

PREFACE

We think we want to see the entire future. We think we want to know all the steps and turns in the path ahead. But the truth is that would bore us and make life not worth living.

It really is so much more fun to follow our desires, listen to our Inner Guidance, and take the next right step, then the next right step, and then the next right step, not knowing where each step will lead but trusting that it is going to lead to someplace amazing, where we can learn and grow from all our “mistakes” and enjoy all the beautiful gifts offered along the way. Trusting that if we cannot see the next right step, we are not yet meant to, and until the step becomes clear, our job is to find a way to enjoy the present. When we find gratitude and joy in the present, we lift our vibration to one of Light, and with that Light the next step always becomes clear.

This is true happiness. This is living happily ever after. It’s being present in and appreciating all the tiny moments that we miss *right now* when we’re continuously looking forward to living a happy life.

By the time I was twenty-seven, I had been to twenty-seven countries and slept with twenty-seven men. I stopped counting both countries and men when I hit fifty of each. When I was thirty-three I joined a Buddhist cult, where I was severely brainwashed; I

burned almost everything I owned and lost my friends, my sanity, and almost my life. When I was thirty-nine I went into business with a guy I met in a karate dojo in New York. I knew him for only six months. I had no operating agreement. And I ended up embroiled in a huge lawsuit, losing hundreds of thousands of dollars, and smeared all over the New York tabloids. My mother drowned in a bathtub when I was twenty-nine. My father died on Thanksgiving Day when I was fifteen. Most of the rest of my family died before that. I endured my share of trauma; I stuffed down my share of shame.

We shouldn't be afraid of our stories. We shouldn't be afraid of our voice. And we shouldn't see anything that happened to us as "wrong." We are in these human bodies for such a brief period of time. When we incarnated, we signed up for a wild ride. Why spend any moment of it afraid? Why hide who we are? Why limit ourselves? Why numb our emotions with addiction? Each one of us is God/Goddess expressing uniquely through *our own* unique form. We are the *only* expression of us there is. Once we are gone, this unique expression is lost. What are we waiting for?

The time to live is *now*. Our life is *now*. It is all the tiny moments we are *missing* as we keep waiting for life to start. It is all the opportunities to love that we miss because we shut our hearts down in fear. It is all the opportunities to *live* that we miss because crusty old belief systems tell us "we can't." Life only feels "over in a flash" if we keep postponing joy and love for a later date, living the same day repeatedly, sacrificing what could be fresh and miraculous and alive and new for the "safe" and "predictable" and mundane.

Imagine a world where we are courageous enough to be ourselves, to speak our truth, knowing we have a unique and important perspective to add. Where we are bold enough to go after the deepest desires of our heart, knowing our desires are unique to us and planted in our heart by the Hand of the Divine. Where we understand we add our Light to the sum of Light when we stand tall in who we are. Unafraid. Unashamed.

We are guided more than we know. Protected so much more than we could ever realize. We spend so much of our lives worried about what other people think of us, worried about being hurt, worried about dying. Death doesn't just come for us randomly. We don't just die for no reason. We die when we have either fulfilled our purpose here on Earth and are ready to move on or when we have decided we no longer wish to be here and we want to return Home. Either way, death is not something to fear. It is a transition back to the pure Light from whence we came. It is a supreme graduation to the next level.

These moments spent worrying are precious moments we can never get back; they are precious life force energy wasted. Worry is using our mind energy to create a future we dread. Why are we not taught this as children? Why are we not taught how destructive this is? We are taught to feel shame regarding the most magical parts of our human body. We are taught we cannot make money doing what we love. We are taught that we are not okay as we are and have to change to please the adults around us. We are taught so much lack-consciousness and so much restriction. Rarely are we taught to truly be ourselves and follow our dreams.

I heard once that when trying to decide between two options, always pick the one that will leave the better story. I have tried to do that my entire life.

Mary Oliver, in her magnificent poem "West Wind #2," tells us to put down our oars and trust the stream of life to carry us. She says only when we hear the water slamming against the jagged rocks, when we "feel the mist on [our] mouth and sense ahead the embattlement, the long falls plunging and steaming" should we then pick up our oars and "row, row for [our] life toward it."

Row for our life *toward* it. Toward what gets our heart racing. Toward what makes us nervous. Toward what gets the lifeblood pumping.

We are blessed, magical beings. We came here specifically to experience life on Earth in human bodies. We are not meant to be

so afraid. All the mystics, saints, and shamans say we are Source Energy, expressing uniquely as each one of us. We spend so much of our childhood trying to fit in, trying to please the adults around us, trying to blend in with the other kids and be popular. We forget who we are. It is time to remember.

This is the only way life on Earth gets better, for all of us. Haven't you noticed we are drawn to people who are authentic? Think of those people who dance horribly and with total abandon at weddings. We all *love* them! They give us permission to get up and dance horribly ourselves. Think of the super-tan, leather-skinned, wrinkly old man Rollerblading down the sidewalk in a neon Speedo. He makes us smile ear to ear in his eccentricity. We *love* seeing this man as we drive by.

The people we admire the most are those who are completely, unapologetically themselves. The people who have created the most fantastic lives for themselves are people who went against the norm and initially got demonized and ostracized but stayed true to their own understanding of who they were, refusing to compromise. Think of Prince in his high heels and his tiny underpants, prancing around, singing about purple rain. He tried to start his career as an opening band but got booed off the stage. Instead of hanging his head in shame and quitting, he knew immediately he was not meant to be an opening act. He knew in his heart he was a headliner. And he refused to open for anyone else ever again. He was the main event.

Authenticity is magnetic. Authenticity is the true essence of Source animating the expression of each one of us, unimpeded by self-doubt, confusion, or shame. We resist being around people who pull on our energy for attention, love, and validation. And we are in awe of those who stand strongly on their own two feet, believing in themselves, not needing us for validation.

So many people are trying to save the world, change the world. But that has to start with saving ourselves. And we do this by getting to know our self, our *authentic* self. Not what the media tells

us we are supposed to be. Not what our parents and teachers and religious leaders tell us we are supposed to be. What the tiny, quiet voice inside tells us. The child inside us. The one who knows what we love, in which endeavors we excel, what we were born to do. Each one of us is born with unique gifts, the parts of ourselves we tried to hide as children because they made us different—these are the keys to unlocking our destiny. We must uncover them. Dust them off. Give them love. Nurture them. Develop them. And wear them with pride.

Our skin color is not wrong. Our body size and shape are not wrong. Our ethnicity is not a mistake. Our sexual preference is not a mistake. Our accent, our wounds, our traumas, our “deformities,” none of these are mistakes. We *chose*—our soul *chose*—every single experience, every single part of our physical form, in order for us to learn what we came here to learn and teach what we came here to teach. It *chose* the just-right upbringing and the just-right experiences and the just-right physical form to fulfill our destiny here on Earth. Isn't that something to get excited about?

We need you, *as you*, here, now, expressing yourself fully. Trusting yourself. Trusting the ways you are different. Do not be afraid. Do not be ashamed. We need the lessons you have learned from the “mistakes” you have made or the traumas you have endured.

I spent most of my life feeling like an alien here on Earth. Feeling *so incredibly different*. I could blend in, but I never truly fit. And then one day I realized I felt like a caged dragon. I felt like an intense, winged, fire-breathing being stuck in a container that made me hide my wings and my ability to breathe fire, because my size and my wings and my intensity scared people. It was only when *The Burn Zone* was published and my story was in black-and-white for the whole world to read that I realized I was done hiding, that hiding was killing me. I decided to spread my wings, to shatter my cage, and to *roar* with fire . . . I decided to estrange everyone who liked me small. It was terrifying. And it left me almost alone for a

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stretch. But the more I stayed true to myself, the more those who didn't love the true me left and the more space I created around myself for those who loved me *as me* to enter.

It's hard to go against the norm. We risk being ostracized and demonized. We risk being misunderstood. But spending our lives locked in a cage is worse.

I implore you: Begin unfolding those wings. Begin playing with your own fire. Begin testing how high and how far you can soar. Because only when we are willing to expand and roar can other similar beings find us. Only in our authenticity can we finally feel not-all-alone. Only as our *true self* will we ever see where and how we fit into the divine tapestry called life. Let's not wait one moment more.

INTRODUCTION

We're standing outside a hotel in Florida. It's close to 2:00 a.m., and the air is hot and thick and humid, smelling like wet earth, grass, and trees from the recent downpour of rain. We can hear music and laughter from the bars nearby. I'm wearing light-blue skinny jeans and a flowery pale-yellow off-the-shoulder top, blousy in the sleeves and tight around my torso. My camel-colored wedge heels are dangling from my right hand; I had removed them to walk from the bar to the hotel.

My left hand is interlocked with his, our fingers intertwined; the side of my face is level with his shoulder. We're both sweaty from dancing, and I'm drunk. All the tequila is just now starting to hit me, and as we walk, I begin to swerve and my world starts to spin. He notices and stops walking. He turns to face me. And then he leans down to kiss me. A beautiful kiss. Slow and soft, caring and full of passion and presence . . . and love. My knees go weak, and my world spins a little more.

As I lose myself in the kiss and the magic of the moment, I feel fleshy, warm, full lips on the back of my neck. Deliberate kisses working their way from the top of my shoulderless shirt to the base of my skull. Slowly. Senuously.

His friend, who had been walking beside us. His *incredibly* handsome friend. Tan skin, long blond hair, beautiful white smile, super fun on the dance floor, wild and sexy and athletically built. The man who had been lap-dancing me. The man who had been buying me extra shots of expensive tequila. His best friend. Kissing me at the same time from behind. They are both much younger than I am by something close to twenty years. They are both professional tennis players. They are both *incredibly* handsome and healthy and thriving in life. And they both clearly appreciate older women.

Suddenly I understand how far I've come. How much I've grown. How *completely* I have my own back. Because I check in with myself even in my drunken blur.

Do I want this? I ask. Is this okay?

As if reading my thoughts, his friend murmurs into my neck, "You are so sexy. Would you like a night of amazing sex?"

I stop kissing the man in front of me. My world is spinning. My book tour ended this morning. Six years of hard work—over. Is this my gift from the Book Tour Gods? Is this how I want to celebrate? I remember the vow I made to my Inner Child, and I ask her if she wants to invite these men inside. As a light mist starts to fall, we all take a step sideways into the shelter of the trees.



DECISIONS

The most important decision we will ever make is whether we believe we live in a friendly or a hostile universe.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

CHAPTER 1

SLOW DOWN

I have a confession to make: I'm not very good at being human. I still can't figure it out. For the life of me, I cannot figure out other people, and even after all these years of trying, I can't figure out myself. And maybe that's the whole point. Maybe that's what makes life dynamic and thrilling. I'm not sure. Maybe "I'm not sure" is the answer to all of it.

I have noticed that anytime I think I'm sure, life comes along and proves me wrong. I have noticed that anytime I think I'm sure, I turn into a bit of an asshole. I close my mind to ideas and concepts and people that oppose the way I think I'm sure. And I am really beginning to see how quantum physics is right when it tells us there are billions of simultaneous realities. The Buddha said, "With our thoughts we make the world." Science is finally catching up to what the mystics, saints, and shamans have been saying for thousands of years: our thoughts create our reality. There are billions of us, each with a unique perspective, so there are *billions* of simultaneous realities. No wonder we can't get along.

What if we stopped trying so hard to get others to see from our point of view? What if we finally realized our point of view works for us because it is ours. But everyone else has a point of view that works for each one of them. If it didn't work, they would seek alternative information and change it.

What if life on Earth really is just the ultimate video game? We incarnate in these bodies, and like Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and the other characters do in the movie *Jumanji*, we have to figure out how our avatars work. We discover our strengths and weaknesses. We learn about our bodies, our flaws, and our unique skill sets. We discover our likes and dislikes. Personal preferences. And we fine-tune as we go.

We get plopped into these bodies and these personalities that are constantly surprising us. And at the same time, we get plopped into a world where every single other human is living in a different reality, looking through a different lens. They are *creating* from a different lens, and with a different skill set, different wants and needs. And then we add that each human is *projecting* that different reality onto everybody else: Thieves think everyone else is stealing from them; lovers think everyone else has good intentions; cheaters think everyone else is cheating; fighters always find people with whom to fight. You get the point.

Combine all that with the fact that when we are young, and often for most of our lives, we bend and mold and shape ourselves into false versions of ourselves to fit in and people-please. And we end up with a shit show. Seriously. It's fascinating.

The only way to unwind the shit show is for each one of us to stop caring so much about what other people think about us, to stop comparing our lives to the lives of others, to start discovering who we truly are, and then to build an authentic life around it. This raises us up, out of the mess, and it washes off the shit so that we *sparkle* with light. If we trust that we are here for a reason, that we are unique for a reason, and that a divine path is already lined up for us, life gets a lot easier. As we admit we do not know, that it

is all a mystery, that as soon as we think we have the world or ourselves or anyone else figured out, we get the carpet pulled out from under us—we get our paradigm shattered—life gets a lot more fun. It’s like walking up to the River of Life and someone asking, “Where does this river go?” and you answer, “I have no idea, but it sure looks like fun!” and jump in. Arms up in the air. Ready for the ride. *Trusting* that wherever the ride leads is someplace amazing.

This morning I was meditating in my favorite living room chair, and I had a vision of myself in that same chair at about eighty years old. I saw how little and how wrinkled and how wise this version of me was. She was *glowing*. She was so patient, so calm, so *content*. And she offered me advice. She said to me, “Slow down.”

Just those two words.

“Slow down.”

She sat there in her comfy lounge clothing with her warm cup of coffee, and she was so beautiful in her calm, in her peace, in her wisdom.

“Slow down.”

She said, “You will be here in a flash, and you don’t want to miss any moment of it.” She told me, “It is all coming. All of it. All that you dream about. But it is not your work to do. It is God’s work to do through you. If you do not slow down, you cannot be a clear channel. The same way you cannot rush a baby into this world, you cannot rush your accomplishments; they will be born when they are meant to be born, after the proper gestation. Your unique contribution *will* be offered. It must be. But if you rush the process, you end up with a child that does not have fully functioning lungs. So, please, my love, slow down.”

CHAPTER 2

DROWNING

I was drowning. I was going to drown. And I was most probably going to be smashed into the lava rocks as it happened. My mind went utterly calm. There was nothing I could do. A lifeguard was going to have to save me, or I was going to die. No real choices on my end. No options left except try to keep air in my lungs a few more seconds at a time.

I was treading water just outside the shore break of Waimea Bay, about fifteen feet from the beach, getting sucked rapidly toward the “Death Zone” (the name the locals endearingly gave the razor-sharp black lava rocks and cliff faces on the west side of the bay). The swell that day was easily twenty feet Hawaiian (close to thirty-five-foot wave faces) with some even bigger sets. The water was a deep turquoise blue, and the swell was rolling in from far across the world, gathering tremendous momentum as it crossed the wide-open expanse. The surf was *huge* and an amazing spectacle to watch. Its power was tangible from up on the road as it thumped and pummeled the shore with a deafening roar, sending

massive sprays of salt water high into the air as the waves hit the beach and surrounding cliffs.

I had met Latham, an *incredibly* handsome, well-known Australian big-wave rider the day before, while watching the sunset at Sunset Beach. And in my effort to get to know him better, I had allowed him to talk me into paddling out into the channel with him, on his board, to watch people surf Waimea Bay. I knew better than to do this. I had been raised on a boat by a military father who was captain of a landing craft infantry vessel in five invasions in World War II. He taught me from as early as I could remember to respect the ocean, to understand tides and swells, and to never, *ever* get myself in water I could not handle. But . . . this guy was so *hot*. And he was *such* a good surfer.

And, I reasoned with myself, *he has to know what he's doing; he surfs here all the time*. And did I mention that he was hot? Six feet tall, big blue eyes, golden-brown skin, curly sun-kissed dirty-blond hair, muscles on top of muscles on top of muscles. Built like an Adonis. How could I possibly resist?

So I agreed to go. And I got on the front of his thirteen-foot *rhino chaser* (surfboard for surfing huge waves). And I lay down on my stomach and put my tan, round, bikini-clad bottom in his face, my legs spread slightly so he could lie down behind me, torso between my thighs, chest resting on the curve of my behind. And together we paddled out into the channel, my heart racing the entire time.

A lifeguard on a Jet Ski raced up to us as we were paddling out. "You're not planning to surf, are you?" he asked, concerned.

"No," we responded in unison.

He recognized Latham. "Oh, howzit?" he said, sounding relieved.

"Just going to sit in the channel and watch, mate," Latham said.

"Okay," the lifeguard responded reluctantly, then took off to our left and went out to the lineup as we continued our paddle out.

Latham kept us safely away from where the waves were breaking, and we got to see some *incredible* airdrops by surfers on

huge boards—angles and views you simply cannot get from the beach. The energy of the surfers in the lineup was frenzied and passionate. The fear and adrenaline were tangible. The surfers swirled around one another, jockeying for position, those deepest and farthest away from us having priority but also holding the most dangerous positions, with much farther to go to make it to safety once they dropped into a wave and more of a chance that another surfer would drop in on them, blocking their exit into the safety of the shoulder of the wave and the channel beside it. Men were screaming support to one another, hooting and hollering for each surfer that went for it, and yelling in unison when surfers got shot out of the barrels. Lifeguards on Jet Skis were racing from the outside to the inside, constantly scanning for surfers who may need rescue. The buzz of the Jet Skis was barely audible over the roar of the crashing surf. A helicopter was circling above, adding to the noise, photographers hanging out the side doors. I was smack-dab in the middle of one of the best surf spots in the world, surrounded by the best surfers in the world.

But I was afraid. Too afraid to enjoy myself. I knew too much about the ocean. I knew you could never, and *should never*, predict it. You could never, and *should never*, assume in a situation like this that a random rogue sweeper set (bigger set) would not roll through. I didn't care how much he knew about Waimea, about where it would break and where it would not. I was terrified. This was a typical day in the office for Latham; it was toying with death for me. I wanted to go in.

So, after less than ten minutes, I asked to go back to the beach. We turned around and paddled back, my heart thumping in my chest, my body quivering from all the adrenaline, my breath shallow, coming in panicked gasps.

“Okay, now here's the tricky part,” Latham said. “I will take us to the beach, and you will have to jump off immediately so the shore-pound doesn't smash us.”

“Okay,” I responded nervously. And in we went, to the north corner of the bay. Latham had timed it perfectly. I jumped off. I stumbled as a wave hit me from behind. I kept my gaze fixed on the dry sand and heaved my body through the waist-high, churning, foamy, sandy white water. I didn’t know what he was doing, and I didn’t care. I just wanted to get to the safety of the dry sand. I was trembling, panting, and filled with fear.

My legs did not seem grounded. I could barely gain traction. The swirling water grabbed me by the waist and legs and dragged me backward. I leaned away from it and made it a few steps toward the beach, but then got sucked backward, off the sand, by the water. Sucked off the shore and immediately swept south by the current. Latham was trying to get himself and the thirteen-foot surfboard onto the beach and did not notice. I didn’t know what to do. The shore-pound was easily double overhead, smashing with ferocious force onto the sand, and there seemed no pause between waves. I would break into pieces and die if I tried to swim through it to the beach. And yet staying just outside it, I was getting swept toward the lava rocks. *Quickly.*

I made a few attempts to enter the shore-pound and ended up being slammed in circles, airless and choking on water and sand. I gave up. I was going to drown if I kept trying. And my body was quickly tiring from trying to fight the current and from my panicked shallow breathing. I knew I had to relax. I knew people drown because they panic. I knew a relaxed body stays afloat longer. And I prayed a lifeguard would see me. But I was tired. *So* tired. And I estimated I had about four minutes before I got smashed into the rocks.

I had recently been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. After a six-month around-the-world modeling job, I’d tried to make up for my lost semester at college by taking twice as many classes. In my effort to become a professional ballet dancer, I had been dancing six hours a day on top of that. My illness forced me to drop half my classes and give up my roles in the upcoming

dance performances. I'd fallen into a deep depression, which made my illness worse. I could barely get out of bed. I had been sick all the time as a child and adolescent and was beginning to realize the doctors, diagnoses, and pharmaceuticals weren't helping me. I needed to make a radical shift. This trip to Hawaii, I figured, was either going to heal me or kill me. But some part of me knew if I could get myself to Oahu, the *mana* (land energy) of the island would bring me back to life. And yet here I was, drowning. The strength in my already-very-weak body was fading. I was going under. And my world suddenly went black.

Just then a man appeared. He was Hawaiian and wearing swim fins. He looked incredibly peaceful and calm. Dark hair, dark skin, beautiful smile, kind brown eyes. "I'll hold you," he said to me. "I'll hold on to you until the lifeguard comes." He reached for my arm to pull me close. Then, with gentle hands, he grabbed my hips and held my head above the water. He radiated serenity. A calm enveloped me.

And then the lifeguard appeared. He had a red flotation device tied to him. "Grab my wrist," he yelled as he extended his arm. It was difficult to hear him over the sound of the crashing waves. I grabbed his wrist, and he wrapped his hand around my wrist, holding me so tightly it hurt. "We have to take the shore-pound in," he yelled to me. "Do NOT let go of me! Hold your breath!" he screamed.

"Okay," I responded, too weak and limp and scared to say anything else.

"Now!" he yelled. I gulped in oxygen. And we went for it. He pulled me down and forward. The water caught us. We got lifted and slammed into the sand, and lifted and slammed again, and around and around and around we went, head over feet over head over feet. Underwater was dark and sandy and cold and heavy. My wrist ached from where he held me so tightly. I thought my bony wrist was going to snap. My lungs burned from needing to breathe. My back and neck cracked repeatedly as I was smashed in all directions.

And then we came up for air, in shallow water; my feet could touch the bottom. "Run, run, run!" he screamed as he ran alongside me, desperate to get us completely onto dry sand. The sand was deep and wet and made it hard to get a foothold. The water was still swirling around our thighs and lower legs. I used all the energy I had left and ran with him until he and I both collapsed in dry sand. We lay side by side, panting. And then I began sobbing. "It's okay," he said. "It's okay. You are safe." He held my hand and sat up. I kept crying.

Latham appeared and collapsed, panting and crying next to us. He had been running down the beach, a long run in very deep, soft sand. He had gotten his board to shore and turned around just in time to see me getting swept down the beach. He began screaming, and his screaming alerted the lifeguard and initiated the rescue. He had watched the whole thing, panicked, as he ran south down the beach.

"Where is the man?" I asked, dazed and confused.

No answer. Just labored catching of breath.

"Where is the man who was holding me?" I asked.

"What man?" the lifeguard responded.

"The Hawaiian man. The one with fins. The one who was helping me swim," I said. The lifeguard looked at Latham.

"There was no man," Latham said.

"Yes," I responded. "There was a Hawaiian man holding me afloat when you got to me. I let go of him to grab on to you."

The lifeguard looked out at the water and then back at me. "Renee, you were all alone."