

writing
DOWN
YOUR
SOUL

How to Activate
and Listen to the
Extraordinary Voice Within

Janet Conner



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For you. Welcome to the conversation.

The Spirit's Hands

They
can be a great help—words.
They can become the spirit's hands
and lift and
caress
you.

MEISTER ECKHART

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Before We Begin



THERE IS A VOICE INSIDE YOU. There is a Voice inside everyone. Whether you hear it or not, the Voice is there. Whether you acknowledge it or not, the Voice is there. Whether you ask it for help or ignore its guidance, the Voice is still there. Waiting. It is waiting for you to stop, if just for a moment, and listen. The Voice is always there, guiding you, encouraging you, loving you. This book is about connecting with that Voice.

I'll let you in on a sweet little secret right here on the very first page: connecting with that Voice is easy. And why shouldn't it be? The Voice isn't trying to hide from you—it is seeking you. It knows the rich conversation that awaits you both. It knows what you need and longs to give it to you. So it stays close at hand, in your heart, your mind, your soul. The Voice is right there, barely below the

surface, waiting for you to pick up your pen and penetrate the thin wall of consciousness that keeps you apart.

But why the pen? Why writing? After all, there are other ways to connect. There are powerful spiritual and religious traditions like meditation, prayer, and ritual. There are rich body-mind-spirit practices such as massage, Reiki, yoga, and tai chi. For some, long-distance swimming or running are transcendental experiences. My son swears he finds the greatest peace and does his best thinking riding his motorcycle late at night when he's the only one on the road. All these things are good. And all of them work.

Nothing in *Writing Down Your Soul* is intended to supplant or alter the practices you use or the beliefs you hold. Deep soul writing doesn't replace anything; it enriches everything. Writing focuses your attention so clearly on the wisdom within that you cannot help but feel guided and loved. A young woman in a Writing Down Your Soul workshop expressed her surprise when she discovered how little effort was required to make that connection. "This is so easy," she said. "You don't have to listen to a CD or buy a program, or change your beliefs, or fix your diet, or anything. Just show up. Really that's it, just show up."

She's right. This kind of writing is easy. There's no one standing over your shoulder judging your grammar or punctuation or determining if anything you've said makes a lick of sense. But make no mistake, the practice of pouring your soul onto paper is profound, and, in the way of all things profound, it can—and will—change your life. Before you turn another page, consider this carefully: if you like your world the way it is, if you don't want to (or need to) improve your emotional, spiritual, or financial life, if you are content with your relationships, your family, your work, and your home, put this book down! Don't read another word. I mean it.

Because once you open that door in your soul, you can't quite close it again. You can't pretend that you don't know where the door is or how easy it is to walk through. Once you start engaging in rich, deep conversation with something higher, bigger, deeper, and wiser than yourself, you'll find yourself contemplating ideas you've never considered, saying things you've never said, and asking questions you've never asked. Once you open yourself to divine direction, you will receive guidance, but—fair warning—it may not be the guidance you expect. Once you start asking for more, you will start receiving more: more ideas, more intuition, more inspiration, more wisdom, more opportunities, more challenges, and more questions. Always, there are more questions. Because the answers, as you are about to discover, live deep inside the questions.

And let's not forget miracles. Ask and you shall receive. Every spiritual tradition tells us that asking and receiving is the law of the universe, and the Voice is happy to comply. Pick up a pen with the intention of connecting with that extraordinary Voice within, and your life will start rumbling, shifting, and moving. Awakening, as if from a long sleep, you will see your world differently, and you'll find yourself changing, subtly at first. Then, as your trust in the wisdom of the Voice expands, you'll find you have the inner strength and confidence to create your own brave new world.

Sound a bit scary? Well, the best ideas are. We all want safety, but safety, it turns out, is a paradox. To feel really safe, you first have to step out into the unknown, experience the fear, and discover that all is well. I can tell you for ten pages or ten hours that you are safe and loved, but until you feel it—feel it in the deepest place in your soul—you don't know it and certainly don't believe it. You have to step out into that space between here and there, between “who I am” and “who I could be,” between “what I have”

and “what I want.” Nothing new can happen until you step into that empty space. Like Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, you have to thrust one foot forward into empty air and put it down firmly trusting that something somehow will prevent you from falling. And something will. Something will remind you to be not afraid. Something will encourage you to explore the possibilities. Something will talk you through the scary parts, and something will definitely celebrate your joys. From here on, the Voice will guide you. It will let you know that you are safe and loved.

Are you ready to begin? Then, by virtue of intention, you are now officially the writer of your soul. Welcome to the profound practice of entering your soul and recording the messages you find there. Let the conversation begin.

How I Discovered the Voice— or Rather, How the Voice Discovered Me



IT'S A SURPRISE TO ME and everyone I know that I'm the author of a book on deep soul writing. The truth is, I was never much of a journaler. Sure, when I was upset, I'd grab a notebook and write furiously for a day or two, but never consistently and never long enough to resolve anything. Mind you, I loved the *idea* of having a rich spiritual life. I loved to imagine myself sipping tea and writing profound thoughts in a tooled leather journal with morning sun dappling the pages. To bring this fantasy to life, I bought *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron, but it sat on a shelf alongside all the other great spiritual books I would read as soon as I had the time.

Meanwhile, I had a consulting career. I had clients and projects and reports. I had appointments and lunch dates and speaking engagements. I was a busy woman—a woman with no time to journal.

Until November 1, 1996.

I had caught my husband sleeping with his secretary the summer before. He moved out in September, but he didn't move on. On October 31, our Halloween-crazed seven-year-old begged me to invite his dad to join us for our annual Halloween extravaganza. But after trick or treating, my husband wouldn't leave. He thought we should have sex. When I refused, he shoved me out the door. He screamed that I'd never see my child again. He drank. He broke furniture. He cried. He drank some more. When he finally left at one in the morning, I collapsed into a dense, dark sleep. At dawn, my eyes shot open, five words rocketing to the surface: I am afraid of you. Those five words changed my life.

I called my husband at noon and told him I wanted a divorce. He didn't say much. Too hung over, I thought. At five, he called back. In a flat, barely audible voice he told me he had a shotgun in his mouth and was calling to say goodbye.

My mind raced. What do I do? All I could think of were those movies with the main character frantically trying to keep the other guy on the phone. Keep him talking. That's it—keep him talking.

I talked first. I talked about our son, our beautiful son. I asked questions. I asked how he felt, what he'd eaten, what was happening at work. He began to talk—just a few mumbled words, but he was saying something. Suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, he hung up. No goodbye. No grunt. No shot. No nothing. Terrifying headlines flashed across my mind: “Estranged Husband Kills Family,” “Man Shoots Wife, Then Self.”

I started calling friends. They all had perfectly reasonable explanations for why my son and I couldn't stay with them: I'd love to, but my husband doesn't think it's a good idea. We don't really have the room, you know. I don't think your son would be comfortable here, do you? Are you sure that's really necessary? Maybe he's just trying to scare you. Can't you stay with a neighbor?

Well, no, I couldn't stay with a neighbor. I had called my neighbor first, and he didn't want to "take sides." Desperate, I called another second grader's mother—a single mom I barely knew. Before I could finish, she stopped me. "Come straight here," she said, "I'll back my car out of the garage. Pull right in. Don't worry about clothes or food. I'll take care of everything." I grabbed my son and our Great Dane puppy and hustled them out the door.

My husband did not kill himself that night, but from then on, my family was pretty sure he was going to kill me. His rages often made it look like they were right. Overnight, my professional life disappeared. Clients have a hard time sticking around when you go into hiding every other month. Friends stop coming when they see you wearing a police emergency call button around your neck. So, did I start journaling? No, I did not. I sat and cried in the living room, with the phone unplugged so I wouldn't hear his threats, and the blinds down so he couldn't see me if he drove by.

My mother, like all good Catholic women of her time, loved to say, "God works in mysterious ways." Whenever something ludicrous happened, I'd say, "OK, Mom, how could *that* possibly be God's doing?" And she'd say, "Well, dear, God works in mysterious ways." I always thought that saying was a complete copout.

Until Harley, our Great Dane puppy, took things into his own hands—or rather, teeth.

I was sitting in my usual position, sniffing and dabbing my eyes, when I realized Harley was no longer resting his head on the ottoman and looking up at me with that consummate Great Dane blend of sadness and devotion. “Harley,” I called, “where are you?” I could hear him in the hallway, and I got up to find him. He was loping slowly toward me, struggling to carry something too heavy for his scrawny neck. I pulled his burden out of his mouth—and laughed. It was *The Artist’s Way*—now decorated with ripped corner, teeth marks, and Dane drool.

I wiped it off, sat down, and began to read. On page 15, I stopped cold:

Anyone who faithfully writes morning pages will be led to a connection with a source of wisdom within. When I am stuck with a painful situation or problem that I don’t think I know how to handle, I will go to the pages and ask for guidance.

Julia Cameron was talking to *me!* I needed wisdom, I most certainly was stuck in a painful situation, and I sure didn’t know how to handle it. It was pretty clear that sitting and sobbing was not solving my problems. I hunted up a cheap black notebook in my office and an old brown fountain pen. The book said to write three morning pages. Well, it was morning, and at long last, I had all the time in the world to write.

But I didn’t follow the directions—that is, not *The Artist’s Way’s* directions. Something happened when I read that passage. My soul’s needle, which had been careening madly around its compass for weeks, snapped to true north and picked up some silent subterranean instructions that guided me to write in a unique way.

“Dear God,” I began. I have no idea why I started that way. It just felt right—necessary, actually. Whenever my parents were frightened, they threw themselves to their knees and begged God for help. I guess I was doing the same thing in my own way. Of course, they prayed rosaries. Me? I vented. Oh lord, how I vented! I fussed and fumed at God. “Are you paying *any* attention? Do you see what’s happening here? Do you care? How are we going to live through this? How can I protect my baby? What am I going to do? Where *are* you?”

I didn’t write three pages that morning; I wrote *thirty*. That was a clue that I had something to say and writing was somehow helping me say it. After an hour and a half of furious, full-speed-ahead scribbling, I didn’t have any answers, but I did feel a little bit better, a little bit cleaner, a little bit lighter.

So the next morning I did it again. Day after day, I stabbed at the page in angry black ink. I told God every last little detail of every last little thing that was happening: What my husband did or threatened to do. How I cancelled my son’s birthday party because his father said he’d show up with a gun. What happened when he broke into our house. How it felt to protect my son with my body. What happened when we called the police the first time, the second, the third, and the fourth. How the school insisted I drop my son off late and pick him up early to prevent scenes at school. How I moved from one coffee shop to another until it was time to pick him up. How I couldn’t eat. How my son couldn’t sleep. How he gnashed his teeth all night. How he crept into my bed and would not leave. How we startled in the dark at every creak and crack. How he crawled onto my lap and rocked silently for thirty minutes before he would leave for visitations with his father.

After a while, I noticed something. Not the first day or the second, but one day, there it was: a little bit of wisdom on the page.

Not the answer to my life's problems, but definitely guidance for the day's. Occasionally the answer was what to do or what not to do, but most of the time, it was something smaller, something subtler, and perhaps something richer: how to shift my thinking.

The first time it happened, I stopped writing and stared at the page. Huh? That wasn't my voice. I didn't write that. I'd never even had that thought before. But there it was. And I knew, somehow just knew, that this guidance was important. This guidance was it. This guidance was my salvation. So I followed that guidance. Like Hansel in the fairy tale, I didn't know where I was or where I was going, but I followed those precious crumbs of wisdom. Step by step, day by day, journal entry by journal entry, I inched forward.

Every morning I wrote, "Dear God," and every morning the Voice answered. One Saturday morning, I wrote about how powerless I felt when I suddenly realized that the newspaper article I was reading about an unsolved road-rage crime described my ex-husband and his truck perfectly—and that the crime had occurred thirty minutes after he had picked up our son the day before. The Voice wrote to me about the true nature of power. I prayed and tapped into that power and brought my son safely home without leaving my chair.

I wrote about the heartache of listening to a voicemail of my son struggling under his father's screaming command to "say it!" until his little voice squeaked, "Mom, you are a lying sack of shit." And the Voice wrote to me about size. It asked me which was bigger, this terrible thing or the divine? I knew the answer and turned my problem over to the divine.

I wrote about having an enemy—a big scary enemy. I asked the Voice what I should do about my enemy. The Voice told me to love

my enemy. I didn't like that. And, I confess, I didn't do it—not for a long, long time.

I wrote about how scared and weak and helpless I felt, like a person riddled with holes. What's wrong with me? I cried. And the Voice wrote about strength—true strength.

I wrote about court. Twelve times I cried all over the pages telling the Voice that no matter what evidence I presented—the road-rage incident, the voicemail recording, four police reports, parents who testified to my ex-husband's threats, proof of guns in his house—the legal system insisted our son have regular, unsupervised visits with his father.

The Voice listened, wiped my tears, and listened some more.

I told the Voice how my son cried before visitation. “Tuesdays,” he sobbed, “I hate Tuesdays, because after Tuesday comes Wednesday and on Wednesday I have to see my dad.” I told the Voice to protect my baby when he was at his father's. The Voice always did.

I wrote about my ex-husband's weapons. The Voice asked about mine. “Words,” I admitted, “words are my weapons.” And the Voice helped me put my weapons down.

I wrote a list of all the things I didn't want to do but had to do in my marriage. The Voice talked to me about the difference between “have to” and “choose to.” I wrote about how I disappeared into a secret waiting room in my heart when I couldn't bear what was happening. The Voice talked to me about the beautiful language of no.

I wrote about all the dreadful decisions I'd made and how badly they'd all turned out. The Voice talked to me about forgiving myself.

I wrote about my frustration waiting for the judge to let me move back to my family in Wisconsin. And the Voice talked about being frustrated waiting for me to become who I really am. “Help me remember,” I said. “Who is this frightened woman?” And the Voice said, “Unafraid.”

Unafraid—it was a lovely thought, a momentous thought, but I felt quite the opposite. Frightened, broke, and alone would be more like it.

Well, maybe not alone. After all, I was having real conversations in my soul journal with a divine Voice, so how alone could I be? And I was getting answers. And my life was slowly changing. Each morning I was a bit stronger, a bit wiser, a bit more aware that somehow I was going to be all right. A wee part of me kept raising her tiny head and proclaiming, “I’m going to heal. Not just survive. That’s not good enough. I want to be whole and happy again!” I thought that little woman was nuts, but occasionally I let her have her say.

If I was ever going to make it all the way to healed and happy, I needed a miracle—quite a few actually. I was getting guidance. I was learning to shift my thinking. Couldn’t I get miracles, too? I mean real miracles, things of substance—money, to be precise. So I asked. One morning, I wrote: “Dear God, you know I need ten thousand dollars for the attorney. I don’t know how you’re going to do it, but I know you’re going to send ten thousand dollars. Thank you right here and right now for your gift of ten thousand dollars.”

Nothing happened. There were no brilliant words, no lottery numbers, no treasure maps. I got up and made a pot of tea. Two days later my mother called.

“Dear,” she said, “we’ve given money to all the other children but we’ve never given any to you. So, dear, we’re sending you ten thousand dollars.” (Her use of “we” was precious; my father, the other half of “we,” had been dead for five years.) I said thank you, of course, to my mother, but I also wrote a profound deep thank you to my real source in my soul journal the next day.

The ten thousand dollars covered my legal bills, but it didn’t touch the house expenses. I had enough savings to last almost a year. Spending it on the house was foolhardy, but everything else was blowing up in my son’s life; I wanted him to be able to stay in the only house he’d ever known and continue to go to the sweet private school he’d attended since he was in diapers. But the day eventually came when I didn’t have money for the mortgage or tuition. I wrote in my journal: “Dear God, I don’t know how you are going to handle this, but I know you are. I need two thousand dollars. And I need it now. Thank you and amen.” An hour later the phone rang. It was my sole remaining client. She said the strangest thing, “I don’t know why, but I just feel you should send us an invoice for two thousand dollars.” Of course, I did know why, but I just said, “I’d be delighted to do that.” The next morning I wrote “THANK YOU” in huge letters and had a long chat with the Voice about gratefulness.

As my son’s second-grade year came to a close, it was time to face the reality that private school was no longer an option. So I went on a hunt and found gold: a tiny magnet public school with just one third-grade class of twenty-five, high-performing students. There were only three openings, and they would be filled by a countywide lottery. All the principal could suggest was that I get my son’s application in on time so his name would be in the pool.

I went straight to my journal. “Dear God, I found a beautiful, calm, peaceful school for my son. You know how much he has suffered. You know how frightened he is to go to a new school. Please. I trust you to place this precious child in a school where he will learn and be happy. I leave this in your hands.” The morning after the lottery, the school called. My son was number one on the list of over three hundred children.

Eventually my savings were gone, and I had to put the house on the market. The last month in the house I faced a stack of bills with only \$343 in my checking account. “Dear God,” I wrote, “I know you hear me. I have no idea how you are going to do it this time, but I know—I know—you provide for us now and always. And all is well. Thank you in advance for the miracles you provide.”

I blessed the envelopes and began. The lowest power bill I ever had was sixty bucks, but this one said I owed only \$14.06. Despite my best efforts at conservation, the water bill always ran over a hundred dollars every two months. But when I opened this month’s, I blinked at the amount due: \$24.15. Gas was usually fifty-five dollars or so, but the amount due on this Mobil Oil bill was \$13.13. The phone bill was only \$22.98, while the cable bill was for the normal amount: \$33.36. The garbage invoice was always for exactly \$58.45, but this time, the amount due was zero; the statement said I’d paid double last month, but I didn’t remember doing that. Finally, Visa. I knew this one wasn’t going to be pretty. I took a deep breath, looked to heaven, and opened the envelope. Amount due: \$ -39.09. In big letters it said: “Credit balance. Do not pay.”

In the end I had \$48 left in my checking account, enough to buy a week’s groceries if I shopped carefully at the Greek produce

stand. This time I didn't just write my thank-yous, I danced them. Up and down the hallway, laughing and twirling and singing my thank-yous with joyous yelps. "Thank you, God, thank you, God, thank you, God!"

Were these miracles? Coincidences? Delusions? If there were any doubt in my mind, it would soon be erased.

I wrote down my soul every day for three years. At first, I just complained about my problems and begged the Voice to fix them. But as I became more and more conscious of the direction and guidance I was receiving, I began to pursue deeper, richer questions—questions that probed my soul and lanced my deepest wounds. Profound answers, I discovered, came through profound questions: How did I create this mess? What was I thinking? How do I stop fighting with someone who won't stop fighting? What is the taproot of all my fears? Who are the negative voices inside my head? How can I banish them? What is my purpose? How can I build a conscious, joyful life? What is love? What is love really? What are my true vows, the vows that can never be broken?

That question about vows gave me profound pause. I wrote pages on end about vows—vows we make and vows we break. So many promises in life get broken. Are there really vows, I wondered, that I could never, *ever* break? I explored this question with the Voice for weeks. In deep dialogue, I concluded that vows aren't weighty promises made to fend off some undesirable future; no, true vows are words that articulate who I am, who I was, who I always will be. And if they are that—a description of who I am at my core—well then, I can never break them, can I? To break them, I'd have to stop being me. That left one big, big question to explore: who am I when I am fully me?

I asked. I made lists and pared them down. Is this true for me? Always? I played with the words. Can I say it better? More clearly? More succinctly? More powerfully? What words make my heart sing in recognition? Slowly the list narrowed to seven short declarations. When the seven felt sufficiently cooked, I typed them on a piece of paper and taped it to the wall. These, I told the Voice, are my vows. This is who I am, the real me, the whole me, the authentic me—the me I uncovered talking with you.

Janet's Covenant

7. Pray always
6. Seek Truth
5. Surrender, there is no path but God's
4. Come from Love
3. Honor myself
2. Live in Partnership
1. Unite to create Good

I looked at my covenant. It felt good to have my seven vows on the wall, reminding me daily who I am. But it didn't feel quite complete. I wrote about that: "Dear God, what's missing?"

Well, what was missing, I quickly learned, was the ceremony. When people declare their vows, they go through a ceremony—a wedding, novitiate, ordination—some kind of public declaration of their new commitment. That's what I needed—a celebration. I called a circle of eleven wonderful women to witness my covenant with Spirit on November 11, 2000. I read my vows, then we prayed and danced and sang and drank champagne and feasted on caviar and poached salmon. To honor the occasion and cement it for

all time, I traded all the jewelry my ex-husband had given me for one gorgeous, dark orange Mexican opal ring with eleven tiny diamonds on each side and the word *seven* engraved on the inside.

My life had truly changed. The woman who had cried all day now moved through the world with vigor and purpose. The woman who had cowered in fear now confidently stood her ground. The woman who had been forced to sell her house now owned a beautiful townhome. The woman whose consulting practice had disappeared now wrote deep soul writing guides to heal broken hearts. “What happened?” people asked. Writing happened. Connection with the Voice happened. Deep questions and even deeper thinking happened. Willingness to change happened. Prayer happened.

Whatever it was, people wanted it—and I was on fire to share. A large Methodist church in Tampa invited me to address a divorce-recovery group on the topic of forgiveness. I had to think about what journaling exercises I had on forgiveness. I found one profound writing exercise of self-forgiveness and one that mentioned forgiveness in passing. But that was it.

At the group meeting, I shared my story. I showed the members pages where the Voice showed up. I read from some of my favorite sacred texts. I encouraged their active participation in writing deeply from the soul. I answered lots and lots of questions. When the time was up, they didn’t want to leave.

Three months later, the church invited me to come back. The topic this time? Forgiveness. I went right to my journal: “Dear God, I don’t have enough material on forgiveness and *you know it!* OK, I get it: the teacher needs to teach what the teacher needs to learn. Well, I’m ready. I just don’t know how to do it. You show me how to forgive, and I will forgive.”

Ask and ye shall receive—and boy, did I receive. Songs on the radio, articles in magazines, conversations with friends, even my book group’s selection that month—they were all about forgiveness. I was swimming in a sea of forgiveness. I knew this bounty wasn’t just for a good lesson plan. It was something more, something I needed to do, something missing in my life and my books. With that thought simmering in my head, I went to church the next Sunday. The minister opened her lesson with a Bible passage I’d never heard before: “It is someone who is forgiven little who shows little love” (Luke 7:47).

The moment I heard this verse, my heart knew what to do. I had to forgive my ex-husband—finally, totally, and completely forgive him. So he could love again. So I could love again. At long last, I wanted him to be free to love and be loved. As the minister spoke, I wrote the most beautiful and powerful prayer I’d ever written. When the service ended, I didn’t move. I felt strange, woozy almost—like I was breathing different air. Something had definitely happened.

At five that afternoon, I pulled into a McDonald’s parking lot to pick up my son from a visitation with his father. The moment my ex-husband saw me, he popped out of his car and started toward me. My stomach tightened, but there was no time to reach my cell phone. He knocked on the window. I lowered it four inches. His fist came flying in. I flinched back against the seat. Something fluttered to my lap.

“What’s this?” I stammered.

“Half the dentist,” he muttered.

I looked down. There was a check for thirty-eight dollars, exactly half our son’s last dental appointment. According to our

divorce agreement, my ex-husband was required to pay half our son's medical expenses. Until that day, he hadn't paid a dime and owed me thousands.

"Thank you," I called out to his receding back as he walked away.

The next morning I pondered in my journal about that check. "Dear God, why did he do that?" I turned back the page and looked at my notes from Sunday. There was my prayer of final and complete forgiveness—written an hour or two before he wrote that check. I never told my ex-husband I'd written that prayer, but from then on our relationship was less strained.

Our son, however, continued to struggle with visitation. Finally, in the spring of 2002, he looked his father in the eye, and said, "Dad, I'm not coming to your house anymore, and I'm not getting in a car with you again."

When my son told me what he'd said, I had two conflicting reactions. First, I was proud of him for finding the strength to speak his truth. On the other hand, if our son never saw his father again, how would they ever heal? And if they never healed, wouldn't that leave a gaping hole in both their hearts?

I talked the situation over with the Voice in my journal and realized what to do. I shared the idea with my son. He wasn't too crazy about it, but he let me call his father.

"Why don't you come here for visitation?" I said. "Come on Thursday and Sunday night for dinner."

My ex-husband came the very next Thursday. That first night we sat at the dinner table, looking at one another. This is strange, I thought, but somehow OK. The moment dinner ended our son scooted upstairs, ostensibly to do homework. The son and father

probably didn't say five sentences to each other that night, but it was a beginning.

The next week, I told my mother my ex-husband was coming for dinner. She was appalled. "How can you let a man who tried to kill you back into your house?"

"Well, he isn't trying to kill me, Mom, and I'm not afraid of him, and I want our son to see that I'm not afraid, so he can stop being afraid."

She sighed, "I hope you know what you're doing, dear."

I told my sister. She hung up on me. I told my friends. One yelled at me. Most just shook their heads. My dearest friend tried to understand. She asked me why I was doing this. I told her I was doing it in the hopes that the pain could heal between our son and his father. "OK, good intention," she said, but "*how* can you do it?"

"Oh, that's easy," I said. "I have completely and totally forgiven him."

For fifteen months my ex-husband joined us for dinner twice a week, unless he was too sick to get out of bed. Then, on October 6, 2003, he died of a massive brain-stem stroke. October 6 wasn't just any day that year; it was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the highest holy day in the Jewish calendar—a detail I could not miss.

I called his best friend, and together we went to my ex-husband's business. We called his lawyer and banker and learned that the business was in dire financial straits and he would probably have gone bankrupt if he hadn't died. We met with his few remaining employees and arranged their last paychecks. When the office was finally empty, I sat in the dust and started to go through his files. Faced with six rusty, five-drawer file cabinets, packed to the gills with un-

organized and often unlabeled files, I began at the bottom, pulling out each file, reading it, and trying to figure out what to do with the papers inside.

Stuffed in the back of the third drawer, I found a thick file labeled “Life Insurance.” Our divorce agreement had required him to carry \$250,000 in life insurance for our son, but the papers showed he had let his life insurance lapse.

Then, through my tears, I also saw that the week I had invited him to start coming to our home to see his son, he had begun a contentious battle with his life insurance company. Although it had taken him six months and \$7,800 he did not have, not only did he get his insurance reinstated, but he had also increased it and named me beneficiary. When I received that check for \$322,000, I knew I was holding tangible proof of the power of forgiveness. And, just in case I missed the connection, the check was dated November 11, 2003—three years to the day after my covenant celebration.

I wonder sometimes what my life would be like if I had not engaged the Voice in deep soul dialogue. Would I have safely navigated the terrors of my divorce? Would my heart have healed? Would the same miracles have happened? Would I have completely and totally forgiven my ex-husband? Would he have increased his life insurance and left it to me? I can’t rewind the tape of my life and then play it forward in a new scenario without deep soul writing, so I guess I can never really know. But I’m fairly certain the answers would all be no.

Writing from deep within my soul is now ingrained into my daily spiritual practice. It is how I meditate and how I pray. It is how I solve problems and how I learn. It’s where I mourn and where I express joy and gratitude. It is who I am.

And it may well be who you are, too. After all, it is no accident that this book has come to you. In the big scheme of things there are no accidents, only divine appointments. My divorce was the worst experience of my life. It was also a divine appointment—an appointment with destiny, with the Voice, and with my self. Without the divorce, I might never have discovered the Voice, and without the wisdom of that Voice, I simply could not have the life I have, the work I have, and the joy I feel today.

We humans are an odd bunch. We are not very likely to turn to the divine in times of love and plenty, but let those winds of destruction come, and we can't fall to our knees fast enough. If you are the kind of soul that needs a setback to force you to turn inward, well, the universe, I'm sure, will be happy to comply. But here's a little fact that might warm your heart: you don't *have* to experience a trauma to receive that invitation. It's a standing invitation, open to all. Accept it, whether you are currently in good times or bad, and you will experience direct and immediate access to divine consciousness. Accept it, and you will hear and see the Voice. Accept it, and you will receive the wisdom and miracles your heart is longing for.

How do you accept? That's easy. Set your intention to connect with the extraordinary Voice within, pick up a pen, and begin.