find out what risks your travel might pose



to others. Often the real risks are much fewer than it might appear in the news media. But there are real risks, and not only to you as a traveler.

For the past decade my travel, particularly travel to conflict-zones, has mostly been for work. The advantage of traveling for work is that pragmatic decisions are being made about whether the value of the work you can do outweighs the risks that your travel might pose. My advice is to make the same careful assessment for yourself, whatever the reason for your travel. Choosing to travel to a post-conflict territory that is entering a stable phase and trying to build or re-build a tourism economy might be a powerful and practical form of support. Traveling to a conflict-affected territory where your presence might put drivers, guides and even people living in the villages where you stay at risk is a very different proposition.

Once you've made your informed choice then make contact with a local guide or advisor. Where there is conflict, local advice and guidance is even more important than usual and let's face it, access and openness to local wisdom improves all forms of wandering.

4. Any other advice for wanderers?

Above all else, remember the mantra of all true wanderers, in the words of Antonio Machado: **“Travelers, there is no path, paths are made by walking”**



Wandering assessment (Journal Prompts #2)

Answer these questions in your journal, or cut & paste into a word processing file. Note: there are no "right" answers and there may be multiple answers for every question. You are who you are and don't need to fit in a box!

Where do you wander?

In your neighbourhood? Close to your home? To the furthest country you can find on the map? Only in countries where you know the language? In the middle of dangerous jungles where risk is a daily companion?

How do you wander?

On foot? By bicycle? Only with the latest in modern convenient travel? All of the above?

Who do you wander with?

Alone? With a partner? In large groups?

What is your primary purpose for wandering?

Adventure? Contemplation? Photography? Restlessness? Sight-seeing?

What is your wandering style?

Do you tend to follow the road less traveled, or the freeways? Do you prefer tourist destinations or out-of-the-way places that would never show up in a Fodor's travel guide? Do you follow people's advice or go your own way?

What do you learn about yourself while you're wandering?

Are you drawn to crowded markets or quiet country roads? Are you forever seeking the next adventure or the next relationship? Are you introverted or extroverted? Are you a "watcher" or a "joiner"?

How will this understanding of yourself change the way you interact with the world?

Will understanding your wandering tendencies help you be more accepting of your restlessness? Will it help you choose your next career path or course of study?



Lesson #3

Risk Making Connections



Connections.

When I first started traveling alone on business trips, I used to order room service and eat in my hotel room. I'm not that fond of most hotel restaurants, though, so that got old really quickly.

I knew I'd find much better food and more interesting environments if I left the hotel and wandered into the more interesting parts of the city. It took a bit of courage, though, to get used to dining alone. At first I took along reading material so I didn't look quite so lonely sitting and staring at everyone else eating in groups, but with time I became comfortable people-watching without worrying about what they were thinking of me.

Before long, I not only didn't eat in "big box hotels", I didn't even stay in them. I managed to find much more interesting (and often cheaper) accommodations in bed and breakfasts (check bedandbreakfast.com for locations all over the world), hostels, or out-of-the-way locally owned inns or resorts, even on business trips where I wasn't footing the bill.

One of the things I soon learned to love about bed and breakfasts (and hostels) was the morning conversations with the hosts (B&B hosts are often the most informed people when it comes to interesting places to visit in their cities) and other guests. People who choose B&B's over corporate hotels tend to be interesting and diverse people, instead of the usual business crowd you might rub shoulders with (but mostly ignore) in hotels stuck on the airport strip. I've had the most fascinating breakfast conversations with people like the couple visiting Canada to retrace the



husband's father's journey when he'd worked here in his youth. We enjoyed each other's company so much, in fact, that we had dinner together that evening, and weeks later they sent me a card after they'd returned home to England.

Sometimes it takes a little creativity to find inexpensive local transportation to and from the out-of-the-way places, but it's worth the extra effort.

There are benefits and drawbacks to solitary travel. It can get lonely, but at the same time, it is often much easier to engage strangers in conversation when you aren't always engrossed in conversation with your travel companions.

When I traveled to Ethiopia several years ago for the purpose of producing a short documentary about some of the projects supported by the non-profit organization I worked for at the time, I had to arrive in the country several days ahead of the film crew I would later travel with. I spent four days alone, dealing with the challenges of an unfamiliar (and rather dysfunctional) bureaucracy, trying to get the necessary film permit that would allow us to visit remote parts of the country and do filming.

By then I had learned to love traveling alone, so I was quite delighted to arrive before anyone else. When I wasn't sitting and waiting in government offices, I could wander to my heart's content.

One evening I was eating alone in a restaurant, when a small child walked by, followed by her mother. The little girl engaged me in conversation, and soon I was talking to her mom as well. Mother and daughter were Ethiopian, but now lived in the States. They'd come home to their family and were dining that evening with a brother/uncle.

I was almost finished eating by then, but when my dessert arrived, the mother asked if I'd care to join them and finish eating at their table. Ethiopians are social, family-oriented people and don't like to see people alone.



I'd spent a few days alone by that time and was ready for some company. I joined them and was soon deeply engrossed in conversation and much laughter (and a drink or two). When they finished the meal, the brother said "if you're new to Ethiopia, you really **MUST** come out with us for the evening and we'll show you some of the local culture."

Hmmm... to go or not to go? To take a risk and go with strangers to an unknown destination, or spend another evening alone in my room? Actually, it was barely a question in my mind. **GO!** By then I'd spent enough time with them that my spidey senses were telling me they were a safe bet.

I went, and that evening has since become one of my favourite memories of my time spent in Ethiopia. They took me on a tour of Addis Ababa, they told me endless fascinating stories about the history of their country, we watched talented local entertainers sing and dance in a local bar that I would never have found on any tourist guide, and we laughed and shared stories late into the night. (Sadly I have no pictures from that night - I was too busy having fun to take pictures!)

At the end of the night, they delivered me back to my hotel and I went to bed with a smile on my face.

Connections like that are rare and they're worth the risk.

When you wander, especially if you wander alone, you will need to make a choice - do I trust strangers and make connections, or do I stay guarded and mostly alone?

My advice to you is this... **TRUST PEOPLE!** The vast majority of people are trustworthy and not out to harm you. Oh sure - there are con artists out there who will happily part you from your money (I have a story about that from the same trip to Ethiopia, when I was a little too trusting and was separated from more of my money than I should have been), and even a few people who will harm you (I have been raped in my own bedroom, so I know about that side of things too), but most of the people you will meet will offer kindness before maliciousness.



How do you know who to trust and who to steer clear of? I wish I had a hard and fast rule, but I don't. The only thing I can do is tell you to trust your instinct and assess the risk. In Ethiopia, for example, I spent time with the people before I climbed into a vehicle with them. I'd watched them in the restaurant and saw the way they interacted with each other. The signals I was picking up were all of the trustworthy variety. On top of that, they had a child with them, and I saw the love and trust between them and the child. This did not seem like a dangerous situation.

In the other instance in Ethiopia, I let a young man (who said he was a student and would take me to a less touristy store where all of the artisans were students and my money would go to a good cause) serve as my guide in the marketplace, and after I'd spent more money than I should have in the "student co-op" on what he assured me were unique works of art, I later saw the exact same thing all over the country for much less money and knew I'd been scammed. AND I let him convince me to pay him for serving as my guide (and later realized just how crafty he'd been in his scheme when I saw him later in the week pulling similar cons on other hotel guests). In that case, I assessed my risk (I wasn't going off alone with him, we were in a public market, and the only thing that was really at risk was the small amount of money I was carrying with me), took a chance, and found out my instinct to trust him was misguided. BUT... there was little harm done and I came home with some interesting art and a good story to tell. I don't really regret it.

When you find yourself in a situation where you have to choose whether to trust or run for the hills, **ask yourself what you have to lose and what you have to gain.**

Are you missing an amazing opportunity by letting fear hold you back? Or is the risk too big? If you can, talk to people you trust in the country who'll tell you about what kind of crime or danger there is. In Ethiopia, for example, I'd spoken with a friend who lives there and he'd assured me that Ethiopia is quite a safe place to travel, that there is not a lot of crime or theft, and the greatest risk was mostly from creative con artists.

Interview with Alison Wearing

Alison Wearing is the writer/performer of the award-winning one-woman show, Giving Into Light, as well as a new multimedia monologue, Confessions of a Fairy's Daughter. Alison is also the author of the internationally bestselling travel memoir, Honeymoon in Purdah - an Iranian journey (one of my favourite books), in addition to numerous articles and stories. She performs in theatre festivals and literary events in Canada, the United States and in Mexico.



* * * *

1. In your book "Honeymoon in Purdah" you share many stories of how you trusted the local people in Iran. Can you share one of your favourite stories?

EEK! Don't know don't know...the couple that were so concerned about how hot I might be under my hejab that they took me on an all-day odyssey through the desert to a place that was a bit cooler while plying me with bottles of the unforgettably named soft drink Pipi-Zamzam? Or the guy who invited us to his home and very solemnly asked if I would please, uh, play ping pong with his wife? The smiley dentist and his wife-seeking cousin who changed money for us at risk of death? The friendly minister who couldn't stop telling stories and had us drinking his homemade (illegal) wine the grapes of which he had squished with his own feet? That beautiful woman at the airport who took me out to a stretch of sand and told me what she really felt about God? That sweet drug dealer who fed us and bent over backwards to show us the sights in his small, dusty town including a truck driver with such small legs he had to stand while driving? The Mexican woman



whose attitude and outlook made living in Iran a colourful joy? How do I choose?? Every time I turned around, there was another smiling person offering us a meal, a tour of the town, a visit to their mother's, a handful of pistachios, a day with their family...

2. What is it about wandering and connecting with people around the world that makes your heart sing?

For me, traveling is like a moving meditation in that it takes me out of comfort and into a heightened state of awareness. I love to walk the world with a child's sense of wonder, awe and non-judgment, just marveling at beauty, appreciating simple things, drinking in detail after detail and letting the day take me where it may. It's like opening into a state of grace -- one in which anything is possible and everything is a gift.

3. What advice would you have for people about learning to trust other people when they travel?

Turn down the volume of your mind. It drowns out the quiet song of intuition and true intuition never lets you down. The moment you are able to trust yourself, you are in a position to truly trust. When in doubt, assume the best. People who are given chance to be majestic usually rise to the occasion. Laughter is an international language: almost everyone speaks it fluently and through it, we can communicate almost anything.

4. Any other advice for wanderers?

Plan less. Better still: don't plan at all. Magic and miracles happen when schedules fall apart, so if things go dramatically wrong, get comfortable and wait for an angel. S/he/it will appear shortly and point you where you need to go. The most reliable map in the world, the only one worth following, is your heart. **Whatever makes every cell in your body sing...do that.**



Journal Prompts #3

I feel comfortable trusting strangers when...

One of my favourite memories of making an unexpected connection with a stranger was...



When I eat alone in a restaurant I feel...

The next time I travel I want to try...



Lesson #4

The Wanderer at the Edge - On Naming Ourselves



On the Edge.

“I want to stand as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all the kinds of things you can’t see from the center.” - Kurt Vonnegut

A couple of months ago, I was feeling restless and unsettled. Nothing in my life was quite making sense, I couldn’t focus on anything I needed to do, and all I wanted to do was wander. I knew I should be doing productive things like writing or working to make my business grow, but no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn’t settle in to any task on my to-do list.

Part of the problem was that I was feeling really restless about the business I’d started six months earlier. I wasn’t sure anymore what I wanted from it. Part of me was feeling really called to the work I’d started with Sophia Leadership, helping emerging leaders learn to trust their feminine wisdom more, but another part of me just wanted to be a writer, not focusing on any one topic for longer than it took me to get my ideas onto a page.

I have always had a hard time settling on the “one thing” that career advisors or business planners tell you to find. You know - that “one thing” that you’re passionate about and you know you couldn’t live without? That “one thing” that should drive your vocation and dictate what you put out into the world?

For me there was never “one thing”. There was always a myriad of things. I love to write with a deep and enduring passion. But I also love to take pictures, and I love to



paint, and I love to wander, and I love teach, and I love to help people discover things about themselves, and I love leadership, and I love international development and justice work, and....

If you ever told me that I would be able to make my living exclusively as a writer, I'd say "GREAT!" But then five minutes later, the initial glee would wear off and I'd say, "But... wait a minute... do you mean I won't get to do all these other things and I'll be stuck in a writer box and...? Help!" Suddenly I'd start feeling like the life was being choked out of me.

That's how I was feeling on that day a few months ago. I kept thinking that my "one thing" was alluding me and surely there must be something wrong with me because I couldn't focus on anything for longer than it took for another idea to pop into my head.

Finally I gave up and headed to the bookstore. Maybe my "one thing" could be found in a book. Maybe if I just read the right book, it would tie up all the loose strings of my restlessness and I'd feel whole and defined and not so splintered anymore. And then I could get on with the business of putting my "one thing" out into the world.

Of course, there were no books at the bookstore to satisfy my restless longing. There are no books anywhere that will satisfy the longing of a wanderer. There are only more ideas, more paths, and more questions.

The book I was hoping for didn't show up, but that doesn't mean the visit to the bookstore was a bust. Quite the opposite. Something shifted for me in that bookstore, big time.

After I'd given up my hunt for the perfect book, I started shuffling through some edgy art magazines. Just a few days before, my friend Connie (whose interview is below) shared a story with me about how she'd been re-acquainted with a piece of herself when she picked up an edgy art magazine. I was intrigued, so I did the same.



And there, standing in the middle of the magazine racks, I had my epiphany.

“You are called to the edge.”

That’s what the voice in my head whispered. Call it the Muse, Spirit, God, Intuition, Gut - whatever you call it, when you hear that voice you know you’d best stop and listen.

And listen I did.

“You are called to the edge.” Wow.

THAT’S why I often feel so unsettled, so restless, so uncertain where my grounding was. THAT’S why I feel like a misfit, an odd-ball, and the person who rarely gets told the inside joke.

I’m an edge-walker. I am not called to the centre of the circle, where people feel always surrounded by love and connection, where people are content to just sit with the same reality day after day, where the status quo is embraced and honoured.

I am called to a place at the edge of the circle. I’m called to be a prophet, a visionary, a watcher, a sentry. I’m called to guide the people at the centre of the circle, make them feel safe, watch for the changes coming in the future, pay attention to what’s going on in the world, and always be on the look-out for wisdom that will help us weather the storms. I am called to share truth even when it feels uncomfortable to those in the centre. The truth at the edge can’t be boxed into any “one thing” that a career counselor might point me toward.

That’s my place in the world, and there-in lies the beauty in my restlessness and my wandering spirit. **I am called to the edge, and the edge is a precarious place to be.**

I want to invite you to consider the same truth about what your wandering heart means about you. Are you an edge-walker? Do you always feel like you’re on a



slightly different path than anyone else around you? Do you feel like you're busy gathering wisdom that nobody else is even paying attention to? Does your restlessness make you feel like an odd-ball among your friends and family? Do you see the world differently from almost anyone you know?

If these things are true (and I suspect that they are for each of you reading this), then welcome to the edge-walker tribe! You are not alone. You have found your people.

It may feel like a big risk to claim your place at the edge, and you may have days when you're certain you're not worthy of being the prophet, visionary, or sentry, but it's worth it. **The beauty that can be found at the edge is raw, fresh, and exciting.** Claiming that place on the edge will make you feel alive in ways that you have never felt before.

Not long after my epiphany in the bookstore, I started reading a book called [Walk Out Walk On](#) by Meg Wheatley and Deborah Frieze. It's a learning journey disguised as a book, in which the reader is invited to visit several different communities all over the world where people have decided to "walk out" of broken systems and "walk on" to more sustainable, collaborative, people-centred, environmentally friendly and justice-oriented ways of living.

The book had a profound impact on me. I resonated with each and every one of the people who worked up the courage to follow their collective dreams, take big risks, and step into a new way of being. Though the authors didn't use the word early in the book, I saw each of these people as edge-walkers (just like me, but with more courage to push the boundaries at the edge).

Further on in the book, the word started showing up, and it caught me by surprise. I didn't know that others called themselves edge-walkers as well, and was even more surprised when the authors of the book encouraged people to embrace the word.

Toward the end of the book, the authors talk about the four practices of [Berkana Institute](#) - **naming, connecting, nourishing, and illuminating.**



“Naming is being able to claim publicly who we are and what we’re walking on to. Whenever we give ourselves a new name, it’s a way of making visible our intentions. What are you walking out of, and why? By walking on, who are you choosing to be? However you name yourself, choose a name that encourages you to move forward, that challenges you to be fearless. I am a Zapatista. I am a Walk Out. I am an edge-walker. I am a leader. I am daring to live the future now.”

They go on to say that these names offer other people the opportunity to say “me too!” and then you have connection, support, and encouragement.

Bingo! Naming yourself as an edge-walker is important! It gives you an identity, and even more than that, it gives you a tribe.

And that has become very true for me. The more I share my new “edge-walker” title with people (on Twitter, in courses I teach, etc.), the more people respond with “me too!” It turns out there are a lot of edge-walkers around, and we’re all looking for our people, our tribes. We’re all looking for other people who understand what it means to be at the edge of the circle, never really fitting in at the centre.

You may use a different word than edge-walker. Your muse might whisper something different in your ear some day when you least expect it. But know this - whatever the word is that you received, own it, celebrate it, share it, and let yourself grow into the truth of it.

The world needs edge-walkers, wanderers, prophets, visionaries, sentries... and... the world needs YOU!

Stop apologizing for walking the edge and start dancing, because that is where you are called to be.



Interview with Connie Hozvicka

Connie Hozvicka of [Dirty Footprints Studio](#) is one of my favourite fellow-edge-walkers. She is an artist, art educator, yogini, wanderer, and all-around very cool person. I am privileged to be part of her art journal workshop [21 Secrets](#). She is one of those rare people who totally gets it whenever I talk about the restlessness that keeps me on the edge.

1. What's your favourite kind of wandering and how does it nourish your soul?



1. What's your favourite kind of wandering and how does it nourish your soul?

My partner Hansel and I love to wander. We have this thing that any time we go on vacation or a road trip we simply decide on a destination but never on a plan. We rarely bother to look at travel guides or things to do listed on the internet--we just go and wander the new landscape, talk to strangers, and see what catches our eyes and hearts about this foreign place. What I found is that the sites we see, the people we meet, and the things that impress us the most always feel like synchronicity is taking place in the Universe. **Our trips become full of oracles and signs, and we return home always more enlightened about ourselves because of it.**

2. How does wandering feed you as an artist?

As an Artist I crave adventure--an exciting story--a hero's journey. I crave a fresh perspective and wonderment. I crave leaving things totally up to chance and



surrendering to what is. And when I allow myself the space and time to wander, like on our vacations or frequent road trips, I literally feel like an explorer. I turn off the phone, unplug the laptop, and let myself forget the regular routines and stresses of my day--as I see the world through new eyes. Everything becomes a metaphor or a symbol to help me reflect upon my everyday life "back at home". Things such as getting totally lost for hours, a bad Mexican restaurant in the middle of nowhere, or watching ravens fly across the Grand Canyon--become inspiration for my spirituality and fuel for my creativity.

3. Tell me about how you incorporate art-making into your wandering. (eg. art journalling? photography? etc.)

Oh gosh, this is a good one. Hansel and I are both Artists so you can imagine all the junk we take along with us on our wanderings!

I always and I mean ALWAYS bring a heavy duty sketch book, some paint (usually watercolors), oil pastels, pencils, india ink, an easel, my journal, and my Big Girl Camera! And most of the time I bring with me one of those folded up chairs that roll into a pouch you can strap across your back!

All of my art supplies fit nicely into a plastic carrier case with a handle that you can purchase at the art store. The benefit of using a plastic case is that you can also use it as a palette for your paint--and I always keep my bottle of india ink locked in a tiny tupperware container to prevent unwanted accidents from being a total disaster--but also so I can use the tupperware container for water for my paints as well! Bringing my easel along makes it easier for me to put my sketchbook on it--as I hold my palette with one hand and the paintbrush with the other. Purchasing an aluminum easel that folds up and comes with a carrying case is the best for wandering!

But here's the thing--the reason why I take so much--the art supplies, the journal, and the Big Girl Camera, is because **I never know how I'm going to feel--how I'm going to want to explore and express where we are at.** Sometimes I just want to sit and paint--while other times I want to get up close and personal with the environment by using my Big Girl



Camera. Then there are other times when just sitting and writing in my journal feels absolute perfect. Like I said, wandering for me means no plans--so I have to come prepared for anything!

3. How would you recommend other budding artists incorporate wandering into the development of their art form?

I recommend starting in your own neighborhood or hometown. Decide on a place you never been to before--or rarely frequent--and go there with no plan in mind. It could even be something such as a weekly farmer's market, a quaint little street you've always admired, or a park across town. Bring a camera or a little sketch book and pen and wander through taking visual notes. What do you see that catches your attention? What smells do you pick up on? What are the people there doing? Follow that. Shoot photos or make little sketches. Look at it as an adventure! If you feel kind of funny doing this in public for the first time--drawing or taking photos as such--than bring a friend along or better yet a child--and turn it into a hunt!!

5. Any additional advice for other wanderers?

Forget what your parents told you in kindergarten--DO talk to strangers!! My life is so much richer because I spark up total random conversations with complete strangers when we're wandering. Hansel and I just recently went to the Grand Canyon--and one of my favorite experiences was when I started talking to this man outside of a restaurant as I waited for Hansel in the restroom. Happened to be he lived for 10 years at the bottom of the canyon, and wow did he have a story to share--and he recommended the greatest place for us to visit as well!



Journal Prompts #4

To me, the word edge-walker means...

If I were to give myself a name that represents my restlessness, it would be...



When I hear other people share stories of their restlessness, it makes me feel...

I feel most connected with other wanderers when...



Lesson #5

When Journeys Change us - Slowing down to the Speed of Soul



Slow down.

The story is told of a Zen master sitting at the side of the road after a long journey. When asked what he was waiting for, he replied “for all of me to arrive”.

(Thank you to my friend Katharine, who has just completed an incredible 3 month journey, for sharing that story.)

In this era of fast travel, we often forget that it takes our bodies and minds time to transition from one place and one experience to the next. We fly home from vacation and jump right back into work the next day. We fly across the country for a quick weekend visit or a funeral or wedding and then step back into our lives like nothing has changed. We move in and out of different cultures and different spaces as though we're barely impacted by the experience.

It's not just because of jet lag that our bodies (and souls) need time to re-adjust. Even the simplest and most mundane of travel changes us. It introduces us to new paradigms, new ways of thinking, and new edge-walking perspectives. It gives us new ideas about how we want to live our lives. It lets us speak to new people outside of our normal circles of influence. It shifts us in ways we don't always understand.

I've done a lot of business travel, and many of those trips were short hops across the country for meetings. In the early days, feeling obligated to be back at my desk as quickly as possible, I made fast trips, and once or twice even flew in and out of a city for a meeting without missing a night's sleep in my own bed.



That kind of travel wreaks havoc on one's body and mind, and so I soon decided that I wasn't okay with that. If it was important enough for me to be at that meeting, I argued, than it was worth it to the organization to at least invest in one or two nights in a hotel so that I could properly make the transition and get enough rest. (As mentioned earlier, in my latter business travel, I rarely stayed in hotels but instead chose bed & breakfasts or other unique alternatives, where the transition was even more gentle.)

We are not meant to rush our transitions.

We are meant to move gently through these lives of ours, savouring the moments, letting change seep into our hearts, and honouring the vastness of our experiences.

This is especially true if the journey has been particularly transformative. The first time I returned home from Africa (one of the most life-changing trips I've ever been on), there were complications on my flight and I arrived home later than expected. Within hours of landing at home, I had to rush back to work for a 2-day board meeting.

It was one of the hardest weeks of my life, and I am convinced that the transition (and heartache, and unsettled feelings) ended up taking much longer than it would have if I had sufficiently rested and given my mind time for the massive culture shock that happens when you first return from a developing country.

Last October, I was at a circle/story retreat with Christina Baldwin that changed my life. Christina and I were at the airport at the same time waiting for our flights home. Just before I boarded, she hugged me and said "be kind to yourself on re-entry". After years of leading retreats, she understood the restless, unsettled (and even slightly anxious) feelings that often come when we rush back into our lives and don't really have the language to properly explain to our family and friends how our lives have been changed.



Letting change seep into our hearts takes time, and space, and self-care.

Later this week I'm heading to Columbus, Ohio to attend ALIA (Authentic Leadership in Action). This is the kind of place where edge-walkers gather, where big ideas are shared, where dreams of changing the world feel like real possibilities, where deep relationships blossom, and where you can't help but be changed.

Having been to ALIA once before, I know how transformative it will be. In anticipation of that, I have been thinking long and hard about how to ease the transition and re-entry. At first I was going to return home on the train instead of the plane, but in the end it worked out better to spend a few days after ALIA in a quiet, beautiful, retreat-like place with a dear friend who understands travel and will give me the space and support I need to process it all slowly and contemplatively.

The next time you are going on a journey that you know will change you (even in a small way) consider these ideas for easing the transition:

1. Choose slower transportation. Is it feasible to take the train home instead of a plane? Trains are delightfully slow and contemplative spaces to read, think, engage in conversations, or just stare out the window. Can you add an overnight stay into the middle of a long flight home? Though my first flight home from Africa was long and arduous (made even longer by multiple missed flights), I enjoyed a relaxing and unplanned overnight in an Amsterdam hotel with a lovely jacuzzi tub that made the trip (and many, many hours in airports) a little more bearable.

2. Spend time in conversation. In the days following a life-changing journey, plan to sit with supportive people over chai lattes or pancake breakfasts. Choose these people wisely - not everyone will understand, for example, that your response to a great trip will be endless tears.



3. Journal. I never leave on a trip (not even a short business trip) without at least one journal (and sometimes both a writing journal and an art journal) tucked into my luggage. You never know when you might need to process things on the pages of your journal, especially on the trip home. It's not only a great place to record the things that happened to you, it's a great place to wrestle with the way those things changed you.

4. Write thank you notes. I once knew a Deputy Minister in the federal government who spent every flight home (and he made a lot of trips, given his high-profile career) hand-writing thank you notes to every person who had helped him or positively impacted him on the trip. I was the recipient of more than one of those notes and I can tell you how meaningful they were to receive. I know that they were also meaningful for him to write and a great way to process the gratitude that a trip had left him with.

5. Clear your agenda. Do whatever you can to keep your agenda clear the week after a significant journey. That can be really hard to do, especially since the time away has meant that our responsibilities have been put on hold, but do what you can to provide space for self-care. As a mom, one of the reasons I tend to add an extra night to a trip before I come home, or take slow transportation when I can, is the fact that my children expect a lot of attention when I get home.

6. Pack things that bring you comfort. I almost always pack a candle and a favourite shawl when I travel. After a big transformative day, I curl up in my shawl, light a candle, and sit in contemplative silence for awhile.

7. Be kind to yourself on re-entry. The words of my mentor, Christina Baldwin, have stayed with me ever since that hug in the airport. It's important to extend kindness to yourself. Forgive yourself for the tears that seem out



of place. Let yourself wander aimlessly around your living room. Don't beat yourself up for your lack of focus and your need to curl up under the covers at random times.

8. Be mindful. Spend time in meditation, contemplation, or simply staring into space. Let your mind wander, let your body wander, stare at flowers - take a lesson from the Zen master I mentioned at the beginning of this piece, and simply sit down to wait for all of you to arrive.

Slowing down your transitions and giving your body and soul the time it needs will be worth much more than all of the tasks you can complete if you rush the process.

Change takes time - don't rush it.



Interview with Alessandra Cave

Alessandra Cave is a photographer and film producer with a 'gypsy' heart. She loves color, sunshine, afternoon naps, redwoods, small villages, long walks, and she never (ever!) says “no” to dark chocolate or an invitation to travel. She blogs about her gypsy lifestyle at [Gypsy Girls Guide](#) and she shares her adventures in Photography at [AlessandraCave.com](#).



* * * *

1. You host a site called Gypsy Girls Guide for people with wanderlust. Tell us a little about the site.

I created Gypsy Girls Guide to connect and inspire like-minded women that wish to explore the world and life with curiosity and a sense of possibility.

2. What is it about wandering that makes your heart sing?

Wandering is like a meditation for me, as it allows me to slow down and take in the world around me. That is also my favorite time to take photographs, because I can really be present to notice my surroundings and all the special details that I would normally have missed while rushing in my day to day.



3. Tell us about how storytelling (like what you and others do at Gypsy Girls Guide) is an important part of embracing our inner gypsies.

When we tell our stories, we begin to understand what matters the most to us. By sharing those special moments and experiences that changed and inspired us, we can all feel more connected in our sadness and in our happiness, not just as wanderers, but also as human beings. Stories can also be a great source of inspiration and support, as we prepare to go after new dreams and adventures.

4. Any advice for wanderers (a.k.a. gypsies)?

Always follow your heart! I guarantee that it will always take you exactly where you need to go.

Journal Prompts #5

The journey that had the biggest impact on me was...



When I rush the transition after a significant journey, I feel...

The next time I return from a journey I will...

When I travel, I will invest in self-care by...



Lesson #6

Curiosity DIDN'T Kill the Cat - Life as a Learning Journey



Curiosity.

As I write this, I'm in Columbus, OHIO for ALIA Summer Institute. [ALIA](#) (Authentic Leadership in Action) is like a conference, retreat, workshop, and summer camp combined into one delicious package. It is full of edge-walkers, change-makers, leaders, innovative thinkers, and all kinds of my favourite people.

There are few places in the world I feel more surrounded by my own tribe. These people get me. It's the kind of place where you can sit down with a stranger and within minutes dive deeply into a conversation, simply because we have come to this place holding our favourite questions in our hearts and open to the wisdom that shows up in all of us.

We need places like this - places where we truly feel at home, not because of the location, but because we are understood.

This is my second year at ALIA, and it already feels like a form of pilgrimage to come here. While it is both a vacation and a break from my ordinary routine, it is so much more than that. It is filling my soul with goodness, filling my heart with love, and filling my mind with ideas and fuel for my passion. It is my biggest learning journey of the year.



This trip feels like yet another wander on my path of self-discovery. It's a deeply spiritual experience, a challenging thought journey, and a chance to explore another part of the world and experience people who view the world through different lenses. People from all over the globe come to this gathering, and the conversations that emerge here are life-altering and paradigm-shifting.

Journeys stretch us, if we let them.


They are so much more than just mindless diversions from our usual work. They show us where our passions lie and help us follow the thread that leads us to our life's work. Those of us who are wanderers and edge-walkers know that our journeys are integral to our growth.

For a number of years, I had the distinct pleasure of being the primary story gatherer for a international development organization, which meant that I got to travel to interesting places like Africa and South-east Asia. Although the organization I worked for was a service organization, and many people thought that I was traveling out of a sense of altruism, the fact of the matter is that part of my motivation for taking the job was deeply self-centred. Even the most altruist among us will admit that journeys of that kind, even to the poorest parts of the world, are more about how they impact us than about how we might be of service to people while we're there.

There is nothing wrong with that. If you feel called to international development work, and feel a little guilty because you know that your primary reason for going is your deep curiosity about the world, it's not something to apologize for.

Curiosity is the best way to live in the world and the best way to begin to change the world.

Curiosity is not about being selfish. It's about learning what we can to be more fully ourselves and therefore more fully serve the world from a position of strength.



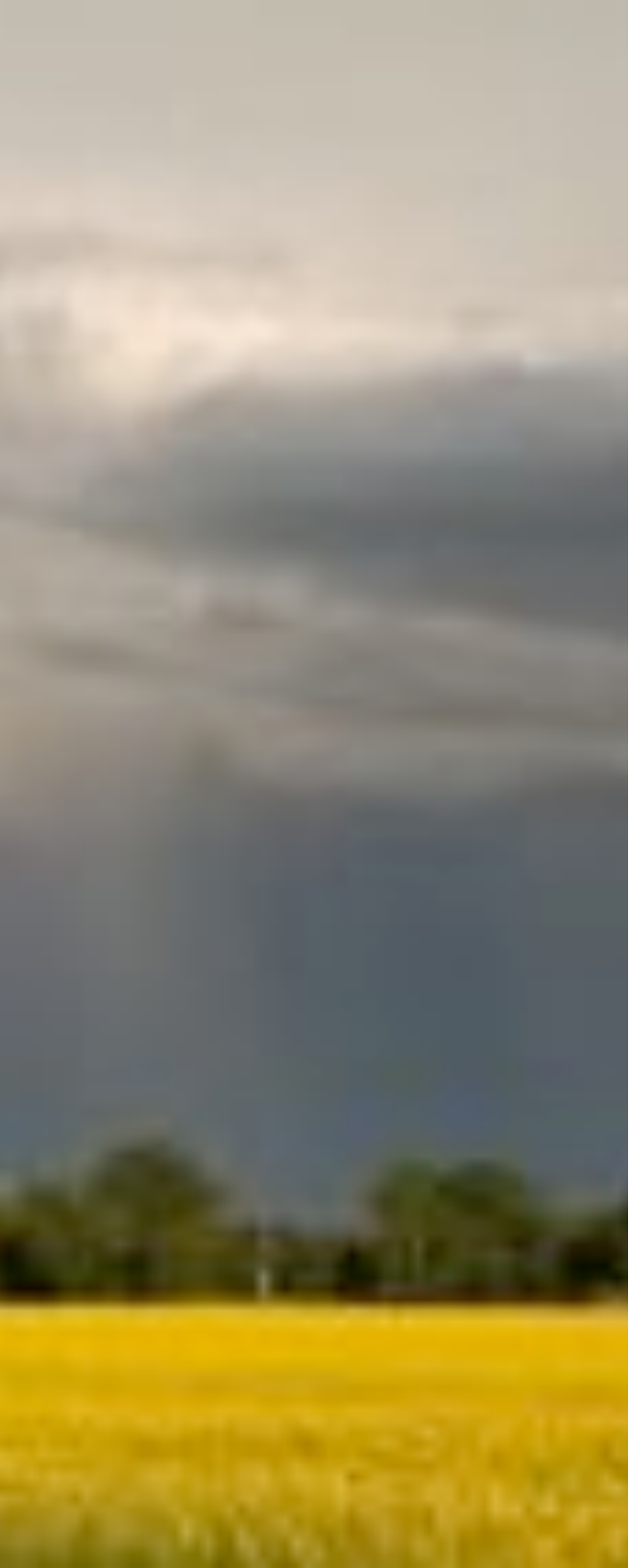
In the organization I worked for, we hosted learning journeys for people who wanted to learn about hunger issues overseas and witness the programming that their funds were helping to support. Some people signed up for the trips with the altruistic view that they wanted to go to poor parts of the world in order to help people there. Through gentle education, we assured them that the trips were about their own education and not about them saving people from poverty. And then we encouraged them to be open to whatever learning they would find on the journey, suspending their judgement and trying to step outside the bonds of their North American privilege. If you've traveled to poorer parts of the world, you know that we in our comfort and privilege and self-centeredness have much to learn from others about community, compassion, and love.

Whatever journey you make, whether it is to another city in North America to attend a retreat or teaching/learning opportunity, or to a remote village in Ethiopia, trust that journey you alone will be the most impacted by the trip. Yes, you may help build someone a house for an organization such as Habitat for Humanity, and the family will be grateful, but you will be cheating yourself if you think the only value of the trip will be to the new home-owners.

Life is a learning journey. Take each step believing that it will help you understand yourself better.

Just yesterday, at ALIA, I heard Peter Block say these words, “Stop being helpful to other people. The idea that I know what’s best for you is a colonial idea. Replace your helpfulness with curiosity. My transformational mission is to find out who you are.”

Many of us (especially those of us who have worked in international development) believe that we are here to help people. As Peter Block says, though, that’s only serving to perpetuate colonialism. It’s not that we shouldn’t serve each other with love and compassion, but if our approach is one of curiosity, ie. asking “What are your passions? What can I learn from you? How would you like me to serve you and how can you serve me?”, then we begin to step into relationships with reciprocity and love instead of judgement and patriarchy.



That doesn't mean that you shouldn't accept an opportunity to build a home for someone in Haiti - you should. These programs are important in building global communities and reminding us that we are dependent on each other. They are also important to the people who will now have shelter after sleeping under a tarp. But when you go, remember that you are there to receive as much as to give, and be open to the learning and gifts that are offered to you.

One of the greatest lessons I learned about hospitality, for example, was from a woman in a tiny mud hut in a remote village in Kenya. We didn't share a language, but she warmly waved me into her hut and proudly demonstrated how she had built the hut with her own hands out of the mud and dung she'd found on the land where she lived. She urged me to sit down on the rough wooden bed with its tattered blanket. She had only pride in her meagre belongings and never once flinched when I looked around the room.

In my North American comfort, I often neglect to invite people into my home because it's too messy or I don't have enough food to serve them. I miss opportunities for community over foolish shame and insecurity.

Here are some tips for you as you wander along the learning journey of life:

- 1. Always be curious.** Let the questions on your heart pull you along to your next trip, your next adventure. Let your curiosity be your guide to your passion and the unique power you hold in your giftedness. Don't believe that curiosity killed the cat, because it didn't.
- 2. Talk to people.** Ask the cab driver what country he comes from, and then let him tell you what he misses about his country. Give people space for their stories by asking them heart-opening questions. Turn strangers into friends.



3. **Set your intentions to be a life-long learner.** Let yourself wonder “what can I learn from this journey? Who will be my teachers along the way?”
4. **Hold your perceptions of the world lightly.** Be willing to change your mind. Go to a country that you’re afraid of and find people there who help you change your mind about the place. Talk to people who have different spiritual views than you. Let their wisdom stretch you.
5. **Gather stories everywhere you go.** Keep a journal while you travel and write down whatever intrigues you. Be a deep listener. Sit down with someone on a bus and ask them to tell you about their family or the beauty of the place they call home. Remember the stories that you hear and collect them like treasures. They are your best souvenirs on any journey, as they will grow and change and transform you in the process.



Interview with Desiree Adaway


Just as I was about to leave my job in the non-profit world to launch my own business, I met someone else who was doing the same and we quickly became fast friends. [Desiree Adaway](#) served in senior-level roles in the nonprofit and grant management sectors for such renowned organizations as Habitat for Humanity International and Rotary International. She is now a coach, consultant, speaker, organization builder & storyteller who helps people & organizations move from inspiration to ideas, from stories to strategy.



* * * *

1. You have traveled all over the world in your work in non-profit. Tell us how wandering to other parts of the world has filled your soul.

I have been an adventurer, journeyman, explorer since I was a very tiny girl. My first adventures were via the pages of the books that I devoured sitting on my bed in Chicago. My parents purchased a set of encyclopedias when I was in 2nd or 3rd grade. They changed my life. I would read about far away countries and cultures—look at pictures of people and places....dig deep into new languages I found my passion. I traveled abroad for the first time at 16 --- mind you no one in my family had ever owned a passport. **Other than my children, my first passport is probably my most valued possession.** It represents freedom and my ability to explore limits.



As an adult I have traveled, lived and worked in many countries—everywhere from India to Cambodia.....from Bali to Mozambique. Every trip taps into my belief that WE ARE ONE. My connection is real and deep and transformative. When people whom you have never met, open their community—break bread with you---share a drink and laugh even beyond the barriers of language and culture then you know that WE ARE ONE. You cannot help but be changed

2. What recommendations would you have for people who want to incorporate volunteer or non-profit work into their wanderings?

Do it.

One of my favorite quotes is from Pema Chodron - We work on ourselves in order to help others, but also we help others in order to work on ourselves. The transformation and blessings of being of service and working “with” others is transformative. Seek out the chance as you travel...connect with communities in a meaningful way. I have had people ask me how can I handle all the devastation that I see globally. I can and I do because I know one thing to be TRUE...Service is transformational.

It is easier to do “for” someone and much harder to do “with”---partnership is the key to any successful volunteer experience. Enter the community with humility and an open heart—leave the guilt, shame and fear behind. In successful projects the recipient and the donor are partners. Equal partners - helping, learning, working and laughing together in the most perfect of worlds. Partnerships are built through conversation, connection and collaboration. They take time You have to KNOW people, their lives and stories BEFORE you can offer help. So do your homework... understand the community & their challenges, but also understand their assets because every community has them.

Personal transformation is the secret and you will show your faith, your beliefs and what you love by what you do - we become by doing.



3. What recommendations would you have for wanderers who want to travel to developing countries for the first time?

I am a pretty spiritual person. Even though I am not a Christian, every time I enter a community I think of Micah 6:8- what is required of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? I meditate and pray on the words “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly”. Enter these travels with love in your heart, with a humble spirit dedicated to learning and with a sense of adventure and mutual respect.

I am the student when I travel...open wide to the adventures of the day. It may be the first time in your life that you are the “other”. I think that is a good thing It may bring up all kinds of feelings of shame and guilt and fear. Things will not go as planned, there will be chaos. There is beauty and richness in the chaos. Embrace it and let it embrace you.

4. Any other advice for other wanderers?

I am a firm believer that transformation comes from both education and action. Corporations are changed when their leadership and employees work side by side with local residents. Families are transformed when parents and grandparents garden, paint or cook with children. Communities are transformed when money is raised for band uniforms, or community watch groups are created. A new vision for one’s life can be created through action, through sweat, through connection and through sharing of gifts. It is a blessing and a privilege to travel, meet and connect with others as you travel.

The more we say NO to injustice than the more we say YES to love.

I think this cool guy in this funky group once said Love is all you need. And he was so right. We say YES once we know people. Once we connect with the humanity in all of us the easier it is to love - Once we look in their eyes and see ourselves. We have to SEE to love.

Journal Prompts #6

I am curious about...

My most transformative learning journey was...

I was surprised to learn from (what person?)...

My intentions for my next journey





Lesson #7

At the Halfway Point - Self-care for Wanderers & Wandering as Self-care



Self-care.

I can tell you exactly when the dip came. It was lunch time, and we had just heard Yolanda... speak about the two years she'd spent in a place of darkness (a story she shares more about in her memoir "Treasures in Darkness") and the lessons she'd learned in that dark place.

She could have been telling my story. These past two years have been a time of so much transition and pain and restlessness that I too feel like I've been wandering in a place of darkness.

That afternoon, my emotions took a dive. I was in the middle of a leadership intensive workshop at the ALIA Summer Institute, and we were talking about how transformative play can be. But... I didn't want to play. I wanted to cry. I found myself wishing I'd signed up for one of the other workshops, where depth and tears were on the agenda and I wouldn't need to stifle what was going on for me at that moment.

The truth is, though, I'd signed up for the workshop I was in because I WANTED to immerse myself in play. I was tired of the tears. I wanted to move on. And yet Yolanda's talk had shown me that I wasn't completely ready for the "moving on" part. I still needed to cry out some of the hurt, share some of the stories, and feel the pain of the life-stretch I was going through.

I should have known that the dip was coming. I've done this often enough, traveled to enough places, been on enough personal journeys and wanderings, and attended enough learning events that I know what to expect.



At the halfway point of any journey, a dip comes.


It always does, in one form or another. It doesn't matter if your journey is a week long or a year. Approximately halfway through, you can expect a dip to show up.

What does the dip look like? It's different for every person and every journey. It might simply be a drop in energy. A tiredness that sinks into your bones. A feeling of let down after the initial excitement of the departure, arrival & discovery. Or it might be an emotional low point, when you find yourself crying for no particular reason - or for a tiny reason, like the fact that the water coming out of the tap is rusty. It might be the realization that you no longer like any of your travel companions and you're sure their idiosyncrasies will drive you crazy before the end of the journey. Or it might be the moment when you're sure you've chosen the wrong destination and should have gone on another journey instead. For a longer journey, it might be the depth of homesickness, when you realize you still have a long, long time to wait before you'll be with your loved ones again.

I first learned about the dip several years ago before my first trip to Africa. During a two day intercultural workshop, the facilitator (whose name I have unfortunately forgotten) mentioned the dip. "I've seen it happen in 2 year journeys and in 2 week journeys. **Even if the journey is something you've been dreaming of for many years, the dip will most certainly come.**"

Sure enough, during that first trip to Africa, I experienced the dip in a big way. It was the middle of the night, I was hunched over the toilet with my bowels turning inside out, and I'd just spotted a gecko on the wall eating a cockroach. Not only was I sick and worried that I would pass out, I was discouraged and emotional and the knowledge that there were cockroaches in my room made it that much worse.

What did I do to get through the dip? I knocked on a friend's door (though it was the middle of the night), told her I was afraid of passing out alone in a cold bathroom with a concrete floor, curled up in the extra bed in her room, and finally drifted off to sleep.

Three flagpoles are visible against a light, overcast sky. The leftmost pole has a red flag. The middle pole has a green flag with a white emblem. The rightmost pole has a dark green flag. The flags are slightly blurred, suggesting a shallow depth of field.

Just as it had on every other trip, the dip passed, and by the next afternoon I was completely in love with my African experience again.

The same thing happened last week. When the dip happened, I knew enough to be gentle with myself. I went outside and sat under a giant sycamore tree (that I fondly dubbed Grandmother Tree during the week there). I cried, I journaled, I talked to friends, and then I wandered all over the campus at dusk with my camera, capturing the beauty of the changing light.

What I did not do was change my path. Though I knew I had the option of switching workshops, I chose not to, knowing I was there for a reason, and that even this dip was part of my learning.

Back in the dorm that night, a spontaneous jam session (with a guitar, violin, and banjo) started in our room, and the dip passed, just like I knew it would. After the dip passed, I dove back into my intensive workshop, embraced the new relationships that were emerging, and celebrated my incredible journey.

It could be my new motto: **Dips happen.**

Here are some tips to carry with you the next time you go on a journey of any kind:

1. **Expect the dip.** It's easier to get through something when you know it's coming. You'll still have to live through it, and the tears will most likely flow nonetheless, but at least you'll know that it's normal and you're not the first one to experience it.
2. **Let the tears flow.** Experience the depth of the feelings and don't judge yourself for them. Lean on a tree (or a friend) and cry as much as you need to cry. Remember that tears are healing.



3. **Be gentle with yourself.** Sleep a little longer, get a massage, have a hot bath, talk to a friend, eat a luscious meal... do something special for yourself. You don't have to "power through". You just have to rest for awhile and be as kind to yourself as you would be to a loved one going through similar emotions.
4. **Grab your camera or your art supplies.** Wander the neighbourhood you're in, looking for beauty. Get lost in the moment. Let yourself be captivated by the light reflected off the water.
5. **Turn to a friend who won't judge you.** Find someone who will hug you and support you, but won't leave you feeling foolish for experiencing your emotions so deeply. Don't ask for advice - just ask for a listening ear. If the friend wants to offer advice, simply say "Please listen, and tomorrow if I still need your advice, I'll let you know."
6. **Don't change your path right away.** The worst time to change your path (give up on a journey, move to another destination, ditch your traveling companions, etc.) is in the middle of a dip. Wait for the depth of the emotion to pass before you make any drastic decisions. If, a few days later, you still feel you need to make a change, then re-evaluate.
7. **Let the dip teach you.** After the dip passes, curl up with your journal and ask yourself "what did the dip teach me about myself?" Be witness to the way it stretched you. Take your learnings with you on the next journey.



Interview with Jen Louden

Jen Louden is one of those people who exudes love, light, and joy, even if all you ever get to see of her are 140 character tweets. In the past, she was known as the Comfort Queen having written several books about self-care for women. These days, she's on a new mission to Savor & Serve, and to inspire other people to do the same. I have learned a lot from Jen in the past couple of years, and I am delighted to now call her friend.



* * * *

1. You have taught people a lot about self-care over the years. How do you think wandering can be part of a person's self-care routine?

It's so great you ask because my secret self-care love - secret in that I've never written about it before - is to wander by myself. It's almost always as part of a work trip - a few extra hours or a day for a hike or a museum trip or some small adventure. I love being alone in a strange place, open to adventure, responsible only for myself. When I was 27 and on my first self-created 7260 mile book tour, I had so many wandering moments - like hiking a trail in Santa Fe along a wall of blooming lilacs or driving back roads while singing along to Van Morrison. Heaven!

Now this is not something I get to do very often - although I would love to do it more! - **so "home wandering" is also vital for my mental health.** For me, that might look like going on a hike on the Olympic Peninsula I've never been before, poking around a nook of Seattle that's new to me, or driving to a part of my island I don't visit, parking the car, and going for a walk. The essence



is being alone and doing something new - out of the ordinary. This is especially important for me because I love adventure yet I work at home and live on an island. Julie Cameron codified this in her artist date concept but I always found that idea wonderful but too much pressure - refuel creativity now! I prefer wandering as it has no agenda, and whatever happens is good enough.

2. Your mission is to help people "Savor and Serve". How can wandering be part of savoring our lives?

When you wander, you are following your instincts. You are without an agenda - nothing to accomplish. This is the direct portal to savoring your life. What gets in the way of savoring, which I think of a combo of being present and being grateful? Your to-do list, living in the future projections, your plans. Wandering is a playful way to leave that all behind, and plunge into the mystery of your senses, your desires, to flirt with what beckons and let that be enough.

3. Is there a way to incorporate wandering into the "Serve" part of your mission?'

What if we wandered in places and with people we want to serve?

What if, for all of us who so very much want to do something to help others, we spent time listening to their stories, dropping our agendas and plans, and learning from them what might help? If you want to serve the homeless, why not wander (where and when it's safe) around and talk to them? Or visit a shelter and listen? Wonder as well as wander. Or teenage at-risk girls - what would it be like to wander where they hang out? If you can't do it physically, can you do in art or photographs and stories about them?

I'm planning a service trip with my daughter this summer. Tori Hogan, who created the documentary series www.beyondgoodintentions.com, has proposed we might wander to serve - show up and listen and then tell their stories on my blog. Tori says, "Don't fret too much about the planning-- for most of my travels all I have is a plane ticket, a contact person, and a place to stay the first night or two and the rest just



works itself out on the ground!" The idea is that instead of parachuting in to "save the world" on a volunteer trip with a particular agenda, we might wander and learn about a country and the people, and report what we learn. I want to do this and I am afraid - but I also know that curiosity and being with "the other" is a huge part of serving.

4. Any other advice for other wanderers?

Don't let comfort keep you from wandering!

Comfort that keeps you in your routines makes you dumb and old before your time. Take the risk to wander. Start small if you are afraid and know that many people are - life is anxiety-causing and exhausting, and routine helps us cope with it all. I meet women all the time at my retreats who have never traveled alone before - it's a big deal!

And so worth it. Wander for renewal, wander to savor, wander to serve, and let wonder be your muse.



Journal Prompts #7

The last time I experienced the dip on a journey was...

I got through the dip by...

After the dip I realized...

The next time I go on a journey I will...

I will help myself get through future dips by...





Lesson #8

Following the Thread - A Wanderer's Journey



The thread.

Lately I have found myself in conversation with several young people who are launching into the career stages of their lives. Some have completed university and others are contemplating what course of study they should take. All are wondering “what should I do with my life now?”

These are big, heavy questions, and I have seen the weight of them on more than one face. The people I have spoken with are bright, passionate people who are committed to serving the world with their gifts. They take these decisions very seriously because they want to be true to themselves, true to the Source of their gifts and passions, and true to their communities and the world in which they live. They feel the weight of responsibility, growing up in a world in which poor choices, over-consumption, climate change, conflict, poverty, and so many other challenges are running rampant and threatening to destroy the world we know.

In two recent conversations, with two young women in their early twenties, I have said the same thing when asked for advice. “Hold it all lightly,” I’ve said, when I’ve seen the weight of worry on their faces. “Don’t take tomorrow’s decision as the be-all and end-all of your life. Yes, each decision will help shape your life, and they are important, but each decision does not CONTAIN your life or restrict it in any way.”

“Just follow the thread,” I continue. “Your passions are part of you for a reason, so follow them. If you love spending time in the woods, then spend time in the woods and see where the trees have to teach you. If you love being with children, then be with children and see what you



can learn from them. If you love to write, then don't ever stop writing. Don't take it too seriously and don't put too much pressure on yourself to know your path already. Your path will be made clear as you follow it."

It really is okay to adopt a wanderer's posture as you make your way through life.

You don't have to have a clear vision of where you will be next year, or the year after that, or ten years into the future.

Your guidance counselor in high school might have told you that you needed to form a goal and pursue it, and your parents might have reinforced that idea, but, though they had your best interests at heart, their advice might not have been the best thing for you to follow. Certainly, there are those people who do well with a single clearly lit path, and I am grateful for those people, for example, who decided early on to become the best doctor or kindergarten teacher or scientist they could be, but you are a wanderer, and wanderers do not do well with clear, straight paths.

Recently I came across some interesting research that suggests that asking questions about your future is of more value than setting goals. Participants in the study were asked to write some version of either "I will complete this task" or "Will I complete this task?" before they were given a series of puzzles to solve. The people who asked a question first instead of setting a goal were consistently more successful in completing the task.

That research was a revelation to me. "You mean it's OKAY to walk through life asking lots of questions and following dimly lit paths instead of having a clear direction of where I should be going? You mean this can help me SUCCEED?"

Yes, it's okay, and for wanderers like you and I, it may very well be the ONLY way to live. We are easily distracted by sparkly things. We take the road less traveled. We often find ourselves off the beaten trail. We like to circle the edge and explore the shadowy crevices in the rocks.



The beauty of this life is that we discover things that those on the well-traveled trail never get to experience.

You don't have to know the future, you just have to follow the thread.

In the myth of Ariadne, Theseus arrives at the palace to fight the mighty Minotaur. It's the hero's journey - to pass through the dark and meandering labyrinth to get to the centre where one must battle one's inner demons in order to emerge successfully into the life one is meant to follow.

To help him reach the centre and emerge successfully, princess Ariadne gives Theseus a ball of thread and tells him to unwind it as he enters the labyrinth and then to follow it back out. He follows her instructions and emerges successfully.

Like Theseus, there will be many times in your life when you will feel like you are lost in a dark and puzzling labyrinth, about to fight demons you can't even see. At those times, it will be especially important to hang onto the thread of who you are, what you are passionate about, what brings you joy, what you value, where you find love, and what you have to offer the world. That thread will help you reach the centre, will give you security as you fight the Minotaur, and then will help guide you out again to a place where the light will appear once again.

Remember this - it's just a thread. It can easily be broken if you hold on too tightly or tug it too hard. When, like the young women I spoke with, we take ourselves and our decisions too seriously, it's like tugging on that thread and expecting too much from it. It's not a lifeline that will pull you to safety - it's a thread that you have to hold lightly in your hand as you make your way through life. Sometimes it will feel like it has disappeared, and other times it will feel like it's slicing its way into your hand when you're running too fast.

You don't have to see your way clear to the end of the labyrinth - you just have to follow the thread.



*(Note: For an interesting exploration about how the myth of Ariadne represents a woman's journey into the divine womb, and how the destruction of the Minotaur represents the destruction of patriarchy, read *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* by Sue Monk Kidd.)*

Tips on following the thread:

- 1. Keep a question journal.** For this tip, I have to credit my 9 year old daughter Maddy, who recently named her journal "A lifetime of questions". "I'm going to write all the questions that pop into my head," she said, "and leave a blank in case I find the answer." I think it's a brilliant idea.
- 2. Hold decisions lightly.** Each time you start a new job or go on a journey, tell yourself "this is just one step in my journey through the labyrinth. It's not the WHOLE journey."
- 3. Explore your passions.** If you've always been fascinated by art, it may be time to sign up for a class. If you love the water, perhaps it's time to rent a kayak. If you're curious about architecture, check with your local university to see if you can audit a class to explore your interest.
- 4. Rely on other people.** Like Theseus, making his way through the labyrinth, you need other people who will offer you a ball of thread and will hold the other end of it for you. Don't go into the dark alone. Find support.
- 5. Change your mind.** Sometimes you realize, after you've started a new job or new course of study, that it is actually taking you further away from your thread. It's okay to change your mind and return to the source. It's okay to be wrong sometimes. There is something to be learned from each decision you make, even the bad ones, so don't carry regrets with you into the next place you go. Just carry on and get back to that thread.

Interview with Barbara Winter:

Last year, when I quit my job to begin my self-employment journey, [Barbara Winter](#) was one of the first people who said "Good for you! You'll do great!" Since then, she has consistently been one of my favourite cheerleaders, encouraging me along this path. Barbara is the author of [Making a Living without a Job](#), an essential tool for anyone considering entrepreneurship as a way of living. She blogs at [Buon Viaggio](#).



* * * *

1. I know that you are a lifelong wanderer. Tell us how wandering makes your heart sing.

I'm pretty sure I was born with wanderlust. My father had a chronic case of it and several of his sisters were wanderers—and role models for me. Ironically, I grew up in a town where wandering was considered to be a suspicious activity engaged in by those who were malcontent.

Fortunately, I paid no attention and have always made room in my life for wandering in both large and small ways. As I learned more about the creative process, I also became convinced that a regular change of scenery was favored by the Muse.

As travel writer Bill Bryson says, **“Is there anything more wonderful (other than a chocolate cream pie) than waking up in a new place that you’ve always wanted to visit?”**



2. What are some of the ways that wandering has been incorporated into your lifestyle?

My longing to wander went unfulfilled for several years of my life. It wasn't until I realized that I could create a business that paid me to travel that I really began to get the hang of it.

I don't think wandering should be limited, however, to long explorations. Every so often, I get in my car and practice what I call Getting Lost on Purpose. Sometimes that just means exploring a part of my nearby world that I've never investigated and sometimes I head out of town with no destination in mind and see what catches my fancy.

I also have a strong nesting instinct and after my daughter and I moved to Minneapolis, I wrote in a journal, "We put down roots and sprouted wings." Roots and Wings became a theme for my life—and a chapter in my book [*Making a Living Without a Job*](#).

All four of my siblings share the wanderer gene so we sometimes plan family reunions in exotic or interesting parts of the world. My sister Nancy is an archaeologist who lived in Athens for many years and then in Rome for the past decade. She's been a wonderful addition to our family travels because of her experience—and language skills. Our first trip together was a bit rocky, but having these shared adventures has had a positive impact on our relationships.

One of the highlights of my wandering was the sabbatical I took several years ago. I spent about three months of that time traveling alone in Europe with absolutely no itinerary. I would literally get up in the morning and ask myself, "Where do you want to go today?" and then go there. Since most of my previous wanderings were more scheduled, this was heady stuff.



3. What tips would you have for people who want to use the strengths of their wandering hearts as part of their businesses or vocation?

The options for incorporating wandering into a business grow all the time. Not that long ago, people who had the urge to travel usually ended up in travel related businesses, but today our enterprises can be just about anything with a travel component added on.

It's never been easier to create a portable business. Technology makes it possible to do so many things without being in a fixed location. I wrote an essay about that a few years ago and said we're the first people in the history of the world for whom geography is not an obstacle in creating a business. I said business in the future is going to look very different. Our customers and clients will be people who share our consciousness, not our postal code.

Another bonus is that an entrepreneur can control the amount of traveling and the places traveled to. I often encounter road weary corporate folks who are being sent hither and yon and not having much fun doing so since their itinerary seems limited to Airport to Hotel to Meeting to Airport. Smart entrepreneurs neither overbook nor underbook themselves which strikes me as a much healthier way to go.

Then there's this delightful extra: as an entrepreneur, I get a special thrill from creating trips that incorporate business and therefore are tax deductible.

4. Any other advice for wanderers?

Get creative about making it happen. So many people still think they have to scrimp and save for years in order to have One Trip of a Lifetime. Years ago, when I still hadn't figured it out, I read a line in a book that I memorized and adopted as my



potential epitaph: "For her, crossing the ocean was like crossing the street." That's how I wanted my life to look.

Another thing that has really enriched my wandering is to create themes. So, for instance, one year my project was to see all the Monet paintings I could see with my own two eyes. Another year I explored gardens; then my theme was London bookshops. I also made a project out of sampling and rating creme brulee wherever I went (as a public service).

Weaving personal passions into our wandering, seeking out things that we personally love enriches our lives enormously.

As St. Augustine said all those years ago, "The world is like a book and he who stays home reads only one page."



Journal Prompts #8

The question about my life that I ask most often is...



Some of the things that feel like "threads" (passions, values, etc.) in my life are...

I worry most about decisions when...

The new mantra I want to carry when I make decisions is...



Lesson #9

Like the Wild Prairies, Remember your Nature



Your nature.

It's Saturday afternoon. There is laundry to do, groceries to be bought, and a house that needs to be cleaned before tomorrow's visitors arrive. But instead of doing any of that, I'm sitting on a shaded park bench after a long and lovely wander through my favourite park.

In the last hour and a half, I have photographed a dozen wild flowers, followed a deer through the woods, stared at the clouds (long enough to watch one vanish before my eyes), and chased a butterfly through the meadow.

This is no ordinary city park. There are no impeccably groomed walkways, no play structure, no picnic tables, no tennis courts, and no bandstand or gazebo. There's not even a manicured flower bed in sight. The only flowers here are the wild ones that grow uninhibited, surrounded by untrimmed prairie grass that grows as tall as my head.

That's why it's my favourite. It's the "park less traveled".

This park is rugged. So rugged, in fact, that very little of the grass is mowed, and when I followed the deer through the woods, I did it at the risk of getting poison ivy. Instead of mowing the grass and weeding the flower beds, caretakers of this park have lovingly worked to restore this small strip of land along the river to its natural (ie. wild) habitat.

Before the city encroached on this property, it was farmland. Everything that was once wild had been tamed out of it. Everything that was natural was stripped away



and tilled into the ground for the purpose of growing food for the people who domesticated the land.

Thankfully, though there are housing developments springing up all around it, someone had the vision to preserve this piece of land. Prairie grasses have been replanted, naturally growing trees are encouraged to grow once again, and the creek is being restored to its pre-development state, so that fish can swim in its waters once again.

It's ironic, isn't it? That humans - the very beings who destroyed so much of the natural habitat - are now responsible for re-introducing it. It's like the prairies have to be re-trained how to be their natural wild selves. At least in this small contained space. (Not far away are rows of perfectly manicured homes. Many of the homeowners probably don't appreciate the seeds that blow across their fences from these wild grasses.)

When I'm in this park, I am reminded of my own natural, wild self.

Just like the prairies, there are things that are natural to me that have been stripped from my life. There are tendencies and passions that have been tamed out of me because they just aren't fitting for a respectable woman in a civilized society.

It's the same for all of us. We are born with an inherent wildness that years in the education system, the workforce, our marriages, and our roles as responsible adults have managed to squelch.

Unfortunately, when you tame the wildness out of a person, you take away much of what makes one beautiful. Just like these prairies, which have lost much of the diversity of plant and animal life that once made them beautiful, we become homogenous and less adaptable to the seasons that blow through our lives.

My dad, a farmer who loved the land but was never the kind of business man that could make modern day farming a success, taught me this: diversity is important.



When farmers get too far away from nature's way, give up diversity and plant only one kind of crop on their expansive land, they leave themselves much more vulnerable to the elements. Drought, flood, pests, or disease can wipe out an entire crop with one fell swoop. This doesn't happen, though, if you plant diverse crops that have varying degrees of resistance to different weather, disease, and pests.

The prairies know this, and so in their most natural state, they are diverse, wild, and beautiful. They are dotted with colour, bees and butterflies pollinate their flowers, deer and other animals spread their seeds, and the cycle of life continues.

And so it is with each of us. We need diversity and we need our natural, wild beauty. Those of us who are naturally drawn to wandering and walking the edge need to do just that. Those of us whose bodies want to move in wild dances on the dance floor need to release that wildness. Those of us who can barely contain our bold brush strokes (or better yet - love to finger paint) need to do so.

Dancers need to dance and painters need to paint, just like wild flowers need to grow in untamed, chaotic ways that help them attract butterflies and bees and release their seeds to the wind. We need to follow our passions, even if they seem a little crazy.

Each of us needs to unleash the wild child we managed to squelch so many years ago.

My wild child used to wander through the woods by my home, building teepees out of dead logs and twigs, finding hideaways deep inside bramble bushes, and riding my horse like the wind down country roads. I imagined I was Pocahontas, strong, wild and free. I didn't even use a saddle on that horse - I learned to hang on with the strength of my legs.

In this park where I wander, I can be Pocahontas again. I am almost always alone here, like I was in the woods on our farm. Most people are either doing civilized Saturday afternoon things, or they're in the well-manicured parks down the street. I like it this way. I like to get lost in the smells and sounds and sights of a park that feels like it's mine alone. I like the fact that I often come across deer in this park and that they haven't been scared away by too much human presence.



I especially like the fact that I encounter my wild self here. I don't have to fit any models, live up to any expectations, or pretend to be something I'm not.

What about you? What is the wildness in you that has been tamed out? How can you re-introduce it, like the people who have lovingly planted wild flowers back into this habitat? Is there a place - a park, a dance studio, or art class - where you can release that wildness once again?

Here are some tips for re-planting the wildness in your heart.

- 1. Explore the things that brought you joy as a child.** Did you have a favourite hideaway in the woods? Did you love to make things out of clay? Find a way to rekindle those things.
- 2. Find a place that makes you feel wild again.** If you don't know of such a place, explore Google maps for the green spaces in your city (that's how I found my wild park). Make a point of exploring each one until you find a special place that connects you to nature in a fresh way.
- 3. Go camping.** Go on a nature hike, or a canoe trip. Rent a kayak for a day and paddle down the river.
- 4. Try intuitive art-making.** Grab a big sheet of paper and some paints, and get messy. Do it in your driveway if you need the space. Finger paint. Let your body be part of the process.
- 5. Steal an afternoon.** Cancel a meeting, ignore the laundry, or say no to one of your commitments. Set aside your "responsible adult" hat and put on your "carefree child" hat just for an afternoon. Buy an ice cream cone and wander your neighbourhood. Be wild, just for awhile.

Interview with Nancy Sathre-Vogel

I first encountered [Nancy Sathre-Vogel](#) about a year ago on Twitter. I was so intrigued with the journey she was on with her husband and two young sons that I started following her blog. I'll let her tell you about that journey...



* * * *


1. You have recently completed a three year journey with your husband and two sons. Tell us briefly about that trip.

We left Prudhoe Bay, Alaska – at the northernmost terminus of the road on the shores of the Arctic Ocean – in June 2008. In the next three years we cycled 17,000 miles through 15 countries and ended where the road ends at the southern tip of South America.

2. What is it about wandering that makes your heart sing?

I thrive on the unknown and unexpected. I love cycling along, not knowing what's beyond the next corner. I enjoy being with my family without the distractions of jobs/school demands pulling us in four different directions.

Wandering on my bike allows me to see things I would never discover with any other means of transportation. I get to experience life in tiny villages and get to know people who live far away from towns and cities.



Being on the bike means we are vulnerable to everything – the onslaught of Mother Nature’s fury and the graciousness of total strangers. We’ve been on the receiving end of more kindness than I ever thought possible and have learned that people are mostly wonderful – not like what we see on the nightly news!

3. What advice would you have for people interested in doing longer term wandering as you have done?

Go. Life is too short not to. The world is not a scary place and you have nothing to be afraid of. Do you really want to be old and gray and sitting in your rocker someday thinking, “I wish I woulda?”

4. What advice would you have about wandering with children?

As my son put it: “We don’t need chests of toys and the same bed to sleep in every night. All we need is to be with our parents and feel safe.”

5. Any other advice for wanderers?

Follow your heart! Go where it takes you and don’t fear – live life while you have the chance. Tomorrow may never come.



Journal Prompts #9

When I was a child, I used to love to...



The parts of my wild nature that have been tamed are...

I feel like my wildness has been re-kindled when I am...

When I need to be reminded of my wild nature I go to...



Lesson #10

The Blessing of the Pelicans - Guidance in the Wandering



Blessing.

On an afternoon in the early spring, I was walking home from the grocery store when I had my first sighting. Past my house, toward the river, I spotted them - a flock of ten or so large mythical-looking birds, drifting in large lazy circles high in the sky. I was captivated.

I ran into the house, dropped my groceries and grabbed my camera. I ran down the street, hoping to get a closer look at the mysterious birds, but they had disappeared.

I couldn't explain why, but something felt meaningful about that encounter. I had no idea what kind of birds they were (I knew they weren't geese, ducks, swans, or any other birds common to our area), but I was intrigued and the brief encounter stuck with me.

A week later, driving down the highway a few miles from home, I spotted them again. Approximately the same number of birds, floating in the same lazy circles, looking for all the world like some mysterious message-bearing creatures out of a C.S. Lewis or J.K. Rowling novel.

I worried I might have an accident, staring up at the sky as I drove, but I could barely take my eyes off them.

This time, when I got closer, I recognized them. Pelicans. I'd seen them at the lake where I'd gone to summer camp as a kid, but I hadn't seen them in years and couldn't remember ever seeing them in the city before.



From that day forward, I've had pelican sightings on a regular basis, almost everywhere I go. They show up especially when I'm going for a contemplative wander. Often, they appear just after I think "I wonder if I'll see pelicans today."

I've become a little obsessed with pelicans. When I spot them, I almost always head in their direction, getting as close as I possibly can. A few times this summer I've taken my kids to the beach, and I'm never surprised to find flocks of pelicans waiting for me when we arrive. One time in particular, there was a large flock of them not far off shore at the far end of the beach. When I got close to them, one of them flew directly over my head and released its excrement just feet away from my head.

These sightings feel like a special kind of blessing to me.

When I'm in the middle of a deep and heavy contemplation, full of the many worries that have been my companions in recent months (ie. financial worries, my mom's cancer, relationship issues, etc.), a pelican often makes an appearance. I stare up at its easeful flight, and I am reminded to let go of worries and trust, the way a pelican trusts the wind that carries it.

As animal totems, pelicans are connected to ease and buoyancy. I asked my wise friend Diane Jung to help me understand the meaning of pelicans, and she shared this from a book called "Animal Speaks": "Despite their size, pelicans are very light and buoyant. They can float like a schooner. The brown pelican is often observed flying solo and then suddenly plummeting in the water. Symbolically this hints at being buoyant and to rest on top in spite of the heaviness of life circumstances. The pelican teaches that no matter how difficult life becomes, no matter how much you plunge— you can pop up to the surface."

The book also mentions that, contrary to what many believe, pelicans use their pouches to scoop fish, but do not store them there. Reflecting on this helps us consider whether we are hanging onto things we shouldn't, rather than using only what we need and releasing what is unnecessary.



I can't imagine a better bird to keep me company this summer in my wandering - one that reminds me to float with ease, trust that I will always return to the surface, and not hang onto the things (worries, relationships, etc.) that don't serve me.


Recently, while on vacation at the beach, I went for a long morning walk. Although I'd followed a well-traveled path and then the highway on the way to another beach, on my return I decided to follow the beach back to the cabin we were renting. Following a small footpath away from the highway, I reached the water and began to follow it. Before long, though, I realized my mistake. There was no sandy beach along this stretch - only large boulders against which the waves were crashing, and then heavy brush that was nearly impassable.

It was already past the time when I'd told my family I'd be back at the cabin, so I didn't want to waste time by back-tracking all the way to the trail that would take me back to the highway. Between the bush and the highway was a watery swamp, so I knew I couldn't cut through and get back to the road. Despite the challenge, I decided to charge through the bush in the direction I needed to go.

It was tough going. The undergrowth was thick, and in some places the willow trees were so close together, I had to slip through sideways. More than once it was so difficult, I considered diving into the lake in my clothes and swimming to the sandy beach I knew was up ahead.

Finally, I broke through the brush onto a clear path that would take me to the cabin. I was home-free. And of course, by now you probably know what was there the moment I emerged from the woods.

Above my head floated the biggest, most beautiful pelican I'd ever seen. Once again, a messenger sent to remind me that "All is well. No need to worry. You are safe. Continue with ease."



And then, a few feet further down the path, I spotted an abundance of beautifully ripe, sweet wild raspberries. Like a little bonus gift added to the blessing of the pelican, the raspberries remind me that, though the path may be rough and I may often feel lost, I will be provided for with an abundance beyond what I can ask for.

You can call it what you want - coincidence, synchronicity, Spirit, Divine, animal totems... whatever. I call it God-whispers. And since my favourite name for God is Sophia, I think of it as Sophia blowing kisses in the wind, on the wings of a pelican, or on the branches of a raspberry bush.

What is appearing to you in your wandering these days? Is there an animal or flower that keeps reappearing at significant moments? Have you had little moments that you might consider God-whispers (or whatever definition suits your own beliefs)? In our moments of deepest contemplation, often when we are wandering without a destination, we are most open to the whispering of the Divine.

Pay attention. There is guidance waiting for us when we keep our eyes open. There are reminders that help us let go of unnecessary worries. There is a presence that wants to comfort us when we feel lost.

You are not alone. Right now, your path may feel as difficult as my short trek through the woods (that left my arms and legs a little scratched), but there will be clarity and peace for you again some day (and maybe even wild raspberries), if only you can persevere and trust.

Wander on.



Interview with Cath Duncan:

Cath Duncan and I bonded this past winter when she lost her baby Juggernaut due to complications related to Kidney Disease. Cath writes with depth and wisdom, and I am always moved by the honesty with which she shares her stories. In September, I'll be traveling to Calgary to walk 100 kilometres with Cath in support of the Kidney Foundation.



* * * *

1. You have taken up the challenge of walking 100 km in support of the Kidney Foundation. Tell us a little about why you're doing the walk.

For over 5 months after we lost Juggernaut, I couldn't feel any interest or joy in anything. All the things that used to fascinate me and give me great joy - painting, writing, business planning, coaching, reading... I tried to go back to doing them but I was just going through the motions, trying to fill time really. I remember thinking, "what if I live a really long life? That's a shitload of time I'll have to figure out how to fill. And if I can't feel interest or joy in any of the things I fill my time with, that's going to be the most unbearably long time." I wasn't actively suicidal, but for the first time in my life I felt absolutely no positive anticipation or hope for my future and I sincerely hoped that I would not live a long life.

My inability to feel interest or joy made it incredibly difficult to socialize, almost impossible to do basic household and family maintenance and completely impossible to continue with my business. Some days it was hard to even get out of



bed, because I just couldn't think of a good reason to do so and I knew that as soon as I got out of bed, I'd have an eternity of time to fill and no idea what was worth filling it with.

As a Social Worker who's counseled hundreds of people through major change, loss, trauma and depression, I knew that my lack of interest and joy was normal as an early grief/ trauma response, but 6 months is a fucking long time when you're interested in nothing and just trying to pass time so that you get through another day, and then another, and another.

I knew that I needed to be able to find something interesting again. I'm not talking about passion here - that would have been way too much pressure! I just made the decision one day that I had to search until I found something that interested me - something I felt vaguely connected to when I did it, so that there was a feeling of "I want to do more of that." I intuitively knew that, with that tiny seed of interest and curiosity, I could grow the possibility of feeling joy again.

Weeks went by after that and all this time, I had been walking most days. Walking didn't feel enjoyable at first - it was hard. My feet and legs were swollen and tender from water retention because of my kidney condition. My body was stiff and I was exhausted (it turned out that the medication they had me on caused severe fatigue and overdosed my Potassium levels, which caused the muscle stiffness and cramping). I could only manage a few kilometres at first, but I walked because it was a way to pass the time. I knew I needed to do some form of physical activity if I was to rebuild my health, and walking was the most I could handle. Over the months, my walks lengthened and I felt my body becoming stronger.

Then one day, while I was on Facebook, I noticed that someone posted about something called the Kidney March. Because of my hereditary Kidney Disease, it caught my attention and I clicked on the link and read more. As I read about the 100km walk through the foothills of the Rockies, I felt that old familiar feeling of interest and knew that I had to do it. Even though I was only managing to walk



around 5km at that stage, I signed up immediately, knowing that, if nothing else, this commitment would be my way of honouring that little inner voice that called out, "I want to do this!" After longing to hear that voice for so long, I knew my only option was to listen to it.

Since then I've discovered so many other reasons why I had to sign up to walk in the Kidney March - things I had no idea of when I first made the commitment. It's given me a role - a "job" to go to where I have a great team to work with and a vehicle for making a contribution, and that's started to rebuild a sense of meaning and purpose in my life. Three of my good girlfriends have joined me to walk and that's deepened our friendships immensely. Over 70 people have gathered around to help us put together our Kidney Raffle fundraiser and we've already raised over \$2500 from donations before our Kidney raffle has even launched. Seeing all that support and being in the middle of that flow of extreme generosity and open-hearted contribution, and having a vehicle for making my own contribution, has been incredibly healing for me.

2. Tell us a bit about how wandering has become part of your healing process after the loss of your baby, little Juggernaut.

Well, there's the figurative wandering and the literal wandering. **Literally, wandering has been a big part of my healing.** I no longer had work to get to, or any other commitments other than my doctor's appointments, so I would set out for my walk without a deadline time for finishing my walk. I'm drawn to the water, so I usually walk along the rivers in Calgary. At first I would just zone out and walk like a zombie, completely lost in my grief, but after many walks along the same routes, I started to notice other familiar walkers and I developed little favoured spots I'd stop at along the river. I started to notice the things that changed around me as I walked the same route through Autumn, Winter, and Spring.

Some time near the end of Winter, I started noticing the patterns in the ice along the side of the river and for weeks, I completely lost myself in photographing the ice patterns. It was around that time that I consciously realized that when I walked, I felt



grounded and calm, my busy mind stopped chatting and my perception opened up so that I could notice and appreciate things I didn't normally notice - things I'd been too busy to notice for years, really. When I noticed and felt awe for things like the leaves changing and the ice patterns, life felt live-able - it offered a contrast that put my pain in perspective. Those quiet, wandering walks along the river have restored me both physically and emotionally.

As my energy and ability to concentrate has returned, I've been reading again these past few months. My wandering walks were a vehicle for helping me to re-learn how to pay attention and I came across a quote in Julia Cameron's "The Artist's Way" that summed up for me why learning how to pay attention has been so healing for me:

"Pain is what it took to teach me to pay attention. In times of pain, when the future is too terrifying to contemplate and the past too painful to remember, I have learned to pay attention to right now. The precise moment I was in was always the only safe place for me. Each moment, taken alone, was always bearable." - Julia Cameron

Then there's the figurative wandering. When I was told that my life and my baby's life were both at risk while I was still pregnant, I de-prioritized everything else. The only thing that was important was my baby's health, and of course my health because my baby's health depended on it. Then we lost her, and suddenly my health didn't even matter to me anymore. Nothing was important to me anymore, which made it impossible to be purposeful or productive. I had no choice but to wander because I was completely lost. As someone who used to be a workaholic and task-oriented perfectionist, being this directionless was incredibly hard for me. Everyone else was living such fast, productive lives and they all seemed so sure about where they were going and what they needed to do next. Without the ability to feel joy, I had no compass for picking my new direction, and so I had to give myself permission to just wander... explore, fiddle, fuff, muck around, and wander until I started to feel interest and joy again.



I guess there's a big difference between sitting and waiting in paralysis, and wandering.

At first I was sitting and waiting for something to happen that would get me interested in life again, but my regular walks transformed it into a more active exploration. I started actively testing out the activities I used to enjoy and all the time I was rebuilding my awareness, curiosity, faith and hope. For me, wandering involves living and giving actively and watching and learning with a curious and hopeful mind, even though you're you don't know what the outcome will be.

I'm still wandering, really. I have the Kidney March in September, but I have no idea what I'll do with my time after that. But my job is to just keep wandering with an open heart, curiosity and awareness. And to trust that the quiet little voice will give me the signal of what to do next when the time is right. And to be ready to follow that small voice - even if I don't yet have the full picture and can't really understand why I need to do it.

3. What suggestions would you have for other people about how to incorporate wandering into a healing journey?

If you're anything like I was before last year, I'd say, **"Drop half the things on your schedule and simplify your life.** You're far too busy and there are too many things you've made important and stressful. Stop spending so much money so that you can work less and can have space in your life for quietness and agenda-free wandering. And pick no more than 3 big things that you decide are important in your life and focus on living those non-negotiable values - even if the other things that have seemed important before slip a bit. If you get your 3 big non-negotiable values right, you'll be okay if the rest slips."

Wandering is physically and emotionally restorative (read Tony Schwartz' book, *The Way We're Working Isn't Working* if you want some evidence of that), and it's great for creativity (read Michael Gelb's *Think Like Da Vinci* for more about that), but we don't do it because it takes time, and we think we don't have the time for it. Life is so



busy and fast these days that you're only ever going to have the spaciousness for quietness and agenda-free wandering if you make the commitment to create the space.

Your wandering can take many forms - it's the mindset that's most important. You can "wander" in a journal by creating space for agenda-free writing - writing that doesn't have to be good or useful or influential, or anything really. You can wander with agenda-free art-making. You can wander in agenda-free conversation with others (when was the last time you had a truly agenda-free conversation?!).

Walking is a great way to wander though, because it gives you the opportunity to explore your environment, which opens up your perception, awareness and curiosity. When we're in emotional pain, we get so lost inside and so wrapped up in our painful story that we stop noticing what's beautiful and precious around us, and it's really hard to solve problems, see opportunities or feel hope when your perspective is that small. **Wandering calms and centres us and quietens our head-chatter, so that we can hear the quiet little voice inside when it says, "This is it! Do that!"** Walking also has incredible physical benefits that will help you release the tightness and physical symptoms of stress and trauma - especially for those of us who spend most of our work day seated at our desk.

4. Any other advice for wanderers?

Wandering is difficult at first - not because the wandering itself is actually difficult (it's easy!), but because it goes so against the grain of our culture that says that everything has to be efficient and demands that we cram more and more productivity into our day. The hardest part about wandering is giving up the belief that you'll get left behind if you slow down and give yourself permission to wander.

That permission-giving will probably require repetition because you're going to keep getting messages from the world around you that you should be busy and productive ALL THE TIME. So don't get disappointed when you falter and find yourself needing



to give yourself permission again and again. Expect it to be like brushing your teeth - your teeth get dirty again everyday. That's the nature of teeth and plaque. So we don't feel defeated, we just brush our teeth everyday. Give yourself fresh permission to wander everyday because our cultural plaque that says, "Always be going somewhere - know exactly what you want and go and grab it as fast as you can - or you'll get left behind!" will gather fresh everyday.

A cool wandering game:

Here's a great little wandering game that's incredible for opening up your perception and awareness, for getting outside of your pain and into a bigger perspective, for practicing and developing curiosity, and also for intuiting messages from your unconscious/ Essential Self...

When you take a walk, look around you and either collect or take photos of things you see that resonate with you in some way. Make your decisions really quickly - don't second-guess yourself or try to control what you choose. If you see it and think you feel something - even if you're not sure if it's the right feeling, pick it up or photograph it. Don't try to interpret it or figure out why it resonated. Just have fun wandering and noticing for that resonant feeling and be curious about what you'll collect.

When you get home from your wander, put out all the things you collected or upload all the photos to your computer and look at all the things from your environment that resonated with you. Take each item one at a time and play with some Jungian analysis:

- Describe the item using 5 adjectives.
- Then ask yourself, "What in my life could be described with these same 5 adjectives?"
- Next consider, "If this item was here to bring me a message - a message that was for my good - what would that message be?"
- Reflect on how that message applies to that area of your life that you identified.
- If you were to honor that message, what small thing would you need to do next?

Journal Prompts #10

When I wander, I often notice...

The plants or animals that show up regularly for me are...

They have special significance for me because...

I most often receive guidance from my God/Spirit Guide/Higher Self through...





Lesson #11

Wander to the Right - Playing with your Brain



Your right brain.

This is the second last lesson in this series, and so far, I have not been able to write a single one of these at home. This afternoon I'm at a favourite coffee shop that's within walking distance of my home.

I keep trying to write at home, and I've written many other things there, but for this particular project, the words just don't flow. More than once I've sat in my tiny windowless basement studio, trying to urge the words to show up on the page, but to no avail.

It seems my brain will only give me wandering ideas when I actually engage in the act of wandering. Perhaps it's my brain and body's way of saying "If you really believe in this stuff, prove it!"

Finally, when I pack up my laptop or journal, head out the door, and wander to my favourite park or coffee shop, the words start popping into my brain before I even reach my destination. It's like the sound of footsteps unlocks a secret passageway in my brain and suddenly the ideas start clamouring to get through.

Wandering does that to me all the time. Often when I come home from a good wander and my husband asks where I've been, I say "at a business-planning session". Most of my best business, workshop, and writing ideas have shown up in a park, along the side of a road, or on a pathway somewhere. Sometimes I take a



journal along to jot down what shows up, but often I just let the ideas mellow and mingle with each other until I get home.

What happens when I pack up my computer and step out the door is that my mind shifts from the left-brain activities of planning, organizing, defining, and putting words on paper to a more right-brained way of thinking. Wandering, like art-making, dancing, and meditating, is largely a right-brained activity.

Our left brains like to organize and judge things. They balance checkbooks, make lists, follow recipes, organize words in logical order, build spreadsheets, analyze our decisions, judge our surroundings, and plan our destinations.

Our right brains, on the other hand, like to imagine and create things. They make art, give us intuitive hunches, follow spiritual guides, imagine possibilities, let go of judgement, forget their watches at home, and have a sensory experience of the world.

Wandering, unlike traveling directly to a specific destination, is about letting go of the logic and organization of the left brain and giving the right brain a chance to dance with freedom. When we close our computers and consciously make that shift, creative ideas start bubbling to the surface.

In the book *My Stroke of Insight*, Jill Bolte Taylor, a brain scientist, writes about her experience having a stroke that nearly obliterated her left brain. Suddenly she could organize nothing logically, couldn't read or communicate with words, and had lost much of the memory that made her an exceptional scientist. Despite all of that, she found herself in a place of deep peace, non-judgement, and creative thinking. She no longer had the self-critique of her left brain. Instead, her intuitive sense helped her navigate her relationships and the world.

Taylor had to retrain her left brain to find the files she had lost. Over an eight year period, she re-learned the things that had been lost in the stroke, and returned to her work as a researcher and educator on the functions of the brain.



What's fascinating about Taylor's experience is that she now believes that we all have the capacity to choose which side of the brain we engage. Instead of returning to some of the judgement and bitterness of her past way of thinking, she chose not to retrain those parts of the brain. Now, when she's tempted to let critical self-talk get in her way, she shifts into the non-judgmental, spiritual way of thinking of her right brain and frees herself from the baggage of the past.

When we choose to engage in right-brained activities, like Taylor suggests, we too can shift out of the judgement, logic, and linear boundaries of the left brain and into the creativity, intuition, and spirituality of the right brain.

As Jill Bolte Taylor says, none of us would want to live solely in one brain or the other. Without logic, reason, and order, our right brains would wreak havoc with our lives. At the same time, without creativity, spirituality, and compassion, our left brains would destroy us and the people we are in relationship with.

We need balance, and we need to recognize when we should shift from one way of thinking to the other.

Having grown up in the information age, however, and having been influenced by the industrial age of our parents, most of us have learned to let our left brains overrule our right brains. It takes effort to engage in those activities that intentionally create space for our right brains, and by doing so we acknowledge that both have value and both are trustworthy.

As Daniel Pink says in *A Whole New Mind*, the industrial age is over, and the conceptual age has begun. Because we already have an abundance of information and resources, and it's cheap and easy to ship our left-brain work overseas or automate it, what we now need are people who think creatively and conceptually. We are in an era in which right-brained people, those who are able to create unique, "high concept, high touch" goods and services, will be the ones to rule the future.



Those of us who have already embraced our inner right-brained wanderers are well on our way to Daniel Pink's idea of the immediate future. Our wandering will serve us well - both personally and professionally.

Tips for engaging your right brain on your wanders:

1. Don't plan a destination. Let your intuition guide you. If you have a destination, then at least be open to letting your intuition choose the route.

2. Take pictures of things that intrigue you, but don't let your right brain define what the objects are you're photographing. If the light streaming through the bush creates interesting shapes, try to forget that what you're photographing is a bunch of leaves on a tree. Instead, trust your right brain to find the beauty in the shapes.

3. Follow your sensory experiences. If you hear an intriguing sound, follow it. If the light looks more interesting on the other side of the street, go there. Don't let logic guide your path.

4. Shut out the words. Either leave your iPod at home and let the birds provide your musical backdrop, or listen to instrumental music without lyrics. Get lost in the sounds without trying to organize or define them.

5. Leave your watch at home. Wander as long as your mind and your feet want you too.

6. Give space to what arises. When emotions or thoughts show up, give them space and don't judge them. Create a visual in your mind of a tea party where each thought or emotion gets a seat at the table. Entertain them and don't ask them to leave until they're ready.



Interview with Darrah Parker

Nearly two years ago, when I was contemplating quitting my job, I met [Darrah Parker](#) on Twitter. She was thinking of quitting her job too, and in the end, she beat me to it by about six months. Since then, Darrah has launched a photography business and is teaching people to capture [A Slice of Life](#) with their cameras. She's a delightful wanderer and I am happy to call her a friend. In just a few months, Darrah will become a mom and I can't wait to see the beautiful way she'll photograph her dear baby girl.



* * * *

1. How have you personally learned to embrace your own "happy wanderer"?

I've always had a wandering spirit. For as long as I can remember, I was scheming and dreaming about my next move and looking at the world with curiosity. Sometimes my wandering spirit had me relocating across the country all by myself, sometimes it had me quitting my job, and sometimes it had me buying a new shoes because I felt I needed a change. I used to judge my wandering spirit. I thought I had a commitment issue or that I would come across as wishy washy. But recently I've come to embrace it and realize that it's part of being human and an artist. Wandering through life instead of moving full-speed ahead has allowed me to stop and smell the roses and appreciate the journey.

2. How has photography become part of your wanderings?

How hasn't it become part of my wanderings? Photography is my meditation. Some people meditate on a cushion. Some people walk or run to meditate. I take photos.



On the days when I get bogged down in the muck of life - work, bills, to do lists, laundry - if I pick up my camera and take a few minutes to wander, I return renewed and refreshed. Something happens the second I look through the lens. The world melts away and what is most important reveals itself. Through photography, I have discovered that my life is interesting just the way it is. Amidst the mess and dirty dishes, I can go wandering with my camera and find something beautiful. Most importantly, photography brings out a childlike playfulness in me. I get swept away and before I know it, I'm climbing on chairs or crawling under tables and giggling at the treasures I have discovered through my camera. It is truly magical.

3. What tips do you have for people who want to incorporate photography into their wanderings?

Tip #1: Carry your camera with you often. If you have it with you, you are much more likely to use it!

Tip #2: Don't take yourself or your camera too seriously. Allow yourself to experiment. Have fun! Play!

Tip #3: Photograph things that make you happy, that matter to you, that make you smile, that make you say "hmmmm...", that make you want to know more. If you typically only photograph your family or only carry your camera with you on vacations or to special events, try taking photos of absolutely ordinary, everyday moments in your life. I think you'll find that by photographing your everyday life, you will see beauty in things you normally overlook and find joy just wandering around your own house or neighborhood.

4. Any other advice for other wanderers?

Follow your own path, even if you don't know where it is going to lead you. And take photos along the way so you'll remember the journey!



Journal Prompts #11

Wandering helps me to...

I know my right brain is being engaged when I...

The last time I wandered my senses were awakened by...

I will try to be more intentional about engaging my right brain by...



Lesson #12

Wandering as Spiritual Quest



Spiritual Quest.

It was early morning, on my third day at a leadership conference in Columbus, Ohio. There was nothing on the agenda, and so I went for a long run/walk/wander along the Oletangy River. It was a beautiful way to process the depth of wisdom that had flowed through me the day before. My body was finally given space and time to catch up with my mind in the experience of the place. While I wandered, I was fed by the sanctuary of nature - the river, trees, birdsong, and sunshine.

At one point in my journey, I headed off the beaten track and took a muddy little trail through the woods. There, in the middle of dense bush with no signs of civilization in sight, I came across a beautiful surprise.

First I noticed some shovels, rakes, and a wheelbarrow tucked away under a tree. Then, when I emerged over the top of a dry creek bed, I found the most amazing skate park (or - probably more accurately - “bike park”) carved out of the mud. Someone had painstakingly removed all of the undergrowth & roots, and then shoveled and packed mud into bowls, walls, ramps, and formations of all kinds, wrapping around the massive trees that stood in its midst.

With the morning sun filtering through the leaves overhead, it had the most magical feel of a cathedral. I have no idea who had the ingenuity and determination to build such a magical place. It certainly wasn't a tourist destination and had a rather clandestine feel to it. Someone clearly wasn't satisfied with the stark concrete of ordinary skate parks and wanted a richer experience.

I imagine it as worship space for skateboarders and BMX bikers who seek the same kind of sanctuary that I do when I run, walk, or go on meditative photo walks. There



were no bikers there at the time, but I could picture them reverently circling around the trees, honouring the beauty and holiness of their surroundings.

We are all spiritual seekers, whether we are comfortable admitting it or not.

A skate park is an odd type of sanctuary, but even skaters and bikers need spiritual spaces where they can connect with the earth and with Spirit.

I am writing this final lesson from one of my favourite sanctuaries, the Carol Shields Labyrinth. I like to come here for contemplative walks when I need to shift out of my worrisome analytical left brain and into my conceptual, spiritual right brain. The labyrinth has been lovingly created by local earth-lovers and it is full of wild grasses and flowers indigenous to the prairies I live on.

I imagine that skate park in Columbus as a kind of labyrinth for skaters and bikers. Round and round they go, twirling around the giant trees, dancing with their boards and bikes, shifting their brain patterns and opening themselves up to Spirit. They may never articulate it that way, but nonetheless it feels the same for me.

Wandering of all kinds has long been associated with spiritual quests. There are pilgrimages of some type in nearly every religion that I can think of. On the Camino de Santiago, for example, a 500 mile journey to the Santiago do Compostela (a cathedral in northwest Spain), thousands of people spend at least month of their time wandering in search of their spiritual centre. They've been doing so for a thousand years. (I hope to do the pilgrimage myself some day.)

**"Wanderer, your footsteps are
the road, and nothing more;
wanderer, there is no road,
the way is made by walking."
- Antonio Machado**



“The way is made by walking.” In other words, clarity, depth, wisdom, guidance, and Spirit show up when we put one foot in front of each other and walk. It’s not about the destination, it’s about the journey.

Walking shifts us from “goal oriented doers” to “Spirit oriented seekers”.

Walking causes us to slow down and listen to the guidance of our hearts. Walking engages our bodies, our souls, AND our minds and builds new relationships between them.

I used to think that prayer had to look and feel a certain way - that I had to bow my head, fold my hands, and preferably kneel at my bedside and speak in actual words to God. Now I know that God is much more imaginative than that. God knows how to communicate with our right brains as much as our left. God knows a whole world of wonder beyond the confinement of words and longs to communicate with us in that space.

Now I believe that my best form of prayer (or meditation) is walking. When I walk, I listen to the wind. I see the fluttering leaves. I notice the caterpillar inching its way across the sidewalk. I feel my breath fill my lungs. I notice the strength of my body. I leave my mind open to its own form of wandering and I feel myself sink into the boundless energy of Spirit.

What about you? What form of pilgrimage helps you to open your heart to Spirit? What place serves as your sanctuary?

If you don’t know the answers to these questions, perhaps it’s time to go on a quest. Find the spaces that engage and refresh you. Look for labyrinths or pilgrimages in your neighbourhood or on your travels. Find a winding path in your local park that



might serve as a makeshift labyrinth. Or do what my friend Diane has done, and build one in your own backyard. If you are a skater or biker, perhaps there is a sanctuary for you like the one in Columbus.

It doesn't matter what language you use for this experience - whether you're comfortable speaking of God, Spirit or your spiritual centre, or you prefer to think of it as simply engaging your right brain. No matter how you speak of it, this type of spiritual wandering will serve you well in your life. It will help you find balance, be more creative, approach the world with more calmness and self-awareness, and give you energy to do the work for which you feel called.

And now it's time for me to finish my labyrinth walk, hop on my bike, and return home, refreshed, energized, centered, and full of creative ideas.

Thank you for joining me on this wander!

Tips for turning your wandering into a spiritual experience:

- 1. Find a labyrinth or wandering path** that engages you but doesn't require you to do much thinking or planning as you travel along it. There is something powerful about the spiral shape of a labyrinth that is worth exploring.
- 2. Before you begin, stand for a moment in stillness.** Close your eyes. Feel your breath enter and exit your body. Set an intention to be mindful of whatever shows up while you walk, but to let nothing trip you up or hold you hostage.
- 3. As you walk, let the thoughts pass through your mind, but don't engage them too deeply.** As is often taught



by meditation teachers, it is helpful to label a thought that appears as “thinking” and then wish it well as it leaves your brain.

4. **Engage your senses.** Feel the sun or wind on your face. Notice the chill or heat in the air. See the shapes in the clouds. Smell the flowers in your neighbour’s garden. Hear the birds singing above you.

5. **Imagine yourself floating in a giant pond full of the energy of Spirit.** There is no effort required on your part - just float. Welcome Spirit to hold you. Don’t resist or overthink it.

Interview with Julie Daley

As soon as you come into contact with Julie Daley you recognize her deep spirituality, her boundless creativity, her wandering curiosity, and her beautiful femininity. She teaches creativity, blogs at [Unabashedly Female](#), and she loves to wander in the city she calls home, San Fransisco.



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For some reason, I love to wander. I don't really know why. I just know my desire to wander comes from someplace deep inside. Maybe it's a simple curiosity. Maybe it's a desire to be connected to life. And, maybe it's simply a way to explore the world as it is unfolding.

When I leave my house to wander, I feel a little giddy. **It's like I know I'm going to see things I've never seen, but I don't yet know what they are. That's what I love.**

I've loved wandering for as long as I can remember. The feeling of stepping out into the unknown (even if I've travelled that way many times) is one of lightness and freedom. Even the same path is unknown in so many ways: time of day, time of year, weather conditions, people you pass, animals you meet, sunlight falling, or moonlight radiating; all of these offer up an unexpected opportunity to be in the unknown, right in the middle of what I believe is the known.



I recently moved from the Berkeley Hills to the hills of Presidio Heights in San Francisco. At my old place, I lived directly across the street from Tilden Park. Thousands of acres of land were right outside my front door. Most days, I would wander down to the lake, then up through the hills that overlooked the lake. As I wandered, I would take pictures. This is one on my favorite things to do...wander with camera in hand.

Since my move, I've taken up wandering in the hills of San Francisco, specifically the hills in Presidio Heights and in the Presidio itself. And, I've had a chance to consider why wandering holds such fondness for me. After my move, I watched as I began to wander new territory. Wandering in Tilden was wandering in paradise. A place full of trees, wildlife, and a manmade lake, my walks there were magical, and knew I would miss them.

In my new home, I wander amongst huge homes, city parks, and merchant areas filled with cafes, restaurants and small boutiques. I also wander in the Presidio. A place created by the army back in the 1800's, it's filled with groves of many types of intentionally planted trees. I've found another place to wander through wildness and beauty.

As I've sat with this question of wandering and why I love it, I suddenly saw something beautiful. **Wandering is like the perfect experience of the joy of creating, and the unknown of the creative process.**

I facilitate creativity classes for a living. I know a lot about the creative process, about how it shows up uniquely in each of our lives, and how it can look if we see it as a journey.

One way the process can be illustrated is similar to a ravine or a chasm...the shape of a U, but wider at the top than the bottom. When we step off, we don't know how wide the chasm will be or how deep. We don't know whom we will meet along the way, what will be asked of us, or how we will change by having trusted ourselves and our capacity to be in the unknown and make our way.



When I step out my door to wander, it's like stepping off into the creative process, in that I don't know what is going to happen, who I am going to meet, where I am headed, when I will return, and (most importantly) who I will have become by moving through the process.

In many ways, I love wandering as a metaphor for the creative process, because it is something we all do in some way. And it's so clear that even when we wander the same routes (which happens in our everyday lives) what happens is never the same.

The place where they **seem** to differ is this: creativity usually has some goal or outcome we intend, while wandering by definition allows for exploration, adventure and chance happening. Wandering is discovery, and it's in the noticing, the paying attention to what meets us in life and how we meet it, that we come to be changed by the process. It does take being conscious, aware, and willing to witness, just for the sake of witnessing.

Mary Oliver recently wrote a new poem titled "Instructions for living a life" and it is simple:

**Instructions for living a life:
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.**

When I read this poem, I laugh at its simple profundity. This is what I love: paying attention to what life serves up, being astonished by it (for if we are really paying attention, how could we not be astonished by it), and then engaging with what meets us.



In writing this about wandering and creativity, I've come to see where I usually go into the process with some outcome in mind, like a project, book, or something of that sort.

The invitation for me, and perhaps for you if it feels like one you'd like to accept, is to see any process we engage in as an act of wandering, of meeting life, of being astonished by what we find, then even telling about it...even if it is simply to see ourselves as we see life: alive.