

# **Are You Ready to Be You Again?**

## **The First Step is Recovering Authenticity**

### **Introduction -**

#### **How a Life Long Love Affair with Earrings Helped Me Recover Myself**

I have never understood why women spend their lives pining for a pair of diamond stud earrings. I mean, really, is that all there is to life? One tiny bit of sparkle in your ears? Once women get a pair, they want a bigger pair. When Marilyn Monroe sang "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" she was not wearing diamond studs, she was covered in diamonds from head to toe, big ones, beautiful ones, shiny ones. She embraced diamonds and made them her own. There is nothing wrong with diamonds; they can be exquisite, eye-catching and a fine example of craftsmanship.

I prefer big, bold, bright earrings that invite conversation and that reflect my personality, like the giant silver hoops from Lattimer Gallery in Vancouver with Pacific Northwest frogs on them. They are a good 3 inches in diameter, they have a great weight and shine to them. They were the first gift my husband-to-be ever gave me and he had only known me for a few weeks. But he saw me, the real me, I guess that's why I married him and am still married to him 15 years later. If I were queen, my tiara would be made out of garnets, my earrings would be rubies and sapphires, my coronation gown would be a dark red velvet and my shoes would look like Dorothy's in the Wizard of Oz. What does that say about me?

I used to gigantic earrings for a different reason than I do today. I used earrings as a barrier to protect myself. "Look at my face, not below the chin, keep that focus up here!" I wore large, bright, different, unusual earrings because I didn't want to talk about me. I was looking for a place to start a conversation. If I could talk about earrings, I didn't have to talk about anything real. The interesting truth was that people saw me anyway, behind the earrings, and they started to give me wonderful gifts of earrings from all over the world. My collection of friends, of earrings and my confidence grew.

Diamond studs represent status for many women, but from my perspective, they lack originality and authenticity, whether they are tiny or as big as a dime. Do you really need to be just like everyone else?

Until you embrace your authenticity, recapture joy and accept yourself as you are right now, you cannot begin the quest for a happy, healthy life. I believe it is the longing to have what every one else has, to be like everyone else, that is at the root of our challenge to create the life that we desire. You cannot attract love, have a healthy relationship with your family or feel connected to the world without starting here, with who you are. You know who I am talking about, that you that hides behind food, behind clothes, behind the kitchen door, in your office cubicle or in the library. I am talking about the you that you want to be but are afraid to let out to play because you are afraid of what might happen.

Through the one thing that I used to hide behind, earrings, I found authenticity, joy and self-worth. I learned to wear earrings just because I can, because I like them. I love wearing little works of art on my ears, they are a part of me, now, but I had to work hard to get to where I am. I have a pair of earrings that my stepmother gave me, large tin crosses, hand cut and beautifully painted in copper and turquoise by an artist in San Antonio, Texas. In the center of the crosses there is an iconic image of the Virgin Mary like you see on votive candles in Catholic churches and on home altars. They are eye-catching and always invite conversation. One night at Dickey's barbecue, I had an entire conversation about where I was from, where the earring were from and my tempestuous relationship with Catholicism with the store manager, a man from near Jalisco, Mexico who asked me about the earrings. Every time I wear these earrings, I think about my stepmother who passed away several years ago and about what she taught me about authenticity and joy. She loved art of all kinds and she loved earrings as much as I did. Some of my most unusual pairs were gifts from her and she taught me to wear them with pride.

I invite you to join me on a journey of truth and trust. Start from where you are right now and take the first step on the path to where you want to go. If you really want that pair of diamond studs, ask yourself why? What do they mean to you? How do they add to your sense of self?

## **Are Those Real Diamonds? Finding Authenticity**

*Authenticity: noun. The quality or condition of being authentic, trustworthy, or genuine.*

My first job in college was working at Claire's Boutique in the small mall in College Station, Texas. I was a sophomore and decided that I needed to take charge of my own spending money and have more of it. I spent evenings and weekends selling jewelry and other accessories and piercing people's ears. I

pierced tiny baby ears, teenage ears and hairy older men's ears. I didn't know ears could have so much variety. I learned about people and about sales at Claire's. I learned that I could make a sale by helping someone pick out the perfect pair of earrings for an outfit, a face, a birthday gift and by being honest. I quickly saw that people wanted to be acknowledged, they wanted to be seen and recognized as individuals. This was an early lesson in authenticity for me. I started to see it in others but not necessarily to recognize it in myself or to realize that I was hiding from authenticity.

While at Claire's, I also started a life-long love affair with earrings. It was the early 80's and bright colors were popular. Earrings had become mainstream and were suddenly available in every color, size and shape imaginable. Suddenly it was affordable to have a pair to match every outfit. At Claire's, it was not only acceptable but favorable to wear the store merchandise and model the different looks and styles (we got a great discount, or not so great if you knew how much of my paycheck was spent at Claire's). I had a great manager, who quickly promoted me to assistant manager because I could count the money in the drawer correctly at the end of the night and I was reliable, I always showed up when I said I would. She knew that retail would not be my chosen career path, but she helped me learn the most from that job that I could and I worked there until I graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in Spanish literature and political science and no clear path for the future.

I took advantage of one summer at Texas A&M to study in Spain with a group of about 20 fellow students and two professors. *Dallas* was the most popular television series in Spain that summer, so a bus full of Texans was a big hit everywhere we went. Although there was disappointment that we did not all wear cowboy boots and cowboy hats, we met many warm and wonderful people. I danced my way across Spain, in love with the culture, the people, the food and especially the earrings. My favorite purchase was a black and gold damascene pair of hoops inlaid with flowers and birds that I bought in Toledo, one of our first stops en route from Malaga to Madrid.

After dinner that night in Toledo, we had an impromptu dance party, not a big surprise for a group of college kids on the town. I can still remember the private dining room of the restaurant we were in, soft green walls and wooden furniture, brightly colored tablecloths and simple original art on the walls. We pushed the furniture back and turned up the music. At one point, one of the professors, Dr. Martinez who was originally from Zaragoza, Spain, stopped me, looked right at me and commented that I must have been a gypsy in a former life. I was wearing all black, a long skirt, a scarf around my neck and my new stunning earrings. I felt like a gypsy queen that night. I have often wondered why that particular

comment is what stuck out for me. I spent 6 weeks in Spain and have many other memories but few as vivid as that moment and that simple statement of fact from a professor I barely knew. A professor who in one brief moment, saw me, recognized that I was being true to me in that moment. I have spent years trying to recapture the freedom and joy I felt that summer, trying to make peace with the gypsy queen and allow her to come out to play.

As a business owner in a small community, I have had to learn that it is safe to be authentic, to show who I am. I live in a conservative town and when I started my business I felt like I had to dress conservatively, not wear big earrings, not be too outspoken. The gypsy queen was hidden in the back of the closet along with the Virgin Mary earrings. I learned the hard way that I could not grow myself, my family or my business by being someone I am not. I spent several years being unhappy, not finding the success I felt like I was working so hard for. I felt like it was all just a struggle without purpose or meaning. Here I had started this fabulous newspaper, I was getting great feedback from clients and from readers, but I wasn't happy. I was stressed out and overworked. I gained 40 pounds and lost myself. It took me three years and a great accountant to help me realize that I either needed to grow up or get out. If I wanted to lead my business, then I had to be a leader and I had to be myself. In order to attract the staff that I needed and wanted to build a profitable business, I had to be authentic in my leadership and in my connections with friends, colleagues and clients. I could not hide behind my desk wearing a navy blue suit and diamond studs.

Once I began to open up to people in my community, to dress in the bright colors that I love, to pull out the big, bold earrings, my business began to grow and I attracted other authentic people into my life, both in my personal friendships and in the people who work for me. I am surrounded by strong, glowing women and supportive men who know their own strengths and acknowledge and support me on my journey into leadership. I proudly wear my big earrings and laugh when people have something to say about it. I have a favorite pair of rhinestone dangling earrings that I bought for \$4.95 at Sam Moon, a local paradise for earring lovers and costume jewelry fans. I wore them to a networking lunch recently and an older gentleman commented on my "big" earrings. I just smiled and said "I love my bling."

Leading a life of authenticity means being free of ego. Be who you are with no excuses and no need for the approval of others. When you live authentically, your true self shines through. When you begin to be true to yourself, to be genuine around others, then you start to attract more of what you want into

your life.

When I think about the people throughout my life who have modeled living an authentic life, I think of my friend Sharon. She is the friend that I can always call when I need a boost, a sounding board or just a reality check. I have sometimes gone two years without talking to her but when we speak, it's as if it were yesterday. We all need friends like this in our life. We need listening partners who will allow us to share our trials and challenges without judgement, without trying to fix it for us and without interruption.

Over the years, Sharon has given me many pairs of earrings but one of my favorites are small blue squares that glow and resemble large pieces of Chiclets gum. Sharon could never wear earrings, she was allergic to all the metals, so she bought me the ones she wanted to wear and I wear them all. They are all dangly, all small and unique in the material or construction. She bought these small blue squares because they were made out of some unique material that was technologically advanced or left-over from some computer parts. I remember that she gave them to me and I remember that they glow in the sunlight and make me think of Sharon and the ocean.

Sharon gave me permission to be myself. She was a safe place to practice, to let myself shine in small bits and pieces or in full force. We all need other women in our life that can be that safe place for us, that acknowledge our authenticity, that hold us up and say, "I see you." Too often, we spend our time and energy being critical of each other. Women spend too much time being jealous and spiteful instead of loving and supportive. We lavish attention and love on our spouses and children but too many of us have forgotten what it means to be a good friend. Have you ever walked by another woman, big smile on your face, feeling like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*, and that woman gives you that head to toe look that just crumples your spirit? Why do we do that to each other? Because we feel insignificant, we are daunted by your authenticity and envious of the happiness on your face. Remember that to be crowned queen, you need ardent supporters and fans.

When you lead an authentic life, when you let your true light shine, you begin to attract the life, the friends, the lover, the spouse, the job that you want. Those withering looks no longer phase you. When you are being true to your self, when you are being genuine, your fans will follow you in droves.

Many of us have been hiding for so long, we don't know where to start. The guided visualizations and

journal questions that follow will help you start to uncover the authentic you. Answer the questions as thoroughly as possible. Create an action plan for living an authentic life and commit to taking one step before you move on to the next chapter. Find a partner, a spouse or a girlfriend who will hold you accountable and who will create a safe place for you to practice being you.

### **Guided Journaling Activity: Remembering Who You Are**

Guided visualization

*You can find the recorded version of the guided meditation at <http://minetteriordan.com/heartwise-sister-circle-membership/>. I recommend having a journal or notebook nearby so that you can write down any feelings, memories or experiences that arise during this guided visualization.*

Find a place where you can sit or lie down comfortably. Take three or four deep breaths that start deep in your belly. Pull the breath up through your body, your chest and release. Feel your body relaxing and sinking deeper into the chair or the floor. Feel your muscles relaxing as you continue to breathe deeply, allowing each part of your body to soften. Start with your feet, move slowly up your legs, your abdomen, your chest, your arms, your neck, your face and the top of your head. Continue to breathe slowly. Now I want you to imagine yourself in a place that evokes happy memories and calm feelings. The beach, a meadow, in the mountains, near a lake, your grandmother's house. I want you to see yourself as a young child in that place. What are you doing? Sitting, standing, dancing, singing, crying. Is anybody with you? What are you wearing? Do you hear any sounds. Relax, take another deep breath and watch yourself. What feelings or emotions are coming up for you? Now see yourself as a little bit older. Are you still happy? What are you doing? What are you wearing? Who are you with? Has anything changed, are you still the same as the little girl in the first scene? Take a deep breath, let any thoughts or feelings fade away. Now see yourself as a teenager. What has changed? How do you look? What emotions are coming up? Just let them come, don't judge them, don't try to change them. What are you wearing? Who are your friends? Can you see your family? What thoughts or feelings arise. Say goodbye to the teenager and allow her to disappear from your sight. Now see yourself standing or sitting in this place that brings you happiness. What do you notice? How are you feeling? What would you like to be doing? Do you need to dance? Run? Skip? Allow yourself the freedom to do that in this safe place. There is no one watching, what do you want to do? When you feel like you are complete, return to your breath for a few minutes and slowly bring yourself back to the present moment. Sit up slowly and take your journal out.

## **Journaling Activities**

*If possible, do all of these activities immediately following the guided visualization. If you do not have time to complete everything in one sitting, give yourself permission to put it aside and come back to it another time. Take a few minutes to center yourself, take a few deep breaths and focus before continuing with the written activities.*

### **Step 1.**

Write what you remember from the guided visualization. Do not worry if you cannot remember all of the details or the sequence of actions. Write whatever comes into your mind. Pay special attention to what you were doing at the different ages during the visualization.

Questions to help you remember what you might have experienced:

What was the little girl doing, wearing, saying?

What was the teenager doing, wearing, saying?

What changed as you grew up?

What would you like to do now that you don't get to do or are afraid to do?

### **Step 2.**

Name 2 or 3 people who represent authenticity to you. These can be friends, mentors or public figures.

Sidebar:

Three women who represent authenticity are Oprah, Queen Latifah, and Madonna. These women embrace life with no show of fear, they change and grow before our eyes and they are willing to share their journey with us. They all wear big earrings, too, of course. Madonna keeps reinventing herself and whether or not you like her music or her style, she is a model of someone who embraces change, who faces life head on and is always, unmistakably Madonna. Oprah's willingness to share her personal journey, her weight struggles, her spiritual growth and life history are another example of living an

authentic life. None of these women hides behind her fame, her wealth or her past. They always show up as exactly who they are. Queen Latifah represents for me someone who is not afraid to say to the world, you don't need to know everything about me. Here is what I have to offer and the rest is mine. She protects her private life from the public eye without excuses. I applaud her willingness to not give in to the media, to stand solid.

What is unique about the person?

What have you learned from this person?

What would you like to ask this person?

### **Step 3.**

Name 2 or 3 people in your life who do not represent authenticity and answer the following questions about them.

What about them tells you they are being inauthentic?

What role does this person play in your life?

What would you like to say to this person?

### **Step 4.**

Ask yourself the following questions and answer honestly, no one is reading this but you. If you cannot be honest with yourself, you cannot live an authentic life.

I am being authentic when I:

I am being inauthentic when I:

What I really want to do is:

**Step 5.**

Name at least 1 action that you can take in the next day, week or month to live a more authentic life.

Action:

Are you committed to doing this? If so, by when:

Make a list of other steps you want to take after this one and assign yourself due dates.

When you have completed this step, make sure to acknowledge your success. Put a big red heart, x, flower or whatever in your journal beside the action. Change is hard, you took the first step, celebrate!

**Step 6.**

Find someone who you feel safe asking to hold you accountable. Tell them what the action step is, have them follow up with you to see if you have completed the task. Invite them to celebrate your success - do a happy dance, go out to lunch, buy a new pair of earrings. Do it your way!