

DON'T DIE WITH YOUR MUSIC STILL IN YOU

*“There is no greater gift you can give or receive
than to honor your calling. It’s why you were born.
And how you become most truly alive.”*

— OPR AH WINFREY

I was raised with the idea that each of us has our own “music”—that we live in a perfect universe, where everything is connected, and every one of us is here for a purpose. Each of our souls will learn lessons and teach others; that’s why we come to this planet. I’ve never doubted that I showed up here with a mission, but the mission itself has not always been clear.

Don’t die with your music still in you is the most profound phrase I heard over and over as a child. I knew that we all incarnated in this lifetime with a purpose, with something unique that called to us and excited our soul, and the idea of dying without ever expressing the music I came here to play terrified me. It still does! I’ve asked myself many times what my purpose is—why am I here?

As a child, my parents instructed me not to follow the crowd. “Try not to get caught up in what other people tell you to do,” they would say. “Just follow your heart, Serena.”

Later, when I was a teen, they’d tell me, “When you follow the herd, you’re bound to step in shit. Avoid the herd. Think for yourself. Do what you feel is right for you.”

I heard this kind of thing all the time, but it wasn't exactly easy to take such advice. Doing what I wanted and doing what was right were often not the same thing. I wanted to try drugs, to drink alcohol with my friends, to party and lie to my parents about it. I knew that these things were not "right," but I also knew that they were what I wanted to do. I would often justify my behavior by telling myself that it was the right thing to do because I had a desire to do it—I was just following my heart. But you know what? I did these things and learned from them, and now I hardly think about them. The times in my life when I didn't make the best choices were often times of great struggle that led to enormous personal growth. I try not to judge my past; after all, I wouldn't be who I am without it!

I know that not dying with your music still in you isn't about what you "do with" your life. It is about how you *lead* your life. Raising children to dance to the beat of their own drum means raising them first to hear, and then to follow, their own inner calling. It means encouraging them to follow their hearts—to listen to their intuition, and nothing else. It also means encouraging them to move forward in their lives, rather than keeping them stuck on a decision they made in the past.

Being yourself allows you to enjoy every step of your journey, without ever having to change for someone else. As I get older, I understand that life really is about the journey. While that once irked me, I now love it!

Showing Us the Way

I think my parents knew that the best way to teach their children how to be true to themselves was to model it—and that's exactly what they did. For example, my dad never dressed the way other fathers did. People used to send him T-shirts in the mail with all kinds of sayings on them, and he wore those T-shirts every day of my childhood. I remember I begged my parents to let me take cotillion (an etiquette and dance school for kids), and

when it came time for the father/daughter dance, all the fathers showed up in tuxedos. My dad, on the other hand, wore khaki pants, Birkenstocks, and a T-shirt that said *IMAGINE ALL THE PEOPLE LIVING LIFE IN PEACE*. It wasn't that he was trying to be rebellious; he just didn't own a suit!

Mom and Dad also followed their own path in terms of their relationship. They didn't get married until they were pregnant with me—and I'm the sixth out of eight children! I asked my mom why they got married at that point, and she said it was because that's when they both felt inclined to do so. (Personally, I think it was God's way of preparing them for the child who was on the way—me. If they hadn't been married before I was born, surely one of them would have run for the hills after!)

One of the early memories I have of dancing to my own beat took place when I was very young, in first or second grade. We were being taught in religion class that only those who have been baptized and believe in Jesus as their savior make it to heaven. I raised my hand and asked, "But what if they live somewhere really far away where no one knows about Jesus? How could that be their fault? How could God not take them to heaven if it wasn't their fault?"

My teacher gave a vague answer that didn't really address my growing concern for these souls who weren't going to get to heaven. I kept pressing it, insisting that God would surely allow a little child who had never met any Christians or heard about Jesus into heaven. It seemed obvious to me that someone so young couldn't be to blame for their lack of knowledge about Jesus. When my teacher rigidly responded that she believed you had to be baptized and accept Jesus as your savior in order to go to heaven, I recall feeling so bad for her that she thought God's love was insensitive and, even worse, intolerant.

A few years later, a similar thing happened. We were studying current events in sixth grade, and the topic of the week was immigration. To my surprise, the majority of my class believed that people who were not born in America should be "sent back to their own countries." I remember saying something like,

“But what if these people were brought here when they were babies and America is all they know? What if they work really hard and contribute to our society? Shouldn’t they have a chance to stay? Aren’t we all children of immigrants in this country?” I went to a Christian school, and was incredibly upset that my classmates had so little compassion. I was so distraught that I actually started to cry—really hard—in front of the whole class. Even though it would have been easier to sit quietly and “go with the herd,” I just couldn’t keep quiet.

When I got home from school and told my parents about these distressing experiences, they told me how proud they were of me. They congratulated me for being curious and not backing down when a teacher told me an answer that felt unacceptable to me.

Typical parental instructions like, “Be like everybody else,” “Try to be normal,” and “Just try fitting in” were never spoken in my home. Instead, Mom and Dad were the weirdos who were always telling my brothers and sisters and me that fitting in was unnecessary, and that some rules are meant to be broken.

My parents taught me to trust my own desires, listen to my heart, and follow what I knew to be right for me. They encouraged me to abandon any beliefs on religion that didn’t feel right to me, and to let go of any beliefs about society that didn’t resonate with me. They clearly agreed with Albert Einstein, who reportedly once said that “common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age 18.” They felt that sometimes it was best not to use common sense, but to use intuition instead.

Whenever my siblings and I argued, Dad would repeat the Native American saying, “No tree has branches so foolish as to fight amongst themselves.” He would say that we are all branches on the tree of humanity, so fighting was pointless. For a while I thought he was insane, but today it makes sense. I find that this saying can also apply to our relationships with ourselves.

When we hide who we really are in order to fit in or belong, we are suffocating our souls. Our true calling may pass us by while we’re trying make other people happy. And if we don’t love our bodies, it’s because we don’t understand that the body is just a

vessel to contain the soul. Eckhart Tolle says, “You are the universe, expressing itself as a human for a little while.” Having an internal battle where we hate our bodies or reject who we really are has the same effect as two branches of a tree fighting amongst themselves. We cannot experience peace if our inner dialogue is always at war with itself. Over time I have learned that a mind at war with itself—which is another way of saying a mind that rejects its true calling, its own nature and body—is a mind that cannot experience eternal gentleness.

If your inner dialogue is constantly telling you what is wrong with you or your life, I suggest observing that little voice without attachment to what it is saying. For me, I am able to quiet my own inner dialogue by meditating. For others, going for a run, listening to their favorite music, or doing yoga is effective. Do whatever works for you!

The Power of Intuition

As I was growing up, some of my friends’ parents seemed to be concerned with what grades my friends were getting, what colleges they were applying to, and what jobs they were going to get. My own parents were nothing like this. I often wondered how I would feel if my mother and father told me where to go to school or what kind of career to pursue. Would I like it? Would it feel like too much pressure? Or would it actually make decisions easier?

The whole idea was so foreign to me. Dad had always told my siblings and me that our *dharma* (a Sanskrit word which basically means your passion or calling in life) was ours alone. Our future was not for anyone else to decide—including him!

Yet as I got older, I sometimes wished that my parents would just tell me what to do. I wanted them to sit with me and go over my list of pros and cons, guiding me toward the right decision. I wished that they’d get mad at me for quitting something I’d started—that they’d force me to stick with it, or push me to try harder. At times, following my own path seemed more challenging than

being told what to do. It could seem as if so much love and support and understanding made it easy for me to do nothing, which didn't make me feel good or on track.

My dad used to tell my siblings and me that we should strive to be our own boss, so I have generally shied away from any job that involves a boss—which involves basically every job I ever thought about getting! What I know now is that he was most definitely not encouraging us to refrain from getting a job altogether; he was encouraging us to work toward having a career where we could be our own boss, even if it meant starting out working for someone else.

Today, I am grateful that I struggled to figure out what to do with myself, because the struggle itself helped me to understand the direction I wanted to go. If I had been listening to others, I wouldn't have been able to develop my own sense of self, or such a strong relationship with my intuition. I now understand that when I follow my heart, I am following my intuition. My intuition and my heart are always in agreement.

I think I learned this most vividly when I was 12 years old. I was at my friend Courtney's house for a sleepover. Her brother, who was five years older than we were, was having a party at the house. Since their parents were home and everything was pretty tame, we were allowed to be downstairs "watching" the older kids hang out. (Much to the brother's annoyance, I should mention.)

My friend and I wanted to impress the older kids so badly that we were afraid to say very much out of fear we'd embarrass ourselves. At one point I went upstairs to use the bathroom, and afterward I went into Courtney's room to put on more lip gloss. As I walked inside, I heard a voice tell me to lock the door. It was a voice I'd heard before—nowadays I'd call it my intuition. Even though I was young, I knew to listen to it. But before I could get over to the door, two older guys came in. I didn't recognize them from downstairs, so I felt afraid as they closed the door behind them. One of them approached me and said it was okay, that he was a nice guy who just wanted to do something that would feel really good for me. He came over and put his hand under my shirt, touching my

stomach and slowly moving upward toward my training bra. He kept saying it was going to feel good, but already I felt sick inside.

My intuition urged me to run. For a split second I worried that if I did, they wouldn't think I was "cool." But my heart and intuition were screaming that I needed to get out of there, and thank goodness I listened. I pushed the guy away and ran down the stairs to tell Courtney what had happened. I was embarrassed about it, so I asked her not to tell anyone else and she agreed. It was our secret for many years.

While I was able to escape before anything really terrible happened, the feeling of what might have been has stuck with me. Now that I'm a woman in my 20s, of course I know how things could have ended up, and I am so grateful to my little 12-year-old self for getting out of there. I think that there are situations like this that happen for all of us, and at some point, we learn to follow our intuition because we realize that it never leads us astray.

Where Passion and Purpose Meet

I've always had strong likes and dislikes, and I've always had things I am passionate about. The older I've gotten, the easier it has been to accept that certain things come preprogrammed. The problem comes when we ignore who we truly are and convince ourselves we're something we're not in the attempt to fit in.

In my younger years I tried very hard to turn my back on almost everything that came naturally to me. I loved singing and acting, for instance, but I felt nervous and embarrassed as a kid whenever I would tell someone that I took singing lessons or was in acting class. I found the things that were inherently true about myself to be embarrassing, as if they weren't good enough.

In the same way, I rejected the part of me that wanted to get married and have children. Instead, for a while I pretended as if I wanted to pursue an intellectual career and focus on that, leaving children to a later date. This is the opposite of how I actually feel—I want children *yesterday*. But I pretended that part of

myself didn't exist. I claimed to believe that women who were stay-at-home moms were weak, when I actually wanted to be one of them myself!

On so many different levels, I spent much of my life ashamed of parts of myself that made me who I was. Outwardly I appeared to be in love with who I was, but inside I was very hard on myself. Of course, I was not raised this way; my parents did a wonderful job of loving me unconditionally. But I couldn't offer that same kind of love toward myself. It's as if I was focused on punishing myself for the crime of just existing as Serena—for having my own feelings and desires—that I would do things I didn't really want to do. In fact, it is only recently that I've stopped trying to turn myself into something that I am not.

I feel as though I have now finally stopped running from who I am. Today I can honestly say that I have begun a real love affair with myself. I have stopped caring about what other people think, or whether I am fitting in or not. For the first time in my life, I feel as though I am really on the path I am meant to be on.

I have watched so many of my friends struggle with doing what they are passionate about, versus doing what their families and society tell them to do. I have seen friends give up the major they wanted to study in school to pursue what their guidance counselor tells them will guarantee them a job—whether they were interested in it or not. I relate to this so much! I had a college professor once say to me, “Serena, you have a lot of potential. Don't waste it by getting married and having kids.” I actually agreed with him! Today I would have a very different response, but back then I was more worried about looking right than speaking my truth.

I know so many people in their 20s who are miserable because they're pretending to be someone else, following someone else's rules and neglecting their real passions. Some of my friends assure me they will start their dream jobs later in life—that they have plenty of time. Yet I know from personal experience that whenever we conform to externally imposed expectations, we lose sight of our individual passion and purpose. Some people end up struggling their entire lives with trying to find their purpose. The good

news is that if we adhere to what we're passionate about, and really believe in ourselves and the path we're on, our purpose naturally makes itself known.

I've always known what I am passionate about, but for a long time I didn't think it "counted." It doesn't fit into a neat little box called "medicine" or "science" or "math" or "building." What I am passionate about is *people*. I love connecting with others and telling stories. I am passionate about the world—about the cultures and human beings that make our planet so fascinating. And I am passionate about talking to and being in front of an audience.

As I have learned to start honoring my passions, the universe has presented me with all green lights. I grew up hearing that we are all energy, and energy is vibration. So when we make ourselves a vibrational match to whatever it is we're passionate about, the universe can't help but provide it for us. As my friend and teacher Gabrielle Bernstein explains, "We are always manifesting. Each thought we have creates an energy flow within and around our physical being. This energy attracts its likeness. So if you're thinking, *I suck*, then your energy kinda, well, sucks—and you attract sucky experiences."

I have noticed many of my friends struggling and unhappy, just as I have been so many times before. Many end up on medication, feeling that life is too much to handle without support. In some cases antidepressants and other medications can be helpful; I know people who have found great benefit in using them for a short period of time. However, it's my belief that over the long term these drugs interfere with the natural chemistry of the body—and maybe with our life's purpose as well. Many of my peers also use antidepressants and ADHD medications to get rid of a hangover or to eat less. I have done both at times, but it never felt right for me. When I feel the lowest, I have learned that I can immediately make myself feel better by serving others. I know this sounds cheesy, but it's true!

The question *What's in it for me?* has often crept into my psyche. My parents have taught me that this is the mantra of the ego. The ego is most concerned with itself; how much it can get out of

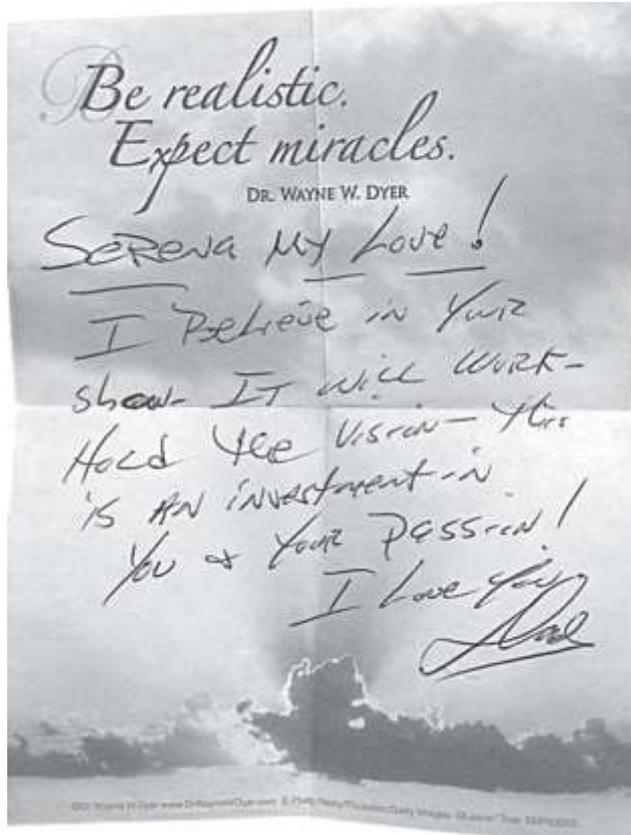
something. The mantra of God—and the mantra of our higher selves—is *How may I serve?* I heard my parents say this frequently, but I never really believed them until I tried it for myself. The irony is that once I really started to practice serving others, all the things I thought I needed in life just started to show up. When I was focused on acquiring more, I always felt lacking. When I shifted my focus toward how I could serve, the money, health, and relationships I had been looking for all just started appearing in my life.

If you would like more love in your life, then I suggest you begin to offer love to people in your life that may really need a little extra of it. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you—it is that simple. When you shift your focus to how you may serve, the universe shifts its focus to how it may serve you as well. And when you are true to yourself, the universe will continue to support you on your path.

The Career Dilemma

When I was a child, Mom and Dad continually encouraged me to follow the notes of my own music. I was never criticized, even if I went after something and then abandoned it later. There were many ideas that I tried out for a while and then left behind. Yet I never felt like a failure for wanting to try something new. My parents actually encouraged me to try everything—if it didn't work out, that was okay. Dad would remind me to trust that I would eventually find my own path. He said as long as I remained passionate about what I was doing, I was moving in the right direction.

When I was 22, my best friend, Lauren, and I decided to create a television show based on our mutual love of cooking and entertaining. We came up with recipes, had a great idea for a show, and then hired a film crew to film a pilot. The idea was that we'd pitch it to the Food Network or something like that. My dad wrote me a note that I carry around with me to this day:



In case you can't read it, the note says: "Serena My Love! I believe in your show. It will work—hold the vision—this is an investment in you and your passion! I love you, Dad."

After a few months of trying to get the pilot off the ground, nothing was coming to fruition. Lauren and I both recognized that we really didn't want to do a cooking show and had just been going with the momentum of having a new idea we liked. Even though I let go of the show, I saved the note my dad had given me. I knew what he'd written applied to anything I tried in my life. It wasn't just about the TV-show idea; it related to any project or

Plan I would ever undertake. He believed in me! It was as simple as that. He was proud of me no matter what.

My parents' support of me has continued to carry me closer to my music. In my early 20s, I tried out several different careers. I considered becoming a professor, a chef, and an actor. None of them quite fit. The only thing I knew for sure was that I liked have- in an audience and working with people. So I decided I would become a lawyer! I have always been a bit on the dramatic side, and I love telling stories. Couple that with the fact that I do well in school, and I decided that I'd come up with a great idea.

Three weeks into law school, I knew I had made a huge mistake.

I'd been miserable from day one. I would sit in the parking lot before class in tears. It wasn't about the work, as I already had a master's degree and knew what hard work was all about. It was that I was beginning to understand what it actually meant to be a lawyer. It meant a lot of paperwork and a lot of detail—neither of which I was particularly good at. I also knew I did not want to be personally responsible for someone else's settlement, divorce, conviction, or acquittal. I realized the job was just not for me. Yet I felt ashamed of the thought of quitting, so I told myself I was going to stick it out for the next three years because quitting was worse than having a job you hate. (Now *that's* a piece of advice I wouldn't give my worst enemy.)

I kept going for a few more weeks; then, not surprisingly, I got physically ill. I came down with pneumonia and had to stay home from class. I will never forget Dad calling and asking me if I thought that maybe I got pneumonia because I was doing something every day that I hated. I knew he was right, but I still had too much pride to make a change. My ego was telling me that being sick and hating what you're doing was still better than quitting. So once I recovered, I went right back to school.

I'll never forget the morning I came to my senses. I was sitting in the parking lot getting ready to go into class when it hit me. *I don't have to do this*. There was no pressure from my family or my peers, no judgment about my decision one way or the other. The only person pressuring me was *me*. I text messaged my dad right

Then. I was still feeling ashamed, so I asked him what he would think of me if I quit.

His response was such a relief. “I am proud of you no matter what you’re doing,” he wrote. “If you are unhappy and getting sick over it, then leave. You will find your path, Serena, stop worrying. I love you.” Reading this, and talking to my mom later, I felt safe to follow my heart. I knew they were proud of me no matter what I was doing. I let go of the self-imposed guilt and shame, and my law school days were over.

No Such Thing as Failure

My dad used to say that some people live their entire lives pretending to be something they’re not, or pretending to love something they don’t, only to wake up one day and realize that they haven’t really lived. This reminds me of the book *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy. As Ivan is dying, he asks himself, “What if my whole life has been wrong?” When I read that, I remember thinking that no matter what, I wasn’t going to choose that fate.

I had been taught to listen to my own calling, to ignore what anyone else said, and to follow my own music. And yet I’d tried to convince myself to stay in law school out of fear of being criticized—when I myself was my own greatest critic! Eventually I realized I would never be at peace if I didn’t follow my own heart. I knew I was doing what looked right rather than what *felt* right. I had to look at myself in the mirror each night, knowing I was abandoning myself. Slowly, I began to understand that it wasn’t about what other people would think. What was important was what *I* thought.

Dad has often talked about how in his personal life, great transformation has usually been preceded by a great fall. To that end, it was only after he forgave his alcoholic father for abandoning him that he was able to write *Your Erroneous Zones*, which has sold over 70 million copies worldwide to date. J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter books, said that “rock bottom became

the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.” It was only when she got to rock bottom that she was able to make her way back up, and look how far she’s come!

My own fiancé, Matt, is a successful businessman who prides himself on his number of failures. This may sound odd, but as he puts it, “You can’t put a price tag on those failures because of the valuable lessons they taught me.” Matt says that whenever he enters into a somewhat risky business deal, he remains unattached to how it will turn out. He knows that, successful or not, the deal will give him experience, so he’ll gain something either way. I now view the rejections of my own inner calling in the same light. I can’t put a price tag on how valuable those lessons were for me, because if I hadn’t rejected myself and ignored my inner voice in so many different ways, I may still be doing it today!

It seems to me that fear is what stops most of us from playing our own music. It was definitely true for me—I was afraid of letting people down, of what other people might think of me, of what I would do if I left law school and how that would look. Perhaps you’re afraid that if you make a change you’ll let people down, but take the risk and see what happens. You may let people down and you may not. You’ll probably be pleasantly surprised by how it all turns out.

According to *A Course in Miracles*, there are only two basic emotions: fear and love. When you decide to play your own music, you are acting out of love for yourself and your own unique path. I know that when I’m living from love rather than fear, I never fail.

I was raised to understand that failure is an illusion, anyway. No one fails at anything. Everything you or anyone else does produces a result. Dad sometimes uses the analogy of playing catch. If he throws a ball to me and I drop it, I didn’t fail—I just produced an unexpected result! Dad taught me that failure is just a judgment, and it is a judgment based in fear. The real question, he would say, is what do you do with the result? Do you complain about not being able to catch the ball? Or do you see it as a learning experience, saying “Throw it again!” until you succeed?

My sister Tracy is a great example of what I'm talking about here. Tracy was in her 30s and working as an executive for Best Buy (a large electronics retail corporation) in Minneapolis, and although she was very successful, she didn't feel fulfilled. She decided to follow Dad's advice and left her position to pursue her real passion, which is designing purses. My sister went from working at a corporation and having insurance, benefits, and a retirement plan to being totally on her own—having to figure out how to get her bags made and sold around the country.

Although there were bumps in the road, Tracy now sells handbags that use recycled water bottles in the manufacturing process. What's more, she managed to combine her understanding of technology from working at her former position at Best Buy with her love of design. Now she has an amazing and successful line of purses called Urban Junket that can actually charge your phone or computer! My sister had to face her fear of failure and take a leap of faith. But because she was willing to take the risk, she's now doing what she always dreamed about.

When we let ourselves be guided by love—love for ourselves, love for others, and love for what we do—fear cannot survive. As the poet Rudyard Kipling once wrote: "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster / And treat those two imposters just the same; / Yours is the earth and everything that's in it."

Triumph and disaster are imposters. They are not real; they exist only in your mind. Fear is the same. Think of how many things you may have feared as a child that now seem silly. To be afraid of following your dreams may seem just as funny to you once you have faced it. Just think how great it will be to be doing what you love and to look back and think how silly it was to be so fearful. I know that's how I feel about leaving law school. Looking back, I can't believe I allowed myself to get so sick over it! Instead, I've discovered a whole new and better world by finding—and following—my dharma.

Finding Your Own Dharma

Shortly after leaving law school, I attended a three-day conference in Maui that my dad was putting on. Sitting in the audience, I kept contemplating the idea of my own dharma. What was it that I really wanted to do with my life?

While sitting there, I was struck with the idea that I wanted to bring the message I was raised on to people my own age. I wanted to help those who were struggling to find their place in the world, just as I had been. I asked Dad how he felt about my writing a book based on his work, and he thought it was a great idea. Shortly after that, I called Reid Tracy, the CEO of Hay House, and pitched the idea to him. Reid thought it sounded great, too. I started to feel like I was really moving on my correct path. The universe kept sending me “You go, girl!” signals that let me know I was heading in the right direction. Now I can say that writing this book has been one of the most important and fulfilling experiences of my life. Today, I am writing and speaking and moving in the direction that feels most natural and peaceful to me. I am doing it all with confidence.

The truth is, it's not where you are, it's the direction you're heading in. As a Turkish proverb says, “No matter how far you have gone on a wrong road, turn back.” For me, law school was the wrong road. But by following my heart, I was able to turn around. All it took was to trust that it would all work out. Now, I know that's not as easy as it sounds. Believe me, there were many nights when I would lie awake worried about what I was going to do with my life. My ego was definitely bruised, especially when I had to tell people that I was leaving, but I let that go as well. Parts of me still believed that my image was everything, and if I wasn't “doing something” I was a failure.

I've finally realized that it doesn't matter what you are or aren't doing. It only matters whether you're moving in the direction that feels right to you, regardless of what others might think.

There's something I have heard my father say too many times to count: "You will never regret what you do in life; you will only regret what you don't do." Everything I have ever done has taught me something, whether it worked out or not. Sometimes the take-away is simply knowing what I *don't* want.

So if there's one piece of advice I'd give you, it's to notice whether you are moving toward or away from what excites you. If you're repeating the same bad habits and continuing to let yourself down by being unwilling to make a shift or change, then you're moving away from what excites you. On the other hand, if you're willing to let go of what you know is harmful for you, and willing to change your beliefs about yourself in order to get what you want in life, then you'll be moving toward what excites you. If you pay attention and let yourself be guided by your intuition, you won't have to worry about dying with your music inside of you.

The Courage to Change

In the past few years, my mom has injured herself more than she has in all the other years of her life combined. She has broken her collarbone, cheekbone, and foot; has had pins and needles put in her elbow and shoulder after falling headfirst down a spiral staircase; and, most recently, suffered a third-degree burn on her wrist. My parents are no longer together (more on that later) but they are still very close friends who speak every day, so Dad asked Mom if she thought there might be an emotional component to all of her injuries. At first she was defensive and said of course not—she was just getting older and had some early-onset osteoporosis due to having so many children.

Shortly after this, my mom and I were making dinner alone together before the rest of the family arrived for the meal. She told me that what Dad had said about her injuries really bothered her, but she couldn't stop thinking about it. She went on to say that

she felt really stuck in her life at this time, and it was if she were standing on the edge of a road that had two paths. One path was starting a new life for herself, serving her own highest calling now that her children had grown and were out of the house. The other path was one of getting older and possibly getting sick and leaving this planet.

Mom has been a mother for the past 41 years and has been incredibly devoted, loving, and nurturing in the process. Her whole life had been wrapped up in raising her children, and now that she wasn't doing that so much anymore, she felt that she had other work that needed to be done and couldn't ignore it any longer. She explained that she felt an inner calling to write and teach about childbirth and raising children in a natural way, but she'd always been afraid of doing that work because she didn't feel worthy of it.

Hearing her tell me this, I was so astonished. Mom is the most worthy woman in the world of teaching about motherhood and childbirth, and yet she doubted her own true calling. She believed in me my entire life and encouraged me to do anything and everything I could dream of, but she didn't feel deserving of the very things she'd always offered me! The funny thing was that I could relate to not feeling worthy of honoring "real" dreams and instead choosing to do something else or nothing entirely. So many of us appear to have it all together, but inside we are rejecting our true desires on a massive level.

I knew that my mother had started writing a book on childbirth, and her dream was to finish it and start to teach and lecture on the subject matter. Since I'd just finished working on my own book with a wonderful editor, Kelly Notaras, I told Mom that whatever she had written up until that point was enough. She needed to e-mail Kelly right then and there and set up a time to talk so that they could begin to work together.

My mom was really hesitant and said that she needed more time. I put down the food I was preparing, and I looked her in the eye and said that I needed her to finish her book and begin doing the work she felt called to do because I needed her to *live*.

With tears in her eyes, she said okay and walked over to her iPad. She sent Kelly an e-mail that said she was “sick of my own excuses” and was ready to leave her fear behind. In her, I could recognize the very thing I felt in myself when I had made a similar decision years before in my life. Mom was so emotional about it because she made the choice to honor her calling, her passion, her dream—and in doing so, she was flooded with relief and pride. I don't know if I have ever been more proud of her, because I know what a challenge that can be.

We went back to cooking, and I noticed that my mom kept checking her iPad to see if she had any new e-mails. About an hour later she exclaimed, “She wrote back!” Mom then read Kelly's e-mail out loud to me, which basically said that she'd be happy to work with my mother on her book, and Mom began to cry. She told me that she felt proud of herself, *really* proud of herself, and she felt so much relief just by sending that first e-mail!

Making the choice not to die with our music inside of us can be gut-wrenchingly hard, but it is so worth it.

WAYNE'S RESPONSE

There is a reason that Serena picked the title of this chapter to be the title of her book. Put simply, there is no greater lesson for us to understand in this journey we call our life. I have persistently emphasized to my children, and to myself as well, that we come to this earth for a brief parenthesis in eternity for a reason. And staying aligned with what feels like our purpose is the key to living a fully functioning life, day in and day out.

My children heard me emphasizing this point over and over throughout all of their lives: “There are no accidents in the universe, and that includes you and all that you were meant to experience and accomplish as well.” To me it is simply the only logical conclusion. If there is intelligence behind life, and there is every reason to believe that there must be, then *all* of that intelligence is innate in each creation of that intelligence. The source of all life is complete and entire

within each of us. “All you have to do,” I would tell my children (and myself), “is to discover it for its power and perfection to be *yours*.”

Even our most erudite scientific scholars acknowledge the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind that is the matrix of all matter. It matters not what we call this source; all we really need to be assured of is that there is no place that it is not, and therefore it is within us to discover and apply it in all the days of our lives. Mark Twain described the significance of this awareness in this way: “The two most important days in your life are the day you were born, and the day you find out why.” Serena writes passionately in this chapter about this idea, reminding us that no one can find their purpose by attempting to be just like everybody else, or to attempt to live out someone else’s idea of what that purpose ought to be.

I have always taught that the purpose of life is to live a life of purpose. This means learning to tame the demands of the ego and to listen to a new inner mantra that quietly reminds us to focus on “How may I serve?” as opposed to “What’s in it for me?” I spoke frequently to all of my children about the importance of trusting their own intuition, which is really the voice of God nudging them in the direction of their own highest aspirations. I would remind them that when they completely trusted in themselves, with no fear of failing or outside judgments, they were actually trusting in the very wisdom that created them. I would remind Serena frequently that all she had to do was to be herself, which is a Divine creation, and that what others thought of her was really none of her business. “You came here with your own music to play,” I would tell her over and over. “And you only have a short time here to fulfill your own unique dharma. No one can do it for you, and it is impossible for you to fail at being yourself.”

I love the sound of the words *Don't die with your music inside you*. It is such a powerful reminder that we all came here with some kind of music to play; it has to be true in a universe that is guided and directed by an invisible supreme intelligence at the helm. This was a message that all of my children heard frequently.

I have often used these words of the great poet Kahlil Gibran from his timeless tome, *The Prophet*:

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
!They come through you but not from you,
!And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.*

I learned to understand and apply the significance of this message. My children all came here to play their own music, and I did not want to be a person who would stifle or silence that urge with them, simply because I happened to be their father.

Serena's stories in this chapter reflect the value that my wife, Marcelene, and I placed on allowing our children to fulfill their own callings. Both Marcie and I knew very early on that our role was to unpretentiously guide, then step aside. No one could be more proud of Serena and all of her siblings than her parents, who know the mighty truth hidden in the title of this chapter and this book itself. We do not want to have our sons and daughters arrive at the end of their lives and utter those infamous words of Ivan Ilyich, "What if my whole life has been wrong?"



