

Who Me?

I'm on a journey in Japan. If you'd told me 10 years ago that this is where I'd be, I wouldn't have believed it. It's been a long row to hoe, but I wouldn't change a thing.

A decade ago was the height of my "pantyhose & briefcase days". Working as a sales manager for a large Manhattan company, happily married, with great friends, and earning great money, everything was seemingly "perfect". Why then did I feel such discontent?

Discontentment has been a recurring theme, propelling me to the next chapter or next phase. But it has also scared and frustrated me. Why couldn't I be like other people who were content with what life served them?

Restlessness aside, my life was meant to be lived with purpose. But the purpose was unclear. Where was the lightbulb moment—the epiphany—that would show me how to live my life to its greatest potential? That hadn't happened.

Old life started to breakdown. Old identities fell away, only to be replaced by new ones. My sales hat was replaced with a consultant hat. We purchased a house in the country; yuppie suits were replaced by jeans and Teva's.

Marriage was changing, too. My wedding band no longer fit and felt so heavy that it was uncomfortable to wear, so I stopped. I didn't want to sack my marriage; rather it was time to stop using a simple platinum band as protection from the world. With that step, the struggle around whether to stay or leave began in earnest. How could I live my life as a gift if I continued to use marriage as a tether?

Psychic abilities or spiritual practices weren't my thing. They were for other people; I was practical, logical and goal-oriented. My talents didn't lie in my intuition, but in careful and methodical planning. Secretly, I envied my friends who seemed to know something beyond this plane of existence and discounted any ideas that I might also have access to that realm.

One friend in particular, used to go to Wisconsin for what he called 'gatherings'. Something stirred inside me whenever he talked about these get-togethers. Who were these people? Could I meet them? Wait a minute, why on earth would I go to Wisconsin to hang out with people I didn't know?

The more time I spent alone, in my little house in the woods, the deeper the exploration and release of anxieties, fears and insecurities. There were a lot there. With the support and guidance of people on parallel roads, I developed past life regression techniques as well as other modes of self-exploration. Digging, digging, always digging. In that quiet space, a new me was emerging. More and more identities were falling away. Those angst-filled tapes that were running in my head began to cease and desist. The observer self was getting stronger.

I started going to Wisconsin a couple of times of year for intensive weeks with fellow explorers. After every return, there was a rough re-entry process. The more I understood about who I was, the more challenging it was to relate to my old life. Many of the people out there had left their marriages and partnerships. Would that be asked of me as well? When had I agreed to this, anyway? I loved my husband. He was a good man and loved me dearly.

My passion for work dried up, so I took time off, allowing myself to flow along the stream of life. Letting go of control, agendas and planning was a big one. My intuitive side was also developing some muscles. As I relinquished control, inner guidance signaled more clearly.

Conflict was intensifying between the life I had chosen and the one emerging. Crying myself to sleep, I wondered how to handle it. Struggle, struggle. Finally, I prayed only for my next step; I didn't need to know the whole plan. In fact, that might have just put me over the edge. It went something like, "Please help me to see and take the step which serves the greatest good." Letting go of specific outcomes helped tremendously.

As the holidays approached, dread struck. My marriage was falling apart and the idea of faking it with family and friends was unimaginable. During a tearful conversation with a friend, I heard myself saying that I was leaving my marriage and getting a divorce. Whoa. A simple calm took over. The truth was clear. I was ending my 19 year relationship. Within a week, my life was packed into my car and I was heading to Wisconsin, arriving on Christmas Eve.

I spent a few years in Wisconsin, unmasking patterns and history. It was a reflective time, learning who I was outside of "we". Tremendous waves of core-rocking pain surfaced. There were times I wished for it all to be over; however, those years were really such a blessing. There was a sense of community that was integral to my maturation process. Alongside many fellow seekers, a spiritual laboratory was created. When triggers surfaced, we explored why these feelings erupted, so that recreating them was unnecessary.

I got stronger and more self-contained. Once again, I'd created a good life there—a good job, good friends, and a sense of peace. Yet, that familiar inner stirring began rumbling. How, where, and when would my life be changing?

Surfing the net one day, I googled "teach in Japan". Really? Why would a 40-year old woman move to Japan with just two suitcases, no friends or real experience teaching English? Because life was calling me elsewhere. By evening, the application was sent. Deep inside I knew I was moving to Japan.

I recently celebrated my 18 month anniversary in Japan. It has been an amazing experience. The beginning might have been considered rocky by some; my employer hit the skids, forcing me to move twice and change jobs in the first two months. However, the groundwork had served me well. Calm prevailed and everything fell perfectly into place.

I am filled with gratitude for this life. Sometimes I look back at my old life and reflect. I'm grateful for *all* of the experiences leading up to this moment. They've shaped who I've become, just as this experience will shape my next chapter. I'm glad I took the leap off the precipice that dark holiday season five years ago and headed into the unknown.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Thank you Robert Frost.

And most of all, thank you Ia and the "DC laboratory" for greater understanding.