

A Butterfly LIFE

4 Keys to More Happiness, Better Health and
Letting Your True Self Shine



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A Butterfly Life : 4 Keys to More Happiness, Better Health and Letting Your True Self Shine

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Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN-13: 978-0692059395 (softcover)
ISBN-10: 0692059393

Cover art by Kristi Bowman

Dedicated to you.
May you shine to your fullest.

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Acknowledgments

Deep gratitude to my dearest love – my partner, best friend and tree-climbing companion. Your support has always come with such sweetness, patience and trust. You make my heart sing every day! Thank you to my family (and extended family) who is making this journey with me, with special thanks to Marci and Cody Zoller, Ryan and Jennifer Royal, Layne and Brenda Bowman, and the Conti clan. I am grateful for your unconditional love and support. Mom, my love for books and storytelling began when you gently read to me *The Gingerbread Man* over and over at my request. My deepest thanks. Dad, you are missed, though I still feel your presence and support. To Duane and Carol Jones, thank you for providing a most wonderful environment for this butterfly to unfold. Heartfelt gratitude to my students and participants from classes, workshops and other adventures. You inspire me to keep walking the path. Friends, teachers, mentors, many of you have had such a big, beautiful influence in my life. Rather than a sentence or two here, I've chosen to recognize and honor you in the pages that follow, for this story is for all of us.

Author's Note

I have adopted fictitious names for many of the people and places mentioned in order to protect privacy. No attempt has been made to create complete characterizations of the individuals, only to portray them as they relate to the story.

At times, you will find various kinds of animals have been capitalized. This is out of respect for the Native American tradition how each animal, indeed every living thing, is considered a teacher. There is much to be gained from a deeper relationship with the natural world.

Preface

The butterfly can be a powerful symbol for our own personal journeys. Change happens, and we can go through it kicking and screaming, or we can embrace it. Times of change are often challenging, no doubt – such as a relationship breakup, job loss or being diagnosed with a serious health issue. Or we may *want* things to be different, but it feels a little scary or overwhelming. The butterfly shows us change can be beautiful, even necessary, in order to realize our full potential and live our best life.

I would often get asked by individuals who read my first book, my memoir, *Journey to One: A Woman's Story of Emotional Healing and Spiritual Awakening*, “But *how* did you get from there to here?” In other words, how did I get from those dark, despairing beginnings to my current state of happiness and well-being? Though I included a few concepts that may be beneficial for others in their own journey of healing and self-discovery, *Journey to One* was not designed as a guidebook. It was primarily a documentation of how and where things began for me. My intention was to share my personal story in order to help others who may have had similar difficult life experiences and to reflect what is possible – that despite the circumstances, we can transform our lives and thrive. So in response to the inquiries, I would assure them another book was on the way.

A Butterfly Life was born from a desire to share teachings, tools and perspectives that I have found immensely beneficial and support as many individuals as possible in enjoying happy, healthy, fulfilling lives. In essence, isn't that what most of us want? We desire to feel good, have more energy, live our best life and feel like we're doing something meaningful.

I believe the secret lies within our own transformation. It's about doing our inner work. The more we learn and grow as individuals, the

more we will be able to experience happiness and satisfaction in love, work and daily life. There is a ripple effect.

In the Native American spiritual tradition it is believed that animals carry medicine, gifts or teachings that can benefit us all. I feel a strong connection with the animals. Maybe it's because of the trace amount of Cherokee blood that runs through my veins, or because I grew up in the country, or simply because of my deep love for nature. Regardless, you will find animal symbolism woven throughout the book, most notably the butterfly. The butterfly is about transformation.

This book is organized into 4 sections, or stages: Egg, Caterpillar, Cocoon and Butterfly. As you move through the 4 stages of a butterfly's life, you can use the gifts found within each stage to positively transform your own life.

A Butterfly Life is part personal story, part guidebook. For thousands of years indigenous cultures have used storytelling, not only to entertain, but to pass along valuable life lessons. I have the heart of a storyteller. I enjoy drawing from this tradition and using story as a way of conveying helpful teachings. So through the first 3 stages of *A Butterfly Life* I share my story, particularly in regard to work and love, including the struggles and successes. Lessons are woven throughout, and these personal experiences also lay the foundation for the 4 Keys.

In addition to Native wisdom, I've included transformative teachings from yoga and leading-edge practices in the field of health and wellness. *A Butterfly Life* is designed to activate the potential for growth and positive change in each of our lives.

The fourth and final stage of *A Butterfly Life* contains tips and practical tools for achieving greater happiness in relationships, finding more satisfaction in work, enjoying increased health and well-being, and experiencing more peace and joy in daily living. Each of these tools are designed to support you in shining to your fullest. It is within the chapters of the Butterfly stage that you will find the 4 Keys. Briefly, they are:

4 Keys

1 Power of Words

Words affect how we relate to others, how we view ourselves and our beliefs. Through raising awareness in how we communicate with others and applying the techniques of “Listen First,” we can reduce frustration and conflict and create more loving and satisfying relationships. By increasing awareness of our thoughts – the words we tell ourselves – we can change how we feel and achieve greater happiness and success.

2 Embodiment

This is about tuning into our bodies and practicing simple ways to support our health and well-being through movement, including walking and yoga, and what we eat. There are a plethora of exercise programs and diets already out there. How is a person supposed to know where to start? Rather than offer yet another program, the focus is on raising awareness and gaining a deeper connection with our bodies, which can lead to making choices that support greater wellness in body, mind and spirit.

3 Be Do Have

This 3rd Key reveals how satisfying work is possible. Frequently, we’re not happy doing what we’re doing and/or we feel like we don’t know which direction to go. It starts with connecting with our core self, *being* who we are – strong, creative, worthy, loving, free, powerful, wise, beautiful beings. Discussed are four factors that play an important role in raising our level of satisfaction and enjoying meaningful work.

4 Remember Love

More than anything else, love has the power to transform lives in beautiful and profound ways. This is true individually, in relationship,

with family, friends, community and globally. When we connect with love, we feel better about ourselves, we're able to make choices that support our own and others' growth, and we enjoy a greater level of happiness and fulfillment in life.

The tools in *A Butterfly Life* have proven to be helpful, not only personally, but in my work with others. For more than a decade, I've had the privilege of coaching and supporting people in a variety of settings, including business executives working to create organizational change, couples desiring less frustration and more joy in their relationships, and individuals wanting to get healthier and feel better about themselves.

This book also provides an opportunity for me to highlight and pay tribute to some of the people and experiences – from martial arts, to the Y, to yoga, to Native wisdom – that have helped shape and influence how I engage with others as a teacher and perpetual student of life.

Finally, there is something very special about Butterfly. Her stages of transformation are offered as a gift and example to us for our personal growth and evolution. Butterfly reminds us change doesn't have to be overwhelming or scary. Rather, transformation can be a beautiful and amazing process, rewarding and life-affirming. She is the true teacher in this story. She takes our hand and gently guides us along the journey, revealing how each of us can live a butterfly life.

Part I: Egg



*She wriggles in her cocoon.
It feels snug on all sides.
She has grown so much recently
and has changed in unexpected ways.*

*She takes the opportunity to reflect on her life so far.
She remembers being close to the earth,
inching her way in search of food, always food.
She remembers feeling drawn to stay on the move
and how natural it felt to propel herself along,
her body bending and flexing with ease,
her movement a wave carrying her forward.*

*Not much is recalled prior to this time, though.
At times she experiences something
that can only be described as an echo from an earlier state,
like when you first blink your eyes awake
and can recollect only a flash of a dream you were having.
You know there was much more to the dream,
and that it went on for some time,
but all you hold now is a single, brief residual image.
The echo she experiences every now and then is simply a feeling,
that of being held safe,
and that of beginnings.*

Chapter 1



Movement Happens

I sit poolside at my apartment complex, letting my toes dangle into the cool water on a sizzling August afternoon in 2009. The 2-story building encircles the pool, and the handful of palm trees and tasteful landscaping remind me of something off of the 90's show *Beverly Hills, 90210*, though perhaps not quite as upscale. Northern California is different from southern California. There are more mountains. It's greener. We get more rain, even snow. Rather than palm trees and Hollywood, we have redwoods and beautiful, rocky coastal shores. It feels more grounded. I have lived in northern California my whole life. I've lived here in this apartment 3 years, 8 months and some odd days.

These last few years have been chock full of memorable experiences. It is while living here that I remembered and reconnected with my love of nature with the help of nearby Diego Park. It is here that I first experienced the depth and joy of yoga, transforming my living room several days a week into a personal yoga studio watching my Shiva Rea DVDs. Here at the apartment I spent countless hours with individuals I was dating, through laughter and tears, and experienced relationships end and new ones begin.

A soft, warm breeze blows across my skin as I continue my reverie. This apartment is where I wrote my first book, *Journey to One*. All those years of experiences spilled over into words, and there was integration, completion.

Writing the book is one thing. Making it available for others to read is something altogether different, I soon realized. The lessons I learned, or perhaps I should say, the gifts gained, through the process of getting *Journey to One* published feel significant enough to share with you in more detail, for it seems to have less to do with writing and publishing, and more to do with perception, how we look at things, and how we potentially can hold ourselves back.

Upon completing the writing of the manuscript, I, like many other emerging writers, no doubt, was confident a publishing company would be eager to help me get the story out to the world. I did my homework, researching literary agents and publishers that seemed in alignment with the subject matter I was presenting. But as one rejection letter came after another, I realized it was going to be a bit of a challenge. The first couple letters I received stung a little, despite their attempts at a gentle let down. However, I kept my chin up, knowing there have been a whole slew of now well-known writers who bared the brunt of multiple rejections before succeeding in getting their work published – J. K. Rowling, Alice Walker, James Patterson.... Each letter affected me less and less until I would simply glance at it, sigh, and add it to the growing pile. I yearned to have *Journey to One* published, and soon, but things did not seem to be progressing as I hoped.

I was driving into town one morning on my way to work at the local YMCA, thinking about my book and feeling a little frustrated. Winding my way through the backstreets so as to avoid traffic, I started daydreaming about what it would be like to be a published author. I began to question myself. How would my life look differently? I envisioned not having to work so much at the Y, and instead spending more time writing, and perhaps also traveling and teaching. I dreamed of being able to move from my one bedroom apartment and having a place out in the country.

Then I further explored what it would *feel* like to be a published author, to be living my dream. I began to feel a strength and confidence well up within me. I felt a lightness and joy fill my whole body. Gripping the steering wheel, I sat up a little straighter in my seat, and I felt a smile spread across my face. And *that* is when the realization struck: Well, I can feel that NOW, BE that NOW! Though I continued to drive to work and carry out the usual and necessary daily activities, from that moment on, things were different. I walked a little taller and had a spring in my step. I let the strength, confidence and joy become part of me.

I also released the burden of want. It is not the desire itself that felt to be weighing on me, for I feel there must be desire in order for any goal to be accomplished. Rather, it was the belief that I would be happy, successful, and confident only once I got published.

It reminds me of some words of wisdom from Mahatma Gandhi. He said how only the person who is utterly dedicated and utterly detached is free to enjoy life. I felt utterly dedicated, but I was very much attached. I was making my happiness dependent on an outcome, rather than simply *being* happy.

Once I realized what I was doing, I decided, okay, I will just enjoy life now. I will make my future reality my reality NOW. I strengthened my intention to get published, knowing that no matter the results, everything was going to be alright. I set a deadline for myself to publish the book by the end of 2009.

I put my heart and soul into 7 more publisher proposal packages. I got bolder in my attempt to catch someone's eye. I made passionate pleas. "I understand how you might think you would be taking a risk on me, but it is often risks that move us forward." I would remind them how someone believed we could go to the moon when that once may have sounded preposterous. But, for whatever reason, the publishers didn't see taking on my manuscript as equivalent to the bold leap of humanity walking on the moon. I had hopes. But after 7 more attempts, I received 7 more rejection letters.

At this point I could have given up. I could have stood there dumbfounded, simply staring at the multiple roadblocks. I could have lost focus and listened to the fear and doubt that crept into my mind: *Maybe I'm not a good enough writer... What if people really aren't interested in reading the story? I thought getting this book out to the world was part of my purpose in life... If I'm not a writer, what the heck am I? Oh, no, what if... How will I...* I had done enough personal work by then to know this was just the empty chattering of my mind. It had no substance, and it did not reflect how I truly felt. With that acknowledgment, my mind grew more quiet, and I heard a deeper part of me whisper words of comfort and support. *Everything is going to be fine. Just trust the process.*

I maintained my focus and persisted. From past experiences I've realized the magic often comes when we choose to *hold* focus and energy toward a particular goal. It is similar to when you take a magnifying glass to a piece of paper on a hot, sunny day. Catching a ray of sun through the magnifying glass, you can see a bright spot on the piece of paper. If you move the glass all over the paper, staying for only a brief moment here and there, nothing happens. However, when you hold the magnifying glass steady, keeping the brilliant light focused, you soon see a brown patch form. Continuing to hold steady, it turns darker until the intensity of the light burns a hole through the paper. That is the power of focused intention.

I pondered my situation more deeply. I asked, *Why do I want my book to go to a large publisher? What is my reason? Is it so that it will get into more people's hands, to help others, or is it my ego wanting recognition?* I let the questions sink down into my heart.

Then I thought about how I had been trying and trying to get my book published, to no avail. Then, I saw it. Ah ha! The wise words of Yoda this time echoed in my ears. (From Gandhi to Star Wars, helpful teachings can come from all manner of sources!) "Do or do not, there is no try."

I've found when we fluctuate in our intention, where there is doubt, it acts the same as moving the magnifying glass around; the light and energy

are scattered, unable to focus. I realized it was time to let go of doubt, let go of any fear, let go of *trying*, and just get it done!

After all the ponderings, rather than continue to seek out agents and traditional publishing companies, I decided to self-publish. After a little over a year of things feeling in a state of stagnation, this choice helped the book project get moving again. I felt fluid, flowing around the obstacles and continuing forward with my goals. With self-publishing, the story would finally be available for others to read.

Over the years, I have discovered it is during these times when you persevere through challenges that you find your limit is not where you originally believed it to be, and with each new challenge, finding nothing can stop you but you yourself. If we are dedicated to something, it's important to be open to possibilities and creative in achieving a solution. There are always alternate paths toward a destination.

So as I dip my toes in and out of the water, there is the sense that a chapter of my life is coming to completion. *Journey to One* is now in production. As I prepare to begin this next phase, I'm feeling it is time to move.

To be more specific, I would like a home closer to the ground, rather than living on the second floor. I want to be able to walk out my door and feel my bare feet touch the earth. I want more space, particularly a big yard where I can dig my hands in the dirt, plant some flowers, a few veggies, and have friends over for barbeques.

The apartment has served me well. I deeply appreciate this space that has allowed for such creativity and learning. However, I'm sensing increased growth accompanying this next phase. Like a chick growing too big for her egg, it feels time to have a place where I can live beyond the walls.

I begin to search Craigslist for a place to rent. Over the next several weeks, I look at half a dozen places. Each of them has its good points but is not quite what I want.

Then I see a notice for a property just down the street about a half mile from my apartment. It is advertised as having been recently

remodeled, large bedrooms and a big backyard. In addition, just like my current place, it is walking distance to Diego Park, which intrigues me. I love the local park, and it would be ideal to stay so close to it. I decide to check it out. I drive down the hill a ways, into the valley, assess the neighborhood and pull up to the place. It's a cream-colored duplex with a single-car garage. The unit is towards the back, away from the road. It looks cute from the outside. There's a young maple tree out front, and also a couple flowering plants, bordered with river stones.

I peek through the front windows and see a large living room and 2 bedrooms with fresh paint and new carpet. I walk through the open gate at the rear of the property to continue my self-guided tour. I find an immense backyard. Maybe it just seems so large because I currently have zero yard space, but I can instantly see it being perfect for BBQs, gardening and all-around lounging.

I walk over to the back patio and look through the sliding glass door to see a dining area and large kitchen with oak cabinets. The only thing I can't see through the windows is the bathroom, but so far everything about it feels open and light. I breathe in and feel a sense of serenity here.

I see copies of the rental application sitting on the kitchen counter, and I call the number from the Craigslist ad from my cell so I can get a walk-through and fill out the form. We schedule a time to meet.

Once inside, I'm able to get a closer look. The living room and bedrooms are painted a soft beige and have light brown carpet. It's not incredibly imaginative, but it feels warm and welcoming and is a nice canvas on which to accent a variety of colors. The bedrooms have large, mirrored closet doors. As I stand looking at myself, I think how infrequently it has been that I've seen my whole self in reflection. The bathroom is a crisp, clean white, is spacious, and has charming, new fixtures. There's room for a washer and dryer off the dining area, and the garage has been freshly painted, so there is not even one speck of dirt or grease in it. Inside and out, the place feels perfect.

I fill out the rental application and chat with the owner. He tells me about his wife and himself and shares how he recently retired from being

CEO of the credit union to which I happen to belong. “That’s nice,” I say, “I’ve been a member of the credit union for several years.” I open my checkbook and begin to write a check for the credit check fee, and I look down to see I’m writing with one of the credit union pens. Both of us notice at the same time, and we look at each other and chuckle. I’ve learned to not take for granted such serendipitous moments.

The following day, I get a call from the owner. “Well, everything checks out,” he says, “so I want to offer you the place.” I accept and give my current property manager notice.

I’ve observed how the fall season, for the last several years, has been a time of big transition for me. Relationship changes have taken place in the fall. A powerful, life-changing journey to Teotihuacán, Mexico took place in the fall. My beloved grandmother passed in the fall. My move into the apartment was in the fall. It’s been almost 4 years to the day. Now, as October winds down, I’m preparing to move again.

During the time of living in my apartment, it feels like I found myself. I know who I am. I know my passions. I feel whole, complete. Now I will venture onward, in a new environment. I’m curious to know what life events, what growth opportunities, await me there.

On a cool Saturday morning in November, five minutes before the alarm is to ring, my eyes pop open. *Today is moving day.*

Chapter 2



From A to Y

*W*hen I first walked into the local YMCA for an interview in January of 2001, I was 24 years old and excited at the prospect of a Monday through Friday, 8 to 5 job. I had been working split shifts, starting at 6am and finishing out the workday at 10pm, with graduate school classes and a 3-hour commute in between. I was enrolled in a doctorate program for Clinical Psychology until I decided it was time for a detour. I was working in a residential treatment facility for adults with developmental disabilities. It was educational and enjoyable in many aspects, and it served well as an internship for school. But now, I hoped to find a full-time job to pay the bills, including the student loans that were now due, and with “regular” hours so I could catch up on some sleep.

I had no previous experience with the Y. There was no Y where I grew up as a child, so I never took swimming lessons there or went to summer camp. I later learned YMCAs all over the U.S. provide a number of great services for their communities in the areas of health and wellness, youth programs and social services. But at the time, I didn’t know it was a place where you could work out. I didn’t know it offered childcare programs. I didn’t know it was a place where you could learn about nutrition or take a CPR class or volunteer. I had no clue that the Y was one of the largest and most well-known charitable organizations in the country.

I knew nothing about the Y other than the Winowa County YMCA had an Administrative Assistant position available with my name on it. I figured I would do that for a while until it became clear what I wanted to do as a career.

I dressed in black slacks, a black and white, sleeveless blouse with lace along the neckline, black blazer, and black flats. My hair was cropped short, in a boyish style, and I wore very little make-up. I felt professional and comfortable.

My interviews with Ellen Adler, the Director of Administrative Services, and later John Smith, the CEO, went well, and I was offered the job. My new role included assisting the CEO and providing general administrative support.

Ellen, who was my immediate supervisor, was a tall, strong-boned woman in her 50s with curly, brown, shoulder-length hair. She was meticulously detailed and organized, and these qualities served her well in her role.

In a Y facility that housed two pools, a fitness center, basketball court, group exercise studio, child watch room and several offices, the Admin Office was centrally located. If the Y were a machine, the Admin Office would be its inner workings. With her oversight, Ellen ensured the gears continued to operate smoothly, which then extended to most other aspects of the Y's functioning. Located towards the back of the Admin area was Ellen's office. She was the wizard behind the curtain.

With her many years of service and experience, she seemed to have all the answers. She held a wealth of knowledge and knew the history behind most everything Y-related. Support staff and directors alike would come to her when they needed to find out where a file was located or how to proceed with a task, or simply when looking for advice. She was the motherly figure of the Y. I found her to be kind, fair and always professional.

I quickly became friends with my officemate, Judy, who was responsible for the technology of the Y. She was in her 40s with a sturdy build and short, dark, curly hair graying around the temples. If Ellen were

the mother, Judy was the cool, eccentric aunt. Standing less than 5 feet tall, she was a petite woman, but she was surely a big, colorful presence. She had a prolific collection of Beanie Babies lining the shelves of her desk, humorous pictures posted on her file cabinet, including the one of a frazzled-looking cat in need of its cup of coffee in the morning, and chocolate usually tucked away in her drawer (pieces generously handed out whenever one was in need of a pick-me-up). She was loved by all, especially kids and younger staff.

I was intrigued by Judy's stories of when she was younger, her saucy tales of living in San Francisco and the unique, loveable characters she encountered. She was the only person I knew who got married in full regalia at a Renaissance Faire. She wore her emotions on her sleeve and never held back in saying what she thought. She was someone others felt comfortable talking to about their personal lives. Having also been with the Y for well over a decade, she knew much about the workings of the organization, as well as personal details on just about everyone.

Ellen, Judy and others at the Y quickly became like family to me. Only 6 months prior to being hired, I had been cut off from several members of my biological family due to differing beliefs and my sexuality. At the Y, I felt immediately welcomed and accepted by my coworkers for who I was.

It was at the Y where I first dressed up for Halloween (not having celebrated it prior to this). Staff often came up with a theme, and that year it was, appropriately, the Village People. Ellen was the Construction Worker. Judy was the Cop. We had an Army recruit, and a couple Chiefs. Most of us dressing up were women. I was the Biker gal. My costume was complete with black leather jacket, boots, riding gloves and black leather motorcycle chaps. We took photos and shared a lot of laughs.

When my partner at the time and I decided to have a commitment ceremony, a few staff members threw a shower at the Y for the brides-to-be. Later, several Y friends came to our ceremony. Being the recipient of such kindness and acceptance, I began to understand that the Y wasn't actually about group exercise classes or youth sports, it was about *people*.

Perhaps certain people and specific work circumstances come into our lives for a reason. I like to believe they do. Or maybe, in looking back, I am simply feeling appreciative of the experience. In either case, little did I know then that I would be embarking on a lengthy career with the YMCA.

Over the years, I continued to grow personally and professionally, due in part to my love of learning, but also due to several positive role models at the Y. My understanding about the Y grew, and I enjoyed having a part in a non-profit, human-service organization. Human service was turning into a recurring theme in my work.

After a couple years, my role shifted into Administrative Coordinator and I took on some additional responsibilities, including supervision of a dozen or so front-line staff. About a year after that, the newness and excitement of the new position was starting to fade. Perhaps it's indicative of us Generation X-ers, but I felt I had many skills and qualities that I could not utilize in my current role, and I dabbled with the idea of finding a different job. I submitted my resume to a few places and had a couple job interviews, but nothing panned out.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a management position opened up at the Y. The Director of Membership & Communications just packed up her personal belongings one day and walked out. There were whispers around the office about what happened, but who really knew for sure? It seemed odd, and a little sad, but interesting timing, nonetheless.

It was exactly the type of position that I felt ready to move into, and I thought I would be able to contribute a lot to it. It looked like it would be a good fit with my skill level, educational background, personality and experience. It would have its challenges, though. If I were to get the promotion, I would have very little training in the responsibilities of the position because of the abrupt departure of the director. There would be a lot of things to figure out on my own initially. It would also be challenging because the Y was preparing for a large expansion and remodel project. It would be a high priority to retain and increase membership during and after the construction. I surmised that it would

take some innovative and strategic thinking. I enjoy a challenge and felt up to the task.

I had a strong working relationship with several individuals on the management team, and when I expressed my interest in the position, I received a great deal of encouragement and support from almost everyone. John Smith, the CEO, was the only one who did not seem supportive. He expressed that he didn't want to lose me as his "secretary." I felt his comment lacked understanding of my skills and what more I could offer the Y. Though he was initially in opposition, after some time of deliberation, I was hired as the Interim Director of Membership in June of 2004. There was some reorganization around the position, and it shifted from directly reporting to John to instead reporting to Amy Long, the Director of Operations. I was grateful for the reorganization. I had enough experience assisting John and getting an up-close view of his character and mode of operating to know that I'd rather have Amy as my direct supervisor.

John Smith was in his mid 40s, physically fit, and had thinning brown hair. He dressed in a stylish, professional manner, but was not necessarily known for his professional behavior.

When I worked as his assistant, there were times when I wondered what it was he actually *did*, for I would see that his time at the computer was frequently spent checking the scores on the latest ball game or surfing the internet. He also was on the phone a lot, frequently talking with one of his ex-wives and dealing with personal issues. I didn't spend too much time thinking about John, though. My interactions with him were minimal, and I just focused on my responsibilities at hand. He did his thing, and I did mine, and it was fine, except when it wasn't.

From early on, John stood out to me as different from the rest of the people with whom I worked. For one, he seemed to lack the emotional maturity that the other directors exemplified. One morning I was in John's office for our weekly meeting. I was there to take notes about items he wanted me to handle. He was having one of his irritable days and just finishing up a phone call. Maybe he and his ex-wife were arguing again,

I'm not sure, but it was apparent he was upset. John angrily slammed the phone down, then with a quick swipe of his hand scattered papers across the desk and onto the floor, and said a few choice words. After he settled down, we went over the weekly items.

When I returned to the Admin Office, Ellen and Judy were there. I couldn't help but say it out loud, "John is an emotional child." Ellen did one of her "mmm"s.

"What?" I asked.

"Careful," she said, as she strolled to her office. It was then I understood that though we all knew it, we were not to talk about it. It was the wisdom of the long-timers.

Shortly after I stepped into my new role as director, there was another memorable experience with Mr. Smith. My office was now adjacent to the Member Center where people stopped in to get information about the Y, join as a member, sign up for classes and the like. The Member Center was frequently the first point of contact individuals had with the Y. An important aspect of my job was to ensure they had a pleasant first experience. There were no blinds on my office window, so I had a clear view of the goings on in the Member Center. I was standing in this area one afternoon talking with a couple members of my staff when John came storming in with clenched jaw and furrowed brow. "Kristi, I need to speak to you!" he ordered, pointing to my office. I followed him into my office and closed the door. It wasn't unusual for him to start conversations in such a way. It was familiar, but I would still get a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach and a flushed face.

Once inside my office, he demanded to know how a specific error occurred on a postcard mailer. I had designed a postcard at his request to send to the members, got his approval and emailed it to the offsite printer. I reviewed the proof from the printer and let them know they could proceed. Last minute, John instructed me to add more information. Last minute demands were familiar as well. I called the printing company and asked them to add the info. Being relatively new to my position, and new to marketing responsibilities in general, I didn't request a second

proof before it went to print and instead relied on the printer to ensure it was correct. The additional wording caused the phone number to not be visible on the printed card.

I sat down at my desk and calmly explained to him what happened. John was furious, “Do you know how this makes me look?!” he yelled and flung the postcard towards me. It whizzed by my ear and landed on the counter behind me. I wondered momentarily if he intended to hit me with it. It was another one of John’s tantrums. I looked at the card, looked at him, then glanced out my office window, hoping no one was seeing it. Thankfully, no customers or members were in the office at the time, but there were a few staff members witness to his behavior. He continued to rant and yell for some time.

Most days, however, passed without incident. In my new role, I enjoyed getting better acquainted with the staff in the Membership Department. I had known them for 3 years, since I first started, but now I was able to get to know them better working directly with them. The staff person I worked with most closely now was Maureen, the Member Services Coordinator. She was the direct supervisor of the front-line membership staff. Though I was Maureen’s supervisor, I felt we both played a key role in leading the department, and together we maintained a courteous, positive and efficient team.

Maureen was about 15 years older than I and was easily recognized by her long, straight, brown hair that hung down to her waist. She was extremely hard working and always positive, despite a list of challenging life situations. She held a lot of knowledge and experience as well, as she had been with the Y well over 20 years. I liked Maureen. She was patient, caring, smarter than she gave herself credit for, funny, creative, and when she wasn’t at work, she was probably riding her Harley. We worked well together.

I felt a close connection with several staff members. At the Y, the lines often blurred. Coworkers turned into friends, friends became like family. It is these coworkers and friends that often kept me motivated to come to work, particularly on the challenging days. When I walked into work at the

Y, there was always someone with a smiling face to help the day go by a little easier. Sometimes there was even a little surprise treat or good-hearted practical joke left on my desk, which brought a smile.

In the months and years after taking on the director role, I sought out a number of training courses. After first attending a couple classes and enjoying the experience, I decided to work towards becoming a certified YMCA Senior Director. With the Bachelor's degree I already held, there were about 8-10 training courses to complete in order to meet the requirements. The training was designed to provide a strong foundation in non-profit leadership. Senior Director was the highest director level one could achieve in the Y structure, and it opened up opportunities for increased responsibility in the organization.

I found the trainings, offered by YMCA of the USA (Y-USA), the headquarters based in Chicago, to be extremely valuable and of the highest quality. The instructors and presenters were primarily made up of top leaders from Ys around the country, Y-USA staff and leadership development consultants. I gained knowledge and experience in supervision, fiscal management, diversity and inclusion, member engagement, effectively leading others and more. The courses were educational, people-centered and often delightfully encouraged creativity and innovation. The trainings also offered a broader perspective of the Y. I met staff from all over the country and learned the principles, practices and personalities that made up the organization. I knew these skills would be very useful for my work at the Y, as well as any future work I might do. In any case, the Y seemed like an organization that supported growth on all levels.

There were a couple simple points that really stuck with me from some of these courses. The first point was a saying by the instructor of a course on member engagement, "If you don't feed your staff, they'll eat the members." The second was from a training on supervision and leadership: how important, and how much more effective, it is to lead by example. I took these teachings to heart and made a deliberate effort to

demonstrate to the staff that they were appreciated, and to set a positive example.

One day rolled into the next. Month followed month, and year followed year. My thoughts about the Y being just a stop-over until I figured out what I wanted to do as a career faded away. This *was* my career. I successfully managed a \$2 million/year department and juggled the duties of being a Y director. I enjoyed working with staff and volunteers on multiples levels – from individuals on the front lines to members of the Board of Directors. I appreciated the level of responsibility and having the opportunity to play a key role in ensuring the Y continued to operate effectively. I also felt great satisfaction in having a part in helping to increase the health and well-being of members of our local community. Overall, I enjoyed the work.

Some days, though, were more challenging than others. John continued to stand out as different from the other directors in the leadership team. Everyone else seemed to pull their own weight. John was known to use his title and pull rank so that the rules did not apply to him. In simple and complex ways, this became steeped into the culture of the Y. He lacked professionalism. I'd observe him staring at the breasts of one of my young, female staff members. It wasn't even subtle. He'd just chat and stare, smile charmingly, and chat and stare some more.

"It's like I'm not respected around here," John once said.

It was true. John wasn't respected. He was tolerated and obeyed, but not respected. What he did not seem to realize is respect is not afforded simply because of title or position. Respect is earned.

With my close relationships with several staff, both support level and management level, I heard many stories about John over the years, his bullying tactics, temper, inappropriate comments, distasteful jokes and more.

As appropriate, I would share the information with my supervisor, Amy, the Director of Operations. She was all too familiar with such accounts. During her many years working for the Y, she no doubt heard more complaints than I regarding John.

Amy had been with the Y over 15 years. She was in her late 30s, petite, athletic and warm-hearted. She was likable, a hard worker and on all accounts was dedicated to the Y. She was also a person with whom staff felt comfortable talking honestly. As I shared the latest with Amy, she would kindly listen and commiserate, but there was always a sense of “that’s just how things are.” He’s the CEO, after all, what were we to do? I think Amy was simply trying to keep the peace and carry out her responsibilities. I believe she did not wish to rock the boat and instead work to just keep it afloat.

I found myself adopting the same attitude. There seemed to be an unspoken consensus that as long as there were no blatant, illegal activities, we were to simply shrug our shoulders, tolerate John’s behavior, and carry on.

It was important to stay on John’s good side, because if one challenged his view or methods, he or she would likely become a target. We were being molded into a group of Yes Men and Women. Those who were strong enough and vocal enough to challenge his view, or simply offer a different perspective, were often phased out of their responsibilities or no longer with the Y altogether. Those of us who remained learned how to stay on good terms and keep our jobs. That meant agreeing with John or keeping our mouths shut. In large part, I chose to be a quiet observer.

In time, I found myself beginning to take work stress home with me. While I would be cooking dinner or doing laundry, or trying to write, thoughts of the Y would fill my mind. It was not the kind of thoughts like, “I need to make sure I finish my reports tomorrow,” or, “Oh, I have to remember to pick up those items for the member event on Thursday.” It was thoughts about Mr. Smith. It gnawed at me how he showed one face to the Board of Directors while revealing a very different face to the staff members. I would think about how his behavior affected morale and was impacting the environment of the Y.

By the end of 2007, I felt the need to have some kind of change in my work. It was a time in my life when things were already shifting a great

deal. Just a year prior I had taken a transformative journey to Teotihuacán. I was in the thick of writing *Journey to One*, and I was opening to greater possibilities as a whole.

That year I finished the last course needed for the YMCA Senior Director certification. The last step was to get a recommendation letter from my supervisor to make it official.

As 2008 unfolded, in blew the winds of change.

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