

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERING THE HOLY GIFTS IN MY LIFE

As I look back at my life, I have come to realize that every moment of deepest despair or exuberant joy has always opened the door for life-changing insights, learnings and decisions.

I have found that these life experiences, the ones that were the most difficult, helped me to get in touch with some very deep and strong qualities in my being. I would like to share how all of this has influenced and shaped my life now.

The first moment of despair came when I was around 3 or 4 years old. My mother beat me ragefully after I cut up a bag of rice and the kernels spilled throughout the kitchen floor. I could never understand why my mother became as enraged as she did. I was innocent in what I thought was play.

From that moment on, I never felt safe with my mother and in my home. That began my deepest desire--to be away from home as much as I could, and I did that—I ran away from home every chance that I had. With six other sisters and brothers, and grandparents, **it was easy for me not to be missed for long.**

My precious dog, Rusty, followed me everywhere. He was my best buddy, and we had so much fun together. He even let me ride him.

Some other children in the neighborhood and I had gone to a neighbor's home a few houses down from where we lived several times before. We were treated well by these neighbors—spoken to gently and given treats everytime we went there. I felt loved and cared for—the attention I craved for at home but didn't get.

Then I began going there by myself with Rusty and eventually felt safe enough to go into the house. I remember sitting on the laps of some of the men in the house and being treated with tenderness.

One day I became acutely afraid of their intentions and somehow instinctively knew they were going to harm me. I couldn't understand how, but I knew I needed to get away as they approached me. And, as one of them began to take action, I remember seeing and feeling the evil in their eyes.

I felt so scared and trapped when I realized that I couldn't free myself; I thought I was going to die, and I wanted to. That was probably my first experience where I left my body and dissociated because of the abject and numbing terror I was feeling.

At that very moment I heard my mother's voice calling to me. She had heard from the neighbors that Rusty, my truly beloved doggie, now an angel to me, was sitting patiently outside of this house and that I was probably there as well.

My mother, most feared and despised by me, in that instant, became my adored protector! She took my hand and we walked in silence all the way home. I shall never forget that walk home. I felt she had heard my call for help; I had never felt so very heard, so very safe, so very understood and loved by her!

Sadly, after this incident, mother continued to be verbally and physically abusive to our father and to us. I was later to learn of her own abused, neglected and abandoned past with her own parents where she was often left hungry and without a safe place to stay.

Sometimes we need more experiences to begin a deeper journey of recovery.

I was mostly unaware that I had still carried a lot of painful memories of my mother's abuse when I married, thankfully briefly, someone who was even scarier and more abusive than my mother!

There were many crazy and frightening moments of physical and sexual abuse in the marriage, but the one that stood out the most was when an evil presence came into him and he started to spew foul, debasing words about me, put his hand around my neck threatening to choke me, wondered out loud what he should do with me, and then started to bang his head against my head where it became bruised and bled.

Again, I was petrified with a numbing fear and knew that if I did not get away, I would be killed. I felt that an evil presence had entered his body and the room became icy cold.

I began thinking of every possible way to escape from that hotel room. Even though we were on the 5th or 6th floor, I thought of going out of the window and sliding down, thinking that I magically would not get hurt or not caring if I did. Of running out the door, but I didn't know where the keys were. Or escaping with the room service person when he came to the room, but I was so scared, I dared not move!

I was feeling desperate, totally helpless, and that there was no way out, that I was going to die! Then the inspiration came to me to pray, so I prayed and prayed and prayed some more for help while in my deepest despair!

After what seemed like hours, I noticed that the whole room had become warm and was full of light! I wasn't quite sure what that meant and if, indeed, it was real, until more of the unexpected happened! He fell asleep! After waiting a while to make sure that he was fully out, I then fled from the room.

It was after this terror I entered therapy to deal with the issues that started with my mother—the abuse, feeling unsafe, fearful, insecure. These issues had created the belief that I was absolutely not good enough, and I couldn't honor myself in any loving and positive way.

I am now married to a tender and gentle soul who is intrinsically loving and trusting. And for that I am deeply humbled and grateful. And I know that in those ways he is my true mirror, a blessing from God.

As I have had fears in opening up my heart to freely receive and give love and the sweetness of life, my body has been affected and I now have diabetes. I have also had cancer and other disorders, a constant reminder for me to open my heart even more, not only to the Divine love, but to the Divine truth and Divine mercy that have always been there for me.

Six years ago I was introduced to the Sufi path, a way of being and living in the heart, a window to healing not only the physical body, but also deep and unconscious residual mental and emotional pain in one's life and heart through ancient healing methods.

I had wanted to heal my heart relative to my mother even though I had never felt truly loved by her most of my life. Just before her passing recently, I saw a circle of angels above her bed with a circle of cherubs singing so very sweetly, and I could see the bottoms of their robes gently swaying as they waited very patiently and very lovingly for my mom.

The love that gently flowed from their exquisite patience and gentleness touched my heart so deeply. I knew that it was the love from God for my Mom which had overflowed to me--that she had always loved me deeply even when I thought that she hadn't, just like God always had. This has become such a "holy gift" for me, one which I can now draw on whenever I need to.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

There is deep, deep meaning and purpose to every life experience, not only with the most inspiring and uplifting, but especially with the most painful, scary and traumatic.

From my own experiences of absolute beauty and awe to the deepest despair, fear, and sorrow, I now believe that EVERY EXPERIENCE in one's personal life is ultimately a HOLY GIFT FROM GOD. If we open up our hearts to the healing, the learning, the deeper meanings, this will be exactly what we are needing to heal and move on to other life experiences that would probably not have opened up to us without healing the previous painful wounds.

I know this in my heart because I am now helping children, families, single and married couples of all ethnicities, cultures and professions who have been affected by all forms of abuse and other trauma. I also counsel around parenting, relationship, self worth, and mental and emotional health issues that arise from the trauma. Most of all, I try to help each client become aware of the intrinsic beauty, healthiness and holiness of his or her heart.

So EVERY LIFE EXPERIENCE has been a valuable stepping stone, a "holy gift" for me to help my clients with a deeper level of sensitivity, and I hope that deep healing from their past, no matter what has happened, is very possible.

How did I find these “gifts?” I realized that after I had processed most of my grief from my traumas, my heart and mind were more open to seeing these “holy gifts.”

HOW I PROCESSED MY GRIEF

1. I processed my grief until I experienced “acceptance” of the event; I needed to release feelings that came up: anger, rage, guilt, embarrassment, shame, sorrow, and so on. Until I reached a deeper understanding of what happened.

Processing your grief is not minimizing your grief; it is acknowledging your grief, allowing yourself to feel any feelings about it for as long as you need to and not following others’ dictates to “move on” or “to get over it.” You will know when you have processed most of your grief because you will then be ready to move to Step 2 very naturally, even if you don’t necessarily believe that there are “gifts” for you to uncover.

2. I had a genuine desire to discover these “gifts,” that is, deeper meaning and purpose to all of the pain that I had experienced.

If you are at #2, you will have healed from most of the grief from the loss or incident(s) and you are ready to move forward with your life. You may have moments of wanting to spend more time with others, engaging in pleasurable activities and genuinely enjoying yourself; taking care of yourself--exercising, getting massages, doing yoga, qigong, meditation, praying, reading about inner self growth, writing, painting, cooking, sewing, knitting--whatever interests you.

3. I then looked deeper into these experiences to see what these “gifts” could possibly be, including identifying what my role or responsibility was vs another’s, whenever appropriate as an adult, and to learn from them.

At this point, it is so very important to let whatever thoughts or feelings emerge, and deeply understand them. You may come to a deeper level of grief, and you will need to process it without judgement to self or others. Remember, any feelings associated with the grief process are your unique way of healing this grief, and this is another vital step to your recovery. Do not ignore them; process them. A technique that could help you do this is to:

- A. Express the feelings out loud.
- B. Feel the feelings in your body.
- C. Identify where you feel them specifically in your body.
- D. Pray or express your desire to want them healed.
- E. Place the word “God” and/or breathe in white light and positive thoughts into the area in your body that you want healed.

- F. Say or breathe in any positive quality, preferably out loud, if appropriate, or silently from your heart, that you feel you are needing in that moment—peace, love, forgiveness, understanding, gentleness, sweetness, tenderness, truth and so on.
 - G. Take the time to feel what qualities your body truly needs.
 - H. Keep saying or breathing in these qualities until you feel better in that specific area of your body, and continue to say or breathe in the qualities until your whole body is relaxed.
 - I. Then, check into your body to see if there is any area that is not relaxed. If there is, then repeat the whole process from the beginning.
4. I then surrendered the rest to God for a deeper processing of my grief for anything else that I may not have been aware of, that I was not conscious of in that moment.

And, if any new or old thoughts or feelings emerge later regarding the incident(s), this may be another level of grief that you will want to further process to release. Process it within yourself, if you are able to, but do not hesitate to seek out specialized professional help for this as well.

Have I always listened and learned from these “gifts”? No! Do I still repeat some old patterns? Yes! Do I still need to work through my own blocks and denial? Yes! Are there other “gifts” that I have been given, but am not aware of? Most likely, yes! Do I still have moments of feeling scared, unloved and inadequate? Yes, but for shorter periods of time because I am now more open to the Divine for deeper healings.

So, my deepest learning is that all of my life experience was meant precisely for me to work through whatever was needed then and now in my life.

Every moment in time in my life, every interaction I have with people, in nature, in the world had and has holy meaning. And I have a precious opportunity in every moment to see, hear, feel, understand and embrace the meanings for my own inner growth, and ultimately, to share with others!

My learnings are still continuing. My prayer is that I open up my heart more and more to be in a tender place of love, mercy, peace, divine knowledge and strength, whether I am in moments of deepest despair or joy because these moments are both BLESSINGS and HOLY GIFTS meant just for me!

SJM June 2016