

Upon Reflection

The Cactus Path to Rooting Deep and Soaring High

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The deeper your roots, the higher your flight. This message burned into my soul as I scaled Bell Rock in the 100-degree Arizona temperature. Sedona, Arizona—the name with a rhyming ring as high as the as the energy ascending above the Red Rocks—had captured my interest from my first visit in 2016. The magnetic rocks pulled me in as if being near them could reveal the mystery of my very being. No better place to sit atop a vortex and pray for guidance and the grace to implement it.

A few years ago, I believed my life was one big puzzle, and if only I could find the missing pieces of my life plan, I would feel complete. I would know my life's purpose and my path would be clear. Each decision would be easy, and I would arrive content on happiness's doorstep—my final destination.

That did not happen. Each new piece of myself that I found revealed an ever-bigger puzzle. Each purpose pounding in my heart created a mysterious rhythm to which I struggled to dance. I wanted to be free of my eight-to-four teaching job, but I didn't know how to transition out of my fifteen-year career in public education. So, like a gyroscope, my attention revolved around my children's sports, church services, community events and shopping trips while my core remained stable with the hope I would figure out how to segue into the career my heart longed for.

I wanted to write—to contribute more to the world than a smile to a heart-broken student—as wonderful as that felt. I wanted to more-than-wade into the metaphysical world of alternative healing. I wanted to help others heal their relationship with others and with themselves like I did under the skillful mentorship of a Naturopathic Doctor and Holistic Healer.

One choice at a time, I trusted myself and created a new environment. I got out of the classroom by taking a position in administration at a charter school, bought a house and took my mom to the beach for our first adult vacation together. I remarried and divorced. I danced at my oldest son's wedding, celebrated my youngest son's college graduation and played peek-a-boo with my grandbaby. I danced alone around the Christmas tree because my house was no longer the family meeting hub. I moved in, moved out, moved on.

I kept my body moving when my mind felt stuck in a field of quicksand. I bowled badly and strolled festivals alone, watched movies with girlfriends and laughed until I choked on the popcorn. I flew across the country solo to train with masters in the field of healing and hope.

Under City Lights

I gained ten pounds and lost eight. I cried. I prayed. I wrote books and short stories until the wee hours of morning and sent query letters to literary agents. I ripped up rejection letter after rejection letter and got tipsy on airplanes.

My last flight landed me in Phoenix where a cacti-lined Route 17 prompted me to ponder the prickly plants standing, arms raised to the sun as if waving welcome. Those stoic cactus arms grow as high as their main root grows deep. Even though their other roots penetrate only two to four inches into the soil, the main root determines the length of the arms. I wanted to extend my reach as high as my roots are deep just like those iconic Southwestern plants that Clarissa Pinkola Estés, PhD, describes in *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. The Sanguaro Cacti, native to the Sonoran Desert, “. . . can be shot full of holes, carved upon, knocked over, stepped on, and still they store life-giving water, still they grow wild and repair themselves over time.”

I envied those cactuses thriving in the heat and dry dirt. I want to be as resilient during the dry times of life, when nourishment rains not down on me. I want to continue to heal recurring wounds and store ample positivity in each cell. I want to be strong and well-grounded with my arms outstretched to the sky, toward the hope of reaching the highest pinnacle of joy my soul can bear.

Climbing the dusty path, the red rocks straddling the landscape like a living screen-saver, I imagined myself to be like the layers of strata lining the landscape. If only I could find and slide into place the missing pieces of myself, I would be complete and able to stand tall, poised and unique amidst the flurry of uniformity in a materialistic world. If only I could meditate long enough or outline life’s plan well enough, my mission here on Earth would be clear and my longing to express all facets of my interests and creativity would be satisfied. But surrounded by the majesty of the skyscraper rocks and varied strata, reducing my very being to a single layer of existence seems ridiculous.

I gathered images like breadcrumbs on my trek up the cliff—images of where I’ve been and where I’m going—images I attempted to organize in order to determine what I need to do and how to do it in order to be happy my remaining days. As I breathed in the thick air and took in the panoramic view of red rock formations, I realized my soul is more intricate than any architectural plan created by humans.

My life is a menagerie of experiences, some soft, some prickly. I’ve passed and failed tests, I’ve found and lost love, I’ve blasted a trail through friendship forests and set many bridges ablaze. I’ve tossed numerous job titles into the ocean of possibility and watched many dreams float away like a dear friend saying, “So long.”

I kept the skills and people in my life that fit my changing form. I’ve carved new shapes as my experience expanded and after twenty years as a high school teacher, am trusting the tugging on my heart to embrace a new classroom—one where I can share insights about healing relationships with others and with one’s self, insights that I studied and refined through self-work with a master mentor. I long to expand my teaching into the adult arena and facilitate wholeness where there is brokenness, distrust and dysfunctionality.

Transitioning into a new career at the age of fifty may be challenging; but without the storms, the glassy sea would lose its appeal to the courageous sailor in search of the mighty

sunken treasure. Priceless is the ability to boldly captain our own soul ship, to confidently anchor and rest knowing the wind still blows the sail high.

Our days are often like a cactus path to wholeness. We often must traverse the pain before we can embrace the healing life has to offer. We must root deep, reach high. We must protect our sovereignty and feed our dreams. We must not allow any person or organization or tribe of people to encroach on the property of our soul.

We must maintain hope even when the heat from society seems to scorch the tiniest fragments of love. Our essence is not the source of our creativity; our very being is creativity in motion. Our breath is the molecules of the divine now.

Our laptops can crash, our belongings can be lost and stolen, but no one can take our spirit unless we allow it to be stripped away with the wind of hopelessness. Our being is our sustenance and the deeper we root into our main mission—to explore this world with love—the more sublime our experience and the more we will enrich everything and everyone we interact with. Remind yourself of this daily.

So, if you're losing hope of ever finding your groove or of living unapologetically, take heart. Insights that begin with a sprinkle often turn into storms of promise and shower us regularly, nourishing our souls when the heat of doubt pounds the parched grass of despair. Place your anchor in safe waters and accept the prickles that awaken us to endless possibilities.

Happiness is often just one flight away and burnt into our skin with the Sedona sun beating on our heads like a beam of enlightenment. You may not want to touch a cactus, but you can touch your dreams. Look carefully. The path to a whole new you may be waving a prickly hello right now.

Author Note

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this reflective vignette. The author has no financial conflicts of interest.

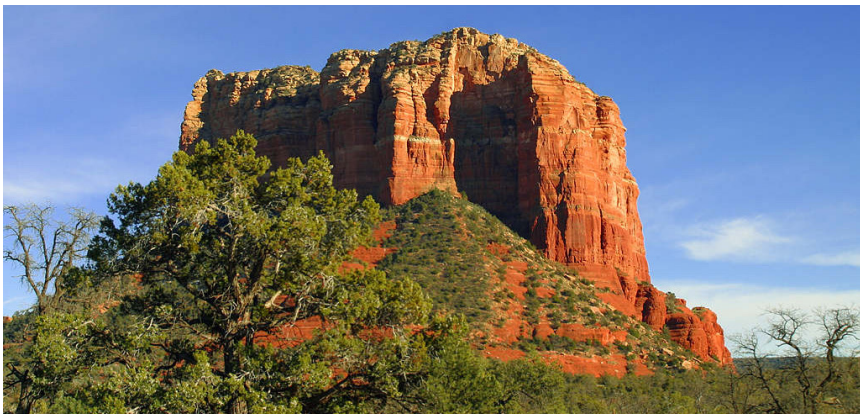


Photo by Jon Sullivan