

There is power in writing your heart out.

Let this simple guide lead you into the heart of your creativity, that place where love deepens within you, expanding into ever widening ripples into the hearts and minds of those around you.

In 21 simple Practices, learn how to express love effortlessly through words that deepen intimacy in all your relations.

As you gain an understanding of your capacity to be and express love through your creative being, your loved ones will learn to trust in your expression and in return, love will flourish in and all around you.



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Right Your Heart Out!

A simple guide to falling into Love in 21 poems

The measure of love is to love without measure.

Saint Augustine

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Welcome to Right Your Heart Out!

My path to finding my way into love through writing a poem a day came through desperation. It was Valentine's Day and I did not know what to get my beloved. He was living 500 miles away and I had done nothing to organize a gift. I thought about sending him flowers, but he had already sent some to me. I could send him chocolates, but they'd never arrive in time – even if I couriered them. *It was the day of Valentine's after all and I was stuck.*

I thought about the distance between us. The time together every second weekend. Sure, we Skype most evenings, text intermittently throughout the day, did our best to stay connected, stay abreast with what was going on in each other's lives. But it's not the same. Being apart more than we were together, I knew the distance between us was wearing on both our hearts.

It was easier for me. While I was 'the one he left behind' I was surrounded by the comforts of our home. I had not moved to take on the challenge of a new position in a city I had never lived in. I had my family and friends around me. He had only a place where strangers walked the streets, where his apartment was filled with furniture that was not his, where he couldn't pick up the phone and call a longtime friend and say, 'let's get together for a beer'. Where ever he went he was reminded of his separateness. And there I was, 500 miles away and nothing done to remind him of our togetherness on Valentine's Day.

What to do? What to do? And then it struck me. He isn't comfortable with words, nor with expressing love, so I decided to do something different. Something that would express to him my love, what it means, how it feels, its colors and shapes and many moods. Something simple and easy. I'd write him a poem. But not just one poem. I'd commit to writing a poem a day for 14 days beginning with Valentine's Day. Those 14 poems-a-day became a year of a poem a day, but more on that later.

For now, that is how I came to discover the power of writing my heart out and its capacity to deepen love, shift perceptions and add intimacy to my relationship with my beloved, and with myself.

My intention for you is that in following this path into love, you too will deepen and expand the intimacy in all your relationships. Through these simple steps, you will gain an understanding of your capacity to be and express love, while those around you will learn to trust in your expression, trust in love and in return love will flourish in and all around you.

Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give, which is everything. *Katherine Hepburn*

WHO IS THIS COURSE FOR?

Right Your Heart Out! is ideally suited for everyone. Not just those in a significant relationship with another, but looking to deepen their relationship with themselves. It has value for anyone seeking to understand love and how they communicate it and how it resonates within their own hearts.

As I've journeyed through the 21 processes detailed in this workbook I have found my own relationship and understanding of love deepening – and in that understanding, I have come to love myself more and more.

So, in short, anyone can gain benefit from this course. You just need to be clear on your intentions.

But I can't write poetry...

That's okay. This isn't a course about writing poetry, or about writing anything for that matter. It's about exploration and the journey into discovery. In this course words are simply a medium to express what you uncover as you delve into the mystery and the beauty of your heart. And don't worry. It's not about rhyming verse or sweet sounding couplets either. It's all about the adventure into love.

And who doesn't like a good adventure when you're the heroine or the hero of your own love story?

Do you think this course is for me? What if I don't get it?

There's really nothing 'to get' in this course. Whatever love is to you, it already exists within you. This course is about exploring ways to see it, feel it, examine it and express it. There is a lot to explore, to unearth, to learn and grow from when we let go of limiting beliefs and fall into love with the idea that better is possible. Through this course people have experienced greater depth and meaning in every relationship in their life. Through doing these simple yet profound exercises, people have shifted how they express love, in all its many facets. And in their expression, every relationship in their life has expanded.

This course is for anyone who yearns for deeper connection, who desires new and exciting ways to connect with themselves, their beloved and every significant person in their lives. It's designed for those who are eager to explore what being loving means for them and how increasing their capacity to 'express love' will enhance the world around them.

My heart is broken. Will this course fix it?

This is not a course that will heal broken hearts and marriages. It will not bring back lost lovers or straying partners. What it will do is give you the space and time to explore how you express yourself through the gift of love. And, through your expression you could just possibly find your heart healing. Mine did.

I'm in love. Why would I want to do this?

Have you ever loved a movie so much you saw it again and again? Every time you saw it, you found something new to enjoy, to savor, to learn. Why is that? Because every time you see it, you are witnessing it from a different time and space. You're experiencing it from a new place, a new position, a fresh attitude – so many different ways that make you open to the exploration of the familiar while opening you up to different points of view.

Love's like that. We fall in love, assume that's it, we're *in love*, and new things happen in our lives, and while our love is dependable, we forget to explore it and see it through fresh eyes because we've become accustomed, or familiar with, what is, not what is possible.

This course is about refreshing love. Deepening your understanding of what it means to be *in love* while continuing to love the one you're with. It's about deepening your relationship with yourself and those you love – and it is not about changing you or another. The fact is – *when I shift, everything shifts*. It doesn't mean things change. What it does mean is that when shifts happen, understanding deepens, intimacy expands and we become more conscious and aware of whom and how we are, in love.

If better is possible, is good good enough? If deepening love is possible, if expanding intimacy is possible, is it good enough to carry on with status quo?

What if you really could experience the love and deep, deep intimacy you desire in your relationships?

What if you could have it all? A deeper, richer relationship without having to give up anything that you've got? Would you be willing to risk letting go of believing 'there's nothing in it for me' to explore the idea of 'What if there's more?'

Because that's really what "**Right Your Heart Out!**" is all about – exploring the idea of enriching relationships through opening up to your own creative urge to create more of what you want in your life.

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

There is only one happiness in life, to love and be loved.

George Sand

Tools of the Trade.

Before we begin, I must caution you. Shifts happen when you shift what you're doing, perceiving and being. And when you shift, everything shifts.

When I shift, everything shifts.

It's easy to begin. This course doesn't require a lot of complicated hardware, technology or devices to complete it. Sure, you can get all fancy and buy tons of colored pens and pencils, watercolors, glow in the dark paint and stickers. While all of that is fun, it is not necessary. This course is about digging into your heart, toiling in the soils of love within you, and letting them flow onto a page.

That said, here's what you'll need to begin.

A notebook/journal

A pen

A computer – email

photo editing s/w (Paint or Canva (open source photo editing s/w), Photoshop Elements

A corner, a desk, a special place where every day you retreat to and your mind and body know – this is my writer's corner, my exploration zone, my map to my heart place. I like to burn a candle when I'm engaged in writing my heart out, and I like to have hearts around me on my desktop – glass hearts, marble hearts, stone hearts – all sorts of hearts adorn my corner of the world where I write my heart out. I also like to play music that stirs my soul – Olafur Arnalds, Keith Jarrett – both have that affect on my heart.

Once you're into the flow of expressing your feelings on paper through written words, you'll start getting fancy with creating visual masterpieces out of your words, but for now, to begin, all you need is a notebook and a pen. For me, I like pretty notebooks/journals. But, when I'm learning something new, I like to use less expensive materials, like an unlined scribbler from the dollar store. I like not having lines when I first begin because it keeps my mind free of thoughts that interfere with creativity – like having to stay on the line, having to make my writing a certain size to fit between the lines, even having to write in a straight line. To begin, you're looking for freedom of expression. Keeping the environment in which you write free of constraints will help you feel less out of place, or out of sorts, on the page. And, no matter what I'm writing on, I really do find writing with a pen I enjoy using helps the flow of my words – regardless of what, where or why I'm writing.

You could, if you choose, write on a computer. The choice is yours. I find, however, that the act of moving my arm, holding a pen, the feel of the paper against the side of my palm all connect me to the writing process, which is why I prefer to write longhand, (it awakens my creative muscles) and then move to the computer.

Optional Items

Colored pens, crayons, inks, paints

Beautiful paper, canvas – any surface to create upon

Images and words from magazines that inspire and move you (you'll need to cut them out)

Glue

Scissors

Computer with writing software (i.e. Word)

Photo editing software such as Photoshop Elements -- completely optional. Word facilitates working with words and photos – relatively easily (more later!)

GETTING STARTED

We sat side by side in the morning light and looked out at the future together.

Brian Andres

Where does love begin?

Let me begin by saying, love has no beginning nor end. Love is. But to begin, in the case of the love of your life, you, Love begins in the womb, long before you ever put in an appearance here on earth.

Life begins with an act of love – sure there are occasions when that act is an accident, or even not-wanted. I'm not trivializing sexual assault or unplanned pregnancies, I just happen to believe that no matter how we are conceived, the womb is a loving and supportive and nurturing place – in other words, a perfectly loving place. In uteri, everything is in balance. Nature provides unconditional support and love, nurturing the tiny seed into human life. Even if the mother doesn't provide enough sustenance, nurturing of the embryo takes precedence over the mother's body. That's what I mean by love begins with an act of love. Because we have all come from the womb. No matter the color of our skin, our heritage, our faith, we all came from the womb. No matter what is happening in the world outside, the womb takes loving care of the seed of our creative expression within.

When does love change?

Love never changes. Love is always Love. It's we human-beings who change, who adapt, who modify the perfection of that inner world to adjust, make way, make do in the outer landscape of the world. It's not ill-intentioned. It's just life. And our job is to evolve through that life, to find the way back to Love if we truly want to be free of limiting beliefs that would have us believe, we are not worthy, or do not deserve love, or are not capable of being in a loving relationship with ourselves, or someone else.

Life is a creative process. Our lives reflect our individual creative expression in action. What we think, what we tell ourselves is truth, what we believe, perceive, assume and do creates the circumstances in our lives. And that includes – how we experience and express love in our life.

How do I express love?

I'm so glad you asked that! Because that's what this course is all about. To delve into your creative expression and understanding of love in your life so that you can express it fearlessly and freely. And in that expression, live the Love of your dreams.

How do I do this course?

That's the easy part. Everyday you'll find a prompt to inspire your thinking, get your creative juices flowing. Something – either a visual aid, a physical task or a writing prompt that will move you out of your comfort zone, or resistance – where ever you happen to be – into that place of creative possibility that lives within each of us.

This workbook is best followed sequentially – but it’s not absolutely necessary. You can read the whole book and come back and begin the first process, or, and this is optimal, start at the beginning and commit to only doing the daily exercise (no peeking) and completing it each day.

Why is it best to do it day-by-day?

Human nature is funny. We like to find reasons to not do things. To talk ourselves out of doing a task, to circumvent, to take shortcuts by telling ourselves, ‘oh that’s silly. I’m not doing that.’ Reading ahead, flipping through, and doing things out of order is often a way to circumvent being committed to following the path so that you can find your own unique way through to the heart of who you are.

By progressing one day at a time, you are slowing down the pace of your movement through the material presented and giving yourself time to be present to the experience of taking each step along your path. The process of delving into your creative core to writing it out is a slowly deepening process into your essence. It cannot be rushed. It cannot be cheated on – it requires slow, loving progress, like a stew simmering, the flavors melding together, blending, co-creating a flavorful and delicious meal.

Soul journeys are like that. They require slow simmering, each flavor enhancing the value through its singular note while invigorating and informing the whole.

Beginning the Journey.

So, imagine you’ve arrived at a portal, a doorway marked, EXPLORE LOVE HERE. You have a choice, you could choose to not go through it, to not step across the threshold into the exploration.

Or, you could choose to step across the threshold into unmarked territory, into a vast unexplored land of yet to be discovered secrets.

Which do you choose?

For most of us, the unknown is scary. We’re humans. We like familiar.

But, stepping into the unknown, stepping beyond the realm of what you know to explore what you don’t know, or haven’t expressed before about this thing called ‘Love’ offers up a wealth of opportunity to grow and to deepen and expand your understanding and relationship in Love.

What have you got to lose? What’s the worst that could happen?

You could spend the next 21 days discovering that exploring Love doesn’t do anything for you. It just isn’t what you’re ‘into’. (But seriously? Do you really think that’s going to happen? Would you even be considering this courseware if you weren’t curious?)

OR

You could spend the next 21 days writing and creating things you never imagined possible. You could find out you really do have a capacity to be creative and to Love with abandon.

Honoring the Process.

There are no rules to this process. No hard and fast guidelines, no do this now, do it this way only or else. There is only this course, a map filled with exercises and ideas to lead you inward. Always inward to the heart of what is important, what matters, what adds Love to your life.

And all it takes is one step to begin.

Oh, and the desire and the commitment to simply do it. To be willing to feel awkward as you learn new steps, feel uncomfortable as you explore uncharted territory, maybe even feel a little lost as you move closer to the heart of what makes your pulse beat wildly in love.

And I promise, if you let yourself go wild, you will not be disappointed. This is not just my commitment to you as you go through this courseware, it is your commitment to yourself. Exploration, learning, growth requires commitment. It also requires a capacity to forgive yourself. Reality is, you'll probably fall off at some point, forget a day, miss a step, get lost. We all do. This course isn't about doing it perfectly. It's about the process of doing it. The experience of each moment on the journey into Love. It's about the exploration. Not the outcome.

So, if you do fall off, fall behind, give yourself a break. Whisper to your heart, "I forgive me" and then, begin again. Always begin again. Breathe deeply. Whisper to your heart, "I'm okay. I just fell down." and begin again.

Always begin again.

There will also be moments when the emotions arising within you might overflow your capacity to engage in the exploration. Those are the moments when it really is important to keep going, keep moving into Love, not away from Love. Perhaps you'll wake up one morning feeling tired. Perhaps you had a fight with your beloved and the thought of writing him or her a poem, the idea of immersing yourself in love just seems too far out there.

Move into your emotions. Move into that fragile space where you are vulnerable and afraid and write it out. Move yourself consciously into your fear so that courage can draw you out into a loving space where you express it through your creative essence.

Always remember, when in doubt. When feeling blue. When you want to run and hide. Write it out.

Always express it and write it out.

You on?

Shall we do it?

And remember... no matter what happens...



Always Begin Again

With the tenderness of a raindrop
clinging to a leaf
I hold onto life
fearing the finality
of the fall.

Letting go
I become
One within the circle
of life
each ending
becoming
a new beginning
perfect in all its dimensions.

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PRACTICE 1: First Loves

Love is letting go of fear. *Gerald Jampolsky*

Let's begin.

This first day focuses on stretching your creative muscles, getting you out of your comfort zone, just a teeny bit to feel comfortable in this vulnerable place of writing your heart out.

It doesn't matter what your writer's history. Doesn't matter if you've written a book or thousands of pages or simply phone messages. What matters is that you begin.

What is this thing called love?

To begin, let's explore what love is to you. What's your 'love story'? Your history of love?

Complete the following statements.

1. The first time I fell in love I was _____ years old. I was in (check appropriate) _____ kindergarten ___ elementary school ___ junior high ___ High School ___ Other _____ I've never fallen in love.
2. His name/her name was _____. What I remember about her/him is _____

3. Other details about that first experience that I remember are _____

4. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being exceptional), that first experience was a _____.
5. Lessons I learned about love and messages I carried from that experience are _____

WRITING PRACTICE:

Take a deep slow breath. In. Out. In Out.

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a beautiful blanket of soft white wool wrapped around you. Feel yourself carried back to that story you just wrote about and using what you wrote, let the words of how it was appear on the page. It's not about 'writing good', in fact, it's important to let yourself, 'write bad'.

Just begin. Where ever you're at, just begin. Don't judge your writing, don't listen to that pesky little critter who likes to sit on your shoulder and pass judgment. Just write. Write a couple of short paragraphs about your first love experience.

To get you started, *here's mine*.

Robbie Palmer had red hair and freckles and he was my favorite boy in Grade 2. He invited me to his birthday party and I wanted to stay by his side the whole time. But he barely noticed me – I thought. And then, three days later, he came to my front door and asked me to come out and play.

My father answered the door and told Robbie to go away. Little girls don't play with little boys, he said. That confused me. Of course they do, I told my father and he told me that I was growing up and couldn't play with boys anymore.

Now that confused me even more. Why did growing up mean I couldn't play with 50% of my class? My father didn't have an explanation for me. But I knew I'd get in trouble if I played with Robbie. So I never did. Fear of my father's anger was greater than my need to be loved.

Wow. Imagine my surprise to see that last line. *Fear of my father's anger was greater than my need to be loved*. I didn't know that about me. I didn't know I carried that fear.

Now's my chance to embrace it with a poem.

Don't Chase Love Away

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Robbie Palmer came to the door
and my father sent him away
I wanted love but hated more
my father's anger on that day.
And so I packed my feelings away
and smiled through everything
until one day I discovered
Anger can't chase Love away.

Now you try it.

Go ahead.

Experiment. Let your pen, or your fingers if you're using your keyboard, explore your world with words upon the page, or screen.

Don't think. Write.

BONUS WRITING PRACTICE:

I love delving deeper into the feelings and thoughts poetry evokes. Here's your chance to explore your writing a little deeper.

Re-read your poem, sink deeply into the senses of it – the time, the space, the feelings, the place, the people, your heart. And now, write a poem to the one you were in that poem. The one who experienced that first love with such hope and possibilities.

A poem to my little girl

You of the gentle smile
 and shimmering heart
 your gift of Love so precious
 You make my world a pure delight.

That's it. You've just completed Practice 1. Now go take yourself for a walk, treat yourself to your favorite coffee or a nice cup of tea. Celebrate the magnificence of you!

PRACTICE 2: Lessons in Love

Life is full and overflowing with the new. But it is necessary to empty out the old to make room for the new to enter.

Eileen Caddy

Now that we've visited our first love, it's time to take a look at what lessons in love we've encountered on our journey through life.

We learn them everywhere, these lessons in love. In fairytales, and storybooks, in movies, at the dinner table, on TV, in the playground. Lessons in love permeate our lives like the smell of popcorn wafting through a cinema lobby. We always want some. Always yearn for more.

What lessons have you learned about love, and how do they serve you?

As the song goes, *Love is a many splendored thing*. It can also be a minefield, that place where all the lessons we've learned, healthy and unhealthy, blow up our peace of mind if we are unconscious of our patterns and beliefs about love and loving and being loved.

In this lesson we will explore our inner maps and beliefs about love. You may feel a desire to run away, to hide, to avoid experiencing the processes. Know, you are not alone. Sometimes, many times, we all want to avoid those dark and dank places within. And that's okay.

Fear is the opportunity to be courageous.

Just because you don't want to 'go in', doesn't mean you won't. All it takes is one step across the threshold of your fear to discover the beauty, even in the darkness. And don't forget – Love shines brightest in the dark.

Be bold. Be brave. Be open and you will discover the real wonder of love within you.

What do I know about Love?

We learn love in all our life situations and circumstances. Being held as an infant, being punished as a two-year-old, receiving praise in school, having a special friend, taking care of and/or losing a pet. Everything and everyone teaches us about love.

Let's explore the people, animals, places and things that have taught you about love. Take a few moments and centre yourself in being present to these memories. Take a deep breath. In. Out. In. Out. Let your mind and body relax. Feel the tension leaving your shoulders, your chest, your lower abdomen. Feel yourself relaxing. Your breath slowing down. Let yourself sink gently into a calm frame of mind and relax.

Think about what you remember about being held as an infant. Did you feel warm and safe? Don't worry, if you can't actually remember, let your imagination come to your rescue and let it build a

memory of your choosing. Good. Bad. Mediocre. Neutral. It doesn't matter. It's about connecting to memory, not judging it in any fashion.

Now, move forward in time, watch yourself as a child, see yourself with your family – whatever your family circle consisted of, together, separated, divorced, no family – accept and embrace whatever memories come up. Let yourself feel whatever you felt about being loved.

As you move forward in time, keep asking yourself, what am I feeling? Is this Love? See the people involved. Note their faces, their names, their relationship to you and then, proceed with writing it out.

1. Make a list of all the people, animals, places and things who taught you about love. There's no prerequisite number required, no right answer – just what is true for you.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Write down the incidents you recalled that seemed particularly loving to you – you don't have to write all of them, but three or four significant ones will give you a map of your beliefs about love.

For example, here's one of mine:

Two of the people on my list are my mother and father, they fought a lot, my mother cried, my father yelled, but always, no matter what, I knew they loved each other.

One of the things I remember most about my parents and their love is how every morning, for as long as I remember, my father would bring my mother a cup of tea in bed. It didn't matter if they'd had an argument the night before (and there were lots of those), my father always made my mother a cup of tea first thing in the morning and carried it to her bedside. And then, he'd kiss her and say, "Bonjour ma Cherie."

I loved that sacred moment of his Bonjour ma Cherie and would try to eavesdrop (I know – eavesdropping is not good!) – but I loved hearing him say that to my mom every morning so much, I didn't want to miss it.

3. Write out the messages you ‘heard’ from these stories. What lessons do /did these stories teach you? Begin each statement with, Love is... *OR* Love makes...

For me, that moment every morning between my mother and father taught me:

Love is constant.

Love is enduring.

Love is sweet.

Love makes you cry.

Love is doing things for others, even when you’re mad at them.

Love is special.

The fact my parents argued so much, especially about money, also taught me lessons.

Love makes you angry.

Love is messy.

Love is scary.

Love is something people fight over.

Love makes it scary to talk about money.

Write your statements here:

I love how in my list, both the seemingly negative and positive beliefs appear. Yet, dark or light, positive or negative, they only have the value I put into them.

Now, let's take a look at your findings/wonderings/musings on what you felt and observed through this exercise by writing a poem about the memory, using one of the stories you created as the cornerstone of what you're writing. Remember, this isn't about 'writing good', or writing a brilliant poem, it's about touching your heart in new and exciting ways through the gift of poetry.

Here's what I wrote of my memory of my mother and father and his morning offering of a cup of tea:

A cup of tea holds
a gift wrapped up
in tender words
that soothe
silent tears
spilled on the pillow
of love.

Now it's your turn. Go ahead, let yourself free associate feelings and memory and words and let your voice come out in a poem. There are no rules here. Just you and the muse connecting through poetry.

BONUS WRITING PRACTICE:

Here's an opportunity to stretch your creative muscle a little bit by writing a poem in another voice. In this case, pick one of the people, animals, places or things on your list and write a poem about what they taught you about love, in their voice.

My poem in my mother's voice is:

Your hands reach out
a cup of tea
on the dawn of daybreak
I take hold
and love fills my cup
overflowing.

I love that this exercise gave me insight into my parent's relationship that I never really had before. Seeing them this way, love fills my heart and I am grateful for all they taught me.

Go ahead. Try it. Who knows what wonder, or miracles, will unfold...



PRACTICE 3: Love Values

Empty pockets never held anyone back. Only empty heads and empty hearts can do that.

Norman Vincent Peale

Long ago I read the phrase,

A broken heart is an open heart and an open heart is a loving heart.

I don't know who said it, or even where I read it, I even googled to see if I could find the source, to no avail. For all I know, I made it up myself. Regardless, those words have resonated in my heart for years, carrying me through many a heartache, many a love lost moment of utter desolation.

All my life I have wanted to have a loving heart. To be kind and gentle and caring. To be considerate and generous and funny too. So many things I want to be which, when I'm in love, sometimes take a back seat to my need to be, more than anything else, right, seen, heard, of worth, worthy.

It's also said, 'you can't give what you don't have'. To give love, I must know myself, in love.

Knowing who we are in love is an exploration of our beliefs as well as our values. What we hold most true to our beings, to our belief in who we are, and what we stand up for, in the world.

In this Practice we will explore our values in Love.

Who am I in Love?

In true love stories there is a formula for love. Boy meets girl. Boy wants girl. Girl falls for boy. Boy gets girl. Something happens to tear them apart, all is righted and boy gets girl back and they live happily ever after.

End of story.

Right. Since when was happily ever after the end of the story? Real life just ain't that simple!

We have feelings, emotions and patterns that dictate how we respond to love's challenges and demands. We have entrenched behaviors that dictate how we react when love gets tough and we get frightened of what could happen to us in that vulnerable place called *being in love*.

Unlike the story books, my experience is often that as the girl, I wanted the boy and he didn't want me. Or, he was interested and I wasn't but I didn't know how to tell him and ended up hurting him. Sometimes, to get the point across, I wouldn't be very nice to the boy. In fact, I could be downright mean. Not answering phone calls or messages. Ignoring him when we were out together. Using sarcasm to deflect my feelings. Saying one thing, doing another. Missing dates...

And then, there were those situations where I wanted to keep the boy but he didn't want to keep being with me. When the tables were turned I could turn into a sniveling, weak and whiny character. I'd ditch my girlfriends if he called, I'd sit by the phone waiting for his call. I'd even take to 'accidentally' driving by his house, going into his place of work, you know all those things we do when 'in love' is more enticing than being loving.

The question is: Who are you in Love?

What pushes you? What makes you act crazy? Act out? Act up? What makes you forget who you want to be in the world?

We're going back into memory so once again, centre yourself in being present, mind, body, spirit, balanced in a peaceful and supportive place. It might help to put on some relaxing, calming music (preferably without words. Words can distract your mind and keep you from moving with grace into the quiet) Take a deep breath. In. Out. Again. Deep breath. In. Out. Let your senses settle into memory. Feel your body relax.

Ask yourself in the quiet of your mind, *"Who do I want to be in the world?"*

Let the words float up through your consciousness. Quietly write them down in your journal. You may hear the words like, Kind (write it down). Gentle. Intelligent. Phrases work too – filled with integrity. Full of energy.

Whatever the word/phrase, write it down.

Now, ask yourself, *"Who do I want to be in Love?"*

Again, let the words float up and quietly write them down – this time beside your first list. Remember, it's not about the quantity of words you write, it's about the words being true for you. Let yourself drift. Be at peace with where you are.

When you feel you've uncovered the words that are true for you, come back into full awareness and look at your list.

Any surprises?

Any confirmations?

Are you pleased with your list? Remember, it's your list so if you don't like what you've written, ask yourself, *"What will it take to create a list I like?"* and then, write down the words you would like to be described as, in the world, and in love.

This list comprises the values that are most important to you – both in your day to day life, and in love. Take a look at the words that appear on both lists – who you want to be in the world, and who you want to be in Love. Circle those words that appear on both sides of the list. These are very important attributes for you. They are the qualities you must value in your life.

Keep your list handy. When faced with a decision, a choice or an opportunity, ask yourself, “Will doing this create more of who I want to be or will it take me away from being who I want to be?” and then act accordingly.

Some of the words on both sides of my list are:

A woman of integrity

Passionate

Kind

Happy

Funny (this one is a bit of a surprise as I am not known for my humor in the world or in love)

Flexible

Compassionate

Filled with wonder

Spontaneous

The invitation is to create a poem using some of the words on your list – depending upon the length of your list, try to use at least five words. It’s okay to use the word on your list and adapt it. i.e. spontaneous could be ‘spontaneously’.

Here’s my poem about who I want to be in the world and in love.

This is Me!

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I like to laugh
(I think I’m funny)
though some would say I’m not
but really what does it matter
as long as when I smile at you
you think you just got kissed by sunshine.

I want to show my love to all the world
and share with you my wonder
so that we can see the beauty
all around and help each other
when we are down
by sharing kindness and compassion.

See, nothing profound or artsy. It’s not about great poetry, it’s about seeing the greatness in who you are and writing it out.



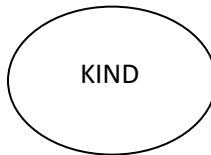
Now it's your turn.

BONUS WRITING PRACTICE

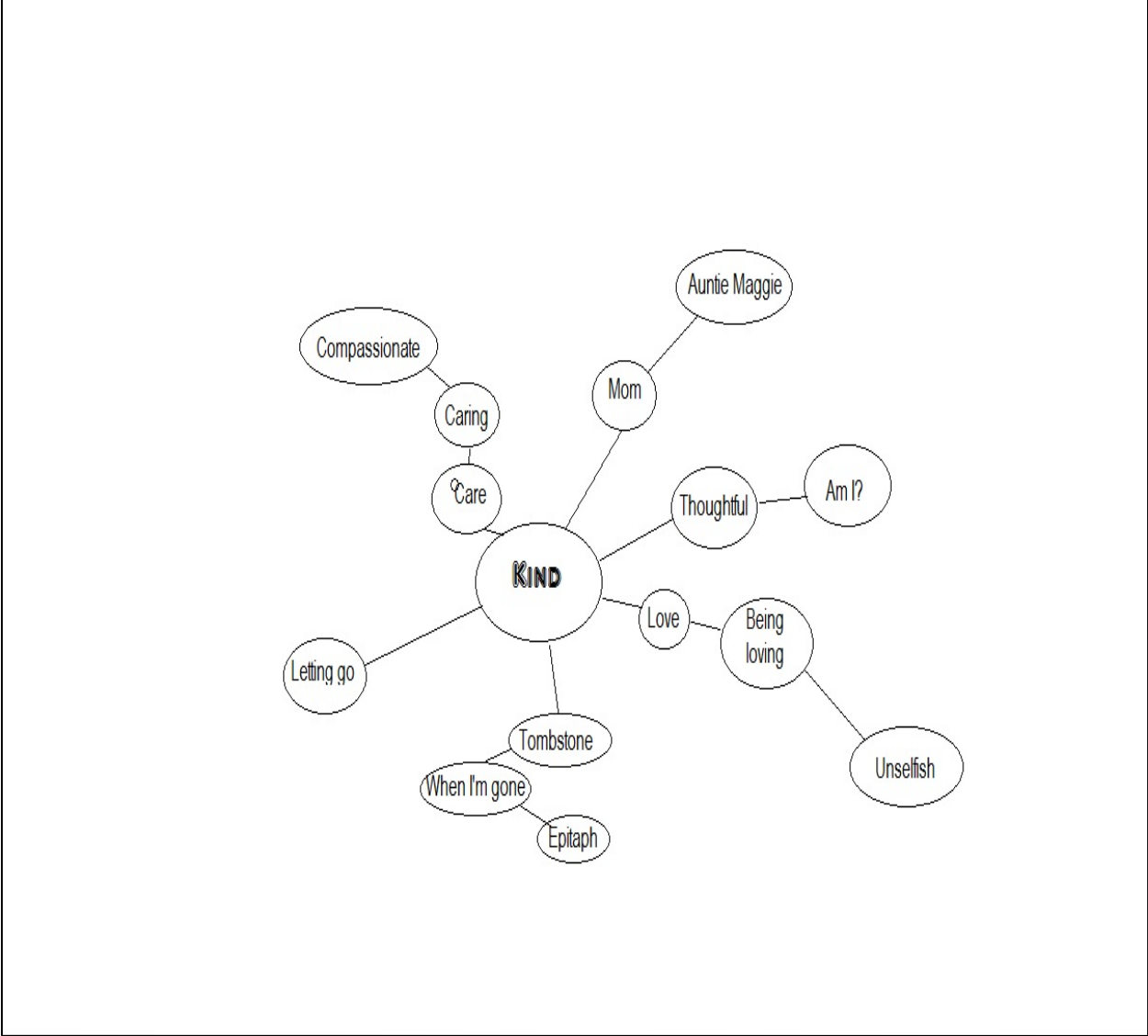
To explore your values more deeply, create a mindmap of one or two of the words/phrases that really resonate with you as a deeply held value. Once you've mindmapped that word, write a poem using some, or all of the words that appear in your mindmap.

Never heard of a mindmap? Mindmaps are creativity tools that help you explore an idea and organize your thoughts through engaging your visual mind. Here's a simple and effective way to create a mindmap:

Take the word you want to work with (your core theme/idea) and on a blank page in your notebook, place it in the centre and circle it.



Now, without giving too much thought, allow yourself to quickly ‘free-associate’ with the word and let anything that connects to the word you’ve chosen appear on the page. Keep going until you run out of ideas or have to ‘think’ about the words before they appear.



MindMap of central idea on the word *KIND*

Using the mindmap as your prompt and guide, create a poem about yourself based on the words and ideas that have appeared in your mindmap. If you’re stuck, begin with the word, “I”.

Here's my poem based on the word KIND and the words/ideas that appeared in my mindmap.

She Was Kind

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When I am gone
and people speak of who I was
I hope they say
I was unselfish
I hope they know that in my letting go
of life on earth
I only want to leave behind
the things I wanted most to give
compassion
kindness
caring
and love.
And on my tombstone
I hope they write
the words I want the most
I hope they say...
Blessed was she in every way
for she was Kind.

What is fascinating for me is that in that word 'kind', is a deep truth of a value I hold dearly – the imperative of always being kind. Even when delivering 'truth' that does not sit well with another, it is important to me that I be kind.

Now you try it! Create your mindmap and then, write a poem that speaks to the value of that word in your life.

Practice 4: Your Love Autobiography

Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.
Mother Teresa

To truly be open and free to love and be loved, we need to come clean on how we have, or have not accepted or given love in the past.

In this Practice, we explore your true love history. The who, what, when and how much you've loved in your life.

To begin, make a list of all the people you have loved in your lifetime and include the years and memorable places, as best as you can remember. Include that first love you wrote about in Practice 1 but now, move forward through time and write the names of every human being you've loved. As these are 'love interests' **do not** include familial relationships.

Don't forget, this is a private journey. No one is grading you or marking the number, or lack of, those you've loved. This is for your eyes only. I'm not going to include my list because the names of those I have loved is private, and I wouldn't want to embarrass them if they didn't know, or were not comfortable with their name appearing on the page.

Remember, there is no right or wrong way to do these exercises. There is only the way you choose to complete them. Being completely honest with your truth on the page is freeing. It opens up doors and gateways and paths you've never before explored. Let yourself let go. Let yourself be brave and bold and courageous. You deserve your truth.

My Love List:

Now, here's where we get creative. Rather than writing a word poem, the invitation for this Practice is to create a visual poem of your Love Autobiography. Your visual Love Autobiography is a graphic, colorful presentations of your heart's journey through time. A sort of vision board of love memories.

This is vision mapping in reverse. We're going back through time to create a pictograph of your loves. The purpose isn't to remember the people, but to create a visual summary of what love feels like, felt like for you, including its many possibilities and presentations.

What you'll need:

Magazines – cut out words and photos that speak to you of your 'love history'

Scissors

Glue stick

A large piece of colored Bristol board or an inexpensive 18"x24" canvas

Photographs of people and places you've loved

Get creative. Get cutting. Get pasting and building your 'love history'.

And remember! There's no right or wrong way to do this. There's only your way.

For me, I do not include actual photographs of the real people I've loved. I include photos I've cut from magazines of people who remind me of them. I do include photos of places I've been and felt love – and if I don't have any, I cut photos out of magazines that remind me of them.

As you work, let your body relax, let your senses fall into that place where being engaged in the moment of enjoying the process is all that matters, all that you are thinking about.

And tell the critter, that little critical guy who sits on one shoulder, to take a hike. Creating your love history is not a time for the critter to come out and have his say!



Practice 5: Love Limits

We accept the love we think we deserve.

Stephen Chbosky, The Perks of Being a Wallflower

What are you willing to do for love? What have you been willing to give up for love?

These are challenging and very important questions.

When I was single, no matter my age, I was always open to ditching my girlfriends if a guy called and asked me out. Doesn't matter that my girlfriends would have and often did, do the same. What matters is, that's what I did. Countless times.

Which, on the surface says I wasn't very committed to being a good friend. Even deeper however, it also means, I was willing to give up my integrity for love.

Ouch.

That hurts.

Seriously? Me. The woman who values her integrity, and wants to be remembered as 'kind' was willing to give up integrity for love? Now that wasn't very kind to the friends I ditched at the last minute was it?

I wanted to deny the fact of that statement, but through **Righting My Heart Out** I had to accept its truth – that is exactly what I had been willing to do back then when I was single and yearning for that special someone to ride in and sweep me off my feet.

When I know better, I do better.

Knowing that was something I did back then, it was important I claim my integrity today by stating, clearly and unequivocally, *I am not willing to give up my integrity for love.*

What Are Your Love Limits?

In this practice, it is important that you simply 'allow' memory to appear as what it is – moments in the past you cannot change. Pay careful attention to your judgments. If you have a tendency to be overly self-critical, give yourself room to simply be in the moment without criticism grading what you did or didn't do in the past. We cannot change the past. We can change its hold on our lives today.

In writing of these incidents, keep in mind that you were doing your best at the time. Also, remember, forgiveness is a gift of love. When we forgive ourselves, we set ourselves free to love deeply and freely.

Some of the ways I have acted out in love include:

- promising to help a girlfriend paint her cabin and then cancelling at the last moment because I got a 'better' offer from a man.

- ditching a man whom I cared about because ‘the bad boy’ I yearned for called and asked me out for dinner when I’d already made plans with the other.

In answering the questions, be loving and kind to yourself. When it comes to answering the questions below, the deeper you’re willing to be honest with yourself about what you’ve given up ‘for love’, the deeper your forgiveness, and ultimately love.

For me, doing this exercise helped me see not only what I’d given up for love, but also how, when I treated others with disrespect, I was unloving of me too!

Looking at my list, I quietly said in my heart, “*Bless them. Forgive me.*”

And let the pain go so that I could move more deeply into being the loving human being I am.

Now, take a deep breath. Sink into that place where you are at peace and restful. Take another deep breath. In. Out. In. Out. Let your mind and body relax. Feel yourself sinking into the waters of memory.

Let yourself drift into a time when you were in love, or at least yearning for that special someone. It could be someone on the list you created in Practice 4, or someone you’ve just recently met.

Think of this exercise as letting go of shame to move into deep love with yourself. Without judging your answers, without grading or deriding yourself, answer these questions:

1. What’s one of the worst things I’ve ever done to someone who loved me. (*This could also read, something I carry shame about because of the way I treated someone who loved me.*)

2. What’s one of the worst things I’ve done to a friend because of a relationship with someone I’ve loved/was seeing/ wanted to date.

3. What have I given up to have/be/know/feel loved?

Remember: *When we know better, we do better.*

In my awareness and acceptance of what I've done to hurt those I care about, I don't look all that 'pretty'. But, to hold onto shame is even more debilitating than to continue those behaviors. Today, I am committed to acting with integrity in everything I do. How I do one thing is how I do all things. And I want to do all things with Love.

Do all things in Love and all things you do become loving.

The Forgiveness Poem

This poem is all about forgiveness. It is a poem that will set you free. It is also a poem you might want to write out and paste somewhere you can see – all the time.

When we hold onto 'unforgiveness', either of ourselves or another, we are holding onto shame, blame, guilt and pain.

Seriously? Is that what you want in your life?

I get that what I did in the past hurt people. I also don't want to keep beating myself up for what I did – it serves no purpose today. I can set myself free by doing today the things that restore and preserve my integrity. I can forgive the past so that I can move freely into the present moment, experiencing all the joy and wonder this moment has to offer.

This isn't the time for forgiving others (that comes later). This poem is all about setting ourselves free by being forgiving of ourselves – for whatever we've done, big, small, indifferent that may have hurt others.

To write a Forgiveness Poem to yourself, it's important to start in the quiet of gratitude.

Write three lines about what you learned from those experiences in the past that add value to your life today.

Here's my list:

1. I learned that telling myself a white lie as a way to minimize someone else's pain is not true. The truth, told lovingly, minimizes hurt to and for everyone.
2. I learned that when I give up my values and principles for love, it is never about love and always about making myself feel better without considering others.
3. I hurt myself when I let go of what I believe in so that I can have 'love'. Like No. 2 – there is no love in treating myself, my truth, and others with disrespect. The only path to love is through self-respect, integrity, dignity, trust and truth.

Acknowledging what I've done to hurt others in the name of love is freeing. It gives me space to let go of shame and pain.

In letting go, we make room for self-forgiveness as well as forgiveness of others. In forgiveness we set ourselves free to behave more lovingly in all our relationships.

One way to embrace forgiveness is to write a poem for yourself that acknowledges what it is you need more of in your life.

Here's my poem:

I'm Done

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I hurt
myself
and those I love
when I let go
of being true
to me.

And in my pain
I give in
to being less
than
all I want
to be.

I'm done
with hurting
everyone
including me.

I'm done
with blame and shame and pain
I'm done
with blame and shame and pain.

In my doing
I declare
I'll never give in
to get Love again.

In Love
I'll only ever give
the best of me
being
loving
kind
caring
and free.

Give yourself the gift of letting go of shame and pain or anything else you're carrying that hurts you.

Write a *Forgiveness Poem* to yourself.

Go ahead. Do it now. No one's watching. No one's judging. Just do it!

Write your forgiveness poem here:

Practice 6: Love Is Active!

All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt.

Charles M. Schulz

We've been doing a lot of hard work examining who we've been in love, what we've done and how we've been affected by the presence and lack of love in our lives.

It's time for some fun!

Today the invitation is to create a Photo Poem just because it's fun!

There's no agenda. No script. No path you need to follow to write this poem. It's all about letting your mind dance in the ideas and thoughts and giving way to the creative process of expressing yourself, in Love.

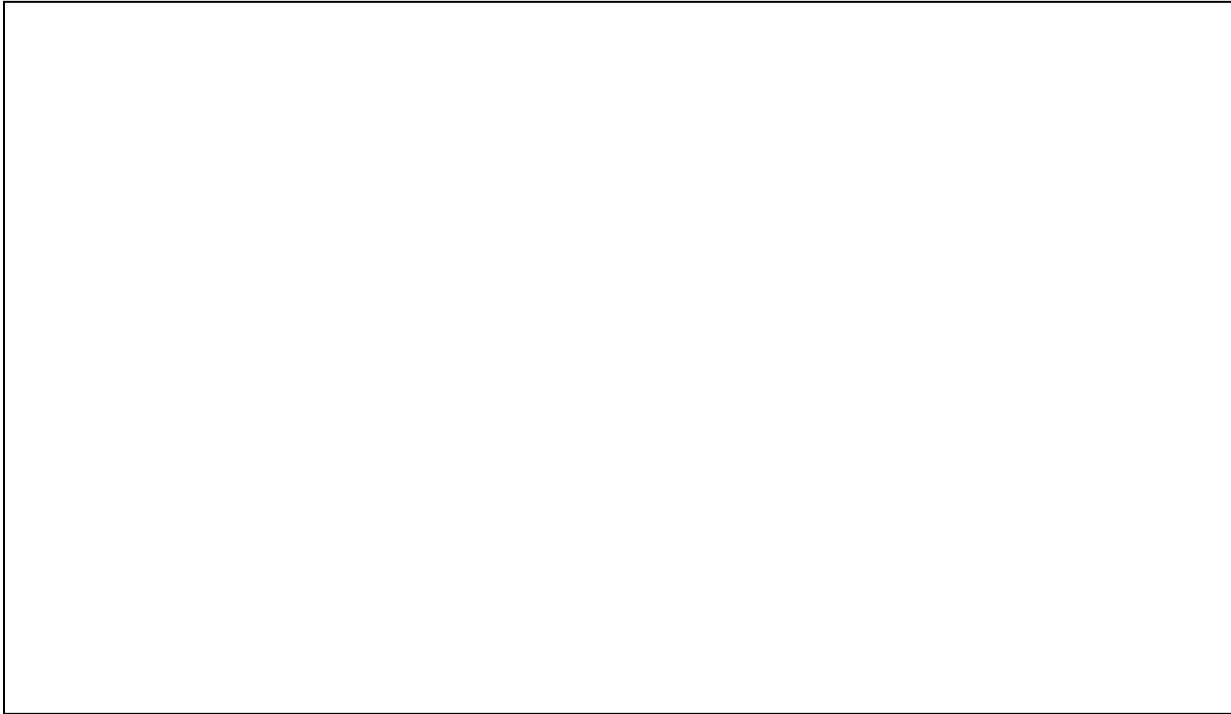
Something I like to do is use a photo as a prompt for my writing.

One day, during the 14 days of writing my beloved a poem for Valentine's, it snowed. Lots. My mind leaped to the occasion and I cut out four hearts from colored paper – three pink and one blue. I decided to set them on the deck as if they were attending a dinner party, took a picture and wrote a poem for my beloved based on the scene I created. It was fun to create and he enjoyed the visual feast!



Create your Photo Poem here:

Insert Photo Here:



A note on working with photos and adding text.

There are lots of software programs that allow you to manipulate photographs. Don't be intimidated by the software – explore.

The simplest way to create a photo poem is to insert the photo you want to use into your Word processing software and use it to write your poem on top of the photo.

I use PhotoShop Elements and only use a fraction of its power – but it does serve my purpose and I'm content with that.

There is freeware out there as well. Canva is easy to use, free to download and has lots of support available to help you learn and work with the software.

I have not invested in any heavy-duty text manipulation/design software as I am not that technical nor do I feel the need at this time, to learn it.



Practice 7: Love Dreams

Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue, and the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true. *Lyman Frank Baum*

What are your dreams about love? Do you have any? Did you have them in the past and give them up?

Let's explore.

Write a list of possible love dreams. For example, you could always have dreamed about falling in love at first sight and what that would be like. You could dream about meeting a tall dark stranger on a cruise ship, having a passionate affair and when the cruise is over, going your separate ways with your memories of love in the hot sun a wonderful reminder of your adventure. Or, maybe you dream about marrying your high school sweetheart and living happily ever after.

Love Dreams come in all shapes and sizes. When we explore our dreams of love, we let ourselves into the secret yearnings and passions of our hearts.

And isn't 'in our hearts' a great place to live?

What are your Love Dreams?

1. Settle into that quiet place within, deep breath, in, out. Feel your body relax from your toes up to the top of your head. Relax.
2. Ask yourself, *In the secret recesses of my heart, what are my dreams about Love?*

Write your list here:

3. Pick a core word/theme/idea from your list above and mindmap it.

Create your mindmap here:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to create a mindmap. The box is currently blank.

4. Using your mindmap as inspiration, write a poem about your Love Dreams.



Practice 8: Love Bytes

The most effective way to achieve right relations with any living thing is to look for the best in it, and then help that best into the fullest expression.

J. Allen Boone

Identifying the gaps

In all of us is that place where what we have in love fails to meet the dream of what we want in love. Our beloved doesn't respond the way we want, they don't tell us often enough how much they love us, we don't feel connected... The gaps are many and for many of us, the gaps keep us slightly off balance, off-kilter and out of sorts in love.

I created this course because I gave my beloved a gift of 14 poems for Valentine's Day. When I gave him the gift, I told him there were no strings attached, no expectations of his responding to my poems in any way.

Well, in my email to him that sounded nice, but in actual fact there were expectations. In fact, by the fourth day of sending him poems, I was feeling a little disgruntled by his lack of response. Sure, he wrote to say, "Nice." "Thanks." But, he usually didn't get to responding until late in the day and one word answers just weren't cutting it in my book.

I decided to take action. Tell him what I want, you know, be clear on my expectations. And that was when the trouble started.

"I'm confused," he replied to my email where I gave him the entire script of how I thought he should be responding (Yes. I seriously wrote him out the script I'd concocted in my head of how he'd awaken in the morning, race to his computer, open his email and clap his hands because he was so excited to receive my poem!). "I thought you said there were no expectations. You know I don't get to my personal emails until late in the day."

"Yes, but..." I began my next sentence and stopped. I had given him the poems as a gift. Not as an "I do this for you. You do this in return," negotiation.

I was being unreasonable. I backed down, asked myself, "Would I rather be right or LOVED and LOVING?"

Well, that's simple. Always. I'd rather be loved and loving than right.

I had to get real quiet and ask myself, *What's the right thing to do in this situation?*

I had contemplated not writing any more poems. But asking myself, *what's the right thing to do* meant I actually had to do what I knew was the right thing. And that was, to get my expectations out of the mix and continue writing and sending my beloved a poem a day for 14 days.

When I shifted, everything shifted. That 14 days turned into an entire year of writing and sending him a love poem a day. It also resulted in a deepening and strengthening of our relationship, in spite of the distance, and it definitely gave me far more than I gave in writing those poem – it gave me a way to start my day, every day writing about love and in the process, a more profound understanding of the power of love in my life.

Expectations are often met with resistance.

Let's take a look at your 'love bytes', those little bits of reality that measure the gaps between what you want and what you perceive you have in love. See, in that scenario with my beloved, I had a lot of expectations (mostly unexpressed and unrealistic) about how I wanted *him to be in love*, not how I wanted to be in love.

1. What do I tell myself about how 'another' loves me?

a. Positive aspects:

b. Negative aspects:

2. What is the last story I told someone (a friend, counselor, co-worker) about the one I love where I did not paint a completely positive picture of the one I love?

3. Write a poem about the one you love that is completely positive.

As an example, Below, I share the poem I wrote my beloved in those moments after I'd told him how upset I was feeling that he wasn't responding to my poems the way I wanted. I wasn't feeling 'all loving' at the time, but knew that to deepen love, I needed to move into love, be more loving and not withhold the things I wanted most, intimacy, closeness, vulnerability, love.

What's your poem? Use a photo as a thought-provoker, or mindmap on a central theme. And write it out.

Here's the poem I wrote him the day I realized I needed to get my expectations out of the way so that love could have its way with me.



Hearts are Fragile Places

by Louise Gallagher

<p>Sometimes, in the promise to never hurt the one we love we do the thing that hurts them most. Not because we want to we don't, but hearts are fragile places</p>	<p>and no one can see into the heart of another until they break it open with caring hands and loving words and tender deeds.</p>
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Practice 9: Love Gaps

If you would be loved, love and be lovable.

Benjamin Franklin

Sometimes, it can be hard to imagine that the future can be any different than the past. Yet, the future is an unwritten page in the story of your life. To create a different future, you have to do things differently today than you did in the past.

If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got.

What are your beliefs around the scarcity of love in your life? For instance, when you were an infant love was defined by how often, and how gently you were held. As you grew older, your definition of love was refined based upon the responses of those in your environment to your need for love. As you grew, you continually fine-tuned your understanding and beliefs around love to reflect the lessons from the past, merged with the things you'd experienced along the way. This understanding forms your 'structure of knowing' what love is.

When a man hits a woman, it is not love. Yet, many women endure abuse because they believe their partner loves them, even when he hits them. The partner believes he loves as well, and will often deny he doesn't, even when he hits his partner. The origin of this belief is buried somewhere in the psyche of each participant in the drama, learned through past experiences of abuse, and love.

The difference between what they know and believe to be true and right, and what they are doing is 'the gap' in their structure of knowing about love.

To know what we need to let go of, we must first identify what we know.

Let's take a look at the gaps in your structure of knowing.

1. Draw a line down the centre of a page in your journal. At the top of the left-side column, write "Things I love about me". At the top of the right-side, write the heading, "Things I under-love about me."
2. List a minimum of ten things in the "Things I love about me" side.
3. Make a list on the right side titled, "Things I under-love about me". That's right, it's not that we don't love them, it is that we haven't learned to love them enough. The objective is to, as Trungpa Rinpoche calls it, 'see the perfection', in everything.

This exercise is designed to help you do that.

I've filled in a few blanks as an example of what you could write. But, you need to make your list all about you.

THINGS I LOVE ABOUT ME

1. I'm creative
2. I like to help people when they ask.
3. I'm a good friend.
4. I listen well.
5. I give money to charity.
6. I focus on the positive.
7. I make a difference in the world.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

THINGS I UNDER-LOVE ABOUT ME

1. I forget things really easily.
2. I sometimes lose my temper when I think someone is ignoring me or being unkind.
3. I often over-book myself.
4. I am prone to emotional eating.

Note: These aren't things that I want to keep in my life, but, they are things that in my 'under-loving' of them, create dissatisfaction within me. Until I learn to love all of me, I will not be able to love the parts of me that I judge as unlovable – and thus, limit my knowing of love.

Once you've completed both lists – and hopefully you've got way more "love" items on the left-hand side of the column than you do on the 'under-love' on the right –write a poem to yourself. Make it a poem of love, a poem of support. There can be NO NEGATIVE aspects to this poem.

For example, here's one I created out of the words on my Things I Love About Me side of the page.

Love Things About Me

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In the quiet spaces between each breath
I listen to my friends
and give them words of love
to help them through tough times
I always let them know the truth
of what they mean to me
for in our friendship
there is only one thing I ever want
and that is for them to know
they make a world of difference in my life.

Now, looking at the right-hand side of your list, on a separate sheet of paper, list one good thing about each item on your list.

Here's how mine, based on the items I showed, would look:

One good thing about each thing I under-love about me.

1. I forget things really easily.

My forgetfulness means I often forget to get angry about things others forget!

2. I sometimes lose my temper when I think someone is ignoring me or being unkind.

This works well with forgetting things – it means I get angry and then forget what I was angry about or even that I was feeling angry!

3. I often over-book myself.

I can sure get a lot done in a short period of time.

4. I am prone to emotional eating.

I feel safe in my emotions and am willing to let them move through me – and sometimes, there's nothing better than chocolate to mend a broken heart or hurt feelings!

Now, using your list of good things about those things you under-love about yourself, write a poem that reflects your acceptance about those aspects of you.

Here's my example based on what I wrote.

Under the Wonder of Love

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I forgot to get angry
when you forgot
my birthday
and found myself
too busy to remember
it myself
and making up was so much fun
for an argument we never had
we got to hug and kiss
and share with just one fork
the thing I enjoy so much...
Chocolate cake
with whipped cream
and strawberry sauce
drizzled on top!

I sure hope you're getting the gist of these exercises. It's not about the 'quality' of your prose, it is about the doing. Like life, it's about exploring each step we take, finding gems and pearls in every overturned rock and beneath every leaf.

As this exercise demonstrates, when we see the perfection in everything, we find joy in small things, appreciating even those things about ourselves that sometimes, we'd like to pretend don't exist.

Loving what is, means seeing the beauty in all of us, the good, along with the things we judge as the bad and the indifferent or ugly.

Now it's your turn. Be bold. Be courageous. Be outrageous.

Write your 'under-love' poem here.



Practice 10: Love Bridges

But which is the stone that supports the bridge?

Kublai Khan

Love is all around. It supports us, fills us, completes us. Love is. And we are all supported by its ability to bridge hearts and minds and span the years of our lives with its beauty.

Imagine you are standing in the middle of a bridge that crosses a mighty river. Beneath you, the waters surge, rushing towards a distant unseen sea.

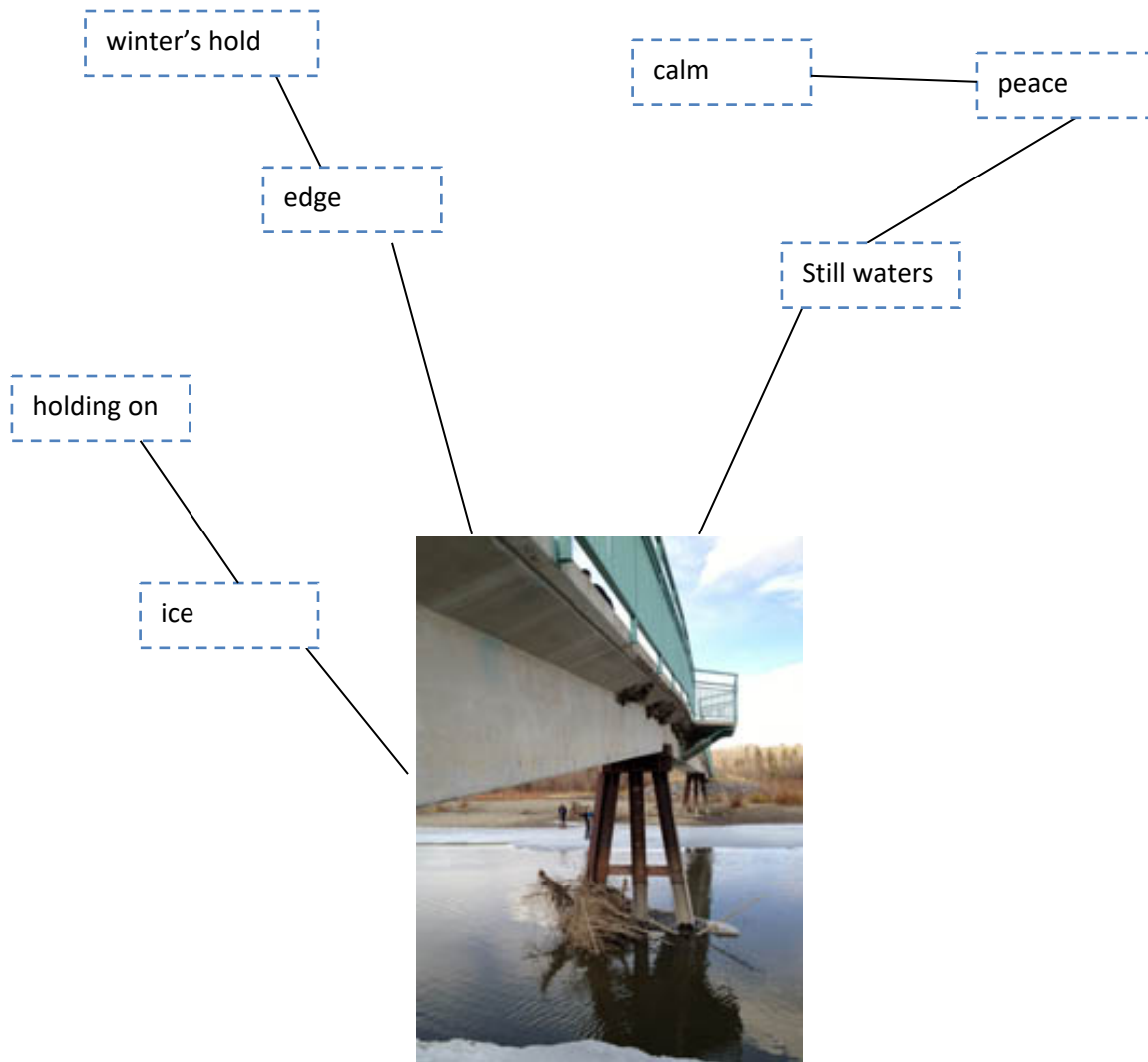
Imagine, flowing in the river is all the pain and sorrow, joy and jubilation you have ever experienced in your life. See how they all flow in the same direction. Notice how they all flow in the same waters. You can't tell the difference between what is a droplet of pain or joy. The waters flow together, with one purpose, to reach the freedom of open water.

Standing on the bridge, you know you are safe. Because no matter what is in the water below, you are supported by love.

In this exercise, we're going to write a poem about love using the bridge as a metaphor for love.

We'll begin with a mindmap but first, find a photograph of a bridge you really like and use it as your focal/unifying theme. If you don't have a photograph of your own, find one in a magazine, or go online and download one. Cut it out and paste it in the middle of your page, then, mindmap away!

On the next page, I share an example of a mindmap I began using a photograph I took of a bridge on one of my walks with my dog.



This is a beginning of a poem I've started using the mindmap:

At the edge of the water
 winter holds on
 wanting to linger
 just awhile longer
 I stand and feel the water's pull
 calling me to let go...

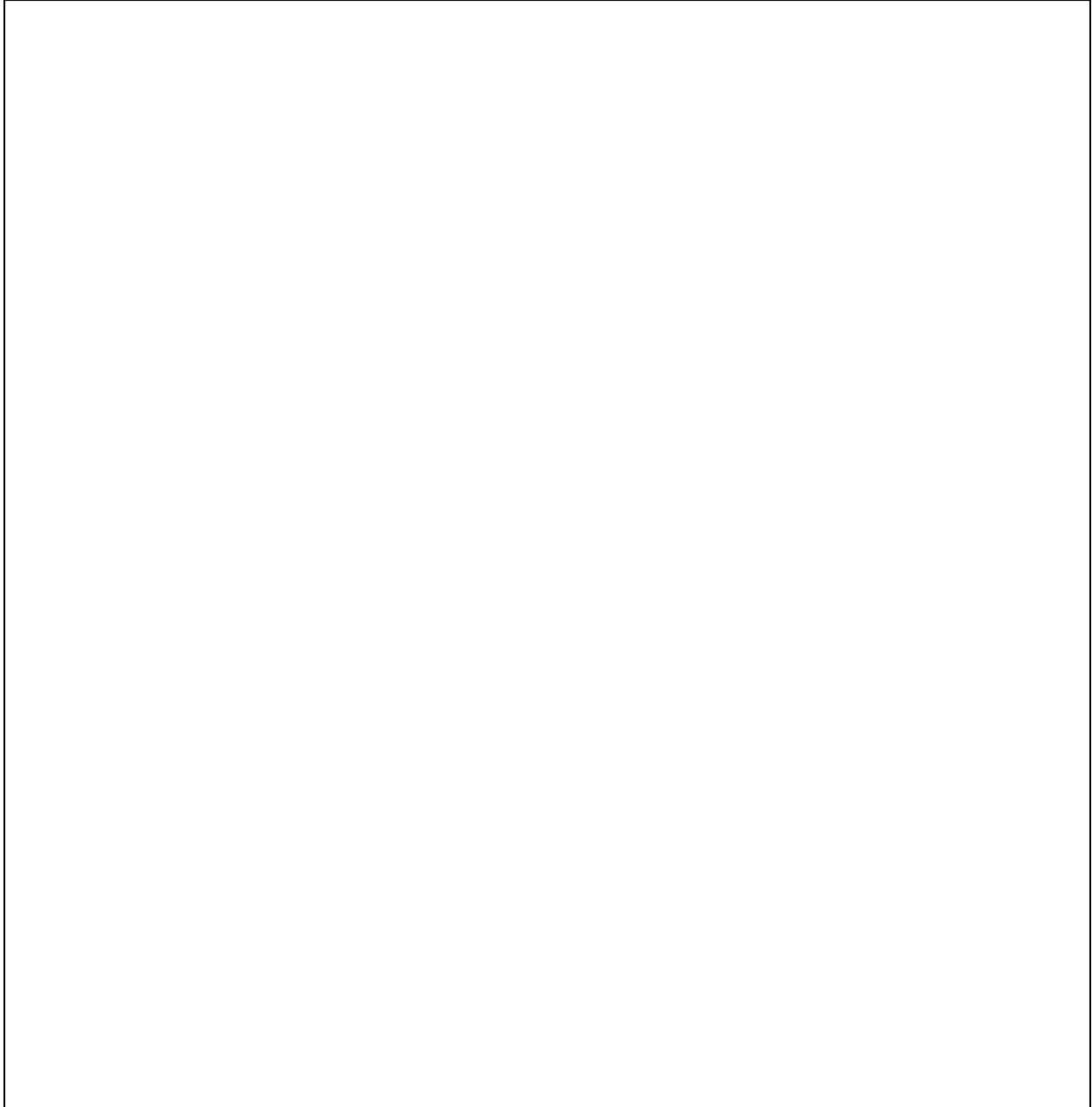
With additional mindmapping, I'd easily be able to finish this poem. See how the metaphor of the ice holding onto the shore moves me naturally into the idea of the need to let go of pain. Continuing on, the poem could be about the need to let go of the past and fall in Love today with life flowing all around me.

Now it's your turn.

Create a mindmap using a bridge as your focal/unifying thought.

And then, write a poem about your feelings, observations, shifts through seeing the bridge as a metaphor for Love.

Create your mindmap and poem here:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for students to create a mindmap and write a poem. The box is currently blank.

Practice 11: Love Walks

In nature, nothing is perfect and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they're still beautiful.

Alice Walker

Enough of sitting at your desk inside while the world is out there waiting to be explored.

In this Practice, we're going to find our inspiration for a poem in our environment. No matter where we live, or walk, the world has lots to offer us to fall in love with. And today, we're going to use falling in love with the world around us as the basis for our exploration.

To begin, put on a comfortable pair of shoes, dress for the weather, and if you have one, take your camera and go capture sights of the world all over. (I always carry my iPhone. It takes great pictures and is small enough to fit in any pocket.) And by all means, if you have a dog, do take them along. My Sheepadoodle, Beaumont, is my ever-faithful walking companion and is quite accustomed to frequent stops along our walks. He actually appreciates the stop and go walks because it gives him more time to sniff away!

This is meant to be an intentional walk. As you move about the world outside, notice the colors, textures, patterns and connections of what is around you.

Look at the leaves on branches. Are they budding? Are they all leafed out? Are they starting to turn into autumn shades in preparation of their fall? Are they mostly needles on pine trees? Examine how they connect to the branch. Notice everything you can about the foliage around you as you walk.

Look at the path you're on. Is it a concrete sidewalk? Are there cracks? Do you remember the childhood rhyme – *Step on a crack, break your mother's back*. See if you can walk without stepping on any cracks.

What lines your path? Is it edged by manicured lawns? Buildings. Wildflowers. Blowing grasses. Trees. Shrubs. Notice the colors, textures and patterns all around.

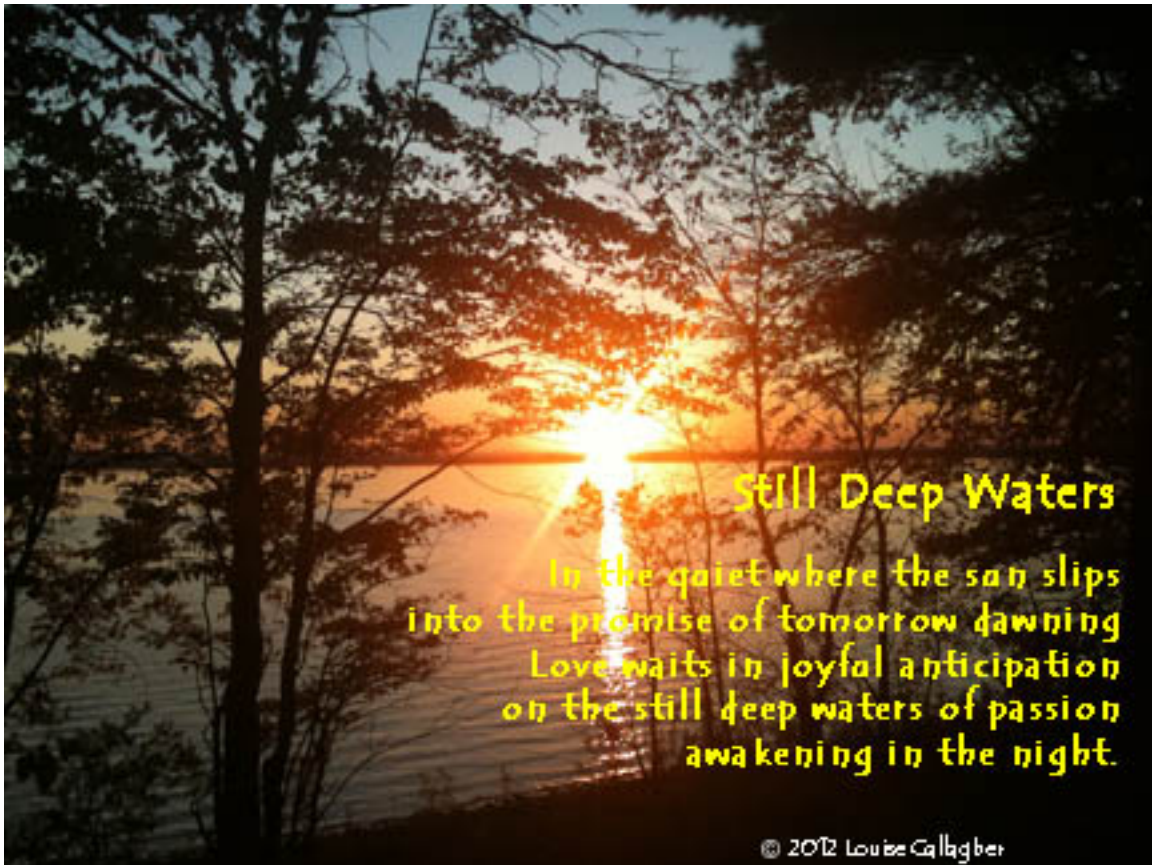
Take lots of photos.

And, when you come back home to your writing corner, pick one photo and write a poem about what you see, feel, experience. See if you can link it to love, being loving, a world of love. See if you can find a metaphor for love in your photo.

On the next page, I share an example of a photo I took of a sunset and the poem it inspired about Love.

Still Deep Waters

©2012 Louise Gallagher



Now it's your turn.

Be bold. Be brave. Get inspired by the world around you as you walk through your environment noticing what is happening, the patterns, connections and moments that speak softly to your heart, calling you into the creative core of your being. Let yourself express what you see by creating a poem of the beauty all around you.



Practice 12: Love Flows

The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.

Elie Wiesel

I love the edge of winter giving into spring. Here on the prairies where I live, the first signs of spring are often seen on the waterways. Ice begins to thin, water seeps onto the surface from the depths below breaking up the ice floes from the inside out towards the shore. It is a process of renewal, of release, of breaking free.

Like my heart, where once, I feared love, feared loving and being loved because my experiences had taught me a lie I believed to be true. And that lie was – Love Hurts.

The opposite of that lie is the truth – Love Flows. Everywhere and always. There is no space between where I am and where Love flows. There is no separation between who I am and where Love becomes me or another or another.

In that truth, I accept, it is not love that hurts me. It is people hurting one another that causes the pain.

In this exercise, we will explore the elements that might be blocking the flow of love in your life.

1. Write about a time in your life when loving really hurt you. Be bold. Be brave. Be gentle with yourself. This isn't about feeling the pain, it's about looking at the events through eyes of love.

For example, I once loved a man who promised to love me 'til death do us part. He took the death part really, really seriously. In fact, so seriously, that my daughters and family and friends feared I was dead. And while through the course of that almost 5 year relationship, there were many moments when I truly did want to die, I was very, very grateful one May morning, when the police walked in and arrested him and set me free.

Write your story here: _____

2. Now that you've written a brief description of that hurting time, let's explore the lessons it taught you about your truth.

For example, I gave myself away in that relationship. I gave into his lies, even when I knew he was lying. What it taught me is that only I can stand up for my truth – and no one has the right to take away my dignity, self-respect, my life. But, it can happen when I don't stand up for what I believe in. When I met that man I believed in fairytales and knights in shining armor. Truth is, no one can give me happiness. I am responsible for my own happiness. I am accountable for me. In fact, I am 100% accountable for everything that happens in my life.

Now it's your turn: _____

3. Having created awareness and understanding from those events, let's explore what might have been the blockages. I'll start with what I see as blockages to the flow of love in my life when I met that man.

*For example, When I met him, I really was looking for a knight in shining armor. My life was good, but I really, really wanted a 'perfect love'. He used to tell me that I was perfect, just the way I was. I wanted to believe him and in reality – what he said about me was true. I was vivacious. Intelligent. Creative. Caring. But, I wanted his words to give me my truth – rather than believing it myself. In my disbelief of my beauty, I relied upon him to tell me my worth. Eventually, when the relationship got really bad, his words turned cruel and vicious and because I had relied on him to tell me who I was, I believed the bad things he told me I was. *The blockage was:* Lack of believing in me. A deep-seated disbelief in my worthiness.*

Your turn: _____

- Using your realization of the blockages that might have inhibited love's flow in your life, write a poem that speaks to your truth. As you are speaking to and for your truth, the poem is always in the positive, and present tense. This poem is a love poem to you about who you are and your worth, or whatever your word is, that you represent in the world.

My example of a poem, using the blockage "disbelief in my worthiness" is:

I Am Worthy!

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I am worthy
yes I am
of loving and living and being free
carefree and light
shining so bright
for all to see Me being Me.

I am worthy
yes I am
of doing everything I can
of living life on the wild side
of every day unfolding
in the wonder of being me.

I am worthy
Oh Yes I Am!

Do you feel it? The energy in the poem. The desire to get up and dance and swirl about and laugh and leap for joy?

Go ahead. Write a poem to yourself about who you truly are! Live it up! Be wild and bold and free!

Practice 13: Love Rocks

Even a heart of stone can be warmed in loving hands.

Louise Gallagher, The Heart Rock

When my daughters were little girls I loved to make up fairytales for them. One such story I wrote for them was called, “The Heart Rock”. It’s a story about a little flaxen-haired girl with a heart of gold whose smile had the power to make flowers blossom and hearts melt in love. In the kingdom next to where she lived, there was a king with a heart of stone whose lands were dying. His peasants were sickly and the cattle weak. Believing that if he could own the little girl’s heart of gold he would have all the riches in the world, he ordered his minions to kidnap her. “Cut out her heart” he told his surgeon.

But the surgeon couldn’t do it. In the light of the young girl’s smile, his heart melted, and he let her escape with the promise to not leave the King’s land.

To the King’s surprise, not knowing the girl was wandering his lands, everything began to flourish. One day while out riding and surveying his lands which were suddenly verdant and rich with bounty, he met the young girl as she ministered to a sickly calf. In her loving hands the calf stood up and ran off to find its mother. The King was surprised. How did she do that?

He dismounted and approached the young girl. “Who are you?” he asked. And the young girl told him of being kidnapped and released by the surgeon who could not cut out her heart.

For a moment, a blinding fury raged through the king’s heart. He would have the surgeon beheaded. And as the black clouds of his anger passed through him, the young girl watched in confusion and consternation. Not at all frightened by his ill-temper, she reached out and touched the king’s hand and smiled so softly and sweetly at him. “It’s okay,” she said. “I like living here. The people are so warm and loving and kind. What would make it perfect would be to have my family here too.”

The king stared at her in consternation. What? She was not frightened of his anger? And then he felt her smile touch his heart, saw the light in her eyes and felt the warmth of her hand against his skin.

And his heart melted.

He didn’t have her captured again. Nor did he cut off the surgeon’s head. In fact, overcome with feelings of love he’d never experienced before, he held a feast in honor of the little girl and her golden heart and even named a school after her. Which was extraordinary because in the past he’d never allowed schools in his kingdom because he didn’t see the need to teach his peasants anything other than to scabble in the hard earth of the land, scratching what living they could eke out from their labor.

Her family came to the feast and the king set aside land just for them and everyone lived happily ever after proving, that even a heart of stone can be warmed in loving hands.



This Practice is about getting outside again and exploring the world around you. Gear up, go for a walk and while you walk, look for heart shaped rocks on your path. They are everywhere. I have buckets of them in my garden, all collected from walks where ever I've been.

Pick one particularly appealing heart rock, hold it in your hand, rub your fingers along it, feel its smoothness, or ridges, or textures, whatever it holds for you to explore. Hold it tightly in your hand, let the warmth of your body warm the cold surface of the rock.

See how little time it takes to warm a heart rock? Now, pass it along. Let your warmth be shared with someone else. If you live alone, go visit a neighbor you've never met, or make a coffee date with a friend and pass your heart rock along, letting the warmth of your body be carried to theirs. And tell them as you pass them the rock, that 'even hearts of stone can be warmed in loving hands.' and I am warming your heart with my gratitude for your friendship, or whatever words feel appropriate to you.

And when you've passed your heart rock along, write a poem about the experience.

I once shared one of my heart rocks with a friend who was going in for surgery to receive radiation therapy for a cancerous lump on her throat. Here's the poem I wrote using a photo of an alabaster heart my beloved gave me along with a blue glass heart and shell – I liked the composition.



Create your Heart Rock poem here:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a poem. It occupies the central portion of the page.

Practice 14: All you need is Love.

In real love you want the other person's good. In romantic love, you want the other person.

Margaret Anderson

We've done lots of exploring of what love means to you, what you know about love and how love has affected your worldview.

It's time to dig into what it is that makes love so exciting, special, amazing and why, all you need is love!

Let's start with a simple exercise to stretch your creative muscles.

1. In your journal, list five people you 'Love'. (You can write more)

2. Beside each name, write one aspect of that person's personality/being, you love.

NAME	What I love about...
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

3. Write a short poem for each person using the word you used to describe them.

4. Here's your opportunity to reach out. Be brave. Send them a card with your poem in it. Or, send them your poem in an email. To make your poem visually beautiful, go for a walk, take lots of photos and use them as the backdrop for each poem.

In the act of creating, love is engaged and in its engagement, it is expressed not just through your words and the visual presentation of your words, but also through the time and energy and effort you put into its expression.

As you express love, it deepens within you and all around you, creating a sense of well-being and joy within your heart that ripples out into the world, where ever you are. The beauty of sharing your words, ideas, visual images and feelings allows others to enter your heart. It creates an opening for intimacy to deepen. In your vulnerability, you inspire others to open their hearts as well.

And in that place of opening, love blooms.



Practice 15: Love is a Compassionate Heart

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

Dalai Lama XIV, The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living

Imagine you are sitting in a doctor’s waiting room. Around you, people sit waiting their turn, reading magazines, staring into space. Some, cough. Some, are bent over as if pain is riddling their body. You too are not feeling well. You too are eager to see the doctor to have your pain reduced.

And you wait. Your turn many people from now.

You are impatient. Feeling out of sorts.

Expressing love, feeling love is definitely not at the top of your agenda and yet, in those moments of waiting, of judging others for how they wait, how they cough, how they sit staring vacantly into some unseen distance their socks mismatched, the knees of their pants worn, we are being given opportunities to awaken to compassion in our hearts.

In our awakening to compassion, our spirits soar, our creative essence flows and we become connected to all that is greater, all that is magnificent in our human condition.

In this Practice we will practice compassion, using its expression as the foundation of our poetry.

1. Pick a busy waiting area – airport, coffee shop, doctor’s office, someplace where being there is natural for you.

2. Sit in the waiting area, and one by one, look at the individuals around you and to yourself say,

Just like me, they struggle to understand Love.

Just like me, they desire to love and be loved.

Just like me, they have been hurt in love.

Just like me, they have hurt others in the name of love.

Just like me, they are on the journey of their lifetimes and sometimes they wonder, where is the love?

3. Do this exercise throughout the day whenever you are around strangers. Note how it feels in your heart. Note any shifts in your compassion, your understanding of what others are experiencing. Notice if you are feeling less impatient, less judgmental. Notice if your heart feels softer. *P.S. Repeat often! Do every day. Help compassion grow.*

4. Write a poem about one or two of the people you did this exercise with during your day.

Here's an example of a poem I wrote one day while I did this exercise at a coffee shop.

Waiting for a Starbucks

©2012 Louise Gallagher

The man in the blue jacket
shifts from leg to leg
as if he cannot find the time
to be still in this place
we stand together
and yet apart
I smile at him
he smiles shyly back
and quickly looks away
as if to look for the other
I might be smiling at
his heart beats
just like mine
his blood flows
just like mine
we breathe
the same air
we walk
the same earth
he is just like me
as we wait
searching for connection
in the line-up
waiting for a Starbucks coffee

Now it's your turn:

Practice 16: Love is Generous

It's quite an undertaking to start loving somebody. You have to have energy, generosity, blindness. There is even a moment right at the start where you have to jump across an abyss: if you think about it you don't do it.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

Love is a dish best savored with another. Sometimes, that 'other' is yourself.

How generous are you in sharing your love with you?

In this Practice we explore your inner gratitude and look at loving ways to express it within, so that it shines all around you.

To begin, let's explore your attitude around being generous with yourself. In your notebook, or in the space provided below, answer the following questions. *Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, there is only your voice getting clear within yourself:*

1. What am I feeling about writing about myself and my attitude towards 'me'? Some words to ponder are – comfortable, uncomfortable, nervous, anxious, awkward, happy, satisfied, suspicious...

2. Beginning with the phrase, "I am" write a list of ten things about yourself for which you are grateful. i.e. I am... Creative. Funny. Smart. Kind. Truthful. Trusting.

1. _____	6. _____
2. _____	7. _____
3. _____	8. _____
4. _____	9. _____
5. _____	10. _____

3. Write a poem of 10 lines beginning each line with the phrase, "I am thankful for..." where each line contains one of the characteristics you've listed about yourself for which you are grateful. To begin, write each word on a slip of paper and put it into a bowl. Pull one word at a time, and in the order you drew them out of the bowl, write a line for each. For example, if I pulled the words I suggested above out in the order of, 1. Graceful. 2. Smart. 3. Creative. 4. Trusting. 5. Kind. 6. Truthful, I could write my poem as follows:

I am thankful for the fact no matter how awkward the situation, **grace** comes in to support me
I am thankful I know the difference between being **smart** and acting stupid isn't about who I am, but what I do
I am thankful for feeling free to express my **creativity** in many different ways
I am thankful I have learned to **trust** in the process of creating because I know when I trust the muse I can never go astray
I am thankful for the **kindness** that rests easily in my heart
I am thankful I trust myself to speak my **truth** in love knowing in love, my truth is always accepted.

Now you try it! And don't forget, you can adapt the context of the word as I did to fit your writing (*kind* in my list is *kindness* in my poem)

As you did in Practice 7, the poem you write to yourself must be positive, affirming and above all, loving. Be generous with yourself, you are expressing your gratitude for who you are and when you express your gratitude, your heart opens up wide to Love's presence.

Write your ten-line poem here or in your journal:

Practice 17: Love is the answer.

If love is the answer, what is the question?

Uta West

Life is filled with complex questions demanding complex answers.

But what if it was really very simple. What if the answer to every question is, Love?

How do we stop war? Love one another.

How do we create peace. Hold each other with loving arms not arms of war.

How do you stop over-eating? Love yourself.

How do we stop hurting one another? Love one another.

How do you stop drinking too much, doing drugs, lying, cheating, stealing? Love yourself, your life and everyone in it.

It's true, love won't solve the question of what are fractals, or how does the atom split, but Love will answer the questions most pressing to our world. Those questions that will create a world of peace, of joy, of harmony. It is impossible to kill someone from a place of Love. It is impossible for anger to drive you to hurting yourself when you stand in Love.

When I came out of an abusive relationship I told my daughters that what had happened to me had nothing to do with my love for them. It had everything to do with my lack of love for myself.

And so I set out to love myself, completely. Shadow and light. Pain and joy. Ups and downs. Ins and outs. In loving myself completely the way I am, I have found my answers to what is important to me, what makes my life worth celebrating, what gives my life meaning. Love.

In this Practice we will explore what can happen when you embrace Love as the answer.

1. Write a list of three aspects/things in your life you'd like to change about someone else in your life today. i.e. I'd like my husband/wife/significant other to express more love. I'd like my daughter to quit talking back. I'd like my son to tell me what's happening in his life.

2. Write three things about each of these individuals about what you really appreciate about them.

3. Write a poem for each of these individuals expressing what you really appreciate about them.

4. Do this for 7 seven days in a row.

5. Watch the miracles grow.

You might have noticed two things in this exercise. One, at the foundation of feeling love is a sense of gratitude. And, two, expressing your gratitude and love is so much better than focusing on what you'd like to change.

When we tell another the things that annoy us about their behavior, or even just think about another in negative terms, we limit the expression of love in our lives and relationships. It's not that we don't love our partners, or our children, or others, it is that our focus is limiting Love's ability to move in and expand the connections between us.

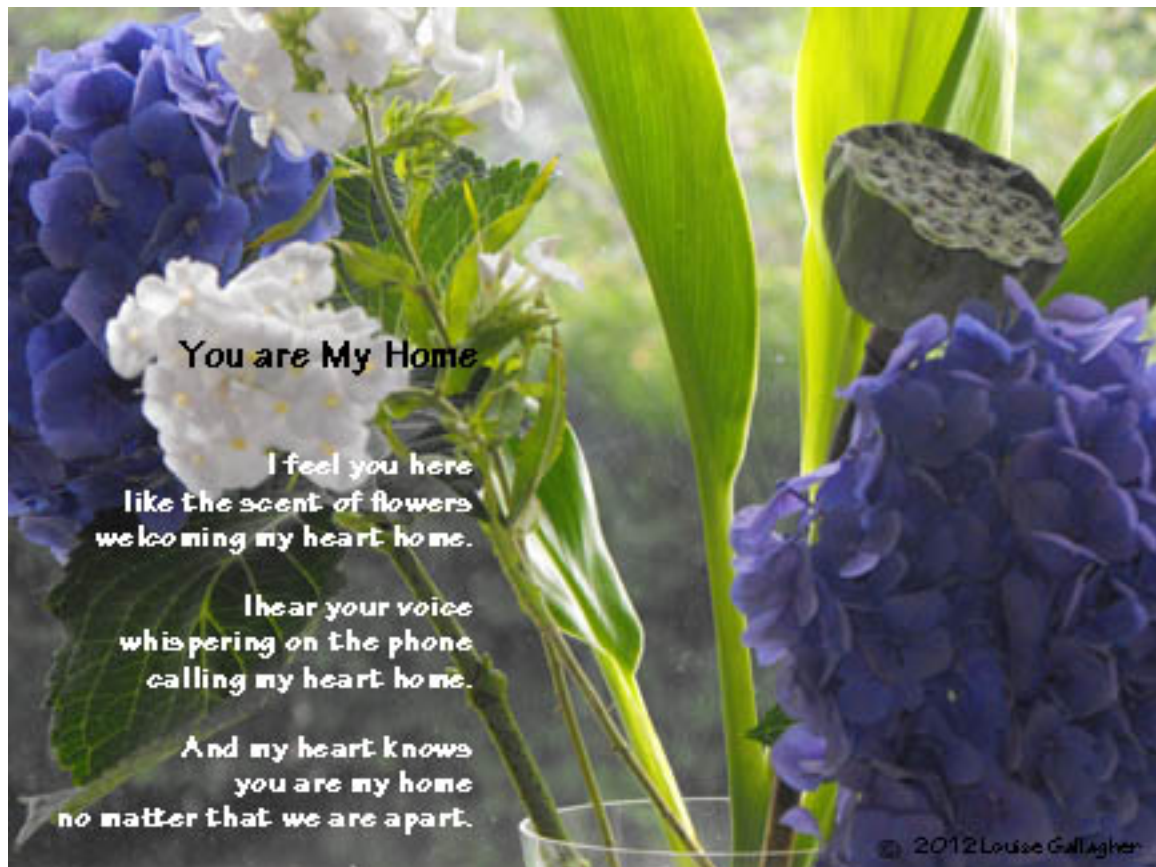
What we put our focus on grows stronger in our lives.

BONUS WRITING PRACTICE:

Make a commitment for the next seven days, to write a poem a day to someone you love. It could be yourself, or your significant other, a child, or a sibling or parent.

Each day, write your poem (it doesn't have to be long) and create a work of art that you can send to them, either in the mail, hand deliver or via email.

As an example, here's one I sent to my beloved. The photograph is one I took of flowers on my desk. We had been living apart, in separate cities, and I wanted him to feel my love across the distance.



Practice 18: Love is Courageous

If you cannot be the poet, be the poem.

David Carradine

In Jean-Paul Sartre's one act play, "No Exit" four people are locked in a room consisting of four walls, floor, ceiling, no windows, and only one door that is locked as soon as they enter. At first, they want out, but no one heeds their calls and they are left with only each other to fight with, talk to, argue with. Eventually, one of the characters realizes he does not have to stay and demands exit. Immediately, the door is unlocked. He leaves but the other three refuse to move beyond the confines of the space within which they have become comfortable. Trapped within the status quo of their lives in this 'living hell' of a room, they lack the courage to move beyond its boundaries and are doomed to live forever in hell.

Consider your journey through this course. When you began, were you nervous, resistant, hesitant to step beyond the status quo of 'not writing poetry', or simply not having time to write it, or no perceived need to do it?

Did you, with each Practice, find yourself becoming more willing, and able, to let go of your pre-conceived limitations of your writing abilities, your capacity to 'stay the course'? In those steps, you demonstrated courage. You actively engaged in doing something different to discover new truths, new ideas, new freedom in your world view of yourself. And all you had to do was to ask yourself for permission to step beyond the confines of your comfort zone. All you needed was the courage to explore another way of being in relationship with the world around you.

In this Practice we will explore how courage underpins everything new you do in your life, including writing poetry.

The modern day word, "Courage" is derived from Middle English denoting the seat of the heart, as relating to our feelings.

At the seat of your heart is a fountain of courage that continues to flow, even when you feel you're stuck in fear. Tapping into this renewable and vital resource is easy. All it takes is a deep, deep breath and a desire to expand, not contract, your being and the willingness to step out, step into, step through your fear. You may still feel the fear, but as Susan Jeffries encourages us in her book, **Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway**, what is most important is that we take action, regardless, or even because of, our fear. "Whenever we take a chance and enter unfamiliar territory or put ourselves into the world in a new way, we feel fear. Very often this fear keeps us from moving ahead with our lives.... so many of us short-circuit our living by choosing the path that is most comfortable." p. 6.

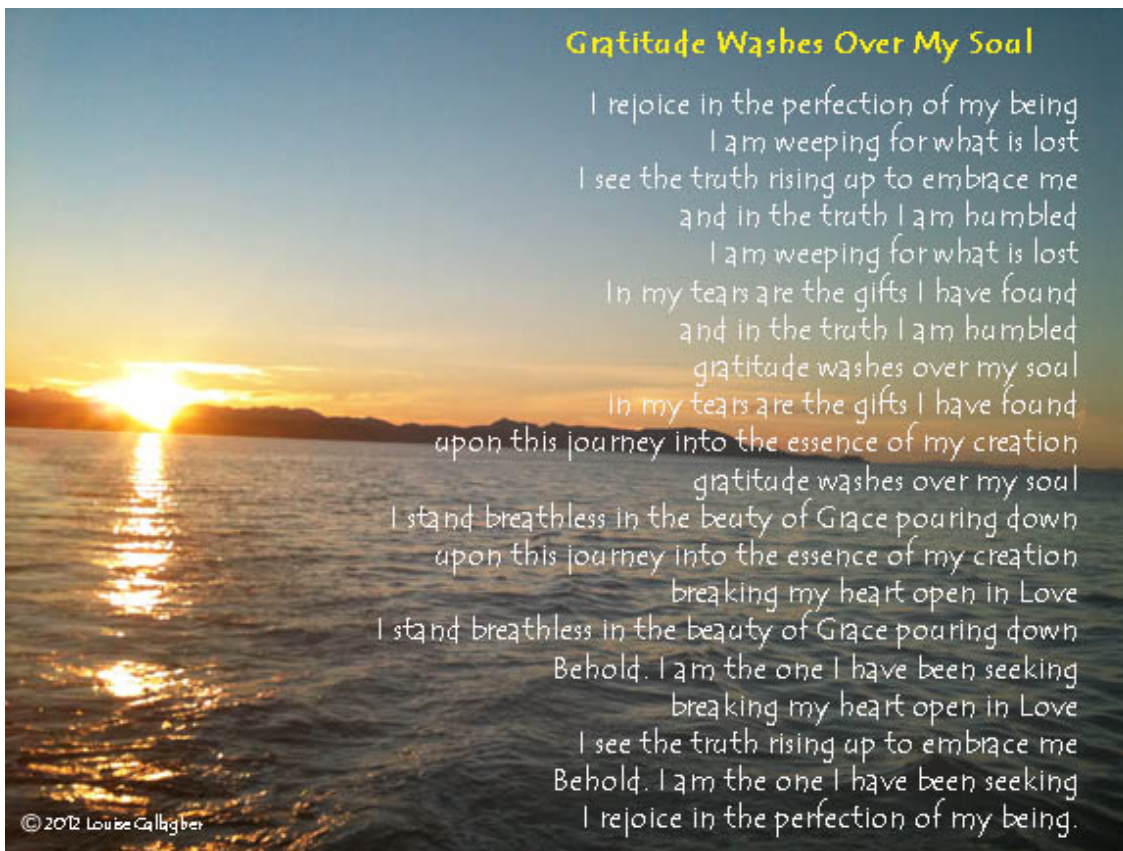
Whenever we take action we teach our bodies, and our minds, that we are capable of more than we imagined. We are capable of moving through fear into courage. Always.

Think about the poems you've written. Are you not in awe of your courage? Your ability to express yourself in an art form you never before imagined you would ever experience? And, if you let go of the critic, are you not impressed with your words? Are you not amazed by your ability to Right Your Heart Out? If you didn't answer a loud and resounding YES! go back, breathe deeply and step beyond the comfort zone of allowing your critic to dictate how you celebrate yourself. Go on. Say it. YES!

The invitation in this exercise is to flex your creative muscles through engaging in writing your heart out using a more formal, and investigative form of poetry. The form of poetry we will explore is called the "Pantoum". As explained at New Poets Press:

"The **pantoum** is a Malay form. It is written in couplets and repeats whole lines in an interlocking pattern. The second and fourth lines of any stanza become the first and third lines of the stanza that follows. In the **pantoum's** last stanza, the first and third lines of the opening are finally repeated as the fourth and second lines. The order of those lines can be reversed, but an ideal **pantoum** will end with the poem's opening line - creating a kind of circle." (<http://www.newpoetspress.com/pantoum.html>)

When I first encountered the Malay Pantoum in an online course, I didn't want to try it. It seemed too contrived and complicated. I hesitated and avoided it. And then, one day I decided to try it and was amazed by how much I learned and how deeply and quickly it lead me into insights about myself and my way of being in the world. Here is an example of a poem I wrote in the Malay Pantoum form.



This Malay Pantoum is a poem made up of 20 lines. Some lines have specific prompts to create guiding you into the line of poetry, other lines have instructions to repeat a previous line. Experiment with it and you'll be amazed by what emerges!

- Line**
1. Start with "I.. (connect with an essential word – what are you feeling, experiencing?)
 2. Start with "I.. (where are you)
 3. Start with "I.. (what do you see)
 4. What happens?
 5. Repeat line 2
 6. Write an emotional reaction to former sentence
 7. Repeat line 4
 8. Write a reaction to line 7
 9. Repeat line 6
 10. Write an emotional reaction to the former sentence
 11. Repeat line 8
 12. Write a reaction, a comment on the former sentence
 13. Repeat line 10
 14. Write an emotional reaction on the former sentence
 15. Repeat line 12
 16. Write a reaction, a comment on the former sentence
 17. Repeat line 14
 18. Repeat line 3
 19. Repeat line 16
 20. Repeat line 1

(reference: *Soul of a Pilgrim Online Retreat. Abbey of the Arts* (www.abbeyofthearts.com))

Writing in this style might appeal daunting. That's when courage comes in. It takes courage to try something new, or different. It takes courage to stay the course, to experiment, to give yourself permission to write bad, or not know, or simply to learn something new.

Can you, better yet, are you willing to, let your courage call you up into a new art form, a new way of expressing yourself?

Give yourself a chance. Go for a walk. As you walk, ask yourself the question:

What do I fear?

When you return to your journal, contemplate your journey and write about your experience using the format for the Malay Pantoum to guide you.

On the next page is the Malay Pantoum I wrote in response to the question: *What do I fear?*

Breathing Deeply, I Soar

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I breathe deeply into my fear where possibility expands into infinity
I edge up against the playing field of the unknown
I see resistance calling me back from the edge
Go back it cries. You are not safe here. I yearn to heed its warnings.

I edge up against the playing field of the unknown
Into that nothing place where yearning to break free awakens within me
Go back it cries. You are not safe here. I yearn to heed its warnings.
I open my eyes and hear my soul's cry for spirit to flood my heart with light
Into that nothing place where yearning to break free awakens within me.

I seesaw between my desire for perfection and the confusion of hopeless despair
I open my eyes and hear my soul's cry for spirit to flood my heart with light
And the calling of the unknown path opens upon a starburst field sparkling all around me
I seesaw between my desire for perfection and the confusion of hopeless despair
Opening my arms I release myself into the void of nothing but the promise of possibility.

And the calling of the unknown path opens upon a starburst field sparkling all around me
Laughing wildly, I release gravity's hold upon my dreams
Opening my arms I release myself into the void of nothing but the promise of possibility
I see resistance calling me back from the edge

Laughing wildly, I release gravity's hold upon my dreams.
I breathe deeply into my fear where possibility expands into infinity.



Your turn! Write your Malay Pantoum here. I've inserted the lines in brackets that need to be repeated.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. (2) _____
6. _____
7. (4) _____
8. _____
9. (6) _____
10. _____
11. (8) _____
12. _____
13. (10) _____
14. _____
15. (12) _____
16. _____
17. (14) _____
18. (3) _____
19. (16) _____
20. (1) _____

Practice 19: Love is Forgiving

There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love.

Bryant H. McGill

When we hold onto the pains and sorrows of the past, we are choosing to suffer. In our suffering we remain victims of the people and events that caused us pain.

Who among us can say they have never blamed, or condemned another for something they have done either to us personally, to someone we love, or someone somewhere in the world?

Anger is a magnetic force in our world. To counteract it we need a force of equal, if not greater, power. Forgiveness is that magnetic force that provides a radical and compelling path away from blame, shame and anger. Forgiveness leads us away from living as victims to the past to living freely in this moment now, in awe of who we are. In this moment, we are enough.

In Practice 5: Love Limits, you wrote a Forgiveness Poem. In this Practice you the invitation is to write poems to people you need/want to forgive in order to set yourself free from holding onto what happened in the past, a past you cannot change or alter. All you can do with the past is accept what was, and let go of any limits it places on your joyful and complete experience of today.

Remember, as you do these exercises, there is no judgment of your journey, of what you're holding onto, or willing to let go of, or not. This is about experiencing where you are at, right now, and celebrating each step along the way to falling into love with yourself completely. These poems are for your eyes only, unless you choose otherwise. There is no measure of success. There is no right or wrong way to answer the questions or write your poems. There is only your way. Your process. Your happiness to consider.

1. Take a deep breath and sink into that quiet space where you are completely relaxed. Breathe deeply. In. Out. In. Out. Let your mind wander back in time, to however far back you feel comfortable going. Think about a situation where you felt hurt by another's actions. Breathe deeply. Let your mind float just high enough above those events that you don't feel angry or anxious about them. Let yourself look serenely over those events, see the person, name the feeling, name what it is you felt they did to wrong you or harm you. Slowly come back to the presence of where you're sitting right now.

NOTE: In this exercise it's important to only think about one situation, one person at a time. Lumping everyone together, clumping all your hurts into one big session can be overwhelming and is not recommended. In fact, it is highly discouraged. Being gentle with yourself is an act of love. You deserve your tender loving care.

2. In your journal, or in the space provided below, write the person's name and a very brief description of what he/she/they did to harm you.

As an example, the man who promised to love me 'til death do us part, and then got busy about making the death part come true is on my list of people who harmed me in some way in my life. Here's what I wrote about him and those events.

"Conrad, you lied to me. You deceived me and cheated me. Because of you I lost everything I owned, including my self-respect, my friends and most devastating of all, my relationship with my daughters. You hurt me and those I love."

And, when I finish the paragraph, I end it with my blessing: *Bless him. Forgive me.* The blessing isn't for anything specific, or a judgment of something I've 'done wrong' or a wrong I've experienced. It is a simple statement that sets me free.

Note how short and to the point my paragraph is. It isn't about reliving every dastardly deed the person did. It's about acknowledging the pain I experienced in a clear, to the point way, leaving off the drama and expletives I might feel compelled to use.

Your turn. Write your descriptive paragraph of where you are in 'unforgiveness' of this person/situation. And don't forget to end it by writing down your blessing,

Bless him/her/them. Forgive me.

3. In the space provided, or in your journal, write a paragraph on why forgiving the individual/situation is important for you. This isn't about why you can't, don't want to or are unwilling to forgive. The focus is on what value forgiveness could give you if you allow forgiveness into your heart. It's about looking at how forgiveness can enhance and enrich your life.

For example, in the case of Conrad above, I wrote:

"Forgiving you means I won't have to carry anger any more. It means I won't have to waste my precious breath thinking about you, or giving you energy in my thoughts. Forgiving you means you won't be living rent-free in my mind. You won't be trespassing in my thinking anymore! Forgiving you will improve my well-being because it will mean I can focus on taking care of me, loving me, healing me, and living my life without you as part of my world today. *Bless him. Forgive me.*"

Now you try it. Be honest with yourself. Dig deep and really see what gifts forgiveness could give you. And don't forget your blessing: *Bless him/her/them. Forgive me.*

4. Breathe deeply again, in, out. Go back into that quiet, peaceful place within you and let yourself imagine forgiving this person based on what you wrote were the benefits of forgiveness. Imagine living in that space every day. Imagine being free of carrying around thoughts of them with every breath. Imagine not having your mind cluttered up with angry thoughts of how they hurt you. Imagine the freedom. The joy. The expansiveness of your life when you let go of holding onto the past.

Come back into the presence of where you're at. Take a deep, cleansing breath. Smile. Seriously. Smile. Big. Smile again. Keep smiling and go for a walk or make yourself a cup of tea, sit in your favorite arm chair and relax. Just be content within yourself, holding this space where forgiveness is possible as the only place you want to be in this moment.

5. Now that you've taken some time to live in forgiveness, it's time to write a poem about what forgiveness looks like in this situation.

I'll share the one I wrote that helped me stay centered in forgiveness, even in those moments when I truly didn't want to forgive him – I mean really... *why should I? He hurt me and those I love. What he did was wrong!* The answer is simple – because I deserve more than he ever could or would have given me. I deserve to live my life in love.

When I Forgive

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When I forgive you it's because I want more
then you stopping my dreams
to live my life
just the way I want because I deserve to.
Freed of anger, shame and blame
I let you go
because I know
what you did was never mine to own.

Without the sadness of what happened then
cluttering my mind and world around me
I am open to accept
the love and beauty and joy all around me.
Without holding onto thoughts of you
I am free
to live my life
in the wonder, joy and love I deserve.

I forgive you
and set myself free.

Now, before you go off and write your own, I want to share what a blessing and relief it is to write that poem, to know and see and embrace the truth – forgiveness has nothing to do with him and everything to do with me and how I want to live my life and how I want to be in the world. To be open to ‘new’ I have to let go of the old. In setting myself free, I soar.

Setting myself free, I soar.

Ready? Go for it. Be bold. Be brave. Be loving of yourself.

And remember, it’s not about the quality of the words you write, it’s all about having the courage to **Right Your Heart Out!**

This is an exercise that deepens with repetition. When I wrote the poem I shared, it had been awhile since I wrote a forgiveness poem about those days when I was so lost. And while I don’t often think of him, pockets of ‘unforgiveness’ surface every now and then. My beloved might say or do something that inadvertently triggers a memory of ‘back then’. In my response are the trigger points that need forgiving. That’s when writing a Forgiveness Poem becomes a healing and active way to engage in living my life in Love, experiencing all the joy and wonder of this moment right now.

You may have several people you want to forgive. Do the exercise for each of them. Weeks, months down the road, you may want to revisit the situation and re-do the exercise. Love deepens as we wash away the sorrow and pain of holding onto things from the past we cannot change.

Everyone deserves to live their life fully alive and engaged in the wonder and beauty of now. Writing a forgiveness poem creates space for grace to enter your heart and wash away your sorrow with Love.

Be gentle with yourself. Be loving. Be the one you’ve always wanted to love.

Practice 20: Dare to Love

Dare to Be by Steve Marabli

When a new day begins, dare to smile gratefully.
When there is darkness, dare to be the first to shine a light.
When there is injustice, dare to be the first to condemn it.
When something seems difficult, dare to do it anyway.
When life seems to beat you down, dare to fight back.
When there seems to be no hope, dare to find some.
When you're feeling tired, dare to keep going.
When times are tough, dare to be tougher.
When love hurts you, dare to love again.
When someone is hurting, dare to help them heal.
When another is lost, dare to help them find the way.
When a friend falls, dare to be the first to extend a hand.
When you cross paths with another, dare to make them smile.
When you feel great, dare to help someone else feel great too.
When the day has ended, dare to feel as you've done your best.
Dare to be the best you can –
At all times, Dare to be!"

– Steve Maraboli, *Life, the Truth, and Being Free*

When I was a little girl, my sister and I used to play *Truth or Dare*. "I dare you to hop around like a bunny for fifteen minutes." "I dare you to make a funny face at the person in the next car to us at a stoplight." "I dare you to hug the boy you said you liked in Grade 5."

It was the' hug the boy in Grade 5' that always got me. I liked a good dare but hug the boy...

I wasn't that brave.

Getting older has meant awakening to my brave-heart pounding out the beat of life within me. To acknowledging, I am brave enough to hug the boy because I have a brave-heart and I am willing, eager and able to express it in Love. And in every aspect of my Life.

Because, ready or not... this is my one and only life and it's up to me to live it up!

Living it up means being brave enough to cry in sad movies. To dream of peace and to take action to create it in my world. And, it means being brave enough to love fearlessly, completely, totally giving myself up to Love because I know, nothing can take love away from me. Love is all there is.

Awakening to your brave-heart is a gift you give yourself by speaking up for love, about love and in Love.

Awakening to your brave-heart doesn't mean you get all mushy and weepy every time you see a couple holding hands, or watch people greeting one another at the Arrivals Gate of the airport. (And it's okay if you do!) Awakening to your brave-heart means treating yourself and the world around you with loving care. It means expressing your love, because you can, you want to and because Love is too big to hold onto all by yourself.

How do you awaken your brave-heart? You've already been doing that throughout this course. Every question you've answered, every poem you've written has been about connecting to your bravery within so that you can **Right Your Heart Out!**

And, just to prove it, in this exercise, you're going to celebrate your brave-heart by exploring all the ways you show the world just how brave you are.

You won't need a phone booth to change in and a red cape to whip into or a pair of winged-shoes and a fairy-wand. All you need is what you've shown all along – the willingness to turn up, however you are, and be present on the page with your words shining all around you.

All you need is your brave-heart that beats steadily within you, every moment of every day. So let's get started exploring even deeper what lives within you.

1. Make a list of at least five things you've done in the past month that required bravery. And yes, you can use taking this course as an act of bravery -- but doing the exercises in this course count as one item on your list, not many!

Get carried away, really show yourself just how amazing and brave you are by listing the things you've done. If you are having difficulty thinking of the things you do that require bravery, here are some examples: *Said hello to the man in the checkout line in front of me at the grocery store. Offered to give my son's class a talk on what I do at work. Asked for what I wanted at work.*

If your critter mind is telling you that you don't do anything that speaks of bravery, lovingly remind it that you deserve to honor your bravery and ask it to please back away. If it's too difficult to think of things you've done, write about things you'd like to be brave about. Like, asking the woman in the next office out for a date, or, asking your boss for the raise you deserve, or going back to school.

1 _____

6 _____

2 _____

7 _____

3 _____

8 _____

4 _____

5 _____

2. See how brave you are? Isn't that awesome! You are a super-hero and because you are, it's time to name your Super Hero self. My Super Hero self is called, "Super Radiant Louise". How I came up with my Super Hero name is based on the words I chose in Practice 3: Love Values.

Some of my love values are spontaneity, passion, and one of the phrases I use about how I'd like to be in the world, not just in love is, "Like the sunshine." To be these values, to live them every day, I need to be more "radiant". Bigger than fearless, larger than courageous, for me, radiant means I must not play small, think little, cop-out because I'm afraid or worried about what others think. And so, my Super Hero Self reminds me of how I want to be in the world.

To create your Super Hero name, read your answers in Practice 3. Let the words and phrases you wrote settle into your being, re-read your poem and ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do I want more of in my life? Focus on qualities/characteristics, not material things. i.e. Peace. Harmony. Laughter. Courage.
2. Mindmap on each quality/characteristic you've listed as something you want more of in your life.

i.e. My mindmap on the word Peace led to the following poem.

Tranquil Shores

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I step fearlessly
into the waters of life
letting love
radiate out
from the centre of my being
in harmony
with the world around me
calling up the song of joy
from deep within my soul
I am
in awe of the abundance of my world
as peace deepens
and I become
me
Vibrant. Alive. Radiant.
All that I am and more
in this world of wonder.

3. Write a poem in your journal, or in the space below, using your words as your guide.

4. Look through your poem, highlight a word or two that really resonate with you. (In my poem, radiate and radiant called to me.)
5. Answer the following question: What would I do in my life if I was more _____? (insert the word you highlighted.)

For example, when I answered the question, What would I do in my life if I was more radiant, I discovered that I would be fearless in getting out into the world and sharing my wisdom and knowledge of what it means to live in Love. The answer to this question was one of the impetuses for creating this course – as Super Radiant Louise – I fearlessly share my joy, my wisdom and my love.

What would I do in my life if I was more _____?

6. Answer the following: What am I willing to do to have more of what I want in my life?

7. Who do I need to be as a Super Hero Self to have more of what I want in my life?

I need to be _____

8. Claim your Super Hero Self:

I am _____

Say your Super Hero Self name out loud – 3 times. 10 times. Every day.

Dare to be outrageous. Dare to be your greatest self. Dare to be your Super Hero Self.

Because, in your daring, you are!



Practice 21: When in doubt, keep writing your heart out

Curving back on myself I begin again and again.

Bhagavad Ghita

We are nearing the end, which is the beginning again. For 21 practices we have journeyed together. Exploring those places where we know Love, see it, believe in it, embrace it. Deepening into those pockets deep within our soul we see ourselves in the mirror of our hearts as the vision of Love we truly are. Always and forever.

Whether you have worked through this material one day at a time, or one practice a week at a time, or however you have journeyed, you began. And in beginning, you have travelled into the heart of who you truly are in Love.

I hope that as you travelled you remembered, no matter where you found yourself, to *'always begin again'*. In beginning, you become both the start of something new and the ending of what was.

As you explored the depths of your beauty, and your Love, I hope you found the one you've always been looking for. For that One is you. Always was. Always will be.

No one can give you your heart. No one can give you happiness, or complete you. You already have your heart, your happiness, your completeness within you. In **Right Your Heart Out!** you have touched the depths of who you are when you are brave enough to move outside that space where you have held yourself in fear of believing the lie -- who you are is not enough.

You are. Enough.

Exactly the way you are.

As you continue on your journey of life, know that always, no matter where you are, there is a place deep within you where Love is.

And in Love, you are. Always. And forever. Love.

In our final Practice we come back to where we began, writing a love poem to ourselves. This time, instead of to the little girl or boy you once were, your poem will be to you, today. To the 'you' you are in all your beauty, wonder and delight.

Begin now, and no matter where you are, never give up, never give in to the voices that would have you believe you are not lovely. Never let go of the truth of who you are – a magnificent being of light, a poem of life, a miracle, pure magic.

Go ahead. You know how. **Right Your Heart Out!**

To deepen your practice, write a love poem to those you care about. To your husband, wife, partner, significant other, children, mother, father, aunt, uncle.

Practice writing a poem a day to someone you love – and don't forget to include you in your practice.

Keep writing your heart out. In those moments where self-doubt, fear, worry or any other emotion slithers up your spine, write your way into courage. Write about your bravery.

In those moments when the world is pounding at your door, asking you to get up or screaming at you to give up, Right Your Heart Out by writing in the voice of your Super Hero Self.

Write a poem now using your Super Hero Self's voice.

To get you started, here's mine:

Hey Louise!

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Hey Louise
it's me!
Your super freakin' hero self
Yeah, I'm talkin' to you
remember
you always wanted to be the sunshine
so wake up, get up
and SHINE
Bright.
You are sunshine for hungry eyes
and lonely hearts
You got the warmth of a gazillion lightbulbs
illuminating the path
for all to see
they are the One
they've been searching for.

You gotta know girl
you got what it takes
to be brilliant
a shining example
of living your life
in the fires of being
all you're meant to be
when you are
exactly
who you are because
you are
enough
just the way you are!
Shine bright girl, you got what it takes
and you know it!
Now show it!

Signed: *Your Super freakin' hero self – Super Radiant Louise!*

So this is it. Go for it!

Right Your Heart Out!

In the space below, or in your journal, write a love poem to yourself in the voice of your Super Hero Self. Don't hold back. This is not a time to play small, to feel insecure, or hide your light. This is your time to shine! Be bold. Be brave. Be your most amazing, incredible, magnificent self – because that's who you are. And always will be.

My Super Hero Self Love Poem:

Now celebrate.

That's a write. That's right.

Dance. Laugh. Sing. Clap your hands and spin about. You are done. Completed. Finished.

And you are at the beginning, all over again. Different this time. Changed. Moved. Shifted.

What is completed, begins again.

Always begin again.



Completed, I Begin Again

The greatest stories are those that resonate our beginnings and intuit our endings, our mysterious origins and our numinous destinies, and dissolve them both into one.

Ben Okri

You have reached the end, which is the beginning all over again.

I wondered what I would do once completed. How would I feel – even in writing the courseware, how would I respond to that final word? That final practice?

And I am reminded, Always begin again.

This is not the ending, but rather, the beginning again of your life, my life, our lives. Every day a ‘do over’, a recommence, a beginning of living this one wild and precious life in the rapture of now.

And so, to begin again, an invitation. A poem. To capture in words the feelings, ideas, desires for what life is, can be, and will be when we breathe deeply into the knowing – We are magnificent beings on this human journey of our lifetimes. We are all connected.

In this final chapter I give to you my words, my feelings, my dreams for what I see as possible.

A poem for you, from me.

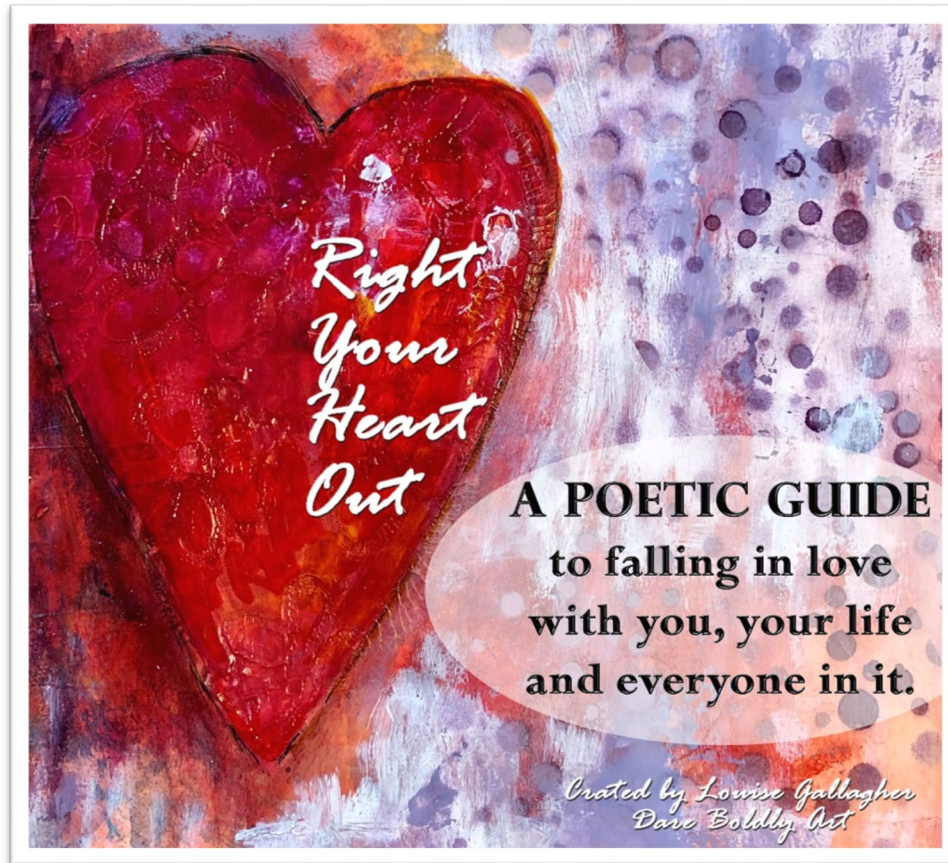
Beyond Boundaries

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I give you my words
plumped up
with fat vowels and skinny consonants,
edging up against
tumbling nouns and juicy verbs
flowing into outrageous adjectives
and complex adverbs shimmering
as they spell out
the magic and the wonder
of your heart
laid bare
against the backbone
of your dreams
awakening in Love.

Just for you, let me create
a world of words
opening up to one another
layering them
one upon the other
like water falling
into an ocean of beauty
spilling out all that you
and I
can be
in our words
breaking free
to live beyond the boundaries
of our imagination.

An Endnote



Thank you for sharing your gifts, your beauty and your heart. May your life be filled with Beauty and Love, forever and always.

I'd love to hear how **Right Your Heart Out!** has been for you. Please do email me and let me know what's happened for you or if you have questions, or ideas, or comments you'd like to share, I am welcoming of your voice being part of this story.

louise@louisegallagher.ca

I write a blog every day and would love to visit with you there. Here's the link:

www.dareboldly.com

Right Your Heart Out!