

# A Ponderer's Dozen

**Kayce Stevens Hughlett**

with photos by Bill Hughlett

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# Table of Contents

<b>Author's Note</b>	<b>page iv</b>
<b>Remembering What you Already Know</b>	<b>page 1</b>
<b>Talking Heads</b>	<b>page 3</b>
<b>Mantra: Read, Write, Rest</b>	<b>page 5</b>
<b>Eyes Wide Shut</b>	<b>page 7</b>
<b>Capturing Fire</b>	<b>page 9</b>
<b>Freedom is in the Air</b>	<b>page 10</b>
<b>God's Ways</b>	<b>page 12</b>
<b>Passionate Loess</b>	<b>page 13</b>
<b>Good Morning Sunshine</b>	<b>page 15</b>
<b>Inner Poet</b>	<b>page 16</b>
<b>Up &amp; Down Serious</b>	<b>page 18</b>
<b>Waiting for Ruach</b>	<b>page 20</b>
<b>Journey through the Night</b>	<b>page 22</b>
<b>the author &amp; the photographer</b>	<b>page 24</b>

# Author's Note

In March 2004, I found myself in a crazy transition period of life. My young family was treading on unfamiliar and frightening territory. Lost and confused, we sought help and solace in a Mexican village called Bahia de Kino. There, during a family workshop, I received an invitation to pause and ponder. The words our teacher used were actually 'meditate and listen,' but I realize this was the birthplace of what I call 'pondering.'

Since I had no experience in meditation and low expectations of any outcome, I did what he requested. I found a comfortable spot, I opened my mind to receive, and I listened.

His second instruction was to jot down anything that might come to our awareness as we listened. As soon as I closed my eyes, words began to flow through my mind, out of my hand, and onto the paper. I wept. I laughed. I wrote until I begged for the process to end. My pen ran out of ink the moment I asked to stop. I knew in that instant that I had encountered something infinitely greater than myself *and* I had come home.

This day and process would change my life in wild and wonderful ways that are still unfolding ten years later. What has grown from those ten minutes beside the water in Kino Bay, Mexico has informed the way I approach prayer, meditation, personal growth, coaching, yoga, life, play, and pretty much everything else I encounter on a daily basis.

The seeds for my book, *As I Lay Pondering: daily invitations to live a transformed life*, were planted that day. Today in honor and celebration of those ten years and the resulting book, I share with you this **Ponderer's Dozen** – a sampling of *As I Lay Pondering* readings throughout the year.



This feels like a birthday book to me, so I've chosen the readings from the 11<sup>th</sup> day of each month because my own birthday falls on September 11. Additionally, I've included one bonus reading that was reprinted from my blog (*diamonds in the sky with lucy*) into the book, *Openhearted and Brave: 26 essays to inspire courage*.

The **extra special super bonus** is that photos have been included for each day. They are the phenomenal work of my husband and fabulous partner in life, Bill Hughlett. I ponder through words. He creates with images. We make a pretty good team, if I do say so myself.

Together we share these words and photos with the hope you will be inspired, encouraged, and remember that we are all on this journey together.

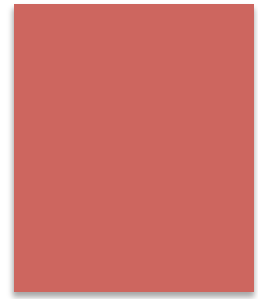
With gratitude and love ~

*Kayce Stevens Hughlett*

*March 2014*



# Remembering What You Already Know



When was the last time you paused and took the time to be curious and observe children at play? Each person in the world is a teacher and there is something to be learned from everyone no matter what age or stage of life. I believe children are our greatest teachers – especially those around the age of four or five. Robert Fulghum highlighted this notion when he wrote his poem (and subsequent book) about kindergarten.

*“Most of what I really need  
to know about how to live  
and what to do and how to be  
I learned in kindergarten.”*

Everything you need to know about being a fabulous, perfect YOU is already present in that early stage of life. As a little girl growing up in Oklahoma, I loved to skip around the block, ride the miniature roller coaster at my backyard kindergarten, hang out with puppies and kittens, eat ice cream, take naps, dress in sparkles, and have permission to get dirty. I could ride my bike for hours without exhaustion because I loved it so much. Chalk was my favorite writing utensil and *Tarzan* and *The Three Stooges* brought me adventure and laughs. Road trips to the California beach and floating for hours on a raft in the middle of a peaceful lake still resonate. In fact, most of these things (or at least their essence) are where I find love and joy today. They are the things I **know** about living my life and being me—both then and now.



Several decades later, I still know it feels delicious to take a nap on a warm or rainy afternoon and there is sweetness in being gently awakened by someone I love. Sharing is delightful whether with a friend or stranger. Seeing a person's face brighten is worth offering a lick of my ice cream cone, a seat on the bus, or a kind word. I also know it's physically impossible to be angry while skipping. Doing something that elevates my heart rate with excitement and a touch of trepidation is worth the risk. Coming out on the other side and saying "I did it!" is one of the best sensations ever. Undertaking something risky each day brings living into life... and you get to decide what "risky" looks like for you.

We innately know what's best for us (although it's sometimes forgotten through years of poor habits and trying to follow everyone else's advice). Our bodies know what is satisfying and nourishing... whether it's cookies and milk after a lingering nap or gluten-free pizza and fresh garden veggies that comfort the soul.

An adult's knowledge and a child's wisdom are the perfect prescription for living life beautifully. Today, imagine what it might be like to nurture and trust the wisdom you instinctively knew as a healthy child. If you're uncertain as to how or where to begin... Start slowly, be gentle with yourself, and explore...

- *Watch children at play.*
  - *Notice what you love and who makes you smile. Acknowledge generously.*
    - *Laugh every day.*
- *Skip when angry. (If you find yourself in a situation where skipping isn't immediately possible, then imagine doing it. The results are nearly as effective!)*
- *Eat well. Dine when hungry. Stop when full. Ask what would best nourish you in the moment.*
  - *Move your body.*
  - *Claim peaceful moments.*
- ***Remember what you already know!***





# Talking Heads

*Learning to trust  
your body and  
listen to it brings  
compassion to  
yourself and the  
greater world.*

There's a great scene from a campy movie of the 90's where two characters have their heads severed and then reattached to the bodies of small dogs. It's an amusing vision and one that sticks in my mind as I think about how often we, as human beings, try to sever our heads at the neck. We become disengaged from our bodies and begin to believe our mind is the only valuable tool we possess. We fail to notice our bodies screaming for attention, as we numb them through work, addiction, television, food, and busyness.

The only thing I might change in the movie scene would be to attach a head to a cat's body and see what happens. Many times I've sat writing while my cat pushes his body into my lap and nudges my hand and arm with his nose. He maneuvers his feline curves until my fingers begin to knead the fur on his back and his motor begins to run, purring with contentment. I wonder if he knows in his brain what he's doing, or does he simply integrate his whole being and move with it?

Learning to trust your body and listen to it brings compassion and integration to yourself and thus to the greater world. Body, mind, and spirit listen, trust, and move together — not as a disembodied head, not as something to fight or numb. The pieces become whole and begin to purr with contentment.



- *Place both feet evenly on the floor and begin to balance your body.*
- *Follow your breath for a few cycles and relax where you are.*
- *Checking in with your body, see if there is one place that calls for attention — perhaps a tight muscle, an achy joint, a queasy stomach.*
- *For the next few moments, direct your breath to that area and listen to what your body might have to say.*

***FUN FACT:*** *The 90's movie referred to in this post is Mars Attacks starring Michael J. Fox, Sarah Jessica Parker and Pierce Brosnan. It was one of my family's favorite movies for a couple of years. Warning: It's not for everyone!*





# Mantra: Read, Write, Rest

*What might it look like to slow down?*

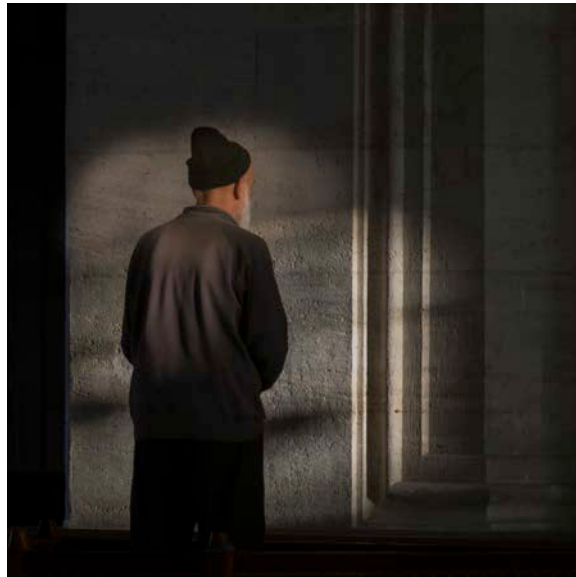
When I was in graduate school, I had a mantra that often helped me through days of intensive study. “Read. Write. Rest. Repeat.” There are still times in my life when those words prove to be immensely valuable. They offer me a pattern that engages, fulfills, and restores. The word “work” can be substituted for “write” and often “exercise” makes its way into the “rest” category. It is a simple rhythm.

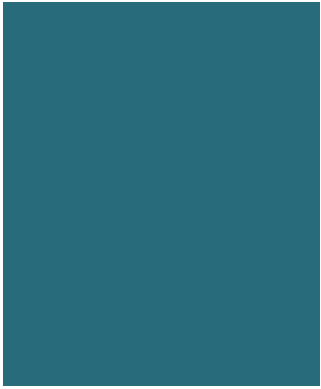
In the Jewish tradition, there is a practice of the lighting of two candles on Shabbat. One is said to be for rest and the other freedom. The intertwining of those two concepts—freedom and rest—reminds me not only of my mantra, but also the larger notion that without rest, freedom is very likely absent.

Productivity has become a god in the modern world, and there is little value placed on rest. The result? People who are exhausted, overworked, and disconnected from their lives and the people in it. Do you find yourself guilty here? What might it look like to slow down?

- *Place two candles before you.*
- *Light the first and bring your mind to the concept of rest.*
- *Simply breathe for a few moments, letting your body relax.*
- *Now light the second candle and move your attention to freedom, bringing it in with the inhale and releasing expectations with your exhale.*
- *As you come to a close, notice what tugs at your heart.*

***FUN FACT:*** *Napping is one of my top favorite things to do. I love nothing more than curling up with my purring kitty and snoozing in the middle of the afternoon. I do it often. Yes, I do!*





# Eyes Wide Shut

*If we don't open  
our hearts, eyes,  
or minds, how will  
we know what is  
there?*

Is it fading memory or past inobservance? I don't remember ever awakening to such an amazing, picture-perfect view right outside my window. Did I not turn to the west upon emerging in the past? Or is there a new window—a wall moved just a foot or two? How can I miss something so simple and astonishing that is right before my open eyes?

I think we must do it all the time. The missing, I mean. Some say we cannot go looking for the Sacred. I wonder if that's true. If we don't open our hearts, eyes, or minds, how will we know what is there? And what of those times when we desperately want to experience something Greater and yet feel or see nothing?

This is the paradox of being. We must see to believe, but in the looking we often miss what is simply there. "Let it be," says the still small voice. "Be"—that simple, tiny, small word that is so huge. Let it be.

How will I choose to "be" today? How will you?

- *Close your eyes and slowly count to ten.*
- *Gently open them and allow your gaze to land on one thing.*
- *For the next few moments, examine this one thing like you've never before seen it.*
- *Imagine it has a story to tell.*
- *Listen to the tale and see with new eyes.*

***FUN FACT:*** *This piece was originally written while vacationing at our friends' home in Hamilton, Bermuda. I rolled over one morning to look out the window and there was a spectacular view that somehow had never before registered.*





# Capturing Fire

*Today, consider  
the warmth of your  
own light.*

Simmering around the edges, I am reminded of the fire in my belly that has dominated the growth seasons of my life. The image of fire tingles like a slow ember just before bursting into full flame. Pondering the places where our humanity and the Divine meet in fullness captures this heat. It comes like a flash when reading the words of another; and burns in its absence when I go searching for it. Often it scalds. Always it warms.

What image does fire ignite inside you? Simmering? Scalding? Life-giving warmth? Whatever it is, I invite you to consider the warmth of your own light.

- *Placing a candle in front of you, thoughtfully bring match to wick.*
- *Allow your gaze to stay with the flame.*
- *Imagine the spark is the fire in your belly.*
- *For two or three minutes, ponder what is ignited in you.*

***FUN FACT:*** *Each year I choose a word (or allow a word to choose me) that I carry with me throughout the year. One of my most memorable seasons was the year "Fire" erupted.*



# Freedom is in the Air

*What I have to give  
you is peace, joy,  
and rest in  
knowing who you  
are.*

Where does your mind go when you consider the element of air? My mind often turns to the lightness of a feather and the ensuing weightlessness.

I am the one who is light as a feather. I am the one who floats on air—light, airy, pink. Carried by balloons—colorful and delightful. I am the one who makes peace with who I am by turning old expectations upside down. I feel the breeze behind me, above me, below me, around me.

And so I ask Air, what do you have to give me? What I have to give you is peace, joy, and rest in knowing who you are. You're only as old as you think you are. It doesn't matter if you have wrinkles or saggy arms or skin as fresh as a newborn baby. Be yourself. Lighten up. Don't stop when you hear the voice of the stopper. Just go. Let go! Play, laugh, love. Be free as a bird. Blossom.

I am the one who laughs and plays and drums and dances and blooms. I am the one who doesn't hide behind conventional wisdom. I am the one who says "Go," not "Stop." There are many fruitful paths, so move in the direction of your heart. Stop holding onto what "others" think. Play. Release. Let go. Drum and dance. Stop stopping You!

Play. Bloom. You won't be foolish. God's wisdom is not what the world thinks it is. We all want to play, but we get stuck. Stuck in the paradigms we think are true. We think spirituality has to look stale and safe. We've taken the fun out of worship. We've put churches inside buildings rather than out in the fresh air on the cliffs and near the water. We've forgotten how to take off our shoes and run through the grass. We hear our mothers saying, "Don't get dirty. Finish your work before you go out to play." Guess what? The work is never done. So, let go and reach toward freedom in the air.

Today I invite you to close your eyes and consider where the element of air carries you.

- *As you feel your breath moving in and out, see if you can experience life all around you.*
- *Feel the wind in your hair. The breeze on your skin. The sun kissing your magnificence.*
- *Be free. Float like the feather. Let your body move with your own rhythm.*
- *Laugh like there is no tomorrow. Stop hiding. Bloom.*
- *Reach toward freedom.*

***FUN FACT:*** *SoulCollage® is a process of deepening personal self-awareness. It is one of my favorite creative practices. Cards seem to take on a life of their own when asked, "Who are you?" Learn more at [www.soulcollage.com](http://www.soulcollage.com).*







# God's Ways

*What I have to give  
you is peace, joy,  
and rest in  
knowing who you  
are.*

I wrote a word of Peace. The reader said, "Too pat."

I spoke a word of Rest. The hearer said, "No way."

I read a word of Grace. My heart said, "I believe."

There are inexplicable ways of being that cannot be described with words. Since we each bring our own experience to any given situation, miscommunication is bound to happen. How does one explain peace unearthed when life is chaotic, or quantify rest in the midst of turmoil? My experience is not necessarily yours. God's ways are not always our ways. They are hard to believe with a "rational" mind. They are impossible to hear with a worldly ear. They are indisputable when received in the heart.

- *Find a comfortable position to rest for a few moments.*
- *Place your hand over your heart center and begin to breathe into the area.*
- *Feel the rise and fall of your chest as the region expands*
- *Imagine opening this space to receive God, Love, your Higher Power or the energy of your own choosing. Rest for a moment and simply receive.*

***FUN FACT:*** *The beginning of this poem was written after an extremely frustrating day when a person I encountered kept trying to convince me there was no way I could be experiencing peace in the midst of my travails. Good thing I chose not to listen!!*



# Passionate Loess

*“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”*

*Howard Thurman*

*We can find  
passion in the most  
ordinary of things.*

Have you ever watched a grown man turn into an excited little boy right before your eyes? Or witness a woman so filled with energy that she glows like a kid at the circus? Those transformational moments are Passion with a capital P. They are life-giving, not only for the participant, but also for the lucky bystanders.

We can find passion in the most ordinary of things. I can only imagine the delight and playfulness that God has for creation. On a trip in Washington’s wine country, I had the pleasure of witnessing a renowned geologist share his passion—in this case, basalt and loess (a fancy word for dirt).

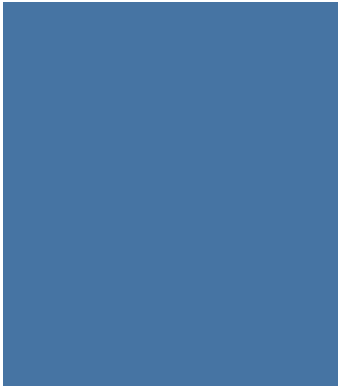
Standing on the side of a small “Grand Canyon,” he warned us to steer clear of the rim that has been known to “spontaneously disintegrate.” With a “what the heck,” he charged off the side of the cliff and became a young spirit romping through the tall, probably rattlesnake-infested grass to show us what he wanted to communicate. Before us lay centuries of organic history, commonly missed by an ordinary observer, yet extraordinary in the eye of this impassioned explorer.

While we gasped from our safe viewpoint and muttered, “Oh, I wish he hadn’t done that,” the earth converted from dirt like magic and the man transformed beyond a middle-aged person into a passionate being who made even the most inert of objects (rocks and dirt) become exciting for all of us. It was truly a gift to behold and experience. We had just received a lesson in how passion begets passion.

- *What brings you alive?*
- *Sit quietly and allow the moments you’ve felt most alive come to mind.*
- *Make a list and vow to do one item on your list today. The world will thank you for it!*

***FUN FACT:*** *Everyone (including my editor) pauses at the title, because they think it is a typo. I was encouraged to change it, but I left it in because ‘loess’ rhymes with less and when it comes to being passionate, I believe we could always use More 😊.*





# Good Morning, Sunshine

*Embrace the  
seasons of life.*

*Experience the  
beauty.*

Good Morning, Sunshine.

Smile. Rest. Pause in the day. Take a slow start for even goodness moves things along too quickly. So pause. Consider things slowly and thoughtfully.

Spend time with a friend. With God. Listen to the words of a song. Take them in. Absorb them. Stop to smell the roses.

Let their fragrance permeate your soul.

Watch the sunset. The sunrise. Embrace the seasons of life. Touch a baby's skin. An aged person's wrinkles. Experience the beauty.

Look into another's eyes. Eyes surrounded by a dirt-crusting face and filthy hair. Look into the soul. You may see Jesus there or you may see yourself—hurting and longing for something more.

- *Consider this momentary pause as a gift for your day.*
- *Listen to the longing of your heart.*
- *Take one small step to experience it more fully.*
- *The above suggestions offer a place to begin.*

**Fun Fact:** *While I don't consider myself a poet, sometimes the words choose to flow out in rhyme rather than reason. 😊*



# Inner Poet

*I recognize her in  
the first morning  
light by the gentle  
shores of the sea.*

My inner poet is French. Tipped beret and Mona Lisa smile. Her voice rings out with playful laughter, her arms wide open, leaping into darkness and light. She is beautiful and earnest. Seductive and serious. She was born on the wings of angels and birthed out of pain and suffering. I recognize her in the first morning light by the gentle shores of the sea. She is bathed in God's fragrance and surrounded by belief.

What does this inner poet know for sure? She is light. She is dark. Complete and unfinished. A creature of God. A glorious paradox. This poet lives hidden from sight. Covered in blue scarves and white. Peeking through the window and knocking on the door. She lives at home inviting others to come and sit by her fire.

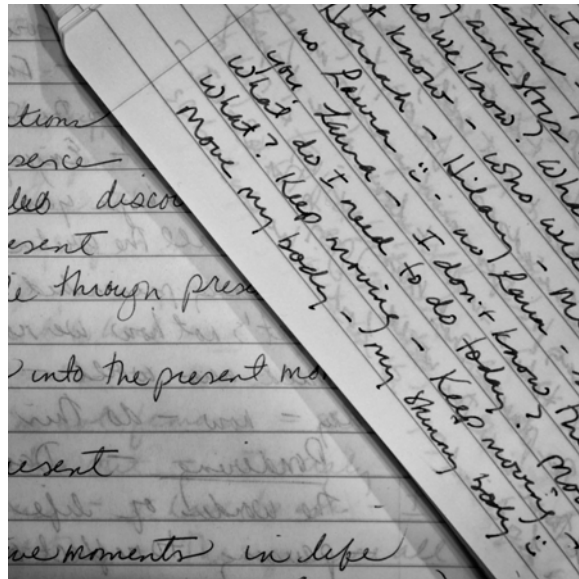
Her imagination is infinite. She dreams of knowing and being known, of embracing and being embraced. She desires community, fellowship, peace and solitude. She must speak of everything. The resonant and the dissonant. The beauty and the depravity. The joy and the sorrow. The fullness of life and the darkness of death.

She sits on the sidewalks of Life, holding a thin cigarette and dreaming her dreams.  
Her voice speaks in a beautiful accent. Tipped beret and all-knowing smile.

My inner poet is a romantic. She is French.

- *Ponder your inner poet.*

**FUN FACT:** *To know me is to know I love Paris. What you don't know is that I wrote this poem years before I ever visited France for the first time. Paris was calling to me long before we officially met.*





# Up & Down Serious

*The ability to play  
is serious business.*

*Today I will choose  
to play like a child.*

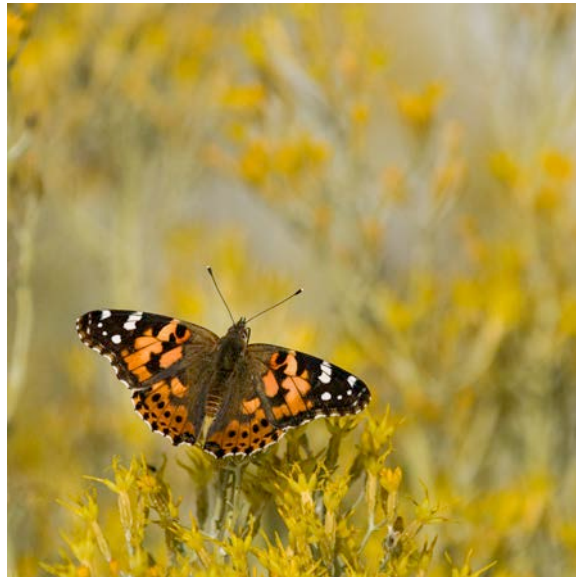
Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to let go of the seriousness that keeps me stuck and instead jump fully into life and play. I could pretend all memories of should and shouldn't have been erased, and my notions of what is good and bad or right and wrong present themselves on a clean blank slate. My rational mind wants to fight this idea and says I must be serious if I want change to occur. "Pooh pooh," says my playful self. Serious is boring. Fighting is more apt to invite problems, while play draws me toward delight, like a bird trilling in the trees just because. But one person's play is another's fight. I see the battle within myself. I truly desire to let go of seriousness, but even as I make that statement, the censoring voices say, "Get real. You must be serious to get anything of value done."

What do you want? What do I want? I want to change the world MY way. It is the only way I can do it. Just like the beetle only knows how to be a beetle or the ladybug who is resplendent with her distinct spots can be nothing else, I can only offer who I am. Some days it looks like seriousness. Other days it looks like play, and the ability to play is serious business.

Today I will choose to play like a child. Perhaps it will only be in my imagination that the world is saved. Perhaps it will seep into the stratosphere and accomplish something greater. Today I will choose to be me as I ride the waves of wisdom up and down the serious road of play.

- *Spend time today pondering your own notion of serious play.*

***FUN FACT:*** *Whenever I encounter someone who is rather challenging to deal with, I try to think of him/her as an innocent child. I keep envisioning this person younger and younger until I can imagine playfully pinch their sweet cheeks or cuddle them in my arms.*







# Waiting for Ruach

*To embody something is to provide a spirit with physical form.*

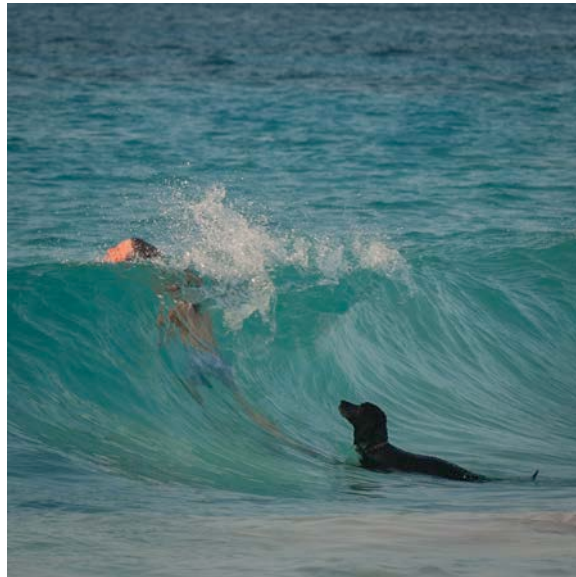
*Feel the wind. The wind blows hard. The wind is blowing us in a new direction. Guide the sails through spirit.*

Followers of my work cannot help noticing the importance of breath to the practice of pondering. Synchronicity and serendipity also play an important role in bringing new awareness to potentially overlooked connections.

My selective memory once displaced the wisdom that breath and spirit are both translations of the Hebrew word Ruach (also interpreted as wind). A period of time arose in my spiritual journey when it became clear I was being called to a new way of viewing the Holy Spirit. While I didn't know exactly what this meant, it felt delicious and liberating—like new breath, a sweet wind blowing, and the spirit of my heart lifting high. The feeling manifested as whole, connected, and embodied. To embody something is to provide a spirit with physical form. There is a fullness that takes over, like lungs filled with fresh air, when we allow our natural spirit to inhabit our being.

- *Ponder this.*
- *How will you choose to view Spirit?*
- *Take a moment and allow your lungs to inhale deeply and embody that which brings you life.*
- *Discover a new way to breathe, experience the wind, feel the spirit.*

***FUN FACT:*** *The first lines of this entry “Feel the wind blow...” were part of the first ‘pondering’ experience I described in this book’s introduction. The wind was definitely blowing me in a new direction!*





# Journey through the Night

*Perhaps I was  
still dreaming?*

Do you ever have those mornings when you wake up and feel like you have been on a prolonged journey throughout the night? One such morning, I awoke and realized I was still dreaming, so I lay quietly and tried to stay in the dream. It was neither a pleasant nor disturbing dream, but it was intriguing nonetheless.

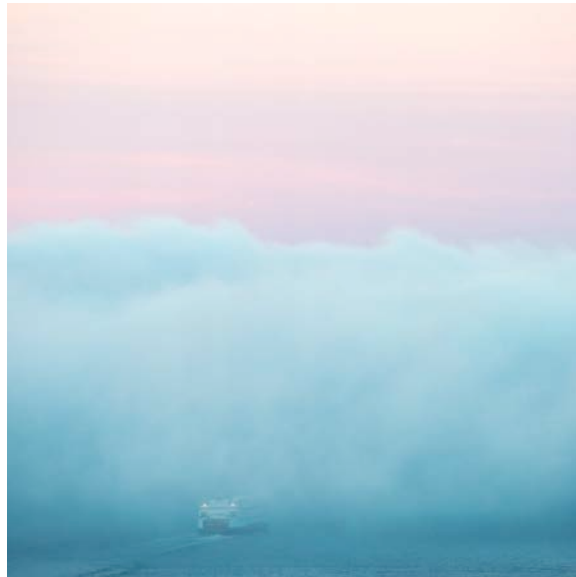
In this exploration, I noticed my body felt like I had been on a long passage. There was a bus ride, a pick-up truck with its bed filled with loads of baggage, a parking lot with only handicapped spaces available. I pitched a tent next to the lot that was in a huge field of dry grass. My tent poles got twisted up and a depressed, sarcastic, and conflicted woman I know helped me realign the poles. There were two additional tents in the field, but no other occupants.

After pitching the tent, I was riding along in my little convertible, going through the fields of dry grass. I was standing and trying to climb through the car while attached at the ankles to my husband. No one seemed to be driving the car.

There were lots of other unusual little images and symbols throughout the dream. Most noticeable was a distinct feeling of being on a very long, foggy journey. Therefore, it was no surprise when I looked out my window this particular morning to see the neighborhood blanketed in white mist. Perhaps I was still dreaming?

- *Keep an open journal next to your bed with a pen and small flashlight.*
- *When you awaken from a dream, jot down everything you can remember.*
- *In the light of day, spend some time exploring what you think each character and/or symbol may represent for you in your current life.*

***FUN FACT:*** *Dreams can be very self-revealing. Doing a dream analysis is a wonderful way to explore what the waking brain can't articulate. It's not surprising that words like baggage, alignment, and attachment show up in the subconscious. 😊*





## the author & the photographer

*ordinary turning  
into extraordinary*

**Kayce Stevens Hughlett** is a self-proclaimed artist of being alive. As a life coach, spiritual director, author, creative muse, and ponderer extraordinaire, she invites others to playfully and fearlessly cross the thresholds toward authentic living. Kayce considers life to be a magnificent journey whether she's navigating the ups and downs of every day living or diving into the unknown customs and rituals in foreign lands.

Her favorite playmate and travel partner is her husband, **Bill Hughlett**. By profession he is a financial guy, but in his playtime (which Kayce highly encourages) he is a passionate and gifted photographer. Bill has this to say about his photos:

*"Most of my images aren't taken in extraordinary settings or under extraordinary circumstances... they're take on ordinary days in ordinary settings. one definition of 'ordinary' is "with no special or distinctive features; normal." The thing is, when you start paying attention to the ordinary, it's often astonishing how much of it is truly extraordinary."*

Bill & Kayce live in Seattle, Washington where they pursue their multi-faceted passions. They are currently dreaming and scheming about combining their talents in print and workshop/retreat settings. Connect at [kaycehughlett.com](http://kaycehughlett.com) and [h3images.com](http://h3images.com).