

Section 5: Finding our TRUE path

Vignettes: Only 1-2 paragraphs each

A. Includes “When fitting in doesn’t fit anymore” and four others

B. Includes “Amateur urban mystic” and three others

Quote to inspire this section:

“Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the final analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.” Frederich Buechner

A. When fitting in doesn’t fit anymore

In any creative endeavor we need to include our own uniqueness in order to make it our own. But that is daunting. Sometimes even one word of praise sincerely given can propel us forward. And, on the other hand, who hasn’t had someone criticize a creative effort and feel a hot searing of the soul, even a creative shut down. A well-meaning person once told me that drawing from photos was not considered art. I quit drawing for twelve years. I started up again when I heard two art historians, talking in front of the Luncheon of the Boating Party by Renoir, about how he had painted three of his friends into the painting from a photo! It took years for me to gain confidence about my own writing voice (even when I was teaching writing) because I wrote non-fiction, about ideas and models not dialogue and storylines. When we create we put an element of our souls in the work so it makes us much more vulnerable.

The most healing story for me in my creative life comes from my work as a fiber artist, making sacred art called icons, using a quilted wall hanging format. It has been an inspiring art form yet a difficult journey. I don’t quite fit in the three worlds that my art represents. The quilt world does not readily embrace sacred art; the icon world does not see non-painted contemporary forms traditional enough; and the art world sets me aside as a craft. I was lamenting this to God and God invited me to draw these three worlds as three intersecting circles. He told me that I reside only and totally where the three intersect. That space is small yet unique. That space is my art. Now I look to my art to speak of God and to fulfill me, rather than trying to fit in. What a relief.

Discernment; my deepest heart's desires

Simply put, discernment is having more of a desire for what God wants for us than what we want for ourselves. Left to my own devices, I would do what I think is right for me rather than trust that my loving God knows more than I do about what I need! The hardest part for me is to really trust God and pray for God's desires for me. I even have to ask God for that trust level. But then I am ready to ask God to make the best way more clear. It's remarkable how that way slowly emerges. Margaret Silf, a wise woman and author who writes of the deep inner life, suggests that when you learn more about trusting God you find that God always wants your deepest heart's desires for you, even when you are not clear what they are yet. You can ask God to turn you towards these desires.

So when I lean into trusting God, my methods of discernment always involve prayer, bringing my questions and issues to God as soon as I'm aware of them, asking for clarity and courage to do what is most life giving, even if it is difficult. I use my journal to describe my issues and then I listen for God to give me insights and direction, sometimes as an inner voice (different from my own voice) and sometimes in my journal. I also listen to my dreams, my friends, my body and my spiritual director. I take walks and read scripture. Then I make a decision and watch to see if the gifts of the spirit increase as a result; love, joy, peace, compassion etc. Discernment: Always simple, but never easy. More of God. Less of everything else.

My motive for writing was to answer my own questions

Why do we do what we do? What motivates us to work long hours on a hobby or on work issues or on creative or sporting activities? Occasionally people ask me how I chose the book subjects I wrote about. With few exceptions, my motivation to write was based on finding answers to my own questions. For instance, I wrote about power and leadership because I did not know the answer to the question "What is success?" I thought I had some measure of success in my life and the bottom dropped out of my personal life. That made my achievements dim in comparison. When I discovered, through my writing and research, that there was a deeper personal and spiritual richness beyond cultural success, my question was answered. My answer was that meaning was more important than success.

Dreams are postcards from God

Dreams, for me, are postcards from God, delivered right to my inner sanctum. Their intent is to advise, soothe, awaken, heal, warn, love, lead. Mine have been embarrassing, funny, adventurous, wild. Even the scary ones or the overflowing toilet dreams, which most people have, are instructive. I've had growth dreams, about-face dreams, daily guidance dreams and repeated dreams. I've dreamed of being buried alive in my business suit! But also about birthing babies in new environments and about being miraculously healed. *But dreams are mysterious.* It's clear we can't control them. And it's even hard to understand them, unless we work at it a bit. I choose to believe that they help us sort out our lives and they may even carry a message from or for our souls.

I use a simple form of the Jungian approach to dream work in order to get more meaning by going under the surface of the dream to the deeper truths. Each part of the dream represents a part of me. I listen for puns, for glimpses of humor, for new patterns, especially in repeated dreams. I follow the emotional stream of the dream. And I title each dream in order to embrace the key message. I ask what question each dream has for me. Sometimes I draw the central image of the dream. I write up the dream in my journal. And when I remember, I thank the Dream Maker for delivering that postcard from a mysterious place.

A Pact with solitude

Solitude is not loneliness or isolation or merely being alone. Solitude is a way of being comfortably alive within ourselves so that we are content and eager to be in the company of one. Inviting solitude is a process, for me a sacred process, in which I ask God to accompany me and help me deal with the inner turmoil that can get activated when I quiet down and cease my activity. With practice, solitude is life giving and it engenders deep satisfactions, calm, and appreciation. How does it work? Here's one way to begin—a tip from a good friend who read about how the author Gabriel Marquez found solitude in his aging process-- although I think it works equally well at any age. "The secret of a good old age is simply an honorable pact with solitude."

B. Amateur urban mystic

I think Frederich Buechner, writer and theologian, was right when he said that all of us are mystics of some sort or another. He says we all experience things that are beyond our comprehension. We experience miracles. We have touches of eternity breaking into our lives. But unlike the saints and mystics we read about, when these things happen to us we go right on as if nothing happened.

I decided to do what I'd read the mystics did, stop and notice what was happening, absorb it, and even look for these mysteries. I'm just an amateur urban mystic with no training, only a desire to connect at a deeper more intimate level with God and the earth. But even as an amateur mystic, I've noticed that colors vibrate, gifts come from the "other side," birds and trees know more than we think, spontaneous tears and scents matter, dreams are postcards from God, people carry intentions in their eyes, love has a glow, forgiveness is visceral. Don't get me started!

Gratitude trumps everything

I'm not a Pollyanna although some might accuse me of that because of the optimism and hope I carry. I've had my share of loss, pain and sorrow. What I've learned is that on my really bad days, one of the things that keeps me from caving in totally is to remind myself what I am grateful for or what I can count on that day. Sometimes it's as basic as gratitude that the sun came up or my building is still standing or that my car started. It helps me to see that there is still something stable in my chaotic world. And if I can stay with those basic gratitude thoughts the list begins to lengthen, like I can list those who I'm pretty sure love me. This in turn gives me a slightly different perspective that enables me to slowly move forward. I've found that gratitude, especially during challenging times is one of the most sacred and effective antidotes for hurt, fear or anger.

The most essential way I weave gratitude into my life is to ask, at the end of each day, "What am I most grateful for and least grateful for, and why?" I ask God into those memories to enrich or heal them. It's called a daily examen. I am so impressed with the impact it has on me that it has become as important as washing my face and brushing my teeth. But by far, the sweetest challenge that gratitude can offer me is the call to be grateful for everything—knowing that "all is gift," as Teresa of Avila so adroitly suggests. Now that kind of gratitude trumps everything.

I hate cleaning

Maybe hate is too strong a word but I do not enjoy cleaning house. I rarely ever get that satisfied feeling of being close to godliness that is supposed to come from cleanliness. I have several friends who enjoy cleaning. For them, it is

relaxing, enjoyable and rewarding, even a form of exercise. Oh, I wish. But it's not to be.

So I clean out of necessity. But not often. I'm sure this habit comes from my childhood when my mother and I would clean together. I don't think she was fond of cleaning either but women in her era made it almost an art form. My mother set the timer on the kitchen stove for twenty minutes and we did all the cleaning we could do in my room in that allotted time. Then we'd move on to other rooms, twenty minutes each. Needless to say we did no deep cleaning but we were cleaning wizards. Now I've discovered a woman on line who has you set your timer for fifteen minutes and whatever gets done is all you do that day. Wow, where has she been all my life? From following her suggestions I've discovered that I can vacuum all the carpeted areas of my condo in seven minutes. Eureka. (FYI, FlyLady.com)

Get out of the car

It was late at night, in the country on a gravel road. It felt a bit spooky. Yet I stopped the car and said "Get out of the car." This short but clear phrase marked the point my life turned in a new direction. I had been in an emotionally abusive relationship with my companion in the car and at that moment, I moved from feeling hopeless and unworthy of better treatment, to a place of inner truth and courage. I'm not sure what allowed me or caused me, at that moment, to say "no" but I knew I would be different from then on, that I could never fully go back, even if I wasn't sure how I would go forward. I had come home to myself.