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# Mending Broken Fences

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**T**ears streamed freely down my face as I watched waves crash on the beach.

My husband put his arms around me. “For what it’s worth,” he said, “I’m sorry this is happening to us.”

So was I. We’d been through so much in our twenty-one years together: the loss of both of our fathers and two dogs, six surgeries for my endometriosis, four failed rounds of fertility treatments, the loss of his job thirteen years prior that had placed all our financial burdens squarely on my shoulders. Despite—or maybe because of—all of these things, I knew my marriage was over.

My husband and I had traveled to Portland during Spring Break in a last-ditch effort to save our marriage. We hoped spending some quality time away from our day-to-day stressors might help us mend our failing partnership. It didn’t.

I knew this ending was inevitable; our marriage had been on the rocks for years. Yet, until that moment, at some level I hoped we could still make it. At the same time, I knew in my gut that getting a divorce was the only course of action that would allow either one of us a chance at true happiness.

While it’s easy to point fingers, the reality was that we weren’t meeting each other’s needs, and hadn’t been for a long time. What made things worse was that, in more than two decades of marriage, I had never been totally honest about my needs and wants—not with my husband, and not with myself. I was the Queen of People Pleasers, you see, and my marriage was no different. Scared of losing my husband if I let my true self shine, I hid behind a façade.

I was The Good Wife, The Academic, The Psychologist, Teacher of the Year, The Boss's Pet, The Wanna-be Mommy. Pick one. I was all of them. None of them were the real me.

I worked full time as a professor so my husband didn't have to. I made sure there were lots of journal articles on my resumé so I looked like a prima donna in the academic world. I spent hours upon hours trying to improve my already-stellar teaching reviews. I catered to every request my boss threw my way. I went through four rounds of fertility treatments, including three rounds of in vitro, in an attempt to give my husband the daughter he so desperately wanted and save our failing marriage—even though I wasn't entirely sure I wanted a child.

I pretended to be happy, and convinced nearly everyone that this was the case. But like all façades, mine eventually began to crumble.

It all came to a head in April, 2013. A month after our ill-fated Spring Break vacation, I had an experience during a meditation that rocked my world.

"You're living the wrong life," I was told. "You need to get back in touch with the Goddess. You will write a book about reconnecting with your Divine Feminine. This book will help you heal and, in turn, help other women heal."

Upon hearing this voice of wisdom echoing in my head, I did what any right-brained, logical academic would do: I ignored it.

Five days later, it happened again.

This time I couldn't ignore it. I sat down and I started writing. Words flowed out of me like water; I couldn't type fast enough. Any time I sat down to work on something besides that book, I couldn't. It was as though time stopped; my world revolved around writing that book.

Three months later, I had completed the first draft of my manuscript. I had also filed for divorce and started looking for a new home.

You see, as my meditation had predicted, as I wrote, I started to change; to heal. I began to realize that I was here for a reason.

I owed it to myself to honor that Divine contract instead of suppressing it to please others. I also began to understand that my life circumstances were my choice, and that I could choose differently. I could choose to live my life my own way, and let go of all my prior expectations about what life was supposed to be like.

I could choose to be happy.

It wasn't an easy road by any means. I call 2013 "the best, worst year of my life." In those twelve months, I got a divorce, moved, and turned forty. I also broke my heel for the second time in a year, which resulted in five and a half months of immobility. By the end of 2013, I had learned a powerful lesson: if you want to be happy, you have to stop fighting the Universe.

That lesson took a little while to sink in. When I broke my heel for the second time, in August, I was told I needed to go back on crutches immediately. As this was the same week that I was moving into my new house, I told my doctor I was simply too busy to go on crutches. A week and a half later, I finally gave in and started using the crutches, but it was with a "bring it on!" mentality. It was me against the Universe, and I was determined to win.

I threw everything I had into proving to the world that I wasn't about to let a divorce, a move, or a broken heel stop me! I launched two new web sites, finished editing my book, started health coaching, blogged like crazy, attended innumerable networking events, and took on just about any project that came my way.

What I wasn't doing, however, was healing, physically or emotionally. I was still fighting the Universe, trying to keep up appearances and please the people around me.

Two and a half months into my second broken heel, my doctor fired me. I had made zero progress; the bone looked exactly the same as when I broke it. She passed me off to a specialist, who immediately put me in a cast, which limited my mobility even further.

I was shocked. How could I not be healing? Shouldn't I be well by now? Shouldn't this be over? I was ready to move on with my life—or so I thought.

Then, the Universe sent me another sign—actually, two of them. (I’m nothing if not a slow learner.) The first one came while I was sitting in the office of a local magazine publisher. A friend of the publisher’s, a woman I had never met before, walked in. Upon seeing my crutches, she asked, “Why did you break your heel?”

I responded with gritted teeth, “It’s not like I *wanted* to break it!”

Two days later it dawned on me. I broke my heel because the Universe was telling me I needed to slow down. I needed to stop moving so fast and take time to heal my broken foot—and my broken heart.

You would think that, after receiving this insight, I would have made some major changes in my life. Not so much. I was still busy trying to prove to the world that nothing and no one could stop me. I did anything and everything to take my mind off of my heel, my heart, and the reality of my life.

A month later, I had tea with a dear friend. “Do you want to heal?” she asked pointedly.

“Of course,” I replied—and proceeded to detail everything I had been doing for the previous three months in an effort to heal.

“When are you going to stop *doing*?” she asked. “When are you going to just *allow* your body to heal and your heart to mend?”

That’s when I finally got it. All of that doing, fixing, proving, fighting, and people-pleasing wasn’t helping. I needed to just ... *be*.

So I gave up, gave in, surrendered, and watched Fall turn into Winter.

I journaled, painted, watched the snow fall. As I allowed myself to simply and profoundly just *be*, I healed. My foot, my heart, and all the rest of me.

As Winter turned to Spring, I realized that every experience the Universe sent my way was a lesson I needed to learn. I started laughing instead of fighting when life’s little hiccups put me off-balance. Instead of meeting unpleasant news with a fierce determination to change things, I started asking questions. Why is this happening

for me right now? How can I be with what is happening without needing to change it? How can I be more forgiving and compassionate with myself?

To my pleasant surprise, the answers came almost immediately, and in three parts: the why, the lesson, and the “what-to-do-now.” Sometimes I still fall back into fighting and *doing*, but the Universe doesn’t put up with that for long. Pretty soon I get another gentle (or not-so-gentle) reminder of what I’m supposed to be learning about myself. Will I ever be done with these lessons? I doubt it—but I no longer fear them.

Happiness is a choice I make every day. I can look at the glass as half empty, or half full—and I’d rather focus on the half-full part most of the time. Life still happens, but these days I’m more inclined to go with the flow. If events temporarily derail my happiness, I know I am being reminded by the Universe to make different choices that honor my needs.

Several years ago, I started a nightly gratitude journal. Even on days where nothing seems to go right, I can always find plenty of things to be grateful for. I also make it a point to do things each day that make me happy: singing, dancing, spending time in nature, journaling, painting, spending quality time with my man, or talking to my best girlfriend on the phone.

Happiness, to me, is a daily journey of decisions, listening within, honoring, and claiming. Joy is dynamic, not static; it’s the heart of authentic living.