

The Story of *Braving It*



Afoot and light-hearted
I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me
leading wherever I choose.

— Walt Whitman
Song of the Open Road

Jo had a mirror. Not in a drawer or off to the side of her desk. But in front of her. Facing her, where she could see it all the time. She happened to be objectively beautiful, and so at first I thought the mirror was just vanity, that she wanted to admire herself all the time.

But as I got to know her, *vain* was probably the last word I'd use to describe Jo. She was smart, humble, and kind, someone who became a good friend. One day, I asked her about the mirror, "Why do you keep a mirror facing you at your desk? It would make me crazy to see myself all day at work!"

"It's there to remind me to be myself in every situation," she said, "to never get caught up in all the bonkers stuff that goes on around here."

Jo wasn't vain. She was just *awesome*.

What made Jo so awesome? Her commitment to being her honest, authentic self in every situation.

A unique, one-of-a-kind *individual*.

Our unique selves

We spend way too much time second-guessing ourselves, not trusting our intuition, in fact, treating it as suspect because it's not "scientific" or tangible – something that we can weigh or hold in a measuring cup. And we as a society, and even as a world, have been taught to distrust what we can't experience with our five senses, that somehow things that can't be experienced this way aren't real.

But we can blow this apart with some simple facts: love is real, electricity is real, hurt is real – I could keep going, but while none of these things can be measured or seen or smelled, they exist. They are *real*. They don't have a color, a weight, a scent. And still, they are essential to our experience of reality as humans.

Even our very life – the electricity that flows through us while we are alive – heart-pumping-lungs-filling *alive* – is immeasurable. If I weigh 140 pounds and I die, if you weigh me, I will still weigh 140 pounds. My very life, the essence, the electricity that animated me is weightless and formless. It's also *real*. And it, like all the most organic parts of ourselves, isn't something we have to work on. It just is. It's effortless.

It just makes sense then that we need to trust the parts of ourselves that *can't* be measured and know that they are real: our insights, memories, natural talents, hopes, dreams, and our intuition. These are not just fluffy, ethereal, unimportant aspects of ourselves. On the contrary, they are part of what makes us

who we are. Taken together, they enable us to be our unique selves.

And, like Jo, we need to trust our uniqueness, live it without apology, and guard it with all our heart.

Our differences are not an accident!

Since the dawn of time, there's never been anyone with our combination of genetics, brains, fingerprints, experiences, and relationships. We are physically and mentally and emotionally one-of-a-kind (which is both scientifically true and kinda mind-blowing when you sit with it for a while...).

The fact that we are all different just *can't* be an accident! Our differences are the source of our ability to learn from each other, to be stimulated by each other, and through that electricity, to form strong bonds with each other. Our differences are the creative sparks that enable us to learn from each other and to grow (i.e., to change for the better).

Differences of opinion and ways of approaching problems make for stronger, more balanced and fulsome solutions to problems. People with ways of thinking that challenge or complement ours are interesting to us, and in this way, our differences are a magnetic force that draws us toward each other. Differences make us stronger and healthier together.

Our differences also reinforce our individuality and the uniqueness we each bring to the world. They enable us to make one-of-a-kind contributions to our relationships, jobs, communities, even (and maybe especially) when our differences are quirky, eccentric, or idiosyncratic. They enable us to leave positive memories behind in every situation, a fact that no doubt

helped write this inscription I saw on a headstone at an old cemetery: “Those never die who leave behind love in the hearts of others.”

Given the extraordinary power of our differences, it makes *no sense at all* to spend as much time as we do comparing ourselves to other people: what they have, what they drive, who they’re with, their job, education, appearance...*and yet we do!* No one has stood in our shoes, behind our eyeballs and had our one-of-a-kind combination of biology and circumstances, and yet a big part of our life’s quest is to shapeshift until we’re all the same!

We’re constantly looking at everyone else for cues and validation about how to live our lives, what is acceptable, essentially everything that is desirable in a human being. (No judgment here, beautiful someone. I do it too!)

Isadora

It’s always amazing to hear about people who brave their lives naturally, effortlessly. I can’t help but wonder what combination of biology and experiences enables them to be so true to themselves, regardless of who they’re with or the situation they’re in. To have the courage of their own truth, to listen and live by their inner voice, often in spite of some of the loudest and most insistent voices shouting around them – this amazes me.

If you don’t know the name Isadora Duncan, it’s worth Googling her. Isadora was a choreographer and dancer who performed in the 1920s and 30s. A renegade, she was definitely unconventional, someone we might label rebellious or an instigator. Her interpretive style of dance took on the art of ballet,

unmoored it from its restrictive, tightly prescribed movements and combinations and transformed it into a creative art form that told a story full of personal expression. And in this respect, she is often credited with helping to spark the development of modern dance.

Isadora's choreography focused on opening every movement from the heart center. There aren't many, but you can find a few videos of her work being performed. If you watch, right away you'll be able to sense this openhearted way of dancing.

And Isadora lived the same way – heart first. She just put it out there and, as the saying goes, “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!” Her life was out-of-the-box for the time and included multiple relationships and children with different people. Sadly, she passed away at an early age in a tragic accident, but in the world of dance, her legacy endures.

At a vintage shop a few years ago, I found this Isadora Duncan quote painted on a piece of tile:

“You were wild once. Don't let them tame you.”

It's hanging in my kitchen where I check in with it literally every day.

Knowing a little about her life now, it's easy to see that this advice from Isadora is completely in character. (And knowing me, it's easy to see why I love her 😊.)

But the quote, especially the last part: “Don't let them tame you”... that just touches a nerve. I don't ever want to sit down, be quiet, and fit in. More than that, I don't want to be

told what a happy life looks like when that's so different for each of us. I don't want to be surrounded by people who say things like, "You should be [*fill in the blank*]" or "That's so weird that you don't like..." or "Why don't you just..." or "How could you possibly feel like that?" or "Why would you ever say something like that?" or "You know how crazy that sounds?"

Nor do I want to feel wordless pressure to show up for people or situations that require me to compromise my true self (especially to make it smaller or vanilla so as not to stand out or excel).

I want to *create* a life that makes me and the people I care about happy and healthy. I want to live and work and play joyfully, never performing or being untrue to myself and the people I love. And through that joy, I want to contribute to the world around me, in all creating a life that's as unique as my own fingerprints.

And yet... *yet*...

For the longest time (like *forever*), making everyone happy and comfortable has been my life's relentless and unwavering focus. The need to shapeshift in any situation to be sure to put myself last and everyone else first has been a literal fixture in my life, defining the tone and texture of every conversation and relationship I've had for as long as I can remember.

And I do mean *any* situation, and I do mean *everyone* else.

Maybe, beautiful someone, you understand?

A little more (but not too much ☺) detail: in my former life as a communications professional, everything I did was in service of others, to be sure my employer/client was completely satisfied no matter what that took –

If it meant cutting my fees to the bone, *done!*

If it meant taking the blame for a mistake I wasn't responsible for – *you bet!*

If it meant working day and night with no sleep for 72 hours straight to help someone out of a really bad jam they got themselves into – *no problem!*

If it meant being told after working for months on a proposal that the project wasn't going to happen because there was never any budget for it in the first place – *oh, of course I understand!*

If it meant working over vacations, holidays, birthdays, and even in the lounge at my cousin's wedding – *you got it!*

If it meant returning emails from my hospital bed after my C-sections (that's plural) – *sure thing!*

Outside my work life, with friends, in romances, and with extended family especially, everyone else was always right, their needs were more important than mine, boundaries were not a thing, they deserved everything and I deserved nothing in the relationship (except the privilege of being allowed in one). In every conflict, I gave in quickly and often apologized for taking a stand in the first place.

In short, as long as everyone within a ten-mile radius of me was happy, I was good, no matter what that cost me, my family, and the other people I loved.

The idea of speaking up, being honest about my boundaries (or even knowing I could *have* any), having the personal confidence to be honest and real and not feel weird and different (read: wrong and inferior), making my own goals a priority, telling boundary crashers that it's *not* okay – none of this occurred to me for a long, long (long) time. And I'm still not great at any of it – even when someone insults me or cuts me off on the highway or is really rude, my first thought is, "I'm sure I deserved that. Now I just have to figure out what I did to deserve it." (I *swear*.)

All this (this *what?* Lack of confidence? Insecurity? Fear of rejection?), beautiful someone, despite an honors degree from Harvard, years of business experience, marriage, divorce, re-marriage, two amazing kids, home ownership, great friends, and hundreds of professional connections. Why haven't I stood my ground? Spoken up? Asked for what I want? Enforced boundaries?

I don't completely know why, though I'm determined to find out, and more important to change for the better (i.e., for the *braver* 😊).

What I *do* know

I'm learning to do all those things: to speak out, to draw boundaries, to tell the truth, to not care about impressing people, in short, to shield my soul and my heart from the assaults they used to experience every day. I know that "No" can be a

complete sentence, that joy is a life strategy, and that it's never too late to begin again.

I've learned strategies for fortifying my insides – the home of my true, unique, one-of-a-kind self. I know in my bones now that I've been entrusted with sharing through my books and my art what I've learned “the hard way,” to encourage other people and thus to give them hope and help inspire them. And I know that I am safer now, safe to share all this with you without being afraid of defying a rule or flouting convention or just acting “untamed” to borrow Isadora's imagery.

I really do believe that this is God's great assignment to each of us, beautiful someone. A seed has been planted in each of us that's completely unique for a reason, and that reason certainly isn't to hide its uniqueness. It's to share it, and in doing so, to help other people see things they otherwise wouldn't see, understand things they otherwise wouldn't understand, experience things they otherwise wouldn't experience, be comforted in ways they otherwise wouldn't be comforted.

Prayers from the dying

At the time the idea for *Braving It* was taking shape in my mind, fueled (as all Blossie's books are in one way or another ☺) by my own heartfelt experiences and those of the people I love, an amazing book crossed my path: *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. Written by Bronnie Ware as a series of reflections on her time providing palliative care in people's final days, this amazing book traces the many ways in which Bronnie herself was transformed by the gift of getting to know these people at this time in their lives.

Especially striking is the number-one regret Bronnie heard people share: “I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.” Sitting with that for a moment is nothing less than earth-shattering. Really – to look back and say so late in life, actually at the very end, something this huge about how you spent the gift of your heartbeat was just jaw-dropping to me. That it’s possible to feel that after having been given a life to create, that we did the opposite – we didn’t create it, but simply *re-created* it based on the experiences of other people, their expectations, their filters, their biases, their goals.

Also interesting is the way in which this is articulated as a matter of *courage* (“I wish I’d had the courage...”). I agree! It *does* take courage to swim against the tide of other people’s expectations. In fact, sometimes that may be the most courageous thing we do in our lives. The tide is so strong, there are so many expectations of us, so many opinions of what constitutes a worthwhile life, a successful career, good parenting, plus pressure to have the right kind of car, house, appearance...*this list can go on for 100 pages!*

Sometimes when I look at a person in their 50s or 60s who made a life out of their art, or a Special Education teacher who dedicated their life to taking care of precious special needs children, or an oncology nurse – these kinds of professions fill me with appreciation, respect, and I mean this sincerely: *awe*. Because honestly? I know that choosing these kinds of careers required sacrifice – lots of it. In some cases financial sacrifice, but much more significantly, spiritual sacrifice – like the knowledge that they were creating art that would in all likelihood (at least initially) be harshly criticized and rejected. The need to be able to celebrate the most minute improvements in a special needs student’s performance. The peace of keeping a se-

riously ill person out of pain for just a little while. The stress of dealing with difficult parents and family members who are trying to help but sometimes can't do so effectively. *And still these people stuck to their passions.* They lived according to what gave them a sense of purpose and joy and built a life around it.

They had the courage to brave their lives and their passions and swim upstream against the tides of *same* and *more*. And I isolate those age groups in particular because while the alluring “siren song of more” as author Julia Cameron calls it, was screaming in the background in the 1980s and into the 1990s especially, when these people would have been coming of age, the pressures to “succeed” by making ungodly sums of money however you could, buying a palatial mansion, and driving a luxury car were enormous. The tide pulling them was more like a tsunami.

And so, with humble thanks to Jo, Isadora, and finally Bronnie, I set out to write *Braving It*, a book about finding ways to literally give ourselves permission to *be* ourselves, and then to enjoy our lives from this vantage point – that would be inside out. To savor our uniqueness and enjoy our lives far from the reach of judgment of other people (which is nothing compared to the harsh ways in which we tend to judge ourselves).

Beautiful someone, here's a hug. Now, let's get started!

This is the end of the excerpt. Thanks for reading!

You can order or download *Braving It* on [amazon](#).