

Letting go via gratitude

This is a very personal story of how the writer's life and finances came crashing down around her, ruining her plans for the future and leaving her in a big hole. Then a simple breakthrough allowed her to let go and a new future opened.

By Morthern Spears

It's hard to know when things began to fall apart. Looking back, it felt doomed from the beginning. Our motivation was not exactly positive. It was like our circumstances of being a 30-something couple, in love, preparing to marry, somehow warranted the idea that we needed to have our dream home, white fence and pool in place. I felt an overwhelming desire to 'achieve' at all costs.

Neither of us was fully aligned with a particular career path at the time; so we focused all of our energy on the future reality of stability and homeliness instead. We would laugh at our friends who insisted on remaining debt free and therefore commitment free, thinking that we would somehow be ahead of them in our 40s. And there lies the problem. Our motivation was not one of fun, love and creativity. It was one of pressure, expectation and responsibility. I remember we would say to each other, 'Oh well, I guess these are the years where we need to take life seriously'.

“No matter what I did to try and look on the bright side of things, the feeling of love and connection I had with my partner had disappeared.”

In the space of 18 months, our mortgage went from \$150,000 to \$340,000, and the house was nowhere near being built. We had managed to renovate a small cabin on the land that we believed would cost around \$5,000. In the end, there was not much change from \$50,000.

Our wedding drew nearer and the mortgage continued to skyrocket. My partner and I would argue continuously about the reality of the situation. He was taking the position that God would prevail and, in the long term, we would be okay, as long as we had each other. I, on the other hand, became very suspect of this God AND my partner because all the money had somehow disappeared –

there was no house and no honeymoon to boot!

I became fearful of the future and I was unable to accept the stark truth of our financial and relational situation. I would not even sit down and estimate how long we had left surviving on our equity, because I could feel it was bad, and the reality of exactly how bad it was would be more than I could bear only four weeks before our wedding.

Everything came crashing down in the last few weeks leading up to the big day, when I realised that I just did not feel like I wanted to get married. I began to have nightmares about the scene where the celebrant says, 'Do you, Melanie, take this man...', at which point I would run screaming from the altar in a puff of pink tulle, tearing my hair out and completely ruining the day for everyone!

No matter what I did to try and look on the bright side of things, the feeling of love and connection I had with my partner had disappeared. I cancelled the wedding and my partner took it very hard. He eventually ended the relationship altogether, as I guess the

shame of a failed wedding was more than he wanted to bear.

So, on 21st of April, seven days after my 37th birthday, I sit alone on the verandah. My home is empty, my partner has left me, I have a mortgage of \$340,000, I have no job, no means of covering the \$700 or so weekly payments, and I am totally physically and emotionally exhausted.

It became pretty clear to me at this point that what I needed to do most of all was surrender. Because my energy levels were so low, I could not follow through on any of my plans anyway. I was too emotionally overwhelmed, and I had every reason to be so.

Early each morning, around 4am, when the anxiety in my body woke me up, I would sit on the verandah in my PJs and just breathe. After about a week of sitting, I was motivated to journal my thoughts. It began with very negative outpourings like 'my life is over', 'I have ruined everything' and 'I cannot trust myself'. Then one magical day, I listened to the news about either the war in Afghanistan or the latest flood victims – I can't remember which – and I compared my level of suffering to these people. My problems paled in comparison. I tried to imagine what these victims were going through and I began to feel silly in the drama that I had created for myself.

I realised that being bankrupt and having a broken-down relationship is nothing compared to ill health, death, war

trauma poverty or environmental disaster. The following day, my journal read very differently. I wrote, "I am grateful for my eggs". This was what was holding my current attention and therefore was my current reality. I was at peace with my current reality... eggs.

The following day, I noticed my ocean views. I had had ocean views for about four years, but it was as though I was just unable to see them. I was top busy dreaming about my dream house – I guess that's why they call them dream houses.

Now, I really need to describe for you exactly what I was doing and what I was not doing. I was not 'being with' the impending doom of bank foreclosure, for this was something that would come in the future and, anyway, the only evidence I had for this was in my mind. I was 'being with' myself and the air surrounding my body. I was being with the sunlight on my skin and the way the sunlight reflected off the ocean in such a surreal and beautiful way. I guess I was just in so much stress, I sort of had a meltdown and landed firmly back into reality again. I began to notice that reality was beautiful, even exquisite.

So from the being with eggs, to the ocean, came a deeper process of being with my emotional pain. The separation and loneliness became such a passionate affair with myself as I learned to gently be with all that I was feeling. I moved from feelings of sadness and deep loss to feelings of ecstasy and true connection within seconds of each other. I had 13 years' experience as a psychiatric nurse and the thought occurred to me that I might have been diagnosed as having a bipolar disorder – but this was not the case. It was simply the full existence of reality, both the darkness and the light, revealing itself to me.

My daily practice became my saving grace. I learned how to 'be with' and be grateful for every experience, emotion, thought and circumstance that was happening.

From the eye of the tornado, which is where I sat, a field of love began to surround me, and, while I knew the tornado had not disappeared, I was no longer affected by its force and gravity. In fact, I was grateful for it, as it was teaching me a great lesson.

The banks would call, and I would chat lightheartedly with the staff. This would catch them off-centre as these 'heavy' phone calls with debt collectors are usually not friendly. I would ask them how their day was and whether they had noticed the gloriousness of the sunshine yet. I gave them any and all the information I had, and I also gave them my truth, which was, I can't pay this month's instalments and I don't know when I will be able to. I have no means to pay, and I'm truly sorry that I have created such a mess. When they continued to demand commitments from me such as when will I 'fix this up', the best I could offer was, "I just don't know, but I will let you know when I do".

About six weeks went by, and I continued my practice of gratitude. I was definitely much lighter, and I felt like I was regaining control in my life again. I decided to rent out one of the bedrooms in my house as it was a big house and I was feeling ready for company again. By this time, I was running two journals, one for my daily appointments and the other for my daily and momentary appreciations of reality, my gratitude journal.

I shared my process with my new flat mate, and mentioned halfheartedly that I wished I could carry around only one book, as two books were heavy in my handbag and beginning to hurt my shoulder. He just so happened to be a graphic designer, and offered to design one for me.

My focus went from drowning in a sea of emotional despair to creating the Gratitude Diary and Daily Planner to be enjoyed and shared by many. We are four years into the life of the diary, and the process continues to deepen and grow.

In summary, it appears to me that anything done from a negative motivation, or more specifically, a motivation of anxiety, will surely end with the creation of that which is most feared. The thing that we are avoiding magically creates itself when we engage in behaviour to control it.

In the process of working in gratitude, however, actions are taken from a secure steppingstone, a stone built by love, humility and surrender. From this place, creation will keep creating itself in a forward momentum, and always on a foundation of love. Humility is also a very important emotion to embrace. With humility, we may begin to feel and connect with ourselves in a way that is authentic and intimate.

I guess I need to say that everything turned out in the end and the property sold before I got into any serious trouble. The process and practice of gratitude has evolved into an online course to be internationally launched in November. I am still in the forward momentum, and I have no idea where we are going. I feel totally surrendered to the journey and continue to feel excited by possibilities yet to be revealed.

If you are having trouble finding anything to be grateful for right now, remember, there's always eggs – and, in return, you will perhaps find heaven!



Melanie (now Morthern) Spears graduated as a registered nurse in 1987, and worked in psychiatry and drug and alcohol rehabilitation for 13 years. In 2000, she left the industry, determined to find a more complete system for healing addictions and addressing psychiatric illnesses. She now runs workshops in soul alignment and emotional awareness.

You can get a free copy of the Gratitude Diary by subscribing to LivingNow for 12 issues. See the ad on the bottom of page 2 of Ripple News for more details.