

# *The Awakenings...Ten Years Later*

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Ten years ago this week, the lives of millions of people changed...many profoundly. On September 11, 2001, I was at home after having just returned from a double lecture tour and preparing for another tour the following week. At close to 9am central time, the news of the attacks on U.S. soil hit the airwaves. As billions of people around the world became riveted by the visceral reminder of life, death, impermanence and priorities, I experienced my second powerful awakening for that year and it changed the trajectory of my entire life.

Just six months and ten days before that pivotal September morning, I was outsourced (along with the entire department) from a job of which I gave my whole focus to. My work family of twelve years was split apart by a corporate board, but there was very little time for finger pointing, I was unemployed and I needed to focus on replacing my seemingly



“secure” job. Although that pre-9/11 wake-up call was disorienting and terribly sad, it quickly forced me to launch the beginning of a new way of living “fearlessly.” For me, that key word, “fearlessly” means to disregard the fear and go forth anyway. Aside from my adult career dreams, there was no idea what to do next. The choice was made. There was nothing to lose at that point. Life dreams were chosen out of default.

The illusion of security in life is an interesting yet very uncomfortable process to untangle and if we are fortunate...we get to bust that illusion wide open. People have a tendency to hook a sense of security to other people, things or situations as if our life depends on it, which it rarely does. It is a painful lesson it is to realize that illusion, one that is often filled with a sense of betrayals, emptiness and terror. Denial is strong and I don't think I am the only one who has clung to magical thinking when illusions are shattering. In the midst of that evolution, it felt like I was working without a net, but the net was there, it just couldn't be seen. The journey to learn how to trust the unseen was terrifying, and that journey continues to unfold ten years later. Perhaps it is an ongoing part of the life journey.

Six months after the outsourcing, I was beginning the early stages of finding my new professional footing when 9/11 occurred. That historical event began to call me to look at my own mortality and my life priorities and the intention in which I live life. As I boarded a plane a ten days later, the post 9/11 stories were starting to be made public. The search/rescue/recovery process was still ongoing, yet those of us on the outer circle of the event, were beginning being thrust into making meaning of the event. It would be years, if not a lifetime for those who lost loved ones.

The utter panic I felt every time the wheels lifted off the ground reminded me the actual parameters of authentic control in life. While looking around the plane, I wondered if it was my last day in this life and if that last breath would be drawn sitting next to someone where no eye contact had even occurred. That is when I began to realize that much loneliness is a choice we make.

After September 2001, I began to leave my books and magazines unopened, my highlighters capped and started talking and connecting those around me (a bit of a stretch for a strong introvert). Seatmates would often share stories of what and who they loved, what made them laugh and they would tell about their life passions and fears. What made life their lives sing became clear...propelling me to reflect on mine.

During that time the wheels-up panic was replaced with a calm question: "Are you ready?" Meaning: if this was the last day of this life of mine, has it been lived with intention and courage? Am I living with regret or fear? What was I going to choose? Would love or fear be my life motivator?

How I was willing to live changed. What I was willing to spend my time doing changed. Gratitude, courage, risks, openness and love became the predominant factors. If any given day was my last (which it will be at some point), I never wanted anyone I loved to feel unloved or disrespected by me. Although I certainly haven't done that perfectly the last decade, it is my conscious intention for those I care about to have no doubt they are loved. No one should leave this life without the experience of feeling cherished by someone.

No longer afraid to tell people what was appreciated and admired, with no regard to if they reciprocated, changed my life. The transformation of the heart provides a freedom like none other. What a powerful living legacy for the thousands of people who lost their lives that day...that one person...maybe tens of thousands of people were inspired to open their heart and love without hesitation.

Life is uncertain. Most things are impermanent. What is it that is truly unchangeable?

If today was your final day, what would you wish to leave as your legacy? Love? Fear? The choice is ours...each and every moment. If you received this email today, I chose you and love.

