



The School of "Heart" Knocks



Author: Jeff Brown

Article:

I went for a walk today through places I used to know while growing up as a child, places that held heart-wrenching memories of the tsunami of tyranny and trauma that was my childhood. I had last visited these places in my 30's, after walking away from a burgeoning career as a prominent criminal trial lawyer to find something that I called 'true-path'. Back then, walking away from law was a most difficult thing to do. I was so eager to be a lawyer and make my family proud. I so wanted to join the world after years on the outside. I longed to eat lunch at the Law Society and get as far away as possible from where I came from - all those nagging memories of poverty and pain. The ego has such a wonderful way of erasing the past (if only for a moment...).

But a little voice deep inside me kept pulling me away from trial law, pulling me in another, initially hazier direction. This little voice carried a karmic blueprint for my destiny and whispered sweet somethings in my ear whenever I dared to walk a "false-path". I heard it when I was planning my law practice, involved in an unhealthy relationship, sitting in traffic on the way to work: "No, not that way Jeffrey...walk this way." Although it came through in hints and whispers, it had an odd sense of authority to it. A distant flute with the energy of a symphony.

After stepping back from law, I immediately began fixating on my future. Like many conditioned male warriors, I was determined to narrow the mystery of "true-path" down to career identity. If I could just explore every career that interested me, if I could just DO it all, I would clarify my identity in no time.

I soon learned. After only a few days of exploration, my unresolved emotional material burst through the defenses that had held me safe since childhood. I began to cry, and then rage, as one wave of emotion after another pushed on through, eager to be released from its primal bondage. My inner landscape was obstructed with congealed holdings, carryover remnants from an embattled, unresolved childhood. The Mystery began with my history. How to walk the path ahead, when our feet are still stumbling along old pathways? (Ah, the power of then).

After a nervous breakthrough of startling proportions, my focused warrior lay down his (bloody) arms, and surrendered to the reality that I had to go back down the path and re-claim my broken heart before I could begin to consider the question of career identity. Soon thereafter, I began to revisit my childhood, beginning at the hospital where I was born. I visited old schools, bakeries, racetracks, people I knew. I walked old neighbourhoods for hours at a time. I sat on old park benches. I bought and read old comic books. I went to the university library and looked through newspaper microfiche. I listened to old music. I stared at family pictures for hours.

Wherever I was, I went for the feeling. It wasn't enough to know that I had been somewhere, I had to feel it in my bones. When I resisted, I meditated. I closed my eyes and envisioned the person or place. I kept at it until the veil came off and the emotional memory emerged. Then I would turn the page.

One of the primary issues that came clear during this phase was my fear of homelessness. I would sit across from apartment buildings that we had lived in and feel into the memories. Throughout my early life, my sense of security was undermined by evictions and by my mother's repeated assertion that I wasn't welcome in my own home. My muladhara- or root chakra- had never felt grounded and safe on Mother Earth.

With this in mind, I devoted many years to building an economic and domestic foundation for my

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life. That phase included the buying of a house in downtown Toronto, the growth of my student business into a solid enterprise, and a determined effort to fortify the boundary between myself and the chaos-mongers I had grown up with. Within this stable cocoon, I was able to ascend to the next stage in my evolution, exploring myself as a psychotherapist, completing an MA in Psychology, and beginning a career as an author. But, of course, the journey doesn't end there. Just when you think the monster has died, he shows up on your doorstep begging to see you.

Last month, I made the decision to sell the house that I have lived in for fifteen solid years. With the publicity phase for my book at an end, I am ready to start writing a new book and I prefer to do that in the country. So I sold my house at a price that made living in the country affordable. All Go(o)d, until I purchased a new home that won't be ready until three months after my current house closes.

Right after signing the waivers on the new property, I drove back to Toronto. While driving, I was overwhelmed by archaic anxieties, the emotional memories associated with a childhood with no fixed address. I pulled over to the side of the road to calm myself, but it was to no avail. The waves of anxiety deepened, as I was swept under by immobilizing fear. I flashed to memories of my Grandparents helping us pack, time and time again. My witness observer jumped to the fore "Just watch, just watch", but he was swept under too, his meditation cushion bobbing in the shadowy depths.

I was right back in the heart of the primal terror, imagining myself in bus shelters, sleeping in my vehicle, riding a Greyhound across North America until the house was ready. Never mind the fact that I have the money to sublet an apartment, never mind that I have a whole soulpod of supporters to stay with, never mind the rational mind. I was awash in an ocean of hopelessness.

Sleepless in Toronto, I have surrendered to the wave for two weeks, alternating between packing up the house and unpacking my emotional baggage.

When I had begun to clear my emotional debris all those years ago, I swore that I would heal everything. My warrior did not understand the embodied nature of trauma, the ways that emotional material becomes cells in the bones of our being. Let alone did he understand the beauty of the shadow, the ways that repressed emotions can become actualized, spiritual lessons, the grist for our soul's expansion. For him, for me, it was just a question of fighting our way through everything.

He was so wrong. Not to say that we cannot heal many of our wounds, but we cannot heal them all, not in one lifetime. As part of the journey, we may have to accept that certain wounds may never fade altogether. Perhaps healing is not always about killing the monster when he comes. Perhaps it is also about learning how to move forward despite him.

Today I briefly caught a glimpse of the gift of this moment. With my creative work moving so strongly into the world, I have been taking my press clippings to heart. I have been imagining myself beyond the fray, beyond the challenges and lessons of humanness. Something about this wave of emotional memory is pulling me back to (h)earth, and connecting me to the heart of the matter- my emotional life. This is where I lived for so long, at my familiar desk at The School of Heart Knocks. Sit down, Jeffrey, there is lots of home-work still to be done.

A former criminal lawyer and psychotherapist, Jeff Brown is the author of "Soulshaping: A Journey of Self-Creation," endorsed by authors Elizabeth Lesser and Ram Dass. It is Brown's autobiography; an inner travelogue of his journey from archetypal male warrior to a more surrendered path.

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8 Responses to "The School of "Heart" Knocks"

Christine Goyer says:
[July 5, 2010 at 5:18 am](#)

Beautiful story of living life straight on and deliberately, with honest evaluation of "where you're at". My favourite in this month's Synergy.

Aradia says:
[July 6, 2010 at 10:58 pm](#)

How true and difficult it is to accept that this lifetime may not be the one! I had wished for

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[Amy Goodman Detained at Canadian Border, Questioned About Speech...and 2010 Olympics](#)
[BC First Nations Spirit Pole](#)

[meghan: good evening, i have been doing some research on...](#)

[Peggy: Love it! A great old concept that proves valuable...](#)

[live and work in canada: This is a very wonderful post. I just graduated...](#)

[Delia Muhammad: I totally agree with this article. As a birth educ...](#)

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it , but recognise shortcomings. My spirit guides say a few more to go. One thing is for sure- if one does not take the challenge it will take much longer- Thank you for showing the courage to (as in one of my songs)" turning to face the chasm too cavernous to jump- but you know I'll learn to fly no matter what the cost"
i think "the cost" relates mostly to fears and ego that must be surrendered in order to go forward- As God is my witness...

Kelly Ray says:

July 6, 2010 at 11:34 pm

Homelessness and poverty. I have seen the fear and anxiety of these in the eyes of many children - but I believe it only manifest as a fear of physical shelter and possession if there is lack of nurturing in family. Don't we know many people who live in adequate or more than adequate shelter with more than adequate income who long to be poor? in spirit?

Your longing for a voice (since you had none as a child) was satisfied temporarily in the career as lawyer. But difference between career and vocation finally hits you when you realize one is what pays you and one is what empowers you to be steward of creation process.

Change and evolution of self is not trauma. It is a necessity. Honestly, Jeff, turn around now. Are there two paths behind you - a false-path and a truth-path? Or is there just one path with a heart?

I surmise the path doesn't change. The reason we're on it does.

Gazelle Williams says:

July 7, 2010 at 8:32 pm

Jeff, I am humbled each time you share your Life journey. You could just hide away someplace and write your next book, but no, you show us that even with much soul work there is still more to do. Stuff from our past does not disappear; we continue to be confronted with it. You are a great author but more than that you are a live example, moving above all the "Hard" knocks. Thanks for sharing your journey.

Cherie Ann says:

July 8, 2010 at 2:37 am

Humm, You are such an inspiration. So many times your journey is mine. It is such a blessing to share with a wonderful soul. Thank you! Please let me know if you need a place to stay, lol. Sorry couldn't resist.

Bobby Joyner says:

July 8, 2010 at 5:21 am

Jeff, that is the most beautiful article I have read thus far on my spiritual journey. We have the same backgrounds even to the exact career, I was a prosecutor and criminal lawyer for a number of years. However I have never heard anyone with the capacity to articulate the real scope of our fears when faced with change, of our own volition or not. In addition to your insightfulness about human nature in the face of adversity you right from the heart, also your writing resonates due to your honesty. Already very successful in your path you have great courage to speak of vulnerable moments just behind you, this vulnerability and speaking from the heart is the true efficacy of your profound writing. I have truly been blessed to be a small part of your life Jeff, now I know the true meaning of synchronicity my friend. Always wishing you God's Peace Jeff. Bobby

Eddie Weinstein says:

July 8, 2010 at 6:45 am

Eloquently written, story sharing at its finest. When I have read your words, including your book, it is as if you reach in and wring out every bit of emotion, leaving none behind, none out in the cold. You embrace them all, the ones that you would celebrate and the ones that might have sent you running for cover in the past.

Blissings,

Eddie <3

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Rene Remington says:

July 16, 2010 at 12:06 am

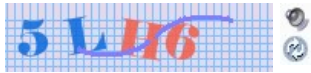
Having visited some of these things myself, I've come to trust in my souls journey. Fear comes from the Ego, if step into your essence and you will know healing on a deep level. It can set you free. Change is good 😊 Love Ya

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