fear.less

"I never let fear stay as fear. It has to evolve."

Danielle LaPorte
holds on to authenticity, not fear **33**

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What to do when there's no escape

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FEAR.LESS

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Generous thanks to our contributors, each of whom took the time to share their story with our readers with honesty, willingness, and wisdom.

DEDICATION

This issue of Fear.less Magazine is dedicated to Howard Zinn and Dr. Bernard Lown. Their important contributions in their respective fields of history & literature/arts and medicine will never be forgotten. Dr. Lown and Mr. Zinn were also dear friends. I met and interviewed Mr. Zinn for a film we produced on Dr. Lown, and spoke with them both for Fear.less. Mr. Zinn passed in 2010 and Dr. Lown in 2021. Their humanity, fight for justice and an end to nuclear arms, and their contributions in medicine and literature continue to live on.

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Nothing in life is to be feared.
It is only to be understood.

Marie Curie

Don't Give Up

"Regardless of how dire things seem, it's important to have hope."

As a child, ***Mawi Asgedom*** *fled civil war in Ethiopia and survived a Sudanese refugee camp for three years. After resettling in the United States, Mawi overcame welfare, language barriers and personal tragedy to graduate from Harvard University. Mawi has written four books that are used in thousands of classrooms across North America and has spoken to more than 500,000 students and educators as a nationally recognized youth educator. He founded Mental Karate, a training organization that challenges youth to create their own inspiring journeys.*

I WAS BORN IN ETHIOPIA, DURING THE CIVIL WAR, WHILE THE COUNTRY WAS RUN BY A DICTATOR NAMED MENGISTU. HE BUTCHERED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AND WAS CONVICTED OF GENOCIDE. OUT OF 4 MILLION PEOPLE, 1 MILLION PEOPLE BECAME REFUGEES.

My family was part of that 1 million and was living in a small village in the woods, constantly worried about the Ethiopian army and rebel groups. One thing I remember vividly as a child when we were fleeing was this woman walking, and the bottom parts of her feet had worn out. The white part that should have been the soles of her feet were completely gone, and there was blood all over her feet. I will never forget that searing image. That showed me what human beings can go through just to survive. Now I'm here, safe, in the United States, and I have a place to live, I have my friends, I have my health. It definitely puts things into perspective for me. That's something I would ask people to think about. I'm not trying to belittle anything people are going through, but looking around the world, you realize that instead of comparing yourself to Bill Gates, it's better to compare yourself to the 40 percent of the world that doesn't have clean water. Billionaires get upset because they compare themselves to their peer groups. People living in tremendous abundance can still feel miserable.

SHOW WHAT YOU HAVE INSIDE

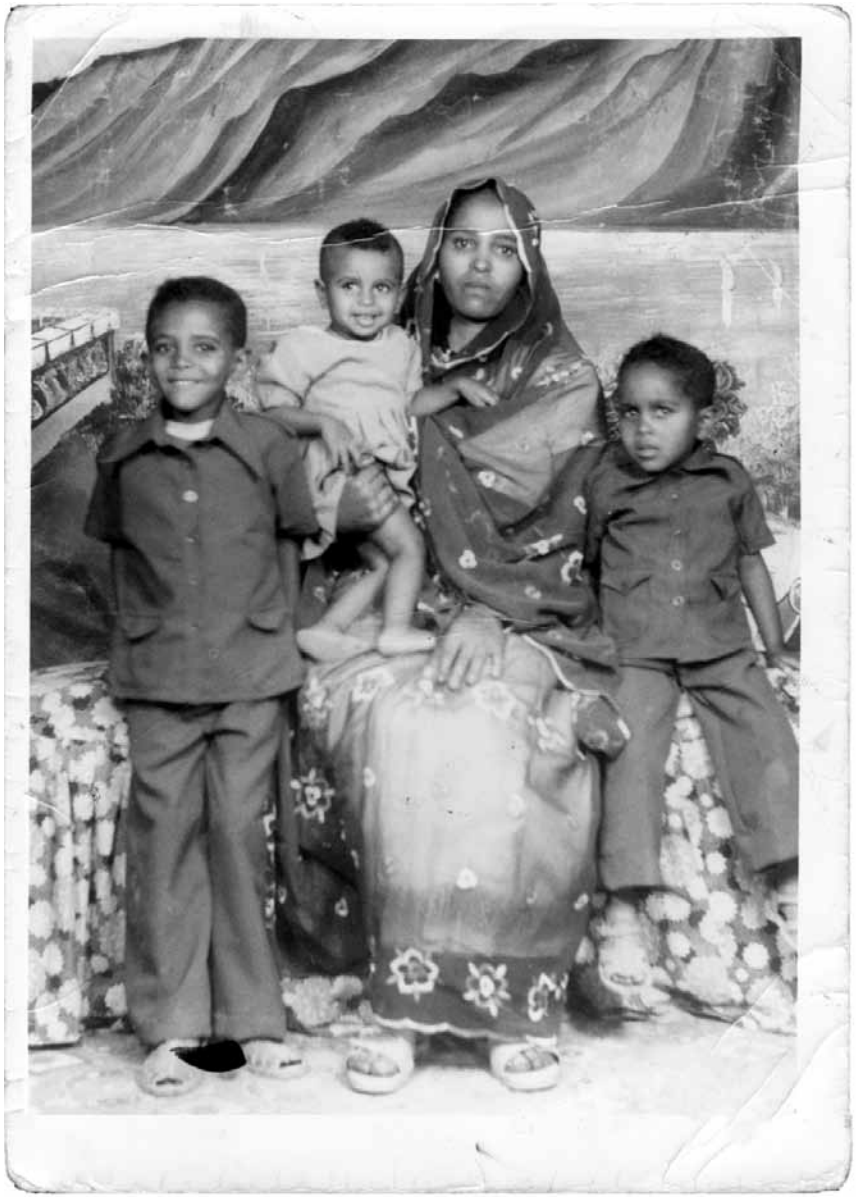
Regardless of how dire things seem, it's important to have hope. You need a belief that the current situation you're in can improve somehow, even if you aren't sure how. The moment of courage in a human being's life is when all the indicators around you tell you that nothing's going to work out, when you don't have any evidence whatsoever that makes you feel like you're going to be happy again. At that specific moment, when you can still step up and do your best, just because you believe that outside your own logic and reason it's possible in the world, and you're going to fight for it, that to me is what courage is all about. My mom was the person who taught me the most about courage. She never had a chance to go to school growing up, because there was no public education, and she was 21 years old with three small kids. We were separated from my father during our escape, so she had to go somewhere she'd never gone before and travel through wilderness to get there. Not on a highway, not by car, we were on foot, just trying to make our way there.

"looking around the world, you realize that instead of comparing yourself to Bill Gates, it's better to compare yourself to the 40 percent of the world that doesn't have clean water."

In the refugee camp, it felt like the war had been going on forever and we would be stuck for a while. That's the same thing people in the States are now going through. Maybe you lose your house. Maybe you lose your job. What most people end up thinking is, "This is it. My life has run its course, and I'm in a really bad place and I don't know how to get out of it." That's the moment where you really have to be fearless. That's where you have a chance to do something where you can look back on your life forever and say, "You know what? When there was no real reason for me to keep going, I did my best, I still did that." That's something people can really be proud of. People should view these times as opportunities to show what they have inside.

BECOMING UNSTUCK

When I was in high school, my best friend, my older brother, was killed by a drunk driver. He was a senior, I was a sophomore, 16 years old. It was just so absolutely brutal. I can't even describe how horrific that was for my family. We loved him so much and he meant so much to us. He was my best friend. I was a pretty good student at that time, and I remember there was a huge temptation to just give up. I just lost my brother, who cares about grades in a class? I thought, "Who cares how well you do in sports when you've just lost something more valuable than 50 state championships?" At that point, I decided, "I'm going



Selamawi “Mawi” as a child (right) with his mother Tsege, brother Tewold and sister Mehret

to work twice as hard: once for my brother, and once for me. And I’m going to really push myself.” At that moment, I couldn’t have predicted that in two years I would get a scholarship to go to Harvard and everything would fall into place. When you get stuck in that nasty situation, the temptation is to give up and assume it is all over. There are so many examples of people stuck in those situations, and that is when they decided to unstick themselves. That’s actually when you need to reach down and do your best. You have to run in the complete other direction. Even though all the signs are telling you to give up, that’s when you need to be able to force yourself – through your will, through your hope, through your faith – to believe in the principle of hope. All the things you believed in life that you knew were true – work ethic, perseverance – fall back on those things and don’t give up on those things. Let those drive you.

REMEMBER WHERE YOU ARE

When I was 19 at Harvard, I actually fell into a nasty depression for a year. I thought, “Why should I be depressed? I’m at Harvard. Harvard is paying for my tuition. I’m getting an awesome education. I have lots of friends.” But I still found a way for the world to close in on me. I remembered that was exactly how I felt as a refugee – it seemed like nothing would ever work out, but even then we were given a chance and got out of the camp one day. Something positive was able to happen even though we didn’t really know how it was going to happen. It was that kind of thinking that helped me survive that year.

I kept repeating, “Let me just keep doing my best even though I’m not feeling good about myself.” This is such a nasty time right now, and that’s why this magazine is so important. Remember where you are today, even if you see all black and you forgot what light looks like. That’s the moment when you have to still believe that there’s something beautiful and positive out there in the world for you to experience even if you can’t see it. There are times in life all of us go through where we can’t see the beauty in a flower or a little cute kid smiling. It has obvious beauty, but we’re stuck so bad that we can’t see it, and nothing in life feels like it will ever be good again.

A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK

To me, the best thoughts on resilience are from psychologist Martin Seligman. He boiled perseverance down to three basic principles; a simple framework to predict whether a human being will give up in any given situation.

Timeframe

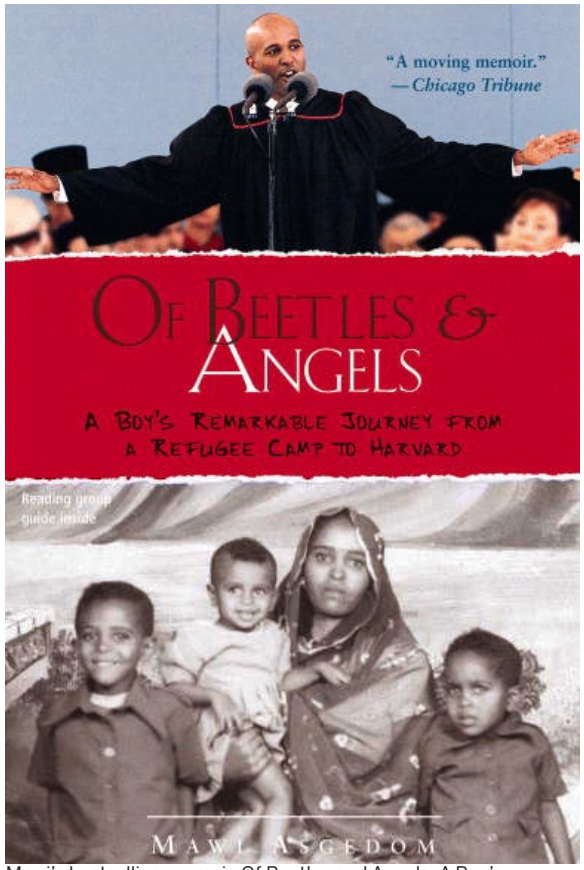
The first factor is understanding timeframe, or how long the challenge is going to last. When my brother passed away, if I looked at it and said, "I'm never going to be happy for the rest of my life," and thought that happiness was gone forever, that's going to make me want to give up. If a relationship ends, people think in their head, "I'll never find someone like that again. My life is ruined forever." It's going to make them depressed. Someone who loses their home and their job right now, if they tell themselves, "I'm going to be in the gutter for the rest of my life - there's no way out of this thing," they're going to want to give up. A person who perseveres is able to look at a challenge and say, "Even if I don't know how, I believe that my life will get better whether I find another girlfriend at some point or not." Or, "I'll find a way to rebuild my professional life and I'll find another good home." I might say, "I may not get my brother back, but someday I'll still be happy in some other ways." And now I have a family of my own. It doesn't replace my brother, but it does show that all is not lost.

Scope

The second factor is scope. Don't take a problem and blow it up so it dominates your entire life. If I said, "My brother passed away. That means that I can never go to college because I'm going to be too sad, and my family's going to fall apart, and I used to play basketball with my brother all the time so now I can't play basketball (which I loved to do)," that would've taken over my life and made me feel depressed. If someone in these economic times looks at losing their job and says, "Everything is ruined now. There's nothing anywhere that has any happiness or meaning for me," then that person is going to be much more depressed than if they

"Don't take a problem and blow it up so that it dominates your entire life."

looked at it and said, "You know what? I've got some problems in this area, but it just gives me some free time to go take the walks I've always wanted to or spend more time with my kids." There are still a lot of beautiful things going on in the world. I can still be happy about my health, my kids, my friends. The trick is that people have to find ways to localize their challenges and not let them dominate all aspects of their psyche.



Mawi's bestselling memoir, Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey from a Refugee Camp to Harvard

If they do that then they're going to give up.

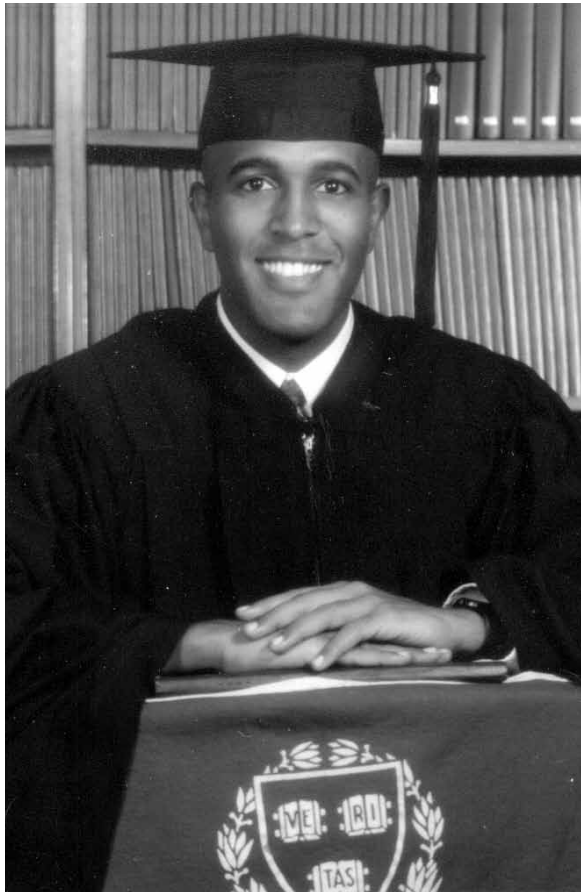
Blame

The third factor is blame. It's defeating to say, "My girlfriend left me because I'm too ugly" or "I'm not smart enough" or "I wasn't..." or "If I would have..." It's easy to run through all the things you did wrong. "If I would have only been more astute," or "If I would have just done a better job at work," or "It's all my fault."

Compare that to someone who says, "I'm in this horrible economic situation, and it's temporary. There are still many awesome things about life, and while I could've done some things to prevent this, there was a lot of circumstantial stuff out there." Which of the two people is more fearless? People should watch the kinds of thoughts that they're letting run through their heads. There's a simple formula to becoming depressed. Know what thoughts make you depressed. Similarly, learn what thoughts make you fearless.

THE BLUE BELT OF COURAGE

When I teach teenagers in Mental Karate about the blue belt, or courage, I have them learn the framework and ask them to teach it to at least two people, because when you teach something to other people, you learn it much better. For me, it's not good enough to just give them examples of other people who have not given up. I also want to provide them a logical framework so they can analyze situations. I hit both parts: the logical and emotional. I've heard so many stories from different teens telling me of times they didn't give up or of ways they were blaming themselves too much. There's so much pressure on youth out there right now. A lot of these kids are so worried about disappointing their parents and not getting into college.
One of the cornerstones of this approach is the concept of initiative. At any point in our lives we can always take some action to try and improve ourselves. It's like being a baby. A baby can't move around really, right? If you don't have any belief in your own initiative, you're just stuck wherever life


Mawi, after delivering the commencement speech at his Harvard University graduation in 1999.

Mawi speaking to students on leadership and confidence.

puts you. When I work with youth, it's like giving them glasses to see as much of that internal world as possible. Each of our internal worlds is a little bit different. It's up to each of us to figure out what it looks like. Once we understand how it works, we become capable of rising to our fullest potential.

SEE WHAT HAPPENS

One of people's strongest fears is that they see a situation as so massive and intimidating that they don't know how to fix it. Most of the time, if they muster the courage for a small first step, that ends up being the best way to start.

When I was trying to get my first book published, I didn't know how to do it. I just decided to write it anyway and see what happened. If I had decided that I didn't know anything about publishing, so why try, then I wouldn't be anywhere right now. But now my books have sold over 200,000 copies. That all started with me just saying, "I don't know anything about this, but I'm going to go ahead and try." That's what people have to do. You have to let life happen. I didn't know I was going to get a scholarship to Harvard. I just said, "I'm going to just be a good student and see what happens." If we try to control the end result too much, and we're so worried about whether we're going to make it, that's paralyzing and we're not going accomplish anything, and we'll hate the journey. If you're worried about the worst that can happen, imagine that the worst already happened. Usually it's not as bad as you would think. If the audience doesn't like you when you speak in public, you haven't lost a limb. Failure usually doesn't kill you, and you can always learn from your mistake.

"If the audience doesn't like you when you speak in public, you haven't lost a limb. Failure usually doesn't kill you, and you can always learn from your mistake."

Even if you're not in a tough situation, if there's something you want to do, just try it. It may lead to something else and take on a life of its own that you never could have predicted. That's what has happened to me about 50 million times in my life.

Get Back on the Bus

"I felt a deep abyss of fear searching for whom I was."

Alison Wright *is an award-winning photographer who documents endangered cultures and people and focuses on issues concerning the human condition. Her work has been published in National Geographic, Smithsonian, American Photo, Time, Forbes, O: The Oprah Magazine and The New York Times. Her book "A Simple Monk" is a visual biography of His Holiness Dalai Lama, whom Alison received unprecedented access to while living in Asia for five years. While on an assignment in Laos, Alison survived a catastrophic bus accident, which she writes about in her book "Learning to Breathe."*

I FELT LIKE EVERYTHING IN MY LIFE HAD BUILT UP TO THAT MOMENT. FEAR WASN'T MY PREDOMINANT FEELING; IT WAS MORE ABOUT SURVIVAL MODE KICKING IN. THERE WAS SO MUCH TRAUMA, AND PEOPLE WERE KILLED IMMEDIATELY ON THE BUS,

and I had to make an assessment of a really bad situation. It was methodical. I told myself, "OK, just try to survive here. First get yourself off the bus." Everyone pushed their way off and I was alone with a broken back, broken ribs and a shredded arm. Somehow I got this superhuman strength to drag myself off the bus, which was filled with smoke and appeared to be on fire at that point. It was scary to see my arm bleeding so much and shredded to the bone, and I had to draw on all my inner strength to get myself off the bus.

I knew I was bleeding to death, but I forced myself not to panic. I calmed down and held onto my will to survive. Soon it became clear that there was no medical help, and even the clinic they took us to had nothing, so a man had to sew my arm up with a needle and thread. No painkillers, no anesthesia. I couldn't even imagine I could tolerate that kind of pain, it was so immense.

I felt so alone. The scariest thing was that I could not breathe, because both my lungs and diaphragm had collapsed. I didn't know it yet, but I had also suffered a herniated heart, now lodged in my left shoulder. I was breathing the shallowest breaths I'd ever taken. I thought each one surely was going to be my last. It was 10 hours before a British aid worker walked by and saw me and drove me another eight hours in the back of his pickup truck to a clinic at the border of Thailand. We got there just in time, because the doctor said that in another two hours, I would have been dead. Right at that moment, I flat-lined and they had to bring me back to life.

RECLAIMING A SHATTERED IDENTITY

Once I returned home and discovered how grim my prognosis was about walking again, the recovery process was layered with fear. I kept thinking, "Is this who I am now?" My back, pelvis and all my ribs were broken, my arm was shattered, and I had major internal injuries. The doctors said I'd better think about another profession, because I was certainly never going to walk properly enough to be a photojournalist again.

"...my recovery process was layered in fear. I kept thinking, 'is this who I am now?'"

My initial instinct to survive had a profound power unto its own, but during my recovery, an entirely different survival mode kicked in as I dealt with my identity. I felt a deep abyss of fear searching for whom I was. One of my doctors told me that I needed to reconstruct who I was, because the accident had taken away my identity. I had always been such an active, independent person, and the thought that I would never be able to shoot photos overwhelmed me. I stopped seeing him after I told him I planned on climbing Mount Kilimanjaro the next year. I needed that lofty goal to give me motivation and positive people around me. I just entirely dismissed anyone who was negative.

Alison with a Tibetan girl from Kham, Eastern Tibet

Of course they immediately sent me to a psychiatrist, but nevertheless, I got to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro the next year, and it was a huge feeling of success for me. But as any good mountain climber

knows, the real survival is in the descent. When I came down from the mountain, I had to overcome a lot of emotional fear and post-traumatic stress that came in the form of nightmares.

My years of meditating really helped me, though, because it helped me let go of my identity as a photographer, of what my job was. I realized who I was just by sitting on a cushion. Dropping the ego around my identity helped release some fear, but I knew if I really wanted to move on, I had to get back on that bus, literally. So I took an assignment in Thailand after I recovered, and about three years to the day of the accident, I went back to Laos and got back on the bus. It felt strange, actually, and I thought, “Fear is just a thought.” You can start playing a whole story around it like, “I’m afraid. What if this bus crashes?” You start thinking these things, but then you realize they’re just thoughts. It’s crazy, because as we rounded the corner, we actually clipped another bus! People were screaming, and I had unbelievable déjà vu, and the girl next to me said, “That was close!” I said, “You have no idea!” If you’re dying by the side of the road, then fear is a valid feeling, but it’s interesting to watch when you get caught up in a story.

DON’T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Life isn’t always pleasant. I don’t believe we’re here to be happy every minute of every day. In difficult moments I just think, “What am I getting out of this? What am I learning? How am I growing?” It’s a healthy way to look at things, because I can call upon that lesson later, and it moves away from taking

Allison’s book “A Simple Monk.” A visual biography with essays of His Holiness Dalai Lama.

Alison on assignment shooting in Antarctica.

things personally. It's not always about you. Things happen in life. If we don't personalize it so much, I think we'll be much happier.

Once I was shooting in Mongolia and a horse ran me over out of nowhere. My cameras came slamming into my face, splitting my face open and causing a concussion, landing me in the hospital. I didn't think, "Why do these things happen to me?" It was so random that I couldn't take it personally. If you're too much into the "poor me" attitude, then you're going to be a miserable person. I think being in challenging situations is what has made me stronger and able to survive such a devastating accident. They say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

I have an immense amount of trust in the universe, and I'm a resolute believer in our inner selves and inner strength. That's why Buddhism resonates with me. There's no guidebook in life, and I find it helps to follow my intuition. I believe part of the reason I survived is that I wanted to return to the job I love and continue to tell the stories of the people I'm photographing. My work gives me a sense of something bigger than myself. The accident brought a stronger sense of empathy to my work.

WORTH YOUR WEIGHT IN... DARTS?

When I first started out, I struggled with the times my work wasn't accepted. Once I went to see an editor of a beautiful magazine in Switzerland, and I said, "Look, I just went to all these countries. Here are my photos. Will you run them?" She said, "No, we just ran images from these places. She wouldn't budge with any of my stories. I said, "Well, how do you choose?" This is not a joke, but she took a dart out of her desk and threw it at a map on the wall. I saw that I was determining my whole self-worth on someone publishing my photos, and she was simply throwing darts at a map! After that, I learned not to get so wrapped up in other people's perceptions of my work.

But preoccupation with the work itself sometimes happens. There is a danger that getting caught up in the end product can be paralyzing because then you become too self-conscious about what you're producing. You have to keep your ego in check. The work is the work. Some people will love it, and others will hate it. You have to just be like water off a duck and learn to develop a thick skin in this business.

I photographed His Holiness Dalai Lama a lot during my years living with Tibetan exiles, and we spent some lovely time together when I first met him. When I went back some years ago, he saw me and gave me a big hug and said, "Oh, you again!" He held my hand, and we walked from his house, and I said, "I really appreciate you taking the time to meet with me, but I want you to know that I really have the best of intentions." He looked at me, like no one has ever looked at me, deep into my eyes, and said, "Yes, I know ... and good intent is most important in all that you do, always remember." It's something that has stuck with me, because as human beings, we screw up all the time, and he's saying to look into your heart and see what your intent is. It's an interesting exercise as you're moving through your day to ask, "What's my intent?" I've certainly done stupid things in my life, but I've not necessarily had bad intentions around them. It's a way to have compassion for yourself. And it's easier to have compassion for others than for ourselves. It's a daily struggle to remember my intent and to be forgiving toward myself.

IMAGINE CARRYING 40 POUNDS OF WATER ON YOUR BACK EVERY DAY.

MILLIONS OF CHILDREN DO.

EACH DAY IN DEVELOPING NATIONS, MILLIONS OF STUDENTS AGES 8 AND OLDER SPEND THEIR MORNINGS WALKING 3 HOURS OR MORE WITH 40 POUNDS OF WATER ON THEIR BACKS. THIS JOURNEY FORCES THEM TO MISS CLASS, AND MANY WILL EVENTUALLY DROP OUT OF SCHOOL. THE WATER THEY BRING HOME IS USUALLY UNSAFE TO DRINK, CAUSING DISEASES LIKE TYPHOID AND DIARRHEA.

50% OF ALL SCHOOLS DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO CLEAN, SAFE DRINKING WATER.
YOU CAN HELP. VISIT WATERFORSCHOOLS.ORG.

WATER FOR SCHOOLS

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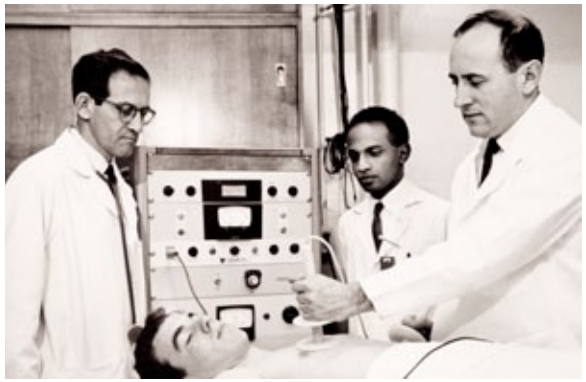
An Action Figure

"Fear is a paralyzing emotion."

Dr. Bernard Lown *was Professor Emeritus of Cardiology at the Harvard School of Public Health, senior physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, inventor of the DC defibrillator and founder of SATELLIFE and the Lown Cardiovascular Research Foundation. In 1985, Dr. Lown co-founded International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, an organization for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. Lown is author of the best-selling book "The Lost Art of Healing: Practicing Compassion in Medicine" and "Prescription for Survival: A Doctor's Journey to End Nuclear Madness."*

DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEFIBRILLATOR, MY BIGGEST DREAD WAS FAILURE OR SELF-DISCREDIT, ESPECIALLY IF I LOST FAITH IN MY CAPACITY TO BE ACTIVE IN HEALTHCARE. EACH THING I'VE DONE IN MY LIFE HAS INVOLVED A CERTAIN CHANCE OF NOT BEING SUCCESSFUL.



Dr. Lown demonstrating the cardioverter.

"To combat fear, action is the greates antidote- to depression, fear, and anxiety. Action."

The defibrillator was a wild guess, but the health issues involved were so profound that I was ready to stick to it - I had to go out on a limb. It made no sense at the time, but now it's changed the way we practice cardiology. In life, you never know if what you do has a chance of succeeding, but if you don't take that chance, you won't fulfill your destiny. Chance means risk, and risk means failure.

Going on an uncertain adventure is what each one of us has to do, because the nature of living is uncertain. Nothing about knowing the past or studying the present gives you secure boundaries about what will transpire in the future. Look at Iraq and Vietnam – all of their consequences are so overlooked. A year ago people said that this market crisis could never occur. Everybody talked about it going from one success to the next. Only a few economists predicted that it was going to be a failure.

PRESCRIPTION: ACTION

To combat fear, action is the greatest antidote - to depression, fear and anxiety. Action. The reason I reject fear is because it undermines the capacity to act. The moment you're engaged in deliberate action, well-thought-out action that is likely to be effective, all fear goes away. But action cannot be chaotic; it has to be focused. For that, you need an education. You need to know what happened before - the facts.

I tell medical students that the fear of being wrong is their greatest impediment to mastering the art of medicine and being a good doctor. Medicine is so complex that science is an imperfect guide to action. Therefore it requires experience you don't have. Therefore you're afraid you'll make mistakes. When you do, you think it's a mortal sin and you hide it. Then you won't learn from it and you will repeat it. I used to tell students that every day I came home, I asked myself, "What terrible mistake did you make today, Lown? Whom have you screwed up? Whom have you hurt? What have you forgotten to do? What don't you know?" These aren't nice questions to ask anybody, including yourself.

Dr. Lown in his office with the Lown DC Defibrillator and photos of his fellows.

"Acknowledge your own errors, and it's best to do it in public, because soliloquy is no substitute for dialogue."

I wanted above all to acknowledge our mistakes. Every morning at rounds, I asked, "What mistakes did we make yesterday?" We'd look at the log books and see that more than 10 times at least, the wrong medication was given, or the wrong dose, or the wrong order was written. Human beings are fallible animals. As soon as you confront that fact, you're able only partially to overcome the predisposition for and the fear of erring, because action is the greatest dissipater of fear. Correct action in relation to fear is to acknowledge your own errors, and it's best to do it in public, because soliloquy is no substitute for dialogue.

A DOCTOR ON DYING

It's important to give people behavioral examples of how to cope with the fear of living, because the greatest fear is life itself. Living is a hold on uncertainty and brevity. Before you know it, you're an old man. We think we're running from fear, but we run away from real life itself frequently. That creates a host of bad emotions. Unfortunately, we deal with it by prescribing a pill, a dye to prevent the whitening of your hair, an injection of Botox. But this is the wrong way to fight aging. It merely enhances fear, anxiety and, ultimately, depression, self-doubt and takes away the dignity of the person.

Being a doctor preoccupied with issues of cardiac death, I dealt with death as my constant companion. The moment you do that, you begin to see yourself in a new way. If you see yourself as a distinct identity, it is hard and frightening to conceive death. We are not here. We disappear as though we never lived. But the moment you change it around and say, "I am who I am by virtue of being a part of a community and humanity and a long history, of a striving for a more humane existence," you have a more eternal life. It motivates you and augments your energy, so life becomes more pleasurable, even though we live in a world that has as much tragedy and unfulfilled promises.

That doesn't mean that each of us doesn't occasionally experience a sort of terror around death. I'm not happy about my dying or not being here, largely because I'm very curious. I'd like to know what happens after I'm gone. What will the world be like? Will we have solved the energy crisis? Will we live still with the threat of nuclear weapons? What will happen to my grandchildren? This question of curiosity is the strongest linkage I have to stay alive as long as possible.

You don't make a conscious judgment, and say one day, "Oh, I've hit nirvana. I've had that ultimate epiphany, I feel liberated." It's more of a gradual maturation. We become more understanding and therefore more tolerant of the reality of life. That tolerance is a practical conclusion because we can do very little about anything else.

TIME, THE MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY

Fear is a paralyzing emotion that has an element of irrationality about it. It's because you're confronted with challenges or tasks that you don't know how to cope with because time is finite. Or you think others have a bloated anticipation of what you are

"We think we run away from fear, but we run away from real life itself quite frequently."

Dr. Lown with President Mikhail Gorbachev.

to produce, therefore you tax yourself to meet their expectations of you - that you have planted in the first place.

In my life, I've lost jobs three or four times. I was kicked out of Hopkins, Yale, Harvard, all of them. And I'm better for it. Life is full of gray. It's not black or white; it's the fact that you accept it. You just have to realize that you're going to fail. One of the earliest problems I've faced is time: time allocated to family, to medicine, to the legal activities, to extracurricular activities, to friends, to all these demands made on you. It's impossible to proportion these tasks that are greedy for your time, because time is love. Giving time, the most precious commodity we all have, means that you express deep affection.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

I've had fearful times when somebody in my family is sick and I'm stressed, and people are not living up to my expectations. My biggest source of anxiety is that I have very high expectations of people. It's only because I have a high expectation of myself. I make the projection saying, "If I can do it, they can do it," so if they're not doing it, they're failing, and I feel frustrated and angry. But it's unrealistic. It's not fair to impose your standards on people with different methods and mindsets and expect them to live up to what you want.

Modern life, with its speed and enormous information overload, severs the connection of what living

should be: an interaction with other people with a depth that is fulfilling for them and you. Personally, the most important aspects are my family and my wife, Louise, and books. Books give you a vicarious sense of participating in a broader family than just your own. Life is not lived as isolated individuals fulfilling themselves. That's a myth, in my mind. The individual is always fulfilled through interaction with others. Human beings acting together can develop enormous strength, wealth and creativity.

AFRAID OF THE LIGHT

When people fear wasting their potential, they have to examine what their potential is in the first place. Are they realistic about it? Frequently, people are forced by economic pressures to do things they don't like, and they don't recognize it. The job may be well-paid, so they become enslaved by their occupation, and we're unhappy because the person may be a great designer, painter, musician, philosopher, etc., but he's on Wall Street brokering derivatives.

Ultimately, we come back to the most pervasive question in literature, which is the preoccupation with death. Shakespeare said, "In death, one is dead. There is no more dying then." That is, if you are able to visualize that and not be afraid, you overcome fear. Children are afraid of the dark, but men are afraid of the light, afraid of illumination, afraid of knowledge. They're ill-prepared for life. That is part due to our education and part due to inadequate family that is wrought with conflict. It's due to the poor process of community so prevalent in America, especially because we live in a mobile society. A nomadic society can't sink deep roots in community to develop lasting friendships, cannot develop into significant conversation and communal activities, cannot give the best of itself.

WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

Those who want to apply their potential in a different direction have to make a deep evaluation and have the courage to live up to what they discover. It's easy to keep talking about our unhappiness, but we have to take control of reality. The most important question is; "Do I enjoy what I'm doing?" Many years ago, I asked a famous physicist, jokingly, "What is happiness?" He looked at me and said, "Very simple. I wake up in the morning, and I love to go to work. Come five o'clock in the afternoon, I love to go home. That's it." The more I thought of it, the more I realized it really embodied both aspects of our lives - our family life and our professional life. If we love our work and we love our family, we're happy people. Then you can take all the strains in life.

Dr. Lown with Nobel Peace Prize Laureates including His Holiness Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Elie Wiesel at the International Peace Foundation Delegation.

Intimacy With Fear

Pema Chödrön

"Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news."

- Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Fear is a universal experience. Even the smallest insect feels it. We wade in the tidal pools and put our fingers near the soft, open bodies of sea anemones and they close up. Everything spontaneously does that. It's not a terrible thing that we feel fear when faced with the unknown. It is part of being alive, something we all share. We react against the possibility of loneliness, of death, of not having anything to hold on to. Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth.

"Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth."

If we commit ourselves to staying right where we are, then our experience becomes very vivid. Things become very clear when there is nowhere to escape.

Anyone who stands on the edge of the unknown, fully in the present without a reference point, experiences groundlessness. That's when our understanding goes deeper, when we find that the present moment is a pretty vulnerable place and that this can be completely unnerving and completely tender at the same time.

What we're talking about is getting to know fear, becoming familiar with fear, looking it right in the eye – not as a way to solve problems, but as a complete undoing of old ways of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and thinking. The truth is that when we really begin to do this, we're going to be continually humbled. There's not going to be much room for the arrogance that holding on to ideals can bring. The arrogance that inevitably does arise is going to be continually shot down by our own courage to step forward a little further. The kinds of discoveries that are made through practice have nothing to do with believing in anything. They have much more to do with having the courage to die, the courage to die continually.

No one ever tells us to stop running away from fear. We are very rarely told to move closer, to just be there, to become familiar with fear. I once asked Zen master Kobun Chino Roshi how he related with fear, and he said, "I agree. I agree." But the advice we usually get is to sweeten it up, smooth it over, take a pill, or distract ourselves, but by all means make it go away.

We don't need that kind of encouragement, because dissociating from fear is what we do naturally. We habitually spin off and freak out when there's even the merest hint of fear. We feel it coming and we check out. It's good to know we do that—not as a way to beat ourselves up, but as a way to develop unconditional compassion. The most heartbreaking thing of all is how we cheat ourselves of the present moment.

NOTHING IS WHAT WE THOUGHT

Sometimes, however, we are cornered; everything falls apart, and we run out of options for escape. At times like that, the most profound spiritual truths seem pretty straightforward and ordinary. There's nowhere to hide. We see it as well as anyone else – better than anyone else. Sooner or later we understand that although we can't make fear look pretty, it will nevertheless introduce us to all the teaching we've ever heard or read.

"We habitually spin off and freak out when there's even the merest hint of fear."

So the next time you encounter fear, consider yourself lucky. This is where courage comes in. Usually we think that brave people have no fear. The truth is that they are intimate with fear. When I was first married, my husband said I was one of the bravest people he knew. When I asked him why, he said because I was a complete coward but went ahead and did things anyhow.

The trick is to keep exploring and not bail out, even when we find out that something is not what we thought. That's what we're going to discover again and again and again. Nothing is what we thought. I can say that with great confidence. Emptiness is not what we thought. Neither is mindfulness or fear. Compassion – not what we thought. Love. Buddha nature. Courage. These are code words for things we don't know in our minds, but any of us could experience them. These are words that point to what life really is when we let things fall apart and let ourselves be nailed to the present moment.

Excerpt from "When Things Fall Apart" by Pema Chodron, published in 2000 by Shambhala

Pema Chödrön *is an American Buddhist nun and leading teacher of meditation and its application to daily life. She is widely known for her charming and down-to-earth interpretation of Buddhism for Westerners and is the author of No Time to Lose, Getting Unstuck, When Things Fall Apart, Start Where You Are, The Places That Scare You, and The Wisdom of No Escape. Pema is the resident teacher at Gampo Abbey, the first Tibetan monastery in North America for Westerners.*

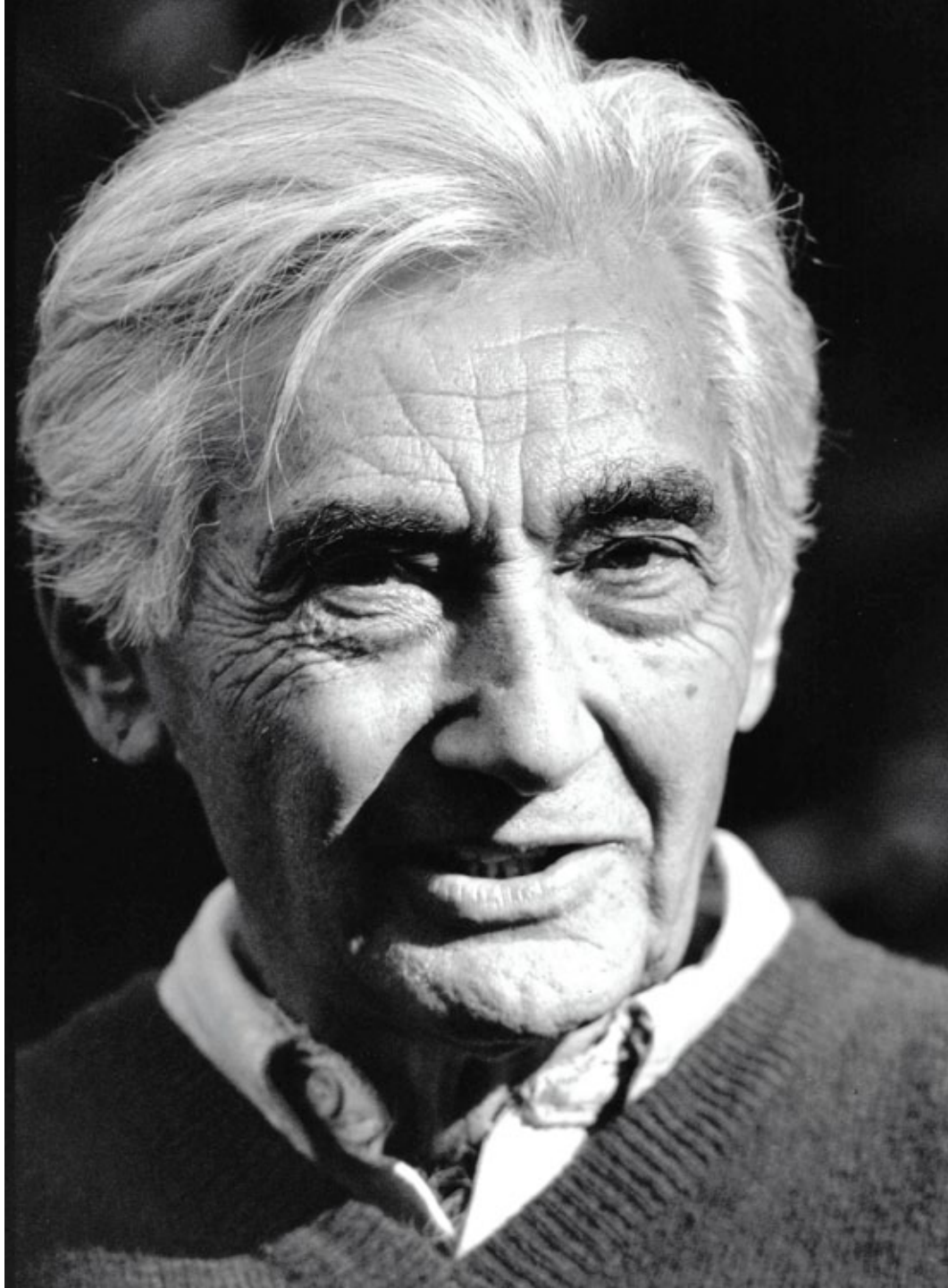
Pema Chodron at Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia.

Collective of Courage

"Collectivity reduces fear."

Howard Zinn *was a political-science professor, historian, social activist and playwright, best known for his book "A People's History of the United States." In 1956, Zinn became a professor at Spelman College in Atlanta, a school for black women, where he soon became involved in the civil-rights movement. When he was fired in 1963 for insubordination related to his protest work, he moved to Boston University, where he became a leading critic of the Vietnam War.*

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT OUR CULTURE INDUCES FEAR, EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE NO REAL CAUSE TO BE AFRAID. ONE OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF THIS IS THE FEAR THAT HAS BEEN CREATED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND REINFORCED BY THE MEDIA.



That somehow, some evil enemy is out there waiting to devour us. The ironic thing is that the U.S. is in many ways the least vulnerable to disaster of any country in the world.

We are a very powerful and rich country, we have an ocean on both sides, nobody is going to invade us, but still, fear is created. As a matter of fact, that fear was extremely intense in the period following World War II, when the Soviet Union and Communism were held up as serious threats to the U.S. That fear then enabled the government to take away the liberties of people, which led to many people losing their jobs and a hysteria about Communism, which caused blacklists in the culture and within the entertainment industry. The "Specter of Communism," which Marx used in the first words of The Communist Manifesto, haunted the U.S. and was spread very deliberately by the government, because it served a useful purpose - it enabled them to justify the expenditure of huge sums of national money for military weapons, including nuclear bombs. It also enabled controls over what people did, what people said, to intimidate them and to distort their own behavior in order to remain safe.

Then, when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989, and presumably there was no more threat from Communism, it didn't stop the government from maintaining an atmosphere of fear, sometimes to absurd lengths. Going into war after war - into Iraq and then Afghanistan, all because the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, created a justification for going to war against an unseen enemy, terrorists who couldn't be identified.

Howard Zinn speaking at a rally in 2004.

The irony was, it was this very creation of an artificial fear in the country that led to a foreign policy which was aggressive and warlike and which led to American military bases all over the world, which then created a *real* basis of fear. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were unquestionably a response to American power in the world and the way it was exerted. You had a classic case where the very thing that you do presumably to alleviate your artificial fears then creates a situation where there is something real to fear. Living in the United States, in an atmosphere of fear - of Communism, of terrorism - the government and its corporate allies are able to benefit from the spreading of this fear.

Q: Are the American people able to combat this fear now that we're aware of its propagation?

A: I think we are, in the sense that the American people who supported the war in Iraq initially, by a very large margin, have in the course of the last number of years, turned against the war by an equally large margin, which shows that the fear that was created after 9/11 is no longer as virulent as it was for the first few years of the war. It means that the American people today are not as fearful of the threat of terrorism, because they've now had the experience of seeing a war which was initiated to stop terrorism and has not. They're able to evaluate more calmly the government's claims that we face a terrorist threat.

I think a learning has taken place. A learning which was the result of the simple observation of reality - the observation of the dispatch of troops to Iraq, the occupation of Iraq for years and years. It's now been six years since the war in Iraq began, and I think it's been a learning experience for Americans to see that this war hasn't accomplished anything. It's led them to question whether the initial fears created by the U.S. government were justified.

Q: How large of a role did fear play in your activism in the Anti-War and Civil-Rights Movements?

A: I associate different fears with the Civil Rights movement, with the situation in the South and with racism. Firstly, there was the fear

"That combination of white and black people that created hysteria and violence to the point of murder was a definite fear. Anytime you were in a situation like that in Mississippi, there was fear."

that existed among Southern whites, which was, again, a manufactured fear by the white leaders of Southern society. This fear of black people created a hysteria that enabled the South to maintain the system of ironclad racial segregation and was crucial in maintaining the humiliation and violence against blacks. This fear was palpable in the South.

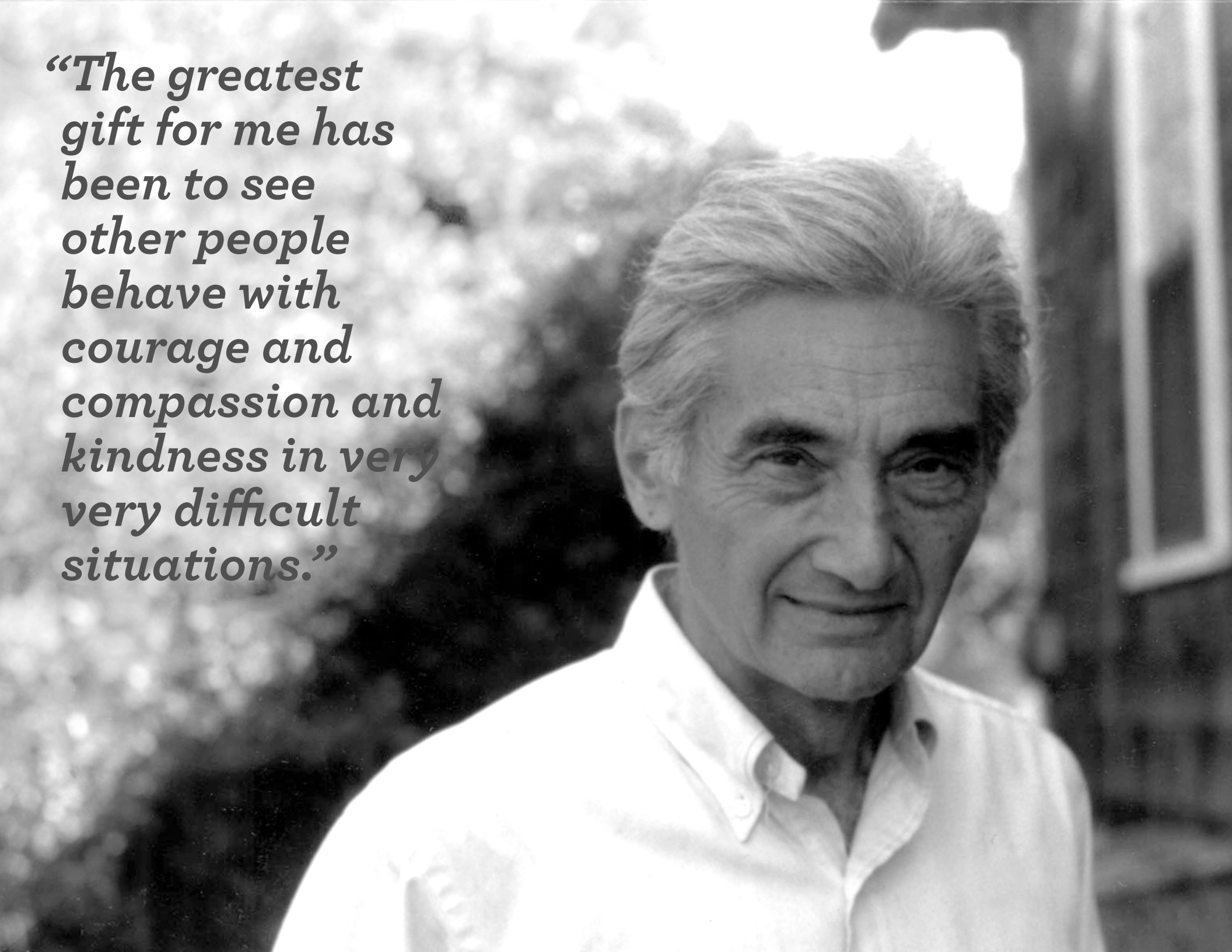
Then there was the fear among black people who grew up in the South, who understood that they were feared by white people and who knew that that fear led to violence against them. You'd become fearful of stepping out of line, and mothers cautioned their children to not play with white kids because they understood what the consequences might be.
So eventually the fear of black people that existed in the white population became mirrored in the fear of black people of what might happen to them if they stepped out of line. Now, not all the people in the South had this fear, although they observed the rules and understood the limits of their freedom, but what happened in the South in the 1950s and 1960s was that black people began to overcome that fear of crossing the boundary.

And the more black people crossed over the line, the more it encouraged others to do so, and the more courage it gave them to overcome their own fears. So you might say that the history of the Civil Rights movement is a history of more and more black people overcoming their fear of breaking the law, of going to jail, of being beaten. Overcoming their fear because they felt the collective protection of their community as more and more people were doing what they were doing. Whereas individuals who were stepping out of line were totally vulnerable. But when 10,000 people march together in Birmingham, well, they can overcome their fear because of the collective courage that is created.

Did you have any cause to fear your personal involvement in the civil-rights movement?
I wasn't free of fear. White people who supported the black cause were vulnerable to attack, there's no question about that. When a white person was seen as supporting the cause of black freedom, that person became a target, so while I was not a victim of violence of the South, I was arrested once for being with a black person in a car. I was taking a student home, and she was sitting next to me in the front seat, and we were stopped by the police and then arrested. This was a scary moment, for myself and for the student too. Any time I was involved in a situation that pointed me out to white people in the South as a supporter of the black cause, there was a certain amount of fear, but I recognized I wasn't in the same position as black people, who were in constant fear and who were in a more dangerous situation than I was.

Q: In what ways did your fears evolve as the Civil Rights movement progressed?

A: The fear lessened as the movement grew, but there were specific moments of fear depending on your involvement in the movement. In Mississippi, there were many, many moments of fear, especially in the summer of 1964, called Freedom Summer, when there was a great number of people organizing in the South. I remember riding in the car at night, which had both white and black people


“The greatest gift for me has been to see other people behave with courage and compassion and kindness in very very difficult situations.”

in it, along unlit roads and knowing that we were vulnerable. Just the sight of white and black people in a car together was an inducement of violence. That combination of white and black people that created hysteria and violence to the point of murder was a definite fear. Anytime you were in a situation like that in Mississippi, there was fear. Once, my wife and I were in Mississippi, and we attended a gathering at a black house. After we left and were walking along the street late at night, we were stopped by a policeman because we were in a black district. He looked very threatening and asked why we were in this black district, what were we doing there. So there were always moments of tension in our daily lives.

Q: What made you continue your involvement in the movement despite your fears?

A: If you believed very fervently in what you were doing, if you believed that what you were doing was right, then you were fearful, but you overcame it. Otherwise, you succumbed to those fears and wouldn't do things that led to fearsome situations. But being involved in a cause you believed in, and also working together with other people, was very important in diminishing my fear. Collectivity reduces fear. Community reduces fear. Doing something with other people reduces fear. I'm sure that soldiers overcome their fear because they are together with other soldiers, even though they still have reason to fear. For me and other people during that time, being part of a movement you believed in and being associated with other people who believed in the same thing, helped you overcome your fear.

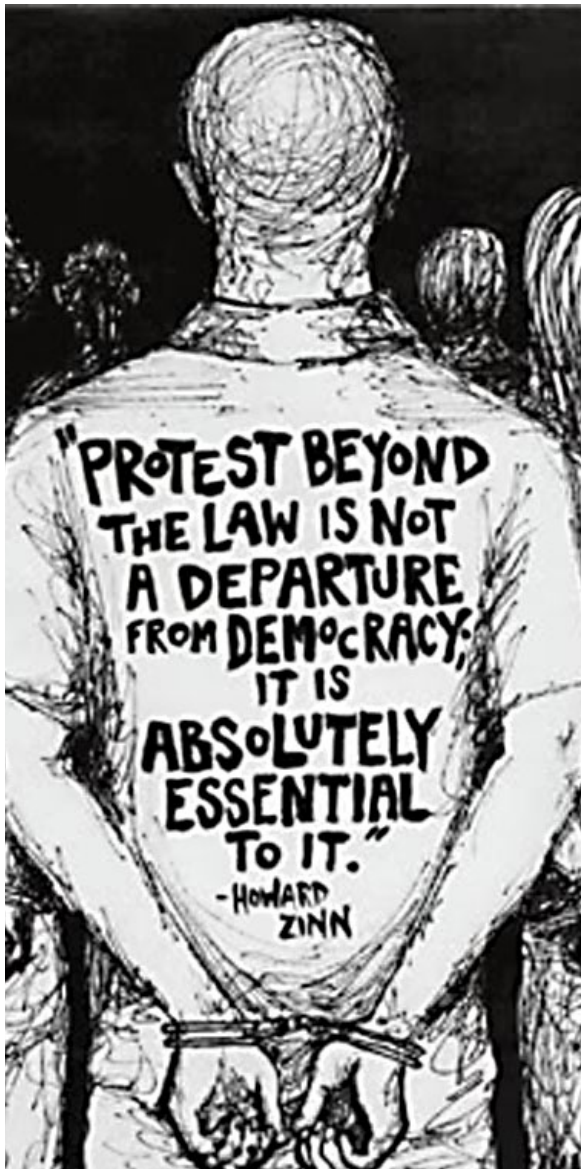
Q: What insight has been revealed to you through your and others' activism?

A: The greatest gift for me has been to see other people behaving with courage and compassion and kindness in situations that are very, very difficult. It's been a blessing to be in a position to observe the heroic behavior of ordinary people in difficult situations. That has been one of the most encouraging and heartening things for me.

Q: What do you tell your students about overcoming their fears about fighting injustice?

A: I try to be as honest as possible with young people, in the sense of recognizing what fears are realistic and what fears are exaggerated. I try not to minimize or conceal the threats that exist in society, not to ignore them but to understand that it's possible to overcome them. I give examples of people who have overcome their fears and suggest that the best way of overcoming fear is to confront the cause of that fear, and to join with other people.

One of most important things you can do in education is to overcome individualism and idealism, that you must do things and compete as an individual.



In teaching, I tried to get my students not to simply work on individual projects, but to work with other students or people in the community on collective projects that gave them a strength and confidence they might not have had working individually. I saw it happen in the South. I saw it happen in the movement against Vietnam, facing police and facing hostility. People felt they could do it if they did it with other people, if they did it as part of a group. Through that came a learning and a sense of overcoming.

Q: Have your fears changed over the years?

A: When I was a teenager going to my first political demonstration, I was knocked unconscious by a policeman, and for a long time after that, whenever I was on a picket line or at a demonstration, I would stay as far away as I could from any police.

Gradually, I steeled myself against my fear by getting closer and closer to police and there came a time in Selma, Alabama, in 1963, on a day of great tension between the black community and the forces of law and order, that I found myself walking past a long line of heavily armed police without any fear. Of course, I'm not in the same situation as I was then, and I'm not as directly involved in physical confrontations, although if I were arrested tomorrow,

"...in 1963, on a day of great tension between the black community and the forces of law and order, that I found myself walking past a long line of heavily armed police without any fear."

I would become fearful of being put in prison, because I know that when you're in jail, you're helpless. I was arrested a number of times after the Civil Rights movement ended and in the movement against the war in Vietnam, in demonstrations in Washington, D.C., and the outskirts of Boston supporting immigrant workers. Every time I was arrested, there was a certain amount of fear, because I understood that when you're in the hands of police or prison guards, you're isolated, vulnerable and in danger. So getting arrested always scared me, and while I don't face these situations very often these days, I know that whenever I'm in a situation that might lead to arrest, a fear is brought up within me.

Q: What helps you gain perspective on your fears?

A: The accumulation of experience, working with people in movements over the years, has strengthened my ability to deal with my own fears and has taught me how to teach other people about the overcoming of fear. I try to remember earlier times when I was fearful, unnecessarily so, and the fears I had were not realized, and I learned they were exaggerated. I also find it very helpful to keep close to friends during particularly difficult times so that other people become a buffer against the dangers of the world.

Q: What personal truth has been confirmed in your life from all of your experiences?

A: What is now undeniably true to me, that I would have claimed I understood in the past, but which I only knew theoretically, is that the love of those closest to you is more important than anything else in the world.

Authenticity is the Driver

"I had to overcome any fear I had about going solo."

Danielle LaPorte *is a strategic and intuitive business adviser who speaks to audiences about entrepreneurship and authenticity. She blogs at WhiteHotTruth and is co-author of the book Style Statement: Live By Your Own Design. Prior to being the former executive director of The Arlington Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank for future studies, Danielle ran her own communications and business development agency.*

MY VOCATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN A STEP TOWARDS MY OWN AUTHENTIC SELF: HOW THAT AUTHENTICITY LOOKS AND FEELS, HOW I WRITE ABOUT IT, HOW IT SOUNDS ON STAGE; NOT JUST WHAT I MEAN TO OFFER, BUT HOW I MEAN TO OFFER IT.

When I overcome my fear about being "white hot" in my truth and genuine in my message, what I produce as an artist and entrepreneur is absolutely magnetic. The articles I post on White Hot Truth, the ones that are revealing and raw about where I'm at in my entrepreneurial journey or my life, are the ones that are the most viral. They get the most quality comments; they get "Twittered" the most. It's not just about quantity, it's "This has had the greatest effect on me." That tells me two things: that I'm on the right path to overcome any hesitation I have with being my true self and that people are hungry for that level of being real.

"I realize that meaning in my life is the only thing I have control over."

The greatest tool for teaching is real stories - it's how people learn. I'm only interested in speaking from experience, not conjecture and conceptualization, which can go a long way, but they won't get you across the finish line when you need to make decisions about where you're going to put your life energy, how you're going to raise money or how you're going to monetize your passion, essentially.

GO TO YOUR WORST-CASE SCENARIO

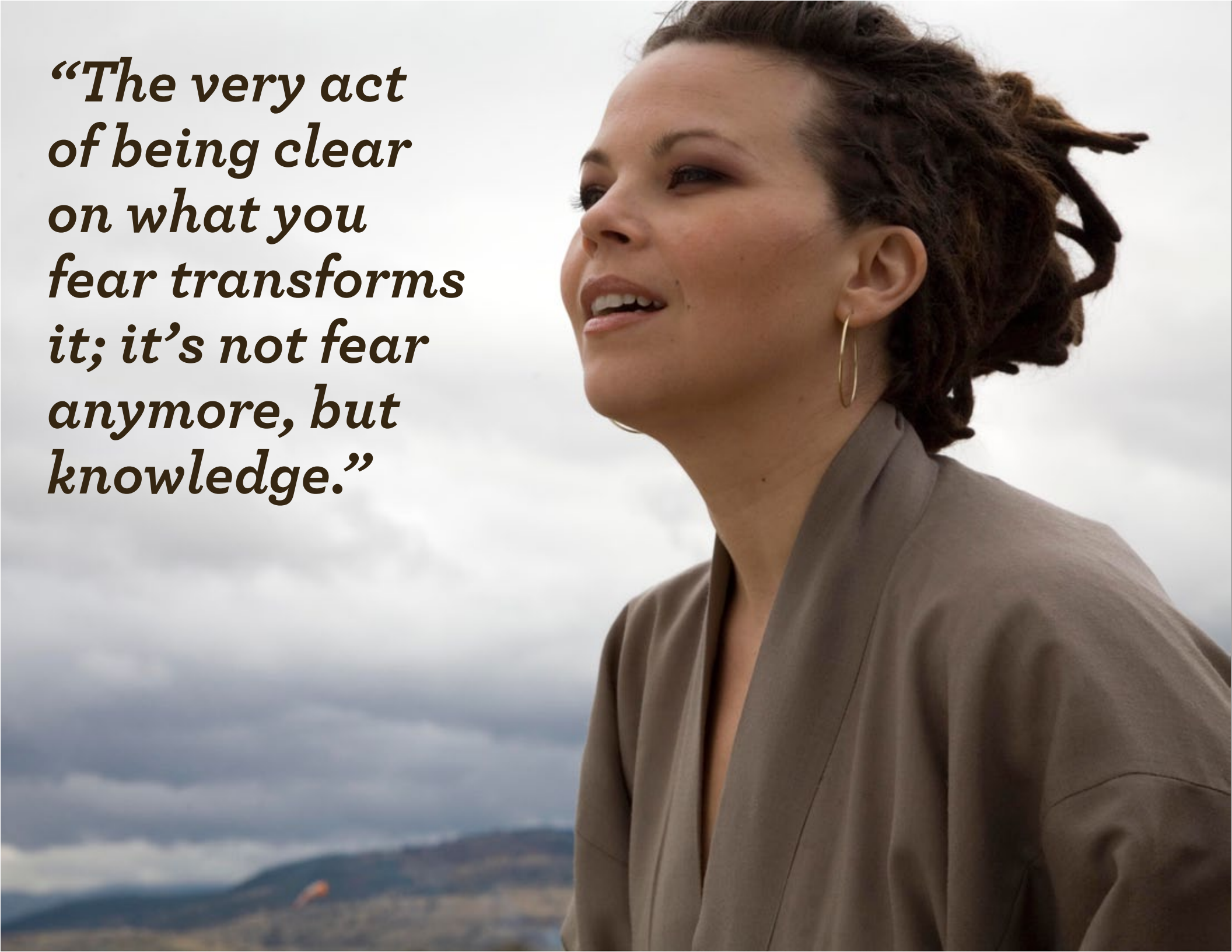
There was a time in my mid-20s where I was in what I call my "dark night." I really felt I had no control over things. As a publicist and communication strategist, I had gigs lined up and my income set for the year, and suddenly, everything just fell apart in a few weeks. I decided I couldn't represent someone because it wasn't grooving ethically with me. A financier for a big event I created pulled out, another contract closed, and it was boom, boom, boom! Then it was all over, and I was 25, sitting in the living room of my rented little adobe house in Santa Fe, with no clients and nothing on the horizon. That was a very scary place to be, and it really taught me the value of going to your worst-case survival scenarios. I'm a huge fan of doing worst-case scenarios in any kind of planning, because you realize that even if you have to waitress or sling beer or live on a credit card, you're not going to die. You're still talented, and you still have passion, and your life still has meaning, even without the gigs.

I'm so grateful for that time; it was one of my first lessons in getting clear on what I did have control over and in letting go of the rest. Now, even though I'm more successful than I've ever been, I still have a worst-case scenario, and it always gets down to clarifying that my life still has plenty of meaning. I realize that the meaning in my life is the only thing that I have control over, and my current question in my new path is: Where does meaning come for me?

I feel like I'm in a constant state of inquiry, and I dance with inquiry and willfulness. I'm highly analytical and always asking, "What's the meaning of this? What's the gift in this?" And it's not so much about faith as it is about trust. I firmly believe that everything is progress, even the setbacks. It's proven that the universe is constantly expanding, so even if it's a deal that goes sideways or a project that doesn't turn out how you want or it's something you need to walk away from, it's all progress. Maybe I'm just dignifying struggle, but it works for me.

HONOR YOUR FEAR

For me, the greatest fear - and it's always been almost a primal concern - is of whether or not I'm being


“The very act of being clear on what you fear transforms it; it’s not fear anymore, but knowledge.”

true to myself and fulfilling my greatest potential. That fear has taken on different faces in different situations, but it's never in the background. It's always right there where I can feel it. When I look back to my 20s, during my dark phase, or into my 30s and leaving the think tank, or now, going solo, the fear is always the same: "Am I making a decision that honors who I truly am?" My greatest fear is that I'm making decisions based on fear. I just can't bear the thought of fear guiding my choices, and I know that it rarely does, but when it does, it's a bloody mess. Fear is the only thing that can make me betray myself and wreak havoc on my life. That's why I never let fear stay as fear; it has to evolve. I have to take it in my hands and take responsibility for it. I can't just sit there and let it become the master of me; I have to be the master of it. You've got to honor it and give it some space and respect, because it's telling you something. It's an emotion I pay close attention to when it comes up, because there may be a message in it if I just acknowledge it and look at it directly. It's not something I just whack out of my head.

First, admit that you have the fear: "Great, it's up on the table." Now, you have to be clear on what the fear actually is. Once you do that, it sort of melts into something you can handle. The very act of being clear on what you fear transforms it; it's not fear anymore but knowledge. If you don't analyze it and just dismiss it, it may bite you as you walk down the path. You don't overcome fear, per se, you just keep seeking your creative edge and realize that every day you've "arrived." Tomorrow there will be somewhere new to go.

A BEAUTIFUL EPIDEMIC

We're a culture of fear because we're a culture of conformity. I'm a Zen master when it comes to fear with my entrepreneurial clients. I get out the cane and whack it and tell them, "Get over it." I ask, "Do you want to be scared or do you want to be broke? Do you want to be scared, or do you want to move forward?" It's OK if you want to be scared. You can do that if you want to stay in your 9-to-5 job. When you make it that black and white, it becomes clear which way they're going to go. I often do an exercise with people where I repeat the same question to them two, three, four times until we get to what's really bothering them, until we get to their truth. If someone's talking about their start-up, I say, "What are you scared of?" And they say, "I'm scared of losing money." I say, "What are you scared of?" They say, 'I'm scared of making my husband angry." I say, "What are you scared of?" They say, "I'm afraid of being alone." And there you go. There's always a silent moment. Who'd have thought they're scared to start their business because they may end up alone? Just the exercise of seeing that "a-ha" moment is fuel for getting on with things.

Everyone is struggling with the same thing: fear of being his or her true self. Everyone from artists to start-ups to high-level CEOs - everyone. They all have the same craving, the same longing to just get paid and be authentic. My God, it's a beautiful epidemic.

If there is no struggle, there is no progress.

Frederick Douglass