

What Readers are Saying

“An invitation to reclaim the parts of ourselves that were abandoned, shamed, or stifled. Brimming with stories and ideas that illuminate and inspire, this book will help you take the sometimes terrifying steps needed to breathe life into a truer version of yourself.”

~ **Jonathan Fields**, Founder of Good Life Project

“Inspirational, vulnerable, and insightful. Every story feels like a summoning back to wholeness. I was emboldened to lean into my truth despite how it may make others feel. This book offers several paths for creating personal change & contributions to the healing of the world.”

~ **Shelley Adelle**, Performer/Maker

“I’m not sure what I was expecting when I sat down to read this for a friend, but the synchronicity that arose between what I read and where I find myself in this moment is undeniable. Just a few chapters in, I found myself feeling a range of emotions from inspired to gutted—it was incredibly beautiful and moving and so relatable. As I kept reading, in all the stories, Amanda’s question, ‘What is your story?’, it just really resonated. I have felt like I ‘should’ be writing more academic, work-related stuff; but my heart hasn’t been in it the way it needs to be to get that work out there. After a few chapters and a short meditation, I realized the story I’m supposed to tell right now and received the title. I can’t imagine that any of this would have come up for me had I not read the chapters I did yesterday and spent some time reflecting on them—I’m so incredibly grateful!!

This compilation on the reality of what it takes to put a message out into the world offers a series of raw, insightful narratives. Exploring each writer’s experience from internal and external perspectives, YCMTSU reveals the innermost thoughts of writers as they vulnerably navigate the insecurities of putting their deepest darkest thoughts out into the world for people to judge, while also learning to celebrate the little wins, and often finding joy and healing along the way. This book is a powerful reminder that behind every story is a flawed human being who makes the choice to push past the fear to share their message with the world.”

~**Dimple Dhabalia**, Founder, Roots in the Clouds

“Reading through these stories, it is clear that Amanda uses several well-known and even researched approaches, whether she knows it or not. Polyvagal breathing techniques, centered and grounded mindfulness approaches, cognitive-behavioral modeling, and even some smatterings of psychospiritual methods are intertwined to provide outcomes similar to that of narrative therapy. (And don’t forget the dark chocolate—there is research to demonstrate that it really does help us deal with dementors!)

From the perspective of ‘deep psychology,’ Amanda’s process emulates that of an ancient, healing pedagogy of storytelling through writing. She encourages others to define what lies outside of our conscious awareness and may even illuminate that which an author may hold in an unconscious space: thoughts, impressions, and feelings which may not have not been previously admitted, even to oneself, including potential collective consciousnesses aspects with cultural and archetypal dimensions.

Amanda’s invitation is in the tradition of depth work—one in which the participant may observe, grapple with, and consider what it means to really heal, and then share that journey with others who may find connection and even hope through the process.”

~**Lonny R. Webb**, MSW, LCSW
Clinical and Forensic Social Work

“YCMTSU is a great read! It’s a collection of stories written by writers from different walks of life who were encouraged to find a message in their messes and share it with others to make the world a better place. Each story is unique, authentic, and stands on its own. All together the book is a heart-warming compilation that reminds the reader we all have our stories and YCMTSU moments and their one purpose is to help one another not just survive but to thrive in this world. It inspired me to get busy and get my story out there. Thanks Amanda... and everyone!”

~**Kathleen Mizell**, Author of *Goo to Gratitude*

You Can't Make This St*ry Up

*What If It's All
Happening For Us?*

Amanda Johnson & Her Rabble

True to Intention

You Can't Make This St*ry Up

What If It's All Happening For Us?

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*To the Creatives and Coaches who question your sanity...
May these stories help you realize you are one
of the sane ones, find your allies, build your own
cocoon, and become truer to your intention.*

Acknowledgments

To the Co-Author that oh-so-perfectly inserts the plot twists and characters required to guide us home, and keeps it so damn interesting and fun.

To the partners and children who support us, we know it is not easy and we thank you for all of your support, even when it is messy.

To the team who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make this book an experience. Theddee, the content is more powerful and true because of you. Alyssa, the cover is epic and captures every powerful message the stories in this book tell. Dawn, the interior is so wonderfully customized. Lori, Aaron, and Ciara, I would not be sane at the close of this project without you. (Wait. I'm sane, right?)

To the clients whose stories are not captured in this book, thank you for allowing me to witness your journey and for being part of my story and rescue mission.

With All My Love and Gratitude,

Amanda

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Foreword

Karlyn Pleasants, Psy.D.

I let out a nervously hopeful sigh as I hung up from my first chat with Amanda and sent her the content I already had for review. She had explained her specialty rested in the non-fiction realm and she would most likely refer me to a colleague who works with fiction. But deep down, I already knew that I would not be able to ignore the magic that had crossed our paths at this point in my project.

The previous two years had been a mercurial blend of magic and frustration. I had sold my business—a unique treatment program for severe mental illness rooted in the values of community and shared responsibility—and found myself at a loss with what I was supposed to do next. My excitement for my newfound freedom had fallen flat. Instead, I was untethered and empty. I had lost my sense of purpose and was desperate for inspiration because one thing I knew: I wasn't done yet. But what would I do?

BOOM! Half-way through my new commute to my new job, out of nowhere, a clear idea landed in my mind. “A book,” a confident version of my own voice said; and an image emerged in my mind’s eye, showing me in a slow-motion instant the story I would be telling: two boys experiencing an awakening of special gifts and their search for meaning within a culture that pathologized them as mentally ill and ostracized them from their communities. I rushed into the office to tell a dear friend-colleague about my supernatural experience on the I-15 South, partly because it was so

mystifying but also because I wanted to be held accountable. A grin spread across her face. “Of course you are! You’re not done yet.”

The following year felt like a magical journey. It was as if I had somehow accessed a mysterious databank of all things enchanting and dreamy. An open conduit where characters and storylines seemed to download directly into my brain along with creative plot twists and surprise discoveries. I traversed the endless maze of research rabbit holes where ideas unfolded and laid bare sparkling new paths to follow. I wrote fast and furious on restaurant napkins and the backs of boarding passes—whatever was available—as my mind wove together elaborate, stirring story lines.

Then, at nearly the same moment the pandemic shut down our world, my mind slowed and reached the inevitable “*download complete*” screen. I stared for weeks at hundreds of pages (and napkins) of content, wondering how to turn it into a novel. Then, two different friends, two days apart, both recommended the same book on writing. I picked it up and *AH HA!* I had my answer. Within days, I had at least a half dozen books on how to structure a novel. I basked in glorious flow charts and colorful bulleted outlines that spoke of acts, plot points, denouements, and climaxes. All I needed to do was place my content neatly into the well-defined formulas. Simple. One novel, coming right up!

Eight months into the structuring process, I had become a professional “plotter” with no novel to show. I was discouraged but not yet ready to throw in the towel and began wondering if there was such a thing as a book coach. As if on cue, an unexpected visit from some dear friends delivered. They graciously asked about my book; and when I embarrassingly confessed that I was stuck and had no idea

what to do next, my friend shared that *coincidentally*, his aunt had just published a book with the help of a coach and asked if I would be interested in talking to her. Um, yes please.

When we met again, Amanda shared that the timing was eerily synchronous: Something had recently happened with a person in her life that resonated strongly with my message. She wanted to work together and would send me a proposal. I was happy and also SCARED. How could that be? Wasn't this exactly what I was hoping for? While I reviewed the details, my mind scanned for all the reasons I should not do this. But I knew I would. Ready to send my contract back, I grabbed my trusty oracle deck for a final dose of reassurance. Shuffling the cards, one leapt out and landed face up, picking me before I could select my own card. *The Rabbit*... who offers the reminder to be wary of paralyzing yourself with all the ways things could go wrong... and release your fears to let your future unfold. Seemed mighty appropriate to me. I sent a picture to Amanda, freeing my fear that she would think I was a little too out there and revoke her offer. Her reply about floored me, and certainly assured me I was doing exactly what I was supposed to in this moment: "Just because synchronicity is the name of the game right now—my maiden name is Coelho, which means 'Rabbit' in Portuguese. You cannot make this stuff up!"

When I entered this project, I was looking to author a story with a message of hope. As a clinical psychologist, for two decades, I had helped guide a therapeutic community that offered belonging, belief-in, and empowerment to individuals with mental illness, most of whom had been written off as too sick or severe to get better. The profound healing and recovery I had witnessed over the years as a result of this approach was nothing short of miraculous, and

I wanted to write a story that would offer inspiration to those who might be questioning the possibility of having a life outside of a psychiatric diagnosis. What if “symptoms” are not always what they seem?

I joined the coaching and story-healing retreats and enjoyed the work, even though I saw no *personal* relationship with the story. I enjoyed and appreciated the stories Amanda told about messengers realizing that the writing process was helping them uncover, heal, and rewrite a personal story; I simply just didn’t think that part applied to me. In fact, as I began my writing journey with my new allies, unbelievable coincidences and breathtaking synchronicities appeared, leading me deeper into a mystical sea of infinite possibilities. The processes flowed. It was becoming a good story about *other* people, for *other* people.

Until the flow came to a screeching halt during a momentum retreat in the inspiring landscape of Mt. Hood, Oregon. After a day of wrestling with what I thought would be one of the coolest scenes to write, Amanda suggested I take a break and work on a different, easier scene. Next day, I churned out the most gut-wrenching chapter of the book, one that dragged me through nausea, headaches, back pain, and all sorts of physical ailments rare to me. My character had recovered a repressed memory of a traumatic, decades-old family secret, and her anguish ripped through me and onto the pages I wrote. At least I knew it wasn’t mine; I was channeling her experience.

I returned home from the retreat and—YCMTSU—learned of a horrific incident that had been held secret in my family for nearly sixty years! A secret full of shame, rejection, threats, and loss. Despite my complete shock, so many puzzle pieces immediately fit together: generational family patterns

and attitudes, bad blood and estrangements, addiction and illness, and plenty of other secrets. *Technically*, it wasn't my secret, but I had no doubt in that moment that I had absolutely been channeling something *real* and *personal* at the retreat.

Having released a generational story I didn't even know was binding me, the writing once again began to flow. For the next several months, I cranked out chapter after chapter in record time. Something had been unlocked inside and my doubts that this story had anything to do with me personally dwindled quickly.

Then I came to yet another skidding halt. I was approaching my last chapters but somehow kept getting caught up in insignificant details and any number of silly distractions. When Amanda suggested I was perhaps having feelings about bringing this story—*my* story—to a close, I leaned in. I'm a therapist after all. I make a living inviting people to consider alternative perspectives on interpreting their feelings and behaviors. And with that willingness, I pushed through the resistance, embraced the torrential and very unexpected meltdown of tears, and hatched the final, transcendent scene, aware with unprecedented clarity that this was indeed *my* story.

Something incredible had happened. On the page, around me, and within me.

I laugh and roll my eyes at myself whenever I think about my insistence that this fictional story was unrelated to my own. Much of my training as a clinical psychologist has centered on attachment and relational trauma, and I am both professionally and personally familiar with how stories influence healing. Even the research supports the fact that storytelling can serve as the voice for an experience that

needs to be told and witnessed and that writing one's story broadens the path to healing.

No wonder the messenger's experience is full of starts and stops, and all the mess and mayhem that seems to emerge in between. No wonder so many people have brilliant ideas and never lay them to paper. No wonder authors write novels and never seek to publish, and dedicated students abandon years of academic study on the eve of completing their dissertation. It is the same reason a suffering individual may start therapy and drop out a few sessions in. The WHY is because the endeavor is usually associated with a story they don't want to revisit or tell.

Let's consider for a moment the psychodynamics of avoidance: We have a message to share, a magnificent idea for creating great change, a desire to teach our methods of success or healing so that others might be inspired to do the same. And then we get stuck. Disoriented and distracted by apparently-unrelated events in our life, confused and doubtful about why we started this project in the first place, we often find ourselves unconsciously sabotaging the very thing we say we want most: to share, create, teach, and inspire.

The key word is *unconscious*, as none of us are intentionally looking to hinder our own goals. What has happened underneath the surface is a serious collision between our new, shiny, and inspired self and our pre-existing self that unwittingly embodies the old stories, beliefs, wounding, and early programming that became hot-wired into our identity. Messages we received from the outside took up residence on the inside and became internalized truths that prevent us from achieving that which we are so eager to have. "Being seen is dangerous" or "Speaking the truth brings anger and rejection" manifests in procrastination of putting

words to paper or avoidance of using our voices on stage, or any other number of behaviors that serve as inadvertent barriers to realizing our goals.

To release ourselves from the controlling grip of these invisible saboteurs, we must pull back the curtains of defense, bring our hidden and oft-forgotten beliefs into the light, and make some revisions to the old programming. This is no small endeavor; it can be painful to revisit the experiences that shaped our self-defeating beliefs. But it is exactly in the revisiting and rewriting of the old, outdated narrative where we find release from the powerful grasp of the past and the freedom to move forward, uninhibited, toward the actualization of our goals and the delivery of the message we seek to share.

In the narrative work of storytelling, Amanda is persistent in her press to tell and write our stories in great sensory detail. Writing fiction, I especially struggled with this in the beginning because after all, this story wasn't about me, right? But the reality was that each one of the characters in my "fictional" story held pieces of my own stories—truths and distortions, biases and blind-spots, adherence to terms of invisible contracts I wasn't aware I had entered into. In life and in writing story, it is too easy to abandon the parts of ourselves that we believe may threaten our status quo and (illusion of) stability. But our forsaken parts want to be heard, too. The neglected child, the forgotten sibling, the bullied student—they are the ones who hold our pain, fear, shame, and all sorts of other realities that aren't so shiny and bright. These parts have spent so much time isolated in those deep dark recesses inside, that when we exclude them—either intentionally or not—they don't like it and will

find a way to show up anyway... and usually kick our asses in the process!

The opportunities for healing come in the rewriting of our underlying, highly influential narratives. By bringing all our parts forward to be seen and heard, we can see and feel our whole story from a fresh perspective and in a new light. It is here that we can begin the task of examining the old programming and hard-wired beliefs and decide where revisions and upgrades are needed. It is here where we discover the moments when we lose our agency and can instead pick up the pen and write a new response. It is here where we are empowered release the roles we no longer wish to play and write into place new scripts and future storylines that support us in achieving our goals, sharing our messages, and living in alignment.

And, this work is so much more meaningful when we travel it with allies.

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.

~C.G. Jung~

To bear witness to another's healing is a sacred privilege and one filled with abundant gifts and opportunities for professional and personal growth. Beholding the transformation that unfolds extends an invitation for us, as coaches, mentors, guides, and teachers, to reflect on our own roles and journeys in the spirit of healing.

If we believe that people come into our lives for a reason, that our paths do not cross by accident, that there are messages to hear and lessons to learn from each encounter, then it stands to reason that the people who come to us for mentoring, guidance, help, and support also have something to teach us—something that could, if we accept the invitation, facilitate our own healing and journey towards wholeness.

Jung posited that the mutual influence of two people offers the possibility of joint transformation. In fact, he believed this was the ultimate aim of the therapeutic relationship. But what if we extend this idea to all *helping* relationships—student and teacher, mentee and mentor, learner and coach? From this view, we might consider our helping relationships more like *working alliances*—a joining of forces with mutual goals that holds the potential for collective transformation.

As we seek to inspire growth, we too can be inspired to grow by the wisdom and gifts the people we work with offer. In supporting another in rewriting outdated narratives, we have the chance to examine our personal stories and do some rewriting of our own. When we lean in to the uncomfortable feelings that are brought up as we work together toward a common goal, we discover the wounds and patterns inside us that still need our love and attention.

As a therapist, I could write a book (ooh, another idea!) on the myriad of ways I have learned from and become a more integrated person from my relationships—*alliances*—with clients. I am often both humbled and heartened by their courage, perseverance, vulnerability, and strength. Their growth inspires my own through the opportunity to self-reflect and ensure I am aligned with myself and my message. It is not always easy, but it is always worth it.

This book presents 19 stories of the healing and transformation that can unfold if and when we decide we have a powerful message to share with the world, and surrender to the reality that any story we share is rooted in ourselves and blossoms when we share it with others. Plus, there is also the story of a coach who seeks to experience every magical and messy moment as an invitation to deepen her own healing.

*It's all those stories and how they
braid together that tells us who and
what and where we are.*

~Charles de Lint~

If we believe people come into our lives for a reason and that our encounters—the good, the bad, and the ugly—all contain important lessons that ultimately propel us forward, then we are poised to ponder the invisible threads of connectedness that link us together. Bell's Theorem, a principal in quantum mechanics, posits that once connected, an invisible stream of energy keeps objects connected, where they will continue to affect one another forever no matter where they are. Is it possible then that one of the goals of this elaborate nexus network that orchestrates our connections (and collisions) with others (and ourselves) is to let us know that we are not alone? That we are meant to belong, to be held and seen in both our trials and our triumphs, and to be supported in our efforts toward wholeness and purpose? The courageous, vulnerable, and inspiring stories in this book, to me, are the embodiment of this notion.

In this sense, we can more easily consider the possibility that events happen *for* us, rather than *to* us and hold the potential for growth, healing, and wholeness, even if it is difficult to understand at the time. A chance encounter, an out-of-the-blue idea, an unexpected rupture, a surprise discovery—if these things are happening *for* us, they could very well be invitations to tell a new story, or rewrite an old one, or help another do the same. Through the magic of synchronicity and the unfolding of boundless opportunities, we stand primed to create alliances, build supportive communities, and experience a shared transformation that has the potential to ripple out to support the healing and wholeness of others.

The only question left is: Are we ready to accept the invitation?

Introduction

You *Really* Can't Make This St*ry Up

“**A**manda, are you scared?” she probed.

“Not really,” I answered, looking into the face of a client-turned-dear-friend on my computer screen. “I mean, I did feel a little unnerved when I walked into the grocery store and saw the bare shelves.”

“Yeah, the fear is palpable,” she started. “But I feel like an alien. I’m just not that scared.”

“I suppose that’s a good thing, right? People need hope and empowerment right now, and it would be impossible to offer it to them if we lost ourselves in the panic.”

“Right. So, what are you thinking about the retreat?” She sipped her tea while she waited for my response.

“Well, honestly, I think that you *really* can’t make this shit up...” I sat back in my chair and laughed out loud with her while I marveled at the synchronicities unfolding.

That’s what last year was all about—preparation for THIS.

Branded Image

Nine months earlier, in July 2019—after six years of deep dives into my own st*ry loops, dissolving identities that had been placed upon me (or that I’d assimilated over time), and taking the terrifying steps to live my truth despite how it made others feel—I found my new realizations about myself, my Source (I call It my Co-author!), and the world being tested. Ridiculous lawsuits, changing relationship dynamics, and impossible work schedules forced me into sixteen-hour

days full of travel, client work, retreats, study, and dozens of activities that I'd never have chosen for myself.

It was like a finals exam.

You see, even though I'd been witnessing it with my clients and preaching it for years, my experience and belief that "this is happening *for* us, not *to* us" had been challenged to its core right after I wrote my first book.

I mean, who wakes up to an almost-life-long abusive relationship and then says, "That happened *for* me"? Who moves to a new state to start their own life for the first time at thirty-six and leaves behind every person, situation, and credit card that had acted as a safety net? Who gets a part-time job at a grocery store, shakes their head the next day when three big contracts close, and keeps the job? Who facilitates the most challenging retreats of their life and shakes their head at the absolute perfection of what unfolded?

I'll tell you who—someone who has lost their damn mind.

Or... someone like me who has spent a decade marveling at the sacred magic contained in hundreds of personal stories *and* the timing of those stories crossing my own path.

I've spent more than a decade working with messengers who came to me for help in getting their story, expertise, and message onto pages and stages.

Inevitably, we arrive at a moment in our work together where the messenger sees the magic in their messy story. "Amanda, if that (*horrible thing*) hadn't happened, I would never have met (*important person*) and know what/who I know today. I would not have started searching for these answers. I wouldn't have experienced this type of connection with my (*Source*), myself, and others. I wouldn't have realized my gifts. I would never have..."

I try to stay silent in these sacred moments and allow the truth they are speaking to fill the space because I know what usually comes next.

A health crisis, a financial fallout, a relationship breakdown, or some almost-unbelievable combination of these find their way into the client's storyline. And the plot twists do what they appear to be destined to do—make the client question everything they've come to believe: their message, their expertise, their capacity, their worth, and maybe even the magic they just realized led them to this moment.

That's when the work *really* begins.

You see, it's one thing to look *back* and see all of the magic in the mess; it's quite another to be *in the middle of the mess* and still trust that there is a sacred magic unfolding.

So, while the finals exam of the summer of 2019 looked like utter insanity to the people who love me and want me to be well and happy, I was present to and nearly (still human here!) enjoying riding the waves of very messy magic.

I *knew* the oversights in my calendar were happening with purpose, so I relished the unexpected hours of commuting with my son, who was about to start driving himself everywhere on his own... without me.

I *knew* that my car rolling across the parking lot while I was at the check stand was a gift, so I thanked my Co-author for showing me a false belief I'd had about my car without it costing someone's limb or life.

I *knew* there was a reason for the lawsuit, and I was listening for it when the lawyer said the six words that would lead to liberation in every other area of my life.

Of course, during this time, I was *also* witnessing similar events with my clients.

Magical moments of synchronistic meetups and connections were unfolding for some; and messy moments of car “accidents,” running “injuries,” and relationship “endings” were unfolding for others. And, because they had witnessed the magic in the mess of their past stories, even those dealing with insurance issues, surgeries, and heartache were sure of one thing: “There’s some higher reason for this. It’s going to make me stronger, wiser, and more WHOLE in the end. It’s preparing me for what’s next. I can already see the gifts unfolding in the conversations I had with the tow truck guy/medics/therapist...”

That’s when the inspiration for this book struck.

Wouldn’t it be amazing if I enlisted my past and present clients to share their magical, messy journeys of putting their message and mission into the world? To inspire other change agents to consider that maybe the inspiration to change the world is actually for us first—to help us become more whole and attuned to the magic that is at work around us all the time, even when we can’t see it or believe it. And maybe I could share why or how their message crossed my path at the exact right moment for my own personal healing or business growth.

But this girl was busy. (Sixteen-hour days, y’all!) I wrote down my ideas and shared them with a few people whose eyes quickly lit up, but I didn’t have time to really pull my thoughts together until November 2019.

By that time, the inspiration had expanded.

I’d had some tough conversations with clients about following the magic instead of The Messenger Matrix when it comes to growing their business. What if they could drop the idea that they “need” a funnel, a membership community, and a train-the-trainer program to “succeed” and just tune in and ask, “What is the right next step?”

I'd hang up and another would call. Of course, it "just happened to be" someone working in the same industry with their own enormous vision. I'd listen and ask them what matrix they needed to drop and what the right next step was, and then they'd hang up. And then someone else would call, and I'd realize that the three people I'd just spoken to needed to be connected because there was an incredible opportunity for collaboration and cross-promotion.

That's when I received a "random" referral to someone who needed some energetic support around a legal situation. After listening, and sharing some insights, I blurted, "It also sounds like you might need a better attorney. I have some lawyer friends in your area—I can find out if they have someone they trust..." I sent three emails and within a few hours, I had referrals in this person's neighborhood.

Evidence of the power of a trusted network of caring professionals with integrity.

Coincidence? No, that's what I call a YCMTSU moment.

So, what would happen if this group of clients came together to share their magical, messy stories of messenger-ing; and then we figured out how to start working TOGETHER to change the world more quickly and effectively?

A dozen people signed up to play at that level and another dozen committed to contributing their story to this book.

By the time we had signed all the agreements, made the deposits, booked the flights, and rented the Airbnb for our retreat, it was February 2020.

Weeks later, while everyone was getting ready to meet and co-create a new paradigm for the industries we serve, the corona virus showed up and the world was turned upside-down with panic as the news churned out one apocalyptic clip after another.

Hence the empty shelves and panic at the grocery store.
You can't make this shit up, right?

Just as we all committed to up-leveling our leadership and collaboration, the world was turned on its head. Travel bans. School and business shutdowns. People told to stay in their homes. Streams of revenue compromised or totally disappeared.

And here we were...

Our inspiration, messages, and beliefs about what's possible in the world—for people to truly reclaim their personal freedom and sovereignty over their bodies, minds, health, relationships, education, message, business growth, future, and more—were being tested.

And we had the choice...

We could look at the appearances and contract or drop this vision because it was so huge, because it seemed like everyone was too busy or upside-down to listen, or because it appeared untimely.

Or...

We could call this a test of what we've come to know by experience: The magic is always there/here in our personal and collective stories, and the plot twists don't just happen randomly.

What if this was the perfect moment?

What if the inspiration came when it did because our Co-author knew this pandemic was on the horizon?

What if we were called to be leaders and collaborators at this time because we have some answers and, more importantly, we have the practices to keep us present, mindful, and listening for more answers as they are revealed?

What if this was Leadership School?

Not the kind where you sit down, listen, take notes, raise your hand when you have a question, and then regurgitate what you've heard. No, more like what almost-doctors experience during internship. It's that moment when shit gets real. They're no longer safely observing, conjecturing, and postulating from behind their textbooks; they are interacting with real patients who need them to behave like real doctors, or else.

Shit was getting real, and we could no longer sit back and bitch and moan and criticize what's not working out there... in the systems that were built, good intentions or not, by people long, long ago. We were being called to the front lines of service to humanity. We were being asked to co-create the new way... fast.

And that's what we did individually in our homes and on the front lines in our own industries as opportunities opened up; it's what we endeavored to do collectively through this project.

Did we do it perfectly? Ummmm... no, not even close.

Did it all happen in the timing we believed it would? Nope, it didn't.

Did it turn out exactly like we planned? Of course not.

Did we all learn and grow and become more whole through the process? Absolutely.

In fact, as you'll see in the conclusion, we hit some turbulence individually and as a community. Some of us realized it wasn't the right fit and left; others had to renegotiate their time and method of contribution. Many of us disappointed each other—ripped some scabs off wounds that still needed healing—and worked together to create the salve. Most of us laughed and cringed and cried together. All

of us became more whole, and the value of our stories and our work in the world became clearer.

Regardless of what happens with this project, we are already the better for it; and I believe it's because we brought all of who we are and everything we've learned, dropped it at the feet of the Co-author that we've come to know is conspiring on our behalf, and said, "We're listening. Give us the scripts. Insert the right plot twists and opportunities. Show us the way."

I believe the world needs more messengers like these.
Will you join us?

Well, actually, maybe you should take a look at what the process often looks like first!

Contrary to what many popular business and book coaches will tell/sell you, writing a book and launching a business to change the world is not as simple as following the formulas they offer so freely, especially for people like us. Those of who us are sharing stories and messages that are the direct result of overcoming and/or succeeding despite an abusive childhood or relationship, a deep betrayal or other tragedy, or a lifelong st*ry of not being enough (or being way too much) quickly slam into our old wounds and st*ries and struggle through the creative process. Most just quit. Not because they *decide* they don't want to rehash the past, but because their life goes upside-down every time they bring this project forward and they unconsciously (and quite accurately, in my opinion) connect the sudden physical symptoms, relationship ruptures, financial fall-outs, and other minor and massive disturbances with giving their attention to it.

More than a decade ago, I decided to use my own transcendent experience watching "magic eggs" turn into

caterpillars and then butterflies as the framework for the journey I witness every aspiring messenger take. Watching caterpillars flip upside-down with absolutely no hesitation, I realized that this is the moment where most of us stop our journey. Our message (and the st*ries it brings up for us) sparks intense disorientation in our lives and we resist the very process required to transform into the beautiful masterpieces and messengers we are destined to be. But what if we knew how to co-create a safe enough space (cocoon) in and around us to allow all of those st*ries to be witnessed and dissolved and reorganized into the body and wings that would carry our message and purpose to the world? What if we had someone to tell us that it's best *not* to fly right away, but to strengthen our wings and learn to trust The Wind first? What if we were in a community (rabble) whose measure of success was wholeness instead of, or at least in addition to, the numbers of followers on social media or dollars in our accounts?

It's true that sometimes projects get stuck because the messenger has failed to clarify the core message, or chosen the wrong audience, or doesn't know how to organize their thoughts in a coherent manner, or is missing the storytelling skills that make content engaging. In fact, you'll find some stories in this book where one or more of these challenges brought a client my way. But more often than not, in my experience, projects and purpose stall and stutter because there is another reason the aspiring author, speaker, or coach has been inspired to write, speak, and support others. It's a divine conspiracy aimed at their wholeness, and writing a message or story is one of the most powerful ways to witness, embrace, and eventually accept their role as the co-

author, narrator, and character of their story. But it's also one of the toughest.

What to Expect

Each chapter is written by one of the dozens of messengers I've supported over the last decade, all of whom are dear friends and three of whom are biologically related to me. I invited those who had the most powerful experiences and who represent many others who I either didn't invite or who decided this wasn't the right project at the right time.

At the end of each of their stories, you'll see that I've written "my side of our story," in order to inspire other coaches to consider the possibility that every client lands in our plotline with purpose and to explore what sacred contributions they bring. Even those who throw their hands up in frustration, throw some poop in our direction, and/or walk away for one reason or another have a gift they leave with us. And trust me when I say, I've had plenty of those clients.

Some of these messengers catalyzed personal healing with their stories while others inspired and supported important expansions in my business. All of them arrived at the perfect time, and that means three of them have been delivering some of the most important messages I've received in my life since before they even knew they had a message.

Our collective intention is that you find at least one or two stories that help you to recognize that you are not alone in your experience of the upside-down creative and/or coaching process. That you will consider the possibility that all those hot messes that blindsides you when you start

a project might just be opportunities for more wholeness. That there is a community of messengers and experts here that keeps it real and raw and safe and fun and is always embracing others who are willing to do this type of work to *become* the change we all want to see in the world.

So, let's get to it!



Ursula Mentjes is an award-winning entrepreneur, sales expert, motivational speaker, and author of four bestselling books. She was promoted from account executive to President of an international technical training company in just five years at the age of 27 when the revenue was in the tens of millions. Ursula specializes in Neuro-Linguistic Programming to help clients 2x their monthly sales while also releasing 10 hours or more hours off their work week. Her clients include Aflac, Ebenezer, Keller Williams, Fairview Hospitals, New York Life, Paychex, and more. She is on a mission to help millions of women business owners break through the 7-figure mark!

UpLeveling with Intention

Ursula Mentjès

“**T**here’s no way I can... publish this... right?” After attaching the document with the most painful story from my childhood, I hit send.

I know that story has been keeping me from my next level in every area of my life, but why would I print that for everyone to see? It’s so... heavy.

Despite the churning in my stomach, I refilled my coffee cup to the brim and took a deep breath.

I need some air!

Plopping myself into the cozy chair on my deck, overlooking Lac Lavon, I imagined my readers and clients trying to digest that story.

There is only one reason to share that story.

The long-repressed hurt and anger were moving through my body, and I closed my eyes to breathe and remember what was true in that moment. I was safe and loved. I had worked for decades to heal from my traumatic childhood, and I had built a beautiful life with my husband and loved being a mommy to our son. My work was meaningful, and my business was growing steadily. And, I knew I wasn’t alone in my journey.

I know I’m meant to do more and that this story is part of what’s holding me back from helping the millions of entrepreneurs who need my message. I see it all the time in my own clients—how these old wounds create the limits of their

impact and income. But do they really need to see my wound? Will it really help them?

“Yes...” The voice was a composite of my own and those of the last few coaches who had been saying this for a while now.

Well, I guess getting it on paper was the first step in bringing the wound into the light.

Buzz.

I glanced at my phone and saw Amanda’s response: “Whew. This took my breath away. Where do you imagine putting this in the book?”

The lump in my throat returned.

Ring.

It was Amanda.

“Ursula, I’m... speechless... I’m so sorry that happened to you.”

“I never told you that story, eh?”

“I mean, you’ve told me about some of the crazy stuff, but this is hard to...”

“Yeah, and I didn’t include all the details there. I don’t know how much of it to share or where, for the readers’ sake, but I know it is time to share it.”

After four successful books and more than a decade of personal and business expansion, I knew I had to do this; and I was grateful I had Amanda and our almost-fifteen years of friendship and coaching to help me sort through the process, and actually put it on paper.

The first time I saw her, she was sitting quietly at a round table at a networking event, in a loud room, politely listening to the business owner next to her. The look on her face said it all—she felt like she had just landed on Mars.

I like her already! I thought to myself, not knowing that she would become not only *my* book coach (I like to think she's all mine!), but also my favorite “quitting coach” and one of my best soul sistas on the planet. I had no idea that I would soon tell her all my stories, even the ones I was still too scared to write about (yes, there are many!), and that she would one day know me better than I probably think I know myself.

As I sat there, watching Amanda squirm, I had just finished writing my first book, *Selling with Intention* after realizing that speaking and training on the topic of sales did not give me the kind of platform I needed to help as many people as I desired to reach. I had founded a sales training and coaching company called Potential Quest (which became Sales Coach Now and is now Ursula, Inc.) with the mission to help salespeople and entrepreneurs discover that selling doesn't have to be hard. In fact, by experience, I knew it could be easy. Plus, I wanted people to know that the more money they made, the more freedom they would gain, and the more they could impact the world.

But then my inner critic had shown up to make a mess. “*Who am I to write a book? I'm not an author. How will I fill an entire book? I don't have that much to say!*”

Despite my negative self-talk, I felt the push and desire to keep going; and when I saw an advertisement for a class on how to write and self-publish a book at the Learning Annex in Los Angeles, I signed up immediately. A few weeks later, I attended the three-hour class taught by a woman who was an

ex-felon that had not only successfully written and published a book, she had gone on to start a successful multi-million-dollar publishing company. Her message was, “If I can do it, so can you.” I took on her belief and kept writing.

After I finished writing the first (bad) draft of *Selling with Intention*, I knew I had to find an editor because that’s what the owner of the publishing company told us to do. (I am very coachable!) Handing the book over for the first time wasn’t easy. It was like asking someone to tell me that my baby was cute, even when I knew, deep down, that maybe my baby really wasn’t the most adorable kiddo on the planet!

I was also running at one of my first insane business deadlines—a launch party for the book where I intended to sell a companion workbook. The only problem was that I didn’t have time to create the workbook. That’s when my editor formally introduced me to the woman who squirmed through the networking event. A few days later, we met at a cafe at an outdoor mall to discuss the project and make sure she was the one to help me cross the finish line.

The original version of *Selling with Intention* still exists out there, with its bright red cover. I’ve seen it floating around. I have a couple of copies myself. As I continued to work and heal my own st*ries over the years, the second self-published version was born and then the third version, published with Morgan James, came to fruition. Each version was an evolution of who I had become, what I had been willing to heal, and how I was showing up in the world. The writing process, coupled with the entrepreneur journey, had forced me to confront those parts of me that were wounded: *I am not enough, I am not a writer, I cannot have that level of success. Who am I to make a lot of money? What if I become visible? Etc.*

Amanda held space for me when I was overwhelmed with old pain while challenging me, in the gentlest way possible, to look in the mirror and see what needs to be healed and cleared before I could write that next chapter or finish editing the one in front of me. For me, all hell always breaks loose when I am in the process of editing and requires piles of chocolate chip cookies and jugs of black coffee. Impatient by nature, I love the initial part of the process—being creative, writing, and tying the pieces together—but my inner four-year old comes out as soon as I realize it's time to edit. Over time, she talked me into building clearer outlines at the beginning, to contain the process, which has made the editing not-quite-as-painful. But, let's be honest, editing is a piece of cake compared to the inner work that I have to do as I write these books.

The biggest opportunities for healing did not come through writing my first book or the second or third. The opportunities for deep healing arrived when I wrote my fourth and fifth books. By that time, I had begun to see how Amanda's annoying insistence that I include my personal stories paid off with my readers and my clients. I really did not want to tell the stories of the financial disaster in 2008 and the moments I cried on the kitchen floor, wondering if I had what it took to come back from that mess. I wasn't excited to include the even more personal stories Amanda had witnessed as my friend while witnessing my journey of becoming a mother after so many years of wondering if it would ever happen. But she knew it was the moment that I began to apply my own message, which I had used to grow my business and help other people grow theirs, that I stepped into a new belief zone where pregnancy became inevitable. Enough people had thanked me for sharing these

vulnerable stories that when this story of my childhood came up at the end of my fifth book, I knew it had to stay and asked Amanda to help me do it in a way that would be powerful for my readers but also safe for me and my family.

It took me years to get to the point where I was even ready to talk about some of the stories that I share in my fifth book, let alone put them in front of tens of thousands of people. And yet, there is a part of me that knows my resistance to telling my story, my truth, is a barrier to helping others. I have come to accept that I've kept a lot of stories on lock down to stay safe because a part of me believed that if I shared them, I might not be as credible, or people wouldn't see me the same way. And yet, the opposite is true: Sharing my story has been the exact thing that has allowed me to free myself, to free others, and to encourage them to keep moving forward despite the inner battles they might be facing.

In fact, as soon as I started this inner work around the story in my fifth book, *UpLevel Now*, I saw incredible shifts happen in my business and my willingness to be more authentic and vulnerable, which in turn gave my clients what they needed to do the same. In my marketing, I also became even more open and authentic which I know allows my ideal clients to find me even easier. In fact, as we got closer to launch time, I received a five-star review from Reader's Favorite. At first, I was terrified to read it—serious impostor syndrome! But then, over a steaming cup of coffee, I opened it up and, with one eye open, began to read. Let's just say that the gentleman's five-star review made every challenging moment of writing this book worth it. Two sentences even made me smile out loud: "In *UpLevel Now*, Ursula Mentjes's writing style is no-nonsense, matter-of-fact, and feels like she is talking directly to you. On more than one occasion, I had to

look over my shoulder to see she wasn't peering directly into my limiting beliefs that UpLevel Now will bust through." My direct sign from the Universe to keep writing, keep going, and never listen to that voice that says I can't.



Amanda's Side of the Story

I was too overwhelmed to close my computer and simply walk back into my life. I had to do something first.

Ursula!

I quickly dialed her number, knowing that if anyone was going to understand what I was experiencing, it was this client-turned-sista-friend who was all about powerful intention.

"Ursula..." My breath caught in my throat with excitement when I heard her voice.

"Yes?"

She always sounds like she's smiling on the other side of the phone—like she already knows what I'm about to say.

I imagined her angelic face, smiling blue eyes, and wavy blonde hair draped down her back.

"I figured out my One Great Goal," I started, using the language I'd been learning from her as we worked on her second book. "I'm going to write a series of children's books with a parenting manual to help them raise happier, healthier children. I was talking to my mentor earlier today and..." I finished my story, including the part about mapping the content out and realizing that I was made for this project.

“Wow! Amanda, that is awesome! What can I do to help?” Her enthusiasm was palpable.

“Well, I left out the craziest part...” I paused.

OMG, if I say this out loud, she might think I’m nuts!!!

“I saw myself attracting a teacher from *The Secret*, and working with them. I mean, these teachers are out there showing people how to use the Law of Attraction to work on their own dreams and self-image. Why wouldn’t they jump at the chance to offer their audiences an opportunity to help their children learn and benefit from the Law of Attraction while they are young?” I held my breath.

“Amanda, that is BRILLIANT. And I know you will do it. How soon do you want this to happen?” she asked.

“As soon as possible...” I blurted. “I outlined all of the content, and I’m going to ask a friend to help me with illustrations.”

“Fantastic! I am going to hold this intention with you while you take that next step,” she declared before telling me she had to run into a meeting. But right before she hung up, she said, “I’d love for you to join this One Great Goal mastermind I’m starting next week.”

“Wow, thank you. Yes...”

“Awesome, I’ll send you the details when I get home. Amanda, this is an incredible idea, and it *is* going to happen.” And with that, she was gone.

As I hung up the phone, I grinned from ear-to-ear, feeling her belief infusing every cell of my body. If there was any doubt that this could happen before that moment, it was gone.

This is just one of the hundreds of scenes in my life where Ursula has been the first person I call, the first person to believe, and the first person to offer support because the

message she had just delivered and I had just edited had arrived in divine time. Four months after this scene, after reading the autobiography I had written for an application to join a training program with The Secret Teacher I had met magically only three months later, Ursula said, “Amanda, as I was reading this, I saw this vision—it was Aaron (my son), leading an army of angels to come help you...”

If that’s true, Ursula was one of the first angels he called in, and it happened at the absolute perfect time.

It was 2006, the year after I’d abandoned my dream of being a teacher and begun working as an online writing instructor for a dear mentor’s new enterprise. My marriage was falling apart. My health was spiraling. My financial situation was more of a disaster. The only bright spot in my life was this little boy who had come to help three years earlier, and I was terrified I was going to damage him beyond repair.

When Ursula had asked my mentor/boss for help in developing the workbook for *Selling With Intention* (in two weeks, cuz that’s how she rolls!), she quickly referred her to me. I remember where I was sitting the first time I heard her tell me what she was up to in the world, and I can still feel the tingly sensation that traveled from my heart to every cell of my body. Her sentiments about potential, the capacities of the conscious and subconscious minds, and power of intention quickly knit together previously disparate parts of my education and experience and made me realize that I was the perfect person to support her. More importantly, it called all of my own potential, capacities, and intention forward. In that moment, I had the opportunity to use my curriculum development chops from my teacher training and all that I had learned from my dad about the power of

the subconscious to help Ursula and everyone who would experience this workbook.

I joke with a lot of people in Ursula's community that most people think of her the way our history books think of its most talked about figure. There's Before and After Ursula. The moment someone meets her, that's it—life as we know it changes... forever.

When I turned the workbook around in a few weeks, she not only gave me more work and asked me to take a second look at *Selling With Intention*, but she started referring all of her entrepreneurial friends to me. She quickly turned into one of my biggest cheerleaders, referral partners, and friends. And working with her has taught me A LOT about how many messengers operate and what we *all* face on this journey.

First, I learned how easy and common it is for messengers to leave their true “secret sauce” out of their message. The thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that come so naturally to them are treated like assumptions, when those are truly some of the most valuable gems they have to offer. After watching her interact at networking meetings and her events, I knew exactly what had been left out of *Selling With Intention* and was able to help her make it an even more valuable offering to her readers.

Second, avid readers and writers like Ursula have this funny little habit of trying to pack several books into one. And even after I spend a whole manuscript keeping them focused, they still start writing the next book before they finish this one. Every time we've worked on a book, she's heard me say, “That's the next one,” at some point in the process.

Third, the journey of a messenger is a spiritual-emotional one that is designed to return us to wholeness. For many

years, I was one of the first people Ursula called to share her “wild” ideas for events and programs; and I had the backstage pass to the realities of the journey—the self-doubt and second-guessing, the fears, the old st*ries and wounds, and the natural rollercoaster of emotion that is entrepreneurship. As a client, as a coach, and as a friend, Ursula modeled honesty and grace through all of it, even when she didn’t think she did.

And she knew how to stretch me like only the best coaches, mentors, and friends do. When I’d state a goal that she knew was too small, she’d ask a question to expand it. When I’d give her the number for what I could see charging for one of my programs, she’d say, “Okay, but what’s the *most* you would ever charge for that program?” When I shared the offer for people who would purchase ten copies of my first book, she asked, “And what are you going to give those who purchase twenty?” Gulp. Always the stretch. And now that I think about it, I’m certain that she and Aaron have been in some sort of spiritual cahoots this entire time. Right after she stretched me to twenty copies, he asked me what I would give to people who wanted to purchase fifty! I knew it!

Of course, it helped that she always received the message I needed right before I needed it.

Selling With Intention reminded me of the God-given power I had to create a new story for my life. I wasn’t concerned with sales at the time, but the universal principles she shared brought my heart and mind together in a way they hadn’t been able to attune before and opened me up to possibilities, dreams, and inspirations I simply couldn’t access before then.

One Great Goal showed up right before my own lightning bolt message inspiration, and I’m sure it’s what allowed me

to see and own the huge vision that came through and take the scary steps of signing up to work with a teacher from *The Secret*.

Selling With Synchronicity was handed to me right in time for me to take action when the vision for my first huge event and inspiration for new offerings to support my messengers came in, leading me to my most exciting and profitable year in business.

The Belief Zone dropped in right after I had taken the biggest step to reclaim my power and my life and then found myself wondering if I'd made a huge mistake and how I was going to do it all on my own because business was dwindling. In addition to editing that book, I worked through all of the exercises and saw the bigger picture that my Co-Author had already been trying to show me—that I needed to offer message and st*ry-healing strategy, not just book strategy, so messengers could see from the beginning that we are doing way more than writing incredible books over here. It definitely expanded my own belief zone.

And this latest book, *UpLevel Now*, arrived as inspiration during a time where my Co-Author was demanding deeper integration between my professional and personal selves. I shook my head in awe and gratitude when I saw that this book was going to offer the most personally and professionally integrative message to date.

Every time she brings more of *her* to her work as a result of more vulnerable stories, more acknowledgment and leading with her obsession with quantum physics and woo, or more intensive personal healing, she infuses more magic into her writing and people get the opportunity to experience her the way I have—intention, coffee, chocolate chip cookies, and plenty of belly laughter as we marvel at the YCMTSU

moments that connected us and continue to unfold in the most divine ways.