

Introduction

INITIALY, WHEN I started writing *Bare Naked Bliss*, I was inspired to share all the tools and intellect I had gathered along the way during my journey into healing. At first, I was writing as part of my healing process; even though, my intent was to help others heal. It was the final work I needed to do to truly embody all I had intellectualized and utilized to set myself free. During this process I discovered how I could heal myself and revealed all the truths buried within my suffering. Simultaneously, I started helping friends make peace with their own suffering. What I realized while helping them is this book embodies the tools needed to heal, find your bliss and inspire you to give---I just need to take the reader on the journey. I began to focus all my energy visualizing the reader or the listener and how to communicate all these ideas and suggest some type of path for an indefinable process of letting go of all their pain and shame and uncovering their euphoric bliss.

During all the rewrites and edits I kept one person in mind, which was brought into my life by no accident Allan Pineda, Apl de Ap, (*aka-the rock star*). He has suffered many tragedies greater than most of us can imagine and he continues to find his way through his life with freedom and a sense of grace. His heart and soul possess a beacon of light which I continue to guide him towards. This energy has provided me with a source of inspiration and direction; his light and “Buddha Boy” energy provides hope for so many people in the Philippines who are suffering everyday. Just as I remind Allan of his energy and the love he possess within I want to remind you that you possess the



same energy. It has been from the inception of our friendship that I made a commitment to him that I would give back to his country, the Philippines, financially and help inspire others to start their healing process. The same process Allan has been committed to and continues--an uncharted path. He is well on his way and about to embark on a beautiful journey into giving back to his homeland and the rest of the world. Allan and I are joined with a similar desire to help those in need around this world, I offer this book to all of you as an opportunity to heal and give to yourself and to others in greater need than you. Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu- Life to all- Love to all- Peace to all.



Bare Naked Bliss

SOMETIMES, IT TAKES an unbearable pain to remove the walls that we have constructed around our limited lives and let us stand bare naked in our own bliss. I know it did for me. My pain is not different from yours or anyone's, but it was happening to me, and so it commanded my attention each time. During the journey, the pain accumulated in the inner layers of my being, until one day, something shifted and I suddenly found myself a free woman, a free soul. I was naked, but clothed in something far more beautiful than I had ever worn before. My worn-out garments of self-doubt, shame, guilt, anger and regret had suddenly been stripped away. I stood in a state of bliss that seemed almost impossible to be true, yet bliss it was. And the funny thing is, all the years when I wore those old clothes and went through the motions of being a "free woman," I didn't have a clue I was in bondage. In reflection, if someone would have asked me I would have said I had moved past all my accumulated pain, I would even say I felt moments of happiness. Until I realized, I was still in bondage and really suffering. What an awakening was in store for me! And it started years ago in the most unlikely place....



An Angel Overhead

December 2004

MY HUSBAND AND I lost a baby during the middle of my pregnancy. From the first moment the doctor told me, with a deep, pained look in his face, that our baby had passed away I felt grave sorrow in my heart which surged down to my core. Shortly after this shattering moment, the doctor informed us that the safest way to remove our baby was to go to an abortion clinic. As those words slipped from his lips, my heart seized and my body gasped for air. The alternatives, he explained, were too dangerous and I had to think of my two small children and my husband. As I found a small gulp of air, I reluctantly agreed, even as I sobbed from the bellows of my heart. I sat in a parked car and I began to scream, grabbing hold of my stomach, aching wanting to feel his feet moving just once more. I began asking myself, "*How could this be?*" I frantically retraced all the events that had led up to this moment, searching for some reason or explanation. In this time of crisis, I wanted desperately to place blame and find a reason for my pain. But it soon became apparent that sometimes there is no obvious reason. The truth within this situation laid somewhere in front of me.

During this tragedy, I was in such a deep state of grief and shock that I began to witness myself and the events around me as if I were watching a movie in which I had been cast in the lead role. In the upcoming days, the intense physical and emotional pain I felt caused me to retreat from the outside world. I found refuge in my bedroom. I hid from my husband, my family, my children and my friends; even



though, all of them certainly reached out trying to ease my pain. I went in and out of deep meditation trying to find the strength to endure the greatest juxtaposition I had yet to face in my life: finding myself in the presence of those choosing to end the potential life of a baby, while having no choice but to say good-bye to a child I had wanted to so deeply. The anger and sadness I felt was so intense, I became despondent and disconnected from what I had known as my life; and the roles I played no longer seemed to define me. I was no longer a mother, wife, daughter, friend, sister, designer or business owner. All of these roles just seemed to disappear. All I could focus on and all I could be, was in the moment. I could not look backward or forward; if I did, I felt I would die. I was completely immobilized physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. During this moment, I was in a juxta position between shock and hyper awareness which lead me into a witnessing state. In this moment I had an inner-knowing that in the days to come I would be asked to look beyond myself and my immediate situation and once and for all break free of the past accumulation of pains and dramas which had hijacked my life over and over again.

As I walked into the abortion clinic, I was profoundly aware of the opposing forces of life and death. While I waited to be called for my pre-op appointment, I began to witness myself slip further into a state of deep sadness and shock. I went through the motions for the pre-surgery procedures – a two day procedure. Through it all I kept whispering to myself, *“This must be happening for a reason.”* In an attempt to distance myself from my own pain, I tried in desperation to witness all that was around me. The energy in the room was filled with utter anxiety, sadness, and chaos. I thought about my husband and the way this tragedy seemed to be pushing him closer and closer to the edge. I could sense his pain and discomfort with not knowing how to support me. I started to realize that we all had our own story. Everyone in the waiting room was not just there to end an unwanted pregnancy. They each had their own story that led them to this horrible place. In this state of witnessing, I watched as everyone’s tale started to unravel around me. I truly realized my story was different

but my pain was no different from the pain all of these women felt. It was not just about *me* it was about *us*. I made it through the initial appointment, and left the clinic feeling more and more uncertain, as if a piece of my soul was being ripped from my very being. The universality of our loss was being pushed into my face and my soul was yearning to understand this sorrow.

Early the next morning I arrived at the clinic. I slowly walked in the door, leaving my husband behind. This wasn’t my first miscarriage; two years prior, I lost another child at the end of the first trimester. Because I was early on in that pregnancy, I was able to go to the hospital, where an ever-present, a compassionate staff coddled and supported me. The atmosphere at the abortion clinic, however, was drastically different. You do everything yourself, you get dressed in a freezing room and wait in an open waiting area with other women. I was sitting silently in this waiting room when I heard the sound of shackles being dragged across the floor. Yes, shackles. I wanted to laugh and cry. Who wears shackles to an abortion clinic? Then, I heard police on walkie talkies: “The prisoner is here,” they confirmed to one another. Suddenly, the circumstances I found myself in seemed utterly absurd, pushing me into fits of uncontrollable laughter. How could this really be happening? In full acceptance that this was part of my story, I said from within, “You have got to be kidding me. I think I am going to lose it.”

Just then, another woman is escorted into the waiting room, and takes a seat across from me. I recognized her as the woman who spent most of yesterday yelling at her boyfriend. I assumed she was terminating her pregnancy because she did not want to have a child. Then she told me her story. Although I was in a state of grief, I never felt such compassion. She had to do something I could never do; if she did not choose to end her pregnancy, she would not survive. She was so strong and yet shaken at the same time. I sat there wanting to just be there for her and take away the pain, when I realized that I had assumed and judged her without knowing her story. I was no different than the picketers outside of this clinic. Just as my husbands words



and gestures were of no comfort to me, I realized nothing I could say or do would ease her pain because words can not comfort any of us in times of desperation; it is time that will slowly ease the pain.

Finally, my name is called. I walk into the surgery room where I am met with the words, "Get up on the surgery table and put your feet in the stirrups." I climb up and pull myself into the right position, feeling like a prisoner myself. A few moments later, the surgeon arrived, a mood of anxiety and detachment looming overhead. His hair smelled like stale tobacco and his mood fell somewhere between anxious and a detached despondence from his own life and spirit.

They slowly put me under and when it was over, they rolled me into a recovery room where ten girls lay in beds side by side. The doctor came over to check on me and I asked, "Did you see my baby?" He could not even look me in the eyes or show one ounce of regard for me or my situation. He quickly turned his head and mumbled, "No." I laid there feeling empty. I then appeased myself with a reminder that the worst was over and I could finally start to cry, weep, and heal.

Moments later my prisoner friend is rolled in to the recovery room. She shoots me a look that seems to say, "I've been through this before," and then begins to tell me her story. She stayed in prison two weeks longer than her prison sentence, she explained, so she could have the state prison pay for her second trimester termination of her pregnancy. I really did not know what to say. I tried to wrap my mind around the social and spiritual implications of her choice. She was detached from life and from spirit. As I lay there, the director of the clinic walks up and I begin to cry. In an admonishing tone she says, "Finally, you show some emotion, you are stoic." I just looked at her and said nothing. I rolled over on my cot until it was time to go to the next room. She finally takes me and my new friend to the other room. The prisoner then turns to me and says, "How old was your baby?" I look at her and reply, "My baby was dead." She looks horrified and for a brief moment, I could feel her compassion and sense of my loss. She replied, "Oh".



The pain she felt for that brief moment pierced my heart. I was not able to even imagine what I could say to bring her peace. I just whispered, "It is okay." It took me a long time to completely process these series of events. The deep sorrow felt so familiar to the deep wounds which struck my heart in a distant past. I reminded myself that in sorrow you can find joy.

Later, as I lay in my own bed recovering from the surgery, I yearned to feel freedom again. I began to surrender to the idea of being present in this moment and to allow myself to finally grieve all that I had been through. I needed to say good-bye and embrace the bigger meaning behind my life. I was finally ready to raise my white flag and scream, "UNCLE!" With a deep sigh, I slipped into meditation and with gratitude agreed to find a way to heal my wounds and find my eternal peace.

In a subconscious and slightly conscious state, I knew all of this had happened for a reason. I would sing over and over in my head, "You can't always have what you want but sometimes you get just what you need." This had become my theme song over the past seven years. I was beaten down and ready to move on. This was yet another life experience which I would use as a tool, a tool to help others have the hope and belief they can move beyond their current state of living and experiencing. Now, when anyone tells me they are going through a difficult time I see it differently. I can be in a place of acceptance, compassion and love. I actually get excited for them knowing that they too are being asked to expand their awareness.

During the days and weeks that followed the procedure, I started to revisit all the highs and lows I experienced in the past several years. I began to reassure myself that I could make it through one more incident. At night, when the sadness lay heavy in my heart, I would whisper to myself, "*You can do it. You have survived before and you will survive again.*" My husband and I had made it through cancer, depression, illness, loss of close friends and family and another baby



all with in the past seven years; we could make it through this too. When I sat in that sterile office feeling the loss of not only my baby but my identity as well, I realized that the greatest obstacle I faced was finally healing. I reflected on seeing my baby one last time during the pre-op ultrasound and realized how in that moment I began to surrender to the idea of healing. I knew that I was being asked to grow from this because I had internalized so much loss in the past; I had built a stone fortress around part of my heart and soul. I knew I was being asked to grow from this moment and finally move on from all that held me in deep bondage and servitude. I would finally allow myself to surrender.

Before the healing process could begin, I first had to give myself permission to acknowledge the bondage I had placed myself in. I became aware of how out of balance I had become and how rarely I was actually *present* in my life. I had lost touch with all of the elements in my life that brought me joy and passion. I realized how much I missed serving others, design, architecture, art, travel, cooking, writing poetry, having inspirational dialogues with friends and family, challenging my mind and body and expanding my spirituality. I had forgotten how to live life and how to surround myself with the people, the places and moments which inspire me. My heart and soul were broken and I wanted to be whole again. Within months of losing this child, I began to break down the walls of pain that I had been building up for years and I allowed my heart and soul to start experiencing life again, but this time with greater vigor, passion and bliss than I have ever known.

These stories, that I am about to share with you, are some of the most profound and defining moments of my life thus far. These life changing events, though intertwined with deep pain and sadness, allowed me to rediscover and understand my inner truth. I now offer the wisdom of all I have endured to you. May it provide a light and a compass to guide your return to the truth that resides within you.

Throughout this book, I will take you through the journey that unfolded when I surrendered to myself. I will reveal how I removed the



walls of my identity, how I discovered and balanced the feminine and masculine traits within me, and how I embraced my internal truth, my peace. This process, though triggered by intense pain, provided me with a deep sense of compassion, love, peace, and joy and delivered me to a place of indescribable bliss and passion- a place I secretly want you to experience, even if it only lasts for a moment.

It is my hope that the melding of poetry in this book will take you out of the linear experience of reading and connect you with the essence of beauty, grace and wisdom that inspired these insightful poems. It is not necessary to comprehend them intellectually, just allow yourself to let the words and visions wash over you during the course of this book.



Seeds of Light

Chapter 1

With all of antiquity in the palm of thy soul,
The very essence lies not in one theory or the next,
But within thy heart and soul.

Opening thy doors to thy existence,
reveal all the realities which entwine the universe.
Like children of our creation clinging to our own ideas.
Our thoughts and expressions are seeds of light.

Allowing all which exists to be the co-creation
And the embers of thy night.

Within in a brief gasp, thy converging vantages of
expanding light drive thy further into thy seeds of light.

-sTs



Bondage

Release these ropes that
Wrap thy soul.

Unlock these shackles
On thy heart.

Break Free.

Thy freedom lies in
The mirage not in
Thy reactions to thee.

-sTs



Chapter 1

Bondage

IT BECAME APPARENT to me that I was at a junction in my life where I must finally let go of everything I had known to be true, to all I had desired and to all that held my soul captive. Upon this realization, I started stripping away the layers which had been built up around my soul. The choice was mine, I could accept one more curve ball, as I had in the past, or decide once and for all to finally let go of all that no longer served me in my life. I could no longer deny that I had been suffering like most of the world does on a daily basis. I wanted to let go of the need to suffer and start remembering who I really was. I wanted to allow my inner power to heal and inspire myself into creating the life I had craved and had forgotten. The only emotion stopping me was fear, which seemed to suspend me from moving forward. I was certain if I started to look inside I might unleash a wild demon, with my twisted sense of humor, my fear was that I would unleash not one demon but three or four. The severe pain I felt seemed impossible to ignore any longer and ultimately it overcame my fears, I knew it was time to *LET GO*.

I witnessed this fear in myself; on the first part of my journey the pain and fear masked any deep desire I had to become intimate with my internal self. This inevitably caused me to tread water, prolonging the repetition of old patterns which had become a habitual rhythm in my life. These fears on some level or another paralyze me, causing me to want to control something or everything in my life. The uncontrollable desire to perpetuate the fear-control paradigm within my life kept me



in a stalemate with my ego and my soul. It was at my breaking point, after I lost my baby, I realized I had grown tired of being held hostage by my fears and I was finally ready to *LET GO!*

Fortunately, my husband was able to see my paralysis and my inability to function, it reminded him of a place he had been. He feared that I was consumed by the pain and loss of our baby; he was scared that I would not return to the peaceful and joyful mother and wife he knew. It was within his fear and compassion that he was inspired to provide me with an opportunity to open Pandora's Box.

December 2005

When we lost our baby right before Christmas time, I was doing everything in my power to be present in the moment for my children and family members but it was all I could do to pull myself together and function without breaking down and crying. During this holiday, I really did not want any material gifts; I only wanted what I could not have: my baby. In the past, I always had wanted Ken to read me perfectly and shower me with a well thought out gift. The poor guy never stood a chance and now I was in a place that I felt I could completely let go of the maya, "the material world." In some profound way I was getting this lesson over and over again during the holidays. I thought I was a quick learner but on some level I was not. On Christmas day, I tried with all my might to engage in the excitement with the children but I found myself, emotionless as I watched everyone rip open their gifts. It all seemed pointless. Then, Ken pulled out an envelope from a secret hiding place and he handed it to me. I opened it and there was one of the biggest gifts someone could ever receive: time to heal. He gifted me with a week of meditation and rejuvenation at the Chopra Center for Well Being.

I had read a few of Deepak Chopra's books, one in particular always felt so familiar that it was as if I had written it myself. As I read his book, "The Book of Secrets," I always knew what he was going to write next. Every sentence unfolded effortlessly. I knew that when I went to the Center I would have a chance to revisit these concepts. But I would

have never, in my wildest dreams, thought of indulging in this type of week. This series of events was a moment of divine intervention and when these moments occur it is imperative that you embrace them do not fight them. For this reason, although I was tempted to postpone my visit to the Center, because I was terrified at what I might discover, I knew I needed it desperately. The fear had paralyzed me all these years and placed me in a state of bondage. Now, I had my chance to release the shackles one by one.

I had about six weeks before my excursion and during that time I slowly started to make peace with my situation and regain my composure. By the time I arrived, I was only expecting to gain knowledge and get some much needed rest. The minute I walked into the Chopra Center I was enveloped by sounds and a sense of certainty that made me feel at peace. There was a familiar magic floating in the air speaking to my soul. I started to remember a feeling of security within myself.

During my stay I let go of everything, I stopped communicating with the outside world and focused exclusively on myself. It had been years since I was in an environment to socialize with strangers, learn new and familiar concepts, and focus on myself. I quickly realized I had completely put myself aside for the past several years and now it was my time to start waking up. Upon my arrival I became aware that I could hardly breathe and my once marathon-firm body was in bad physical shape. I began to realize I was the source of the trauma impacting my mind, body, and soul. Upon having this realization, gradually the anxiety and stress began to dissolve from my body and mind. I started to regain my center ground. I learned a new mantra-based meditation technique, which would redirect my meditation practice and integrate nicely with other energy and visualization techniques that I had been using for myself and to help others. Finally, I felt a sense that I would make it back from this long road I had traversed down. I would make it home. As I started to find my way out, I began to see clearly all of my internal truths and desires. I started to explore my soul. I realized that it had been seven years since I took the time to explore my soul, feed my passions, and heal some of my deepest wounds.



Over the course of the next few years, my spirit and self were beginning to meld. I was learning how to drop judgment; find forgiveness, laughter, love and compassion for myself and others. I was beginning to feel freedom and moments of unbounded bliss. Two aspects unfolded during this uncharted journey. First, I began integrating simple virtues to bring my life back into balance and move beyond the confines of my current way of thinking. I refer to my virtues in the same vein the Greek's did, as "habitual excellence" or a trait that is valued. For example, my desire to always have fun, my virtue is to celebrate and embody fun. It is best if you embody these virtues and integrate them into your life. If you *only* intellectualize them you will *only* arm yourself with a new language and subject matter to share at your next social gathering. Second, I took steps to meld my soul with my outer self. Most of humanity never takes the time to really get to know and make peace with the spirit that resides within them. Yet, the spirit that lies deep within can guide us, respond to our internal dialogue, and provide us with infinite peace. Once I uncovered these virtues and integrated the knowledge I had been gathering from books, teachers, and my silence into my life, I rediscovered who I *really* was. It felt as if shackles had been removed from my soul. Finally, I was starting to feel a familiar freedom, like I was a little girl again, without a care in the world.

I continued to integrate meditation, being present, laughter, physical activity, and self-expression into my life until these virtues were a part of my daily experience. As I dug deeper into these techniques I found a reliable way to meld my ego with my soul. This impacted my life on a personal and a global level. The ultimate outcome that I experienced was peace, euphoric bliss and freedom from the shackles of life and death. This journey has provided an unimaginable transformation in my life and those whose lives I continue touch.

The profound realization was: I no longer had to suffer. I realized within myself that none of us have to suffer; it is our choice. I know all too well in the middle of life's trials and tribulations it feels like there is no other choice but to suffer, but it is within this realization you can begin



to heal. I recently, had a friend call me and he cried into the phone, "Suzanne, I do not want to feel like this anymore. I want it to go away." He has spent years in anguish, suffering from depression and chemical dependency. He is almost ready to and sincerely wants to let go, yet he still has a road to travel before he can surrender. It was within his voice I knew he is almost at his breaking point. As I continue to guide him on his journey, I can see his path clearly, acknowledging he has a distinct journey, and when he is ready he will... *LET GO*. The "letting go" is the hardest part for most of us. I was there; I wanted to cling to all of my dramas. The reason I did this was because I was still wounded, I needed to heal but I did not know how. I can see this in my friend he cannot let go yet, but I am confident he will when he is ready.

For me, when I accepted the gift to the Center, I was surrendering to myself and finally letting go. For you, surrender might arrive in another shape or form--it might be that final night of drunken debauchery or one last day of feeling total darkness and missing feeling alive and in control of your life. You will know, I promise. The good news is even if you have not hit rock bottom, you can start the process of healing and transformation when a wave of constriction—pain or a roadblock--impacts your life by acknowledging what does not serve you within the situation. You might take notice of the behaviors, the people and the outside forces that do not serve you. Once you bring awareness to the situation, you can start to make choices and begin to let go of all that is not aligned with your highest truth. The clarity will present itself if you have the desire and this desire will outweigh any obstacles that might keep you under the confines of your own bound soul. The process starts by surrendering to yourself and then requires you to shed the masks you have become accustomed to wearing.

After visiting the Chopra Center, I will be the first to admit I was not healed or even close to even understanding all that I had suffered. However, I was finally committed to healing once and for all. Even though, I was not really aware or could not completely understand how it was going to happen. I knew I could dive into the uncharted waters---I embraced the unknown and surrendered to myself.

