

From Boring to Being

by

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Never again will I tease my husband about his penchant for sleeping on the cold, hard ground. Those who read Ty's blog, www.LifeAsTySeesIt.com, know how much he enjoys backpacking in the wilderness alone. He claims that's his equivalent of meditating.

I accompanied him a few times years back. In spite of our mutual love of hiking and being out in nature, over time I convinced myself that I prefer the comforts of our motor coach.

He rarely takes a book in his pack, and I couldn't imagine spending hours simply sitting on a rock. "What do you *DO* out there once you've set up camp?" I asked him a couple of months ago. I mean, really ... how *boring!*

Ty gave me a gentle smile without a hint of condescension and said, "I can spend ten minutes just watching a caterpillar move across a leaf."

Not just the words, but the joy in his tone took me aback. That one short sentence brought me instantly to the awareness of what I was missing: millions of tiny details that you can't see unless you slow down and take the time to notice.

Ask anyone who knows me and they'll agree that I rarely slow down. Serving spirit and helping people come to know the greater reality is my passion (Dare I say, "obsession?"). Improving my connection across the veil has been my major desire for the past eight years. I do my best to balance the many tasks involved in those goals with the pleasure of enjoying my life with Ty and our two puppies, but seriously: Who has time to sit and watch a caterpillar?

"*Take the time,*" said the Voice in my heart, and in that moment, I knew I had to eat my words and sleep on the cold, hard ground alone. I also knew that I would have to totally immerse myself in the experience. Of course, there would be no cell phone service in the wilderness, so having no Internet, email, Facebook, or phone calls was a given. I was okay with that for a day, but total immersion also meant no books, no music, and not even pen and paper.

The latter gave me my first real pause. Nothing to write down whatever insights I discerned on such a fanciful adventure? Now I really began to question my sanity.

“Trust,” came the one-word reply. I took a long, slow breath and realized the lessons had started already. I never went anywhere without pen and paper lest I miss a valuable insight from Spirit. I even sleep with a notepad by my pillow to record downloads received in the middle of the night.

I recognized my discomfort at the thought of being without a way to record whatever I learned in the woods and recognized an opportunity. *“What’s this all about?”* I asked silently. The answer came as the realization that I didn’t need to remember anything. Whatever I discerned would be provided again, not in some unknown future, but in any appropriate *“now moment”* from the Source that provided it in the first place.

We were headed for the Pacific Northwest, and I envisioned myself camped by one of the beautiful wooded trails in the Cascade Mountains near Mt. Rainier in Washington state. Immediately, a flood of questions entered my mind: Would I be safe? Would I be afraid? Would I be bored to tears? Would it be hard to convince Ty that this was something I needed to do?

One thing I knew with certainty: I would learn something about this Journey called Life that I would not learn any other way. When I raised the subject with Ty, his overwhelming support earned him huge points, but he surprised me nonetheless.

“Of course, he supports you,” my sister said when I told her about my plans. *“He’s Camping Guy.”*

“Yes, but ...” said the pitiful little voice in my head. *“Isn’t he worried about my safety?”*

I know of no one who is more safety conscious than Ty. He almost took a job at an outdoor leadership school, and he would never send me into harm’s way. I recognized the inner voice as that of my pesky ego doing its best to keep me from learning whatever lessons lay ahead.

Ty was so eager for me to experience a solo backpacking trip that he chose a date for me weeks earlier than I anticipated. When he compared the calendar with potential locations, I had to agree that the trails around Mount Hood, Oregon, were ideal.

We arrived at our base camp with the big rig the night before my departure. Ty and I laughed aloud to find that I would be starting out on my trip from the town of Boring, Oregon.

Clearly, the Universe has a sense of humor.

Like a fireman, Ty’s keeps his backpack ready to head for the mountains at a moment’s notice. We agreed that I would use his gear and he would hike it in with me to set up camp. I knew better than to disagree. This trip wasn’t about me proving how strong or capable I am. It was about how I would handle 24 hours alone with nothing to *DO*.

I was pretty much okay with the alone part. It was the 24 hours of staring at caterpillars that I wasn't so sure about. Still, the thought of enjoying a silent retreat filled me with nervous excitement. Would I discover something new about myself? What surprises might my guides have in store for me?



The evening before my departure, Ty read aloud a news story about two young women killed near Mt. Hood only the day before. In a freak accident, the girls fell to their deaths while camped next to a waterfall. There was no *"Maybe we should rethink this,"* in his voice as he shared the news. We both know that accidents happen just as easily in the home and that life is to be enjoyed. Still, the timing was interesting, as was the arrival that same evening of a cartoon in an email from a friend who had no idea of my plans. It showed bears lurking outside two campers' tent while the husband assures his wife she has nothing to worry about.

For some reason, Ty chose not to share that one with me until after I returned.

I slept poorly that final night. Ty's pack sat by the door to our coach loaded with tent, sleeping bag, first-aid kit, freeze-dried food, stove, snack bars, and five heavy liters of water. My daypack sat beside it with warm clothes for the chilly night, a hat, toothbrush, hairbrush, and cell phone for taking pictures. In the darkness, I groped for my pen. *"Pack notebook,"* I scribbled on my notepad.

The nagging restlessness I had been experiencing at the thought of not being able to write my thoughts instantly disappeared. *"Isn't that interesting,"* I thought.

"Trust," said the Voice, and I knew my heart had finally won the ongoing battle Ego had been waging since I started my packing list. I didn't bother to cross "notebook" off the list. I simply wouldn't take it.

When we got in the car the next morning, I phoned my assistant, Bev. She was the only other person who knew of my impending trip. We reviewed the projects we had been working on together, and I reminded her that I would be "off the grid" for the next 24-plus hours. When we said goodbye, I put the phone in airplane mode and stuffed it in my daypack. I would normally be answering emails in the car, but my adventure had officially started. For the next hour on the drive to the Mount Hood Wilderness, I did nothing but look at the scenery as we left Boring behind.

At the tiny town of Zigzag, we stopped at the Forest Service ranger station to inquire about Mirror Lake, the destination Ty had chosen. Only one mile off the highway and offering "majestic views of Mt. Hood," Mirror Lake seemed an ideal location for my outing.

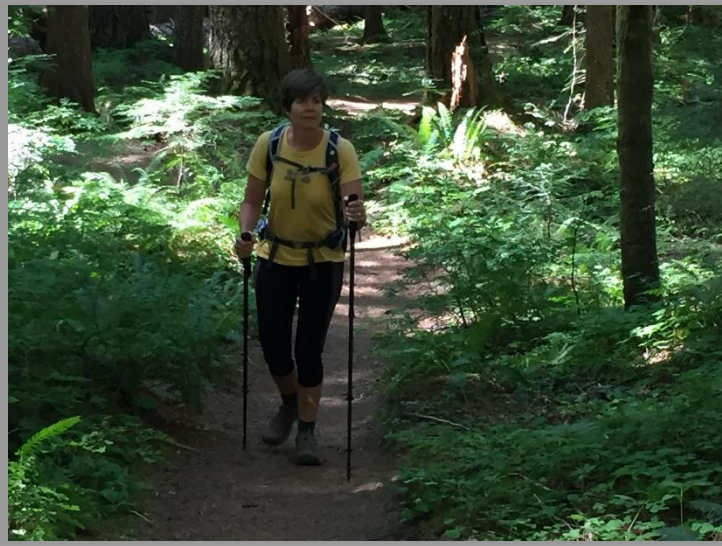
"Be prepared for every 20-something with a day off work to join you with their hookahs and beer," the ranger warned us. Ty and I looked at each other aghast.

“Mirror Lake is a local destination for that crowd,” he said. By noon there will be 300 people passing you on the trail.”

I silently thanked Spirit for guiding us to stop for local knowledge. When we told the ranger that we were looking for something more isolated, he pulled out a topographic map and put his index finger on Burnt Lake. The distance was four times that to Mirror Lake, but the extra mileage insured us a far greater likelihood of solitude.

Following the directions on a mimeographed map, we turned off Highway 26 just outside of town. We headed north on a series of forest roads that became more narrow and bumpy the farther we drove. Pavement turned to gravel for a few more miles as we traveled deeper and deeper into the woods. The rutted road ended at the trailhead to Burnt Lake. With relief, I counted only five other cars in the small dirt parking lot.

We hoisted our packs onto our backs, extended our collapsible hiking sticks, and set out for the lake. I smiled with joy. The trail strewn with soft pine needles winded its way through red cedars and Douglas firs that stretched over a hundred feet to a clear blue sky. Enough sunlight filtered through to accentuate the variegated shades of green of the ferns and moss-covered branches.



For two hours we hiked onward and steadily upward, stopping only once to enjoy the sandwiches I packed for lunch. I felt no need to apologize to Ty for the fact that he would have to hike the same distance back and repeat the round-trip again the next day. He was in his element, as was I.

Several stretches of the trail blessed us with the roaring rush of snow-melt in a nearby stream. Stepping carefully across rocks, we crossed Devil’s Creek no less than four times. If Mount Hood loomed somewhere nearby, it remained hidden by the forest.

Just as fatigue began to make the hiking noticeably less pleasant, we arrived at Burnt Lake. It was small, stretching a quarter of a mile north to south and half that distance across. Tall pines ringed the shoreline. Knee-high grasses grew to the water’s edge except for a few patches of soft dirt and mud that loosely served as beaches.

A small hand-drawn map affixed to a tree indicated the locations of the seven designated campsites in the area. We turned left at a fork in the trail and checked out the sites one by one. To my disappointment, all were set back from the water, hemmed in by trees that cast them in shadows. Signs clearly stated that the few lakeside clearings were reserved for day use.

To me, it was all about “feel.” Each site we came to felt too closed in, until we pushed past the brush on a narrow off-shoot trail to site number seven. “This is it,” I announced with relief. It felt just right, my home for the night.

Ty laid out a ground tarp and assembled the tent on top of it, explaining each step as he did so. He strung a piece of line between two trees and hung the food bag and backpack out of reach from the marauding chipmunks who emerged from the brush, showing great interest in my food. I silently hoped the skittering critters were the only creatures interested in my belongings.

Once he felt confident that I knew how to light the stove and take care of myself for the next twenty-four hours, Ty kissed me goodbye. I wished him a safe hike on the way back to the car, and he departed. I checked my watch. It was 1:00 PM. I wouldn’t need dinner for at least four hours. I buzzed with excitement, knowing exactly what I wanted to do first after the two-hour hike: absolutely nothing.

I assembled the ultra-light camping chair that I had bought for Ty as a Christmas present. I’m sure he thought it was an unnecessary luxury in the wilderness, but for the next 24 hours it would be my most treasured possession. I picked up the chair and my backpack with water and a can of bear repellent spray and walked the short distance to the lake.

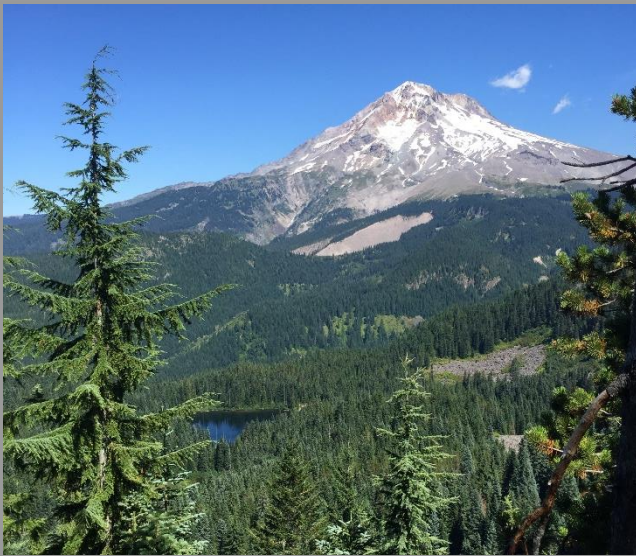
I found a small patch of dirt hardly worthy of calling itself a beach and sat upon it in my chair. I shifted my focus and thanked my guides for bringing me to this moment with a happy “*Here I am*” attitude. I had yet to see Mt. Hood, but the view of the lake and the surrounding trees was certainly beautiful. Beyond the lake, I eyed a peak that stood out as the highest in sight. The ranger had spoken of a nearby trail that offered excellent views of three local volcanoes, and I figured I would scope it out at some point. But first, I wanted some practice in being present.

I was keenly aware of the uniqueness of the moment. I had no books, nothing to write with save the “notes” function on my phone which I refused to access, and no other person with whom to converse. I gazed around me, waiting for something to snag my attention.

The dragonflies won. Time disappeared for a while as I watched them dart here and there, never stopping to let me examine them closely. Were they fairies in disguise, I wondered, or was I being silly? I became aware of an incessant buzzing. I couldn’t tell if the sound came from bumblebees or horseflies until I saw a black and yellow bee crawling up, over, down, and around the fuzzy pink blossoms at the end of a nearby reed. I noticed a hive-mate doing the same dance on a neighboring reed, and I watched them, transfixed. Like the dragonflies, the two bees never stopped moving, trading flowers at one point in their ongoing search for treasure.

The leaves in the bushes immediately to my left rustled, and I startled. A bird far smaller than the sound it produced popped from its hiding place onto a fallen log that extended out into the water beside me. I laughed at my nervousness, startling the bird in return, and it flew away. The dragonflies returned, and I watched them for a while longer, admiring their gossamer wings and iridescent blue bodies.

Feeling rested after our hike, I decided the time was right to climb the nearby peak, Zigzag Mountain. I checked my watch, surprised that an hour had passed while I watched the various winged creatures' comings and goings. I took my chair back to the campsite, retrieved my hiking sticks, slung my daypack onto my back, and headed out.



I hiked for an hour, breathing more heavily as the incline increased, but ever so happy to be immersed in such glorious surroundings. When I emerged at the summit and turned around, I gasped. Mt. Hood towered immediately before me with Burnt Lake between us. I realized that if I had simply hiked to the opposite side of the lake, I would have enjoyed a similar view. The majestic mountain had been there all along, but I couldn't see it through the trees.

Gazing at the snow-capped volcano, I couldn't help but compare this surprise with a recent lesson from my guides. They showed me that we come into this life as souls who know our

oneness with all that is. Once we turn our focus to our human selves, we lose sight of our true essence. I realized that like the mountain, our most powerful aspect is immediately present, yet we fail to see it through our limited human sight. As I hoped this experiment in solitude would prove, at times we must create space within ourselves to view more of the magnificence that has always been there.

Due to the steep grade, it took me another hour to retrace my steps. By the time I arrived at my campsite, I was spent. I rarely take naps, but I crawled into the tent and stretched out atop the sleeping bag. Sleep came immediately. When I opened my eyes after a refreshing, dreamless rest, my watch read 5:00. I placed what I would need to prepare dinner in my daypack, picked up my camp chair, and headed for the far side of the lake.

As expected, the five-minute walk rewarded me with the same view of Mt. Hood that I'd enjoyed from the nearby mountaintop, only from a lower perspective. A good-sized clearing with the remnants of a camp fire invited me to stay a while. I couldn't imagine a more perfect place to enjoy dinner and the rest of the evening.

Ty had laughed at my excitement when I discovered that one of my choices for dinner was a bag of freeze-dried Chili Mac. I lighted the lightweight titanium stove easily and minutes later poured two cups of boiling water into the foil pouch of noodles, beef, and beans in spicy sauce. I used my iPhone to time

9 minutes while the food rehydrated, and then switched the phone to camera mode to memorialize my first solo camping meal.

As the timer ticked down, I took the foil pouch and stepped gingerly across the mud at the water's edge. Reaching a large log, I climbed onto it and scooted sideways until Mt. Hood filled my field of vision. When the timer rang, I dug into the tasty chili, swinging my feet over the water like a kid as I chewed.



I wondered at the nutritionist who determined that one bag of camping food constitutes 2.5 servings. After four hours of strenuous hiking, I had no trouble eating the contents of the entire bag. I scooted off the log and returned to the rock where I'd left my stove. Cleanup involved stowing the stove, stuffing the empty food package into a Ziploc bag, and licking my spoon clean.

All of this took no more than half an hour. I had hiked the nearby trail to its end, my campsite was completely set up, and I had enjoyed the evening meal. The height of the sun told me that I still had several hours of daylight left. The moment had arrived: there was nothing left to do but be present.

I settled into my camp chair facing Mt. Hood. The excitement of preparing the Chili Mac slowly faded, leaving me with an unwelcome sense of melancholy. Ty would have loved being there. I sensed his absence as acutely as I did any time we were apart. Earlier I had seen three couples enjoying the lake, but all had now trekked back down the trail to their cars. I wasn't afraid of being alone, yet I grew more and more uneasy.

Feeling increasingly vulnerable, I closed my eyes and asked my guides to draw near. I knew without a doubt that Sanaya is always with me, but for once I didn't sense them. I waited, hoping to feel the familiar twitch of my upper lip, the comforting sign of their presence, but I felt nothing. As the minutes passed with no lip twitch and no thoughts in their familiar accent, I grew even more anxious.

I sensed that the lower vibrations of my thoughts were blocking my awareness of my Team, and I felt more alone than before. For the first time since the trip began, I questioned what I was doing there. I had hoped for some major spiritual insights, perhaps even a physical appearance of a spirit. Considering I could not even hear Sanaya's voice, a spiritual "wow" at that moment seemed highly unlikely.

Still, I trusted them, and so I asked the most important question one can ask at any moment: *"What do I need to know?"*

Sanaya is normally quite vocal when I ask a question, but again I sensed nothing in response. For a brief moment, I entertained the thought of packing up everything and scurrying down the trail. Besides the fact that I would have no transportation when I got to the trailhead, the navy officer in me knew you just don't do that. You suck it up, whatever unpleasant feelings arise.

Unable to ignore my growing unease, I remembered that every unpleasant feeling holds a hidden lesson.

"Just be present," I reminded myself, and tuned in to the sights, sounds, and smells around me. I alternated between focusing on the tiniest of details and the big picture tapestry Nature displayed for my enjoyment. The incessant buzzing of the bees and horseflies was impossible to ignore, but soon I became aware of the subtler sounds of the water lapping at the shoreline, the creaking of a leaning tree rubbing against his neighbors, and the rustle of some unseen animal in the reeds. Together they played a mesmerizing symphony that held my attention without effort.



The longer I sat completely still, the more my discomfort eased. My gaze was drawn upward, and I became spellbound by the few clouds in the sky. They wafted up behind the volcano, then drifted seductively around to the front as if caressing the craggy giant before drifting off in search of another lover. Powerful as he had appeared at first glance, the mountain became my friend.

After a while, I lowered my gaze and focused on the forest at the far side of the lake. Standing tall and lined up

naturally in rows, I marveled at how the trees provided a home to the birds, a resting place for the chipmunks, and protection for my tent. I felt a strange kinship with these silent sentries, and the trees became my brothers.

Shifting to the right, I noticed the horizontal line where sun and shade met just below the treetops. I chose a spot just a bit higher in the pines and watched to see how long it would take the darkness to travel there. Ever so slowly my sister, the sun, made her imminent departure known.

I looked down, and my hands lying face-up in my lap snagged my attention. As I stared at them, I became aware of the inaudible buzzing beneath my skin. Like the bees working incessantly to serve the queen bee, I realized that the trillions of cells beneath my skin never stopped working to serve my physical body. I felt a sudden urge to cry and recognized not sadness, but gratitude for insights that now filled my mind with uncommon clarity.

Nothing was separate. I had read this; I had taught it, but in that instant, I had the visceral, full-bodied experience of it. From the tiniest cells within me to the largest planets without, extending farther than my human eyes could see in either direction, Life was flowing. I was one tiny part of that flow—no more or less significant than a single cell in my body or the largest sun in any of countless solar systems.



I realized in that moment that “alone” is strictly a human concept, born of our false belief in separation from our Source—from Life Itself. The trees and the bees had no concept of separation. They simply existed. They knew nothing of loneliness or fear, only this perfect presence that I had become part of in the process of doing nothing.

Far from boring, I was immersed in the incredible fullness of being. Nature knew nothing of that oh-so-human feeling of emptiness that had earlier taunted me with tendrils of fear. “Empty,” I

realized, is as much a human construct as “alone.” This was the infamous illusion so many spiritual teachers speak of. Life in all its fullness with its inexhaustible potential surrounded me. The experience of it could not be denied, for I in my be-ing was part of it. To think that I could possibly be only human and therefore alone while surrounded by countless companions from the cellular level to the galactic was delusional. I was both human and a soul, and I had the choice to feel alone or to dissolve into the indivisible unity of Life.

I lowered my head and glanced at my yellow t-shirt. The picture across my chest showed two hiking boots with laces that curled up and around to form a perfect heart. The words beneath the boots read, “*Life is good.*” If I had packed a pen, in that moment I would have used it to deface a perfectly good shirt by crossing out one of the “o’s” in the word “good.” Life is good because Life is God, and God is Life itself in all Its limitless forms.

I became aware that my uneasy feelings had vanished. The unexpected insights had not arrived in a sudden glorious burst, but had wafted over me as slowly as the receding light of the setting sun. What remained was not momentary giddiness or a temporary spiritual high, but a soothing sense of peace and contentment that I knew I would never forget.

As I stood and prepared to depart this sacred spot, I thought of Ty. Unlike me, he doesn’t meditate at all. He tells others that being out in nature is his meditation time. I now understood how a single experience of the oneness that Nature exemplifies can equal sitting in the silence. Frequent hiking “fixes” refresh his soul as much as my daily practice.

The sun had dipped below tree line when I arrived back at my campsite, but the sky was still bright enough to illuminate my surroundings. The feeling of being the only human being for miles was strangely nerve-wracking, yet exhilarating. Still, I had no desire to be outside of my tent in total

darkness. I stole a look at my watch. Ten minutes remained before 8 PM. If I were home, it would be far too early to go to bed, but my body was tired, if not my mind.

I got on all fours and crawled into the tiny one-man tent. Instantly, the odor of my sweaty clothes assaulted my nose and I laughed. It was good to be alone for more than one reason. Having rested for several hours, I had the breath to inflate the Thermarest sleeping pad. Long and narrow like the goose-down mummy bag I placed atop it, the thin mattress provided insulation and a modicum of padding.

The moment I crawled into the sleeping bag and zipped myself in, all remaining Zen-like feelings vanished. The slippery rip-stop nylon of the pad and accompanying inflatable pillow made noisy swishing sounds every time I moved the slightest bit. Their raft-like nature left me rocking back and forth as if on a waterbed. *"Ty actually enjoys this?"* I thought with irritation as I tried to relax and get comfortable.

Outside, the bees continued buzzing. What I trusted were chipmunks and not something larger skittered back and forth across the ground near the tent. I hoped they would settle down after dark and realized that very soon I would not be able to see my own hand. I reached into the back pack at my side and pulled out a pocket knife, miniature flashlight, and whistle hooked together on a clip and attached them to the zipper on my fleece. For good measure, I set the bear repellent spray by the tent's zippered door. The items gave me no false sense of security. My safety was in Spirit's hands. With that thought held in mind, I closed my eyes.

I awoke hours later, overheated inside the sleeping bag and disturbed from a series of distressing nightmares. I groped around for my cell phone and saw that the hour was just after 4 AM. As much as I dreaded leaving the tent, I knew the urge to empty my bladder would keep me awake if I didn't heed the call. Frightening images from the disconcerting dreams continued to play out in my mind as I stumbled away from the tent, my footsteps illuminated by the tiny beam of the inch long flashlight.

I didn't know if it was the bad dreams, the fatigue from four hours of hiking uphill, or the strange surroundings, but I had never experienced such an unbalanced state, both physically and emotionally. Relieved on multiple levels, I dived back into the tent, removed one layer of clothes, and pulled the mummy bag around myself until only my face remained uncovered. The damnable sleeping pad wiggled beneath me, its slippery surface hissing at me with every twitch of my muscles.

Instead of finding comfort at being back in the tent, I felt a rising panic. I felt physically sick, but couldn't identify the symptoms. Was something seriously wrong? Was I going crazy? What was I afraid of? Nothing had changed since I fell asleep other than my state of mind, and it was that mind that now raced, threatening to overwhelm me in the darkness.

I recalled a similar incident a year before when I began to seriously challenge my ego that taught me a great lesson about fear: It was temporary, and therefore not one of the soul's innate aspects. I realized that this camping trip posed a great threat to the ego. I had already learned a powerful lesson about oneness in my time by the water's edge. If I successfully faced down this irrational panic, there was no telling what that would do to Ego's ever more fragile hold on my psyche.

“Let the fear flow through you and it will dissipate.” These were the words Sanaya shared with me that night a year earlier and they proved to be quite powerful. The advice came now from memory, not from my guides, who remained strangely absent in spite of my panicked state. I pictured the waves of anxiety flowing through my chest and out my back, and the panic began to subside. I held this image until I drifted back into oblivion.

I awoke to find the tent filled with sunlight. Once again, I groped for the phone and read the time with surprise. It was 8 AM. Except for my brief 4 AM foray, I had been in the sleeping bag for twelve hours. I no longer felt afraid, but somewhat drugged. My conscience told me to get up and get moving, but instead I rolled onto my side and bunched the sleeping bag under my chin.

I tuned in to my mind, body, and spirit. Not a hint of the unreasonable fear remained, having drifted away like the ephemeral dreams that caused it. I was surprisingly comfortable. If I lay perfectly still, the sleeping bag and pad proved to be as snugly as my bed in the bus. In that moment, I was once again perfectly content.

I held that sense of presence, thoroughly luxuriating in the experience of “now” until the thought of a hot meal on a chilly morning in the mountains pulled me back to the mundane.

Preparations included the same “light the stove, boil the water, rehydrate the desiccated food” routine as the night before. My chosen breakfast was scrambled eggs with ham and green peppers. This may sound delicious, but I had tried dehydrated eggs once when Ty was sampling potential trail food. They tasted pretty bad to me then, but I happily prepared my morning meal in hopes that everything tastes better in the great outdoors.

I was wrong.

I ate all of the eggs anyway, happy for the warmth in my belly. I then set about breaking camp, putting all the gear back in the appropriate stuff sacks. Ty had offered to meet me at the campsite at 1:00 to help me stow everything, but I wanted to surprise him by having it all done when he arrived. I loaded his heavy pack onto my back and picked up my daypack and chair. A glance around confirmed that I had left no trace of having been there. I headed for fork in the trail at the side of the lake where there would be no chance of missing Ty when he arrived looking for me elsewhere.



With breakfast and chores complete, I found myself with even more time on my hands than the previous evening: four hours with nothing to do. This time, however, I eagerly anticipated a long, uninterrupted block of simply be-ing. I had a choice: be present with eyes open, or do my standard meditative practice. I began with the latter, inviting Sanaya to join me. They remained silent, but this

time I felt no unease. Instead, I opened my eyes and asked anew to whatever level of higher consciousness was meant to hear me: *"What do I need to know?"*

The answer was immediate, heard not in Sanaya's voice, but as my own thoughts: *"Why are you afraid of being bored?"* I laughed wryly. Yes, that was the million-dollar question. Why was it such a big deal to sit quietly in a beautiful spot for several hours? Why did I get so antsy when away from work, even if I was with family and friends? Why did I always feel the need to be reading, improving myself and my connection to Spirit, even if that meant being of service?



No insights flooded my mind. Instead, as I sat being present with the million-dollar question hanging in the air, an orange butterfly flew into my field of view. I watched it intently as it landed on the mud and sat in place, ten feet away. My step-daughter Susan had sent Ty and me butterflies as a sign after she passed. I thought of Susan now, but I didn't feel her presence. Still, I continued watching the

butterfly, fascinated by its natural camouflage. With wings folded, it blended in with the mud. When it spread its wings, its beautiful colors stood out in stark contrast.

"Just like all of you," came the thought, and I understood what the Voice in my heart was saying. There is both a side to all of us that we call "human" and an eternal aspect of our self, which is the soul. We come into this world knowing nothing but our oneness with Life. As babies, we see everything around us as an extension of ourselves. We smile and coo, thoroughly enjoying simply be-ing. People are naturally drawn to us and send back the love we radiate, thanks to our still-fresh awareness of who we are. Life is good.

Then people call us by a name, setting us apart from all others, and the story begins. We learn words such as "me" and "you," "mine" and "yours" that accentuate this growing sense of separation. Concepts such as "alone" and "empty" begin to take on real meaning the more we come to believe ourselves to be the name and the story instead of the seamless flow of Life that we experienced in our initial days in a human body. The pain of believing that we are no longer part of the flow of Life is so unbearable that we spend the rest of our lives trying to get back to that state of unity we remember in our hearts.

As I watched the side of the butterfly that blended in with the mud and the more colorful side that revealed itself when the butterfly spread its wings, I understood even more clearly the two aspects of the Self. Even though I had discovered in meditation that I am first and foremost a soul, lifelong patterns of behavior continued to work in the background as I identified with my human story.

With dawning comprehension, I saw that my need to always be doing something was my way of avoiding the unconscious pain of separation from the Higher Self. This perceived separation, going back to early childhood, was the true “original sin.” This major mis-perception is why we humans feel the need to judge each another, to compete, to be right, to feel special, to defend our beliefs, and all of the other delusional behaviors that don’t exist in nature, where Life simply flows.

The sound of footsteps approaching rapidly brought me out of my reverie. A young couple rushed past with nary a greeting, causing the butterfly to flutter away. Deeper insights flowed from the momentary irritation I felt at the hikers’ interruption: There’s not a one of us who isn’t wounded, I realized. Each of us finds our own way of escaping from the pain of perceived separation from our Source. We rush around mindlessly, seeking more and more and more, when what we really seek is a return to the pure awareness of being.

I had allowed Ego to trap me in a state of constant neediness and busy-ness to keep me from coming to this awareness. Concepts such as “boring,” “alone,” “empty,” and “not good enough,” were not real. They were nothing but mental constructs erected by the ego like scaffolding to hold *The Story of Me* in place.

“The gig is up,” I said to Ego, as one by one I identified the constructs that had been reinforcing unwanted behaviors and emotions throughout my life. Holding each false concept in my heart, I raised them higher and higher, bringing them into alignment with my True Self to be dissolved in the Light of Truth.

Each sacred offering resulted in a feeling of increased lightness and excitement. Who would I be without my story, I wondered, and the words of Hafiz, a 13th century Sufi poet, came to mind: *“I am a flute through which the Christ breath blows.”*

I had played the flute since I was in the fourth grade. I was taught to clean out the instrument with a cloth after each use. Dirt inside the flute caused it to play off key. I now saw each of the mental constructs that had kept me from seeing who I am, as clumps of dirt. Over the years, constructs such as “alone,” “empty,” “not good enough,” and “I need ...” had built up on the inside of my energetic body, causing the song of my soul to play a bit flat.

I knew that we all have the capacity to be that clear vessel for Spirit to flow through us. Having identified and cleared out subconscious blockages, would I see major changes? Was it this simple to rewrite the story? Time would tell, but now that I was aware of ego’s game, I vowed to stop wanting and needing the changes, to stop seeking improvements and simply allow Life to flow.

With divine timing, I heard footsteps approaching, and looked up to see Ty coming into view. We smiled and we kissed in greeting.

“How was it?” he asked eagerly.



“It had its good moments and its not-so-good moments,” I admitted, “but all in all, it was an excellent experience.”

I recapped the past 24 hours as I led him to the spot along the lake with the view of Mt. Hood. We enjoyed the sandwiches he brought, allowing him to rest and fuel up for the two-hour hike back.

“What did you do last night?” I asked between bites.

“I finished the Spanish novel I’ve been reading,” he replied, referring to *The Shadow of the Wind*, a translation of an old best-seller from Spain that he found at a campground book exchange. “Honestly, Suzanne, it’s one of the best books I’ve ever read.”

“Wow,” I said. “I’d like to read it when we get back.”

He gaped at me in surprise. “You’re going to read a novel?” For the past eight years, the only books I’d read were those that could help me to improve my mediumship and further my spiritual path.

“Yes,” I said with a smile. “I can’t wait to enjoy it.”

He studied me closely, and his eyes narrowed.

“I learned some things out here,” I said, in answer to his unspoken question.

We snapped a few final photos to memorialize my Great Wilderness Adventure, and we turned to leave. As I stepped over a log, a sharp branch dug painfully into my shin.

“Looks like I got a badge of honor,” I said as bright red blood trickled down my leg.

Ty dug the first aid kit out of his pack and handed me an alcohol wipe. I cleaned the skin and applied the Band Aid he provided. He stowed the kit and we headed down the trail.

I made a conscious decision to remain present for the next two hours, focusing on the sights, sounds, and sensations rather than just getting to the parking lot. As I walked, I became aware of the



alcohol causing my leg to sting. I didn't bother to check it. I had done what was necessary to bandage the cut. The wound would heal itself.

Suddenly, my lip twitched.

My guides!

"We are always with you," I heard in the familiar accent of Sanaya, and in a burst of "knowing," I knew that they had deliberately withdrawn my awareness of their presence. I also understood why: so that I would discover that we don't need anyone or anything outside of us to find the answer to *"What do I need to know now?"*

When we stop *do-ing* and create space for *be-ing*, we find that everything we need is already present. In this state of alignment, in true oneness with our Higher Self, we leave behind the story and become the flow.

Our guides are always with us, because at another dimension beyond the story of "me," we are them. We are the trees, we are the bees, we are the mountains, and the sun. We are Life itself, flowing. When we come to this awareness and allow the Song of Life to flow through us unobstructed, the instrument heals itself.

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Suzanne Giesemann is the author of 11 books, an evidence-based medium and spiritual teacher. She is a former Navy Commander who served as a commanding officer and as aide to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 9/11. For more about Suzanne and her work, including upcoming presentations and classes, visit www.SuzanneGiesemann.com.