



READY
TO

FLY

VOLUME 2



STORIES OF
STRENGTH AND
COURAGE TO

*Inspire Your
Journey Forward*

CRYSTAL BLUE

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**Ready to Fly: Stories of Strength and Courage to Inspire Your
Journey Forward**

Volume 2

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Introduction

“Just like the butterfly, I too will awaken in my own time.”

– Deborah Chaskin

Similar to the first volume, Volume 2 is a collection of stories by women who are *Ready to Fly*. Ready to share their truth with the world. Ready to transform their painful experiences into life lessons and inspirational wisdom.

In the first volume, we covered a variety of topics—from major career shifts to loss to trauma and back again. Many of us visited our own personal hell during the writing process. It was challenging and nerve-wracking. It was emotional and humbling. For many, it was also transformational and liberating. In Volume 2, the chapters are just as moving and powerful, with stories that speak to the challenges of motherhood, body image, friendships, childhood trauma, illness, abuse, death, and loss ... and how we were able to learn from our experiences and make peace with the past.

When creating the cover for Volume 1, the hummingbird was chosen as a symbol of love, happiness, and joy. For many women, the hummingbird is also a symbol of peaceful strength. Many of us resonated with this image, and it became our mascot of sorts. Many readers were also drawn in by this image. I was surprised by how many people mentioned that the hummingbird was their spirit animal or a strong symbol in their lives. It seems the hummingbird was the perfect choice to launch our project with the intention of uniting and uplifting others.

For Volume 2, the butterfly was chosen to honor the process of transformation: casting off the old and growing into the new. As you may know, transformation can be a painful process ... letting go of the past, releasing our old identity, facing the “should haves” and negative beliefs about our self-worth, maybe even finding our rock bottom ... and through the depths of transformation, we hide in our cocoon, we isolate ourselves, we turn into a pile of unrecognizable human jelly ... and then, somehow, we magically start to put ourselves back together, with a new determination and will ... we slowly creep out of our cocoon, strengthening our wings as we go ... and when we come out on the other side, we are stronger and lighter because of it ... bravely exploring the world with new eyes and a new awareness, embracing our true selves, claiming “I am awesome ... and I can *fly!*”

We hope you enjoy these stories of truth and personal freedom.



Dancing with My Shadows

by Dina Tibbs

In the natural world, we are constantly witnessing cycles of death and rebirth; we often don't notice it unless we are paying attention and in a close relationship with nature. In the case of the caterpillar, it must break down completely into a primordial soup of chaos until it emerges as a beautiful butterfly. I never expected to become primordial soup. I never expected to experience a spiritual death and rebirth because I tried so hard for so long to maintain control over my nice, comfortable life. But I have been through the cycle several times, although I didn't always realize what was going on at the time. Each time a new version of myself emerged out of the chaos.

What happens when the chaos comes, despite the fact that everything seems to be going well? When you put on a "perfect" face for the world, when the world believes you are the "strong one" and

you don't need any help? Eventually, the breakdown comes, and the chaos of inner turmoil rears its ugly head because perfection is unattainable and we have no control, not really. It is how we respond and react to the turmoil that turns chaos into light. When we don't respond to our emotions and feelings, and instead try to shove them down, the shadows descend into darkness. Intentionally going to your shadow side is necessary because if you don't, it will come to claim you—and you will be hit by a cosmic two-by-four. Trust me, the deepest medicine comes from meeting your shadow and loving her as much as you love your light, loving your whole self, which includes the parts that are not so pretty. If you try to ignore your shadow, she will make herself known, one way or another. That is when the shitstorm comes. But if you love her and let her speak, it brings her into the light. There she can shine and nourish your soul as much as the lighter side of your personality. Both the light and the dark dance together to make the beautiful and unique being that is you.

We all have shadow aspects of our personalities. It does not mean we are evil, scary, mean, or any of the other words you think of when you think of darkness. It just means that we have places within us that are not all love and light. We judge others, we get angry and lash out—maybe we are in a state of fear or we can't get out of the hamster wheel of negative thoughts. We beat ourselves up for feeling any of these emotions. As women, we were taught that these emotions are “bad.” Women shouldn't get angry, but if we cry, we are “too emotional.” Similarly, men are told that anger is okay but crying is not. I am not sure when emotions of any kind became bad, but these feelings are as much a part of us as our hands.

We fear meeting that part of ourselves. However, it is there. When we cannot find our way to loving those parts, we become fragmented, self-sabotaging, depressed, anxious, prone to addiction, and we live in our heads rather than our hearts. Often these shadows are coping mechanisms we put into place as children to keep ourselves safe. But we never shed them, and as adults, they become distorted. For

me, the coping mechanism showed up as a need to control my environment, having to *know* what was coming next because if I didn't know, I didn't feel safe. As a seven-year-old, if I didn't know whether my father was coming home drunk or sober (which of course I never did), I had no idea what his behavior would be like, or if I would be fed dinner or ignored completely, or if he would wake me up to yell at me for not cleaning the house. But as an adult, I no longer need to feel in control to feel safe. In fact, the more I grip onto control, the more I lose it, and that is when the shadow side of me shows up. What I have come to learn as my truth is that I have no control over anything. When I release control, when I accept and embrace the mystery, I can get down to the business of having fun and living my heart and soul desires. But I did not come to that wisdom until after I rode through the chaos.

The Fourth Hermetic Principle of Polarity from *The Kybalion* explains the continuum of dark and light.

“Everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet; all truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled.”

What this means for us as humans is that we are not either/or, but we are both/and. Everyone's degrees of darkness and light are different, and the balance point is always in motion. The only constant is change, and all we can do is embrace it. I can be fierce and loving; I can carry love and anger; I can be in the shadows and in the light at the same time. As humans, we are capable of feeling and acknowledging more than one emotion at the same time. But it's when we ignore the emotions that the external world tells us are not appropriate and shove them down for fear of being seen as unstable, then we actually do become incoherent and unstable. It's when we beat ourselves up for feeling anything but love and light that things go awry. And those of us who work in the healing arts are told we should be *all* love and light. I say that is bullshit. These days it's called “spiritual bypassing,” which I am no stranger to.



When my husband and I met, we both worked in the high-pressure corporate world. We worked hard; we partied hard. For a while, we discussed not having kids. But we decided we wanted to see what type of being the merger of two complete opposites would bring into the world. So, in 2002, I left corporate America to pursue a career in the healing arts. I knew I had a higher purpose, and my husband and I did not want to be both working 60 hours a week and having someone else raise our child. I pursued yoga, bodywork, spiritual practices, and plant medicine. After two pregnancy losses, I discovered Maya abdominal massage, women's circles, and Divine Feminine work. Instructors told me I was a healer and it was my job to be love and light, a conduit for the Divine, but I was never really taught how to connect with my inner self or my Divine. In 2005, my son Casey was born four weeks early via emergency C-section. After the pregnancy losses, a C-section, and never producing any breastmilk, I thought my body failed me and my son. I wanted so badly to have a natural childbirth, and it was anything but natural. I was in love with my new child but also disappointed.

I thought I would have my son and six weeks later I would go back to my massage practice. In reality, I stopped working to be with him and care for his needs; he was a premie but was completely healthy, just small. I was not prepared for this, and yet I had never felt love like I felt for my son. I was in awe of what my husband and I created. I never intended to be a stay-at-home mom, but that was how things turned out. Then one day, when he was about two months old, I woke up and asked, "Who the fuck am I now, and what am I supposed to be doing?" I knew this wasn't all of it, and I felt like a huge part of my identity was out in the ether somewhere. I love my son with every fiber of my being, but Mother with a big M is not my archetype. Some women embody and embrace the Mother archetype of deep caring and nurturing for all beings, most particularly

their children, and they feel complete and whole in that role. I did not, and for those of us who don't feel complete and whole in the role of Mother, there is a hefty amount of guilt that comes along with that. Being a mother is part of my sacred work, but not all of it. The problem was that I did not know what the rest of my sacred assignment actually was. I was beginning to realize bodywork and massage was not it, but I kept trying to work in that field anyway once Casey went to school. I was ignoring the message that there was more for me. I was also ignoring a huge part of my essence and my gifts, but I was not consciously aware of that at the time. That was the gift of the breakdowns that came later.

At the same time Casey went to school, my husband was working 60 to 70 hours a week and traveling. All of my “mom friends” dispersed, and in many ways, having kids was all we had in common; I never really felt like I belonged. So there I was: no kid to care for, husband not around, no friends to call. I knew I had a greater purpose, but not a clue what it was—or at least that is what I thought. The reality is that I was ignoring the calls, and I was afraid of my own power. I was so isolated and lonely; I felt like there was no community in which I belonged and no one “got” me. I began to drink a bottle of wine a day to get out of my head, and in my mind, “have a little fun.” I let my inner rebel wild child take the reins for a while. As a result, I almost lost my family.

Thankfully, the Universe brought me a counselor whom I resonated with spiritually, and who reminded me that I had gifts. I had the spiritual knowledge of yogic technique, mindfulness practices, how to connect with the Divine and nature, and creative practices that I wasn't putting into practice. It was time I do so. My new counselor was fierce, just like me, and that was just what I needed—no coddling whatsoever. And so, I released and shifted my relationship with alcohol. I was truly taking a spiritual journey instead of just reading about it in books. Because here is the thing: you can read all the self-help and spiritual books that you want, take all the trainings,

get all the coaching. Now you have a whole bunch of knowledge, and so what? Knowledge becomes wisdom through practice. Let me say that again. Knowledge becomes wisdom *through practice*. If you don't practice the tools and techniques you have learned, then it's just words. Start practicing what resonates with you and release the rest. And what resonates can change over time. Be open to exploring, be open to playing, be open to the mystery. Life is an experiment.

Even after reigniting my spiritual practice of getting quiet and listening, connecting with my Divine didn't change my loneliness and isolation. I was afraid of showing my shadow side, of showing my intensity, my wisdom and intellect, my sarcasm, my goofiness, my esoteric side, and yes, of giving and receiving love as well. I hid all of those things in an effort to belong and to seem like I was all love and light. I still did not feel like I belonged anywhere, but now I had the tools to handle it without diving into a bottle again. I thought I was intentionally going "internal" to find my assignment and purpose. But really, I was just going through the healer motions again, taking more classes and getting more certificates. I can't regret that because it led me to the teachers I call my "wise counsel" today. But the reality was that all of the knowledge and certificates I was racking up was just my ego continuing to try to find somewhere to belong, a tribe. In many ways, I was becoming spiritually arrogant, starting to feel above everyone else, isolating myself even more, and still hiding the parts of me that I didn't want anyone to see.

Here are some truths if you ever find yourself lonely, isolated, and alone. Those feelings of being alone and isolated are also a part of the shadow. There are so many of us who feel isolated and alone, despite the fact that we are more connected now than any other time in history. As humans, all we want is to belong, to be loved, to be felt, seen, and heard. I cannot stress this enough. Get yourself a support network and a wise counsel. We cannot do this thing called life alone, and support can come in many forms, paid or unpaid. Just find the guides who love you fully, who can witness you without

judgment, and who can give you counsel based on their experiences without trying to “fix” you. Because you are not broken. In fact, I want you to know without a doubt that you are enough and your presence is the gift. Put out the call to the Universe, and I assure you, your wise counsel will show up. And stop hiding who you are, put down the masks and the robes of oppression, in order to feel a sense of belonging. You will never find a tribe who truly loves you if you are not showing all the parts of yourself and fiercely loving all your parts without apology. The ones who love you, love you because of your shadows, not in spite of them. Your tribe cannot find you if you are hiding.

After this initiation into my shadow side, I was okay for a while. Not unhappy, but not joyous. I now know that I was not living my heart and soul desires, and still not doing my sacred work, or my inner spiritual work for that matter. You may ask why I wasn’t doing my inner spiritual work. Why didn’t I learn the lesson from my dance with addiction, which almost took me to rock bottom? Well, like many women who are wearing many hats, I told myself I didn’t have the time. I was fine; things were going well, I didn’t need to quiet down and listen to my inner workings or wisdom. But the truth is, I still did not want to explore and get to know my shadows. I was in control; things were good. We often choose to ignore our spiritual practices when things are good, and then—when the shit hits the fan—we wake up, yet again. And this is the gift of going into the darkness. It forces us to hold up a mirror and look at what is really going on. Or there is the other option: have a complete meltdown, which is, of course, what I did. A much better choice is to, intentionally and often, get quiet and explore anything in your awareness that seems shadowy. Get curious about what is happening and what story you are running. When you are listening, and something comes up that is triggering or not so pretty, there is no need to judge or bully yourself. Just acknowledge that part of you and love her fiercely, then hold up the mirror and ask how you can respond to and do things

differently. Once again, your inner wise woman will tell you, and she is never wrong. Trust your intuition.

But still, I did none of those things. And so, life brought me another initiation, another chance to go through the cycle of death and rebirth. In February 2016, I was about to launch the next version of my healing arts business. This was it. This was my purpose; I was weaving together all the things I had learned in the prior 15 years, and it was going to be good. Then my husband got into a serious skiing accident. I had to put my business plans on hold, and I kept asking myself, “When the fuck is it going to be *my* time?” Once again, I was not embracing the mystery. I had no idea that this was yet another gift from the Universe. In the end, this hardship brought me clarity, alignment, authenticity, and strengthened my relationship with my husband. But not without first hitting me with another cosmic two-by-four because I was still ignoring the gifts of my shadow side.

In June 2016, we were less than halfway through my husband’s 16-month recovery. I remember saying to one of my teachers, “I can feel the darkness coming. I just don’t know what to do about it or what it’s trying to tell me, but I know it’s coming.” So I had grown a little bit in my awareness but not in my ability to listen, quiet down, or surrender to it and learn. That summer, I lived in a constant state of panic. Not just anxiety but sheer terror, like I was dying of a heart attack or a stroke. My body was buzzing and numb, and my mind would not stop thinking the worst. I could not even leave the house, yet I could not sit still. When I ignore her, my shadow side manifests as anxiety and panic, but this was like nothing else I had ever experienced. I was willing to do anything to get it to stop, including trying pharmaceuticals (which actually have the opposite effect on me, so those stopped as quickly as they started). The one thing I didn’t do is surrender and accept it. Because to surrender to it would be admitting defeat, admitting that I did not have it all under control, admitting that I am not always the strong one and that I needed help, and most profoundly, accepting the knowledge that I would die. The root

of anxiety is the fear of death and our inability to control it. And the funny thing about panic disorder is that your mind wants you to believe that you could die at any moment, and yet you are fully alive in your body. In fact, your body is screaming at you, saying, “Don’t ignore me, I have a lot of wisdom to share with you!” Your body is an intuitive lightning rod; it will tell you when something is out of spiritual alignment. In my case, it manifested as addiction and all of the embodied feelings of panic. Listen to your body before it gets to that point. Know that if your body is speaking, your soul, heart, and energy field have already been out of alignment for a long time.

My counsel to you is to slow down, even if it’s just for a few minutes every day, and listen to what your inner wise woman is telling you. Find ways to get out of your head, so she can be heard. If you don’t find a way to do this, first I can promise you that shit will fall apart eventually. Secondly, there is no way you are living your heart and soul desires if you don’t know what they are. And that information does not come from your head. But hindsight is 20/20. I knew all the healing modalities to deal with anxiety and panic. I knew the yoga, meditations techniques, herbs, essential oils, bodywork. You name it, nothing helped. The idea of sitting on a meditation cushion was a joke. I could not sit. Still, the energy of the anxiety was that intense; the only things that provided any relief at all were dancing and painting, but they were just taking the edge off. It was the embodied practices that moved some of that energy out of my system.

At that time I met Santi, one of my spiritual mentors and part of my council of wise women. She had to come to my house to work with me because I couldn’t leave. She has a magical gift in the ability to hold a loving, nurturing, and safe space for me. She literally held me in her arms like a baby as I shook, cried and, got angry because I was so out of control. I wanted to know when this pain would end, if it would ever end. And she just kept holding me, despite my resistance to actually receiving love so unconditionally while I was such a “hot mess.” Finally, I just let go; I could feel the anxiety leaving my

body, and I went limp in her arms. Even in this moment, as I write this, I am crying and can feel the release in my body, not out of sadness, but out of the deep gratitude I feel. Through this journey, I got to experience what being loved unconditionally really feels like: being accepted as I am, in any moment, in the rawness that can be the human experience, loved fully in my authenticity. It took experiencing it from someone else to be able to do it for myself. Loving all the parts of me has become non-negotiable.

After my release, Santi got me on the massage table and began to do some shamanic energy work. She asked, “Is this work you are doing in the world as a healer your true assignment?” I tapped into my inner wisdom and the answer to that question was a resounding, *No*. I was shocked, but not really. Deep down my inner wisdom knew that was not the type of healing I was meant to do; it was not my work in the world to do. But then I was left to wonder, “What is my work?” I realized I did not want the responsibility of doing hands-on healing work. I did not have the desire, and quite frankly, I prefer to work with the emotional and spiritual aspects of my beloveds. I like to go deep with them; I love to witness their stories. You don’t get to do that while giving a massage. However, I had no idea how to describe or put words around what it was I did want to do, what my assignment really was. I am not a therapist, and at the time, I wasn’t a coach. My inner critic was screaming that I have no training in whatever “this” was. Santi took one look around at the art in my studio and said, “Why aren’t you doing this?” I thought, *I am not an artist, I just do this for myself*. And in that moment, I realized my assignment was to inspire and to connect, however that looked. I felt a deep sense of relief, and my anxiety seemed to dissipate. I was about to step yet again into the unknown, but this time I knew in every fiber of my being that not only was this my assignment but that I had no control over how it would look. Rather than scaring me, it excited me!

Because of this experience, which I would not trade for the world, I now guide women towards accessing their own wisdom through

creative practice and art. Through art, you can take the inner journey to awareness of your essences, including the shadows, and love all of it. I also know that art is just my tool at the moment and that tool could change at any time. I am completely present with what I have accessible to me in this moment, and I have complete trust that the manifestation of my sacred work could change at any moment. I have several teachers to thank for assisting me on my journey towards recalling all the parts of myself I was ignoring and bringing my soul back into alignment. And now I am guiding others towards the same sense of wholeness and total love of self.

One of the most profound awakenings I had on this journey was that I was ignoring and hiding many of my Divinely given gifts and several facets of my true essences. As a healer, I thought I was supposed to always be warm and nurturing. I can be those things, but I am also intense, fierce, a truth-teller, wild, funny, a bit weird, and esoteric. I also was born with the gift of being both creative and analytical, right- and left-brained, structured and fluid, and I was ignoring the left brain business part after I left corporate America. That is when I learned it is not an either/or choice: it is the paradox of both/and. These are huge pieces of my soul and my essence that I was hiding for fear of not being accepted or understood. As humans, we all want these things. At our very core, we hide parts of ourselves because we are afraid we won't be loved, but the truth is, if we are hiding these things, we are not being loved anyway, by the most important person there is: ourselves.

I hope my story and my journey serves as inspiration to you and that you give yourself permission to embrace and dance with your shadows. I don't claim to know it all, that includes being in the mystery of whether or not I will ever go back to a dark place. What I do know now is how to love my shadow and be with her. I also know this is no longer my story. I have transformed it, just like my childhood story. They are just stories, and I have rewritten mine. My stories no longer come from the past but from the possibilities of what

the future has in store for me, which I won't know until I arrive there, and that is the greatest gift of all. Life would be boring if I knew what was coming. Stay curious, my loves.



Dina Tibbs is the Founder and Inspiratrix of Amused Woman Studios in Centennial, Colorado, where she holds sacred space for women to remember who they are at a soul level, explore their light and their shadows, rewrite their stories, and bring their visions into form. She weaves together 20 years of healing, spiritual, and creative arts in her work with women's groups, business leadership teams, and individuals. She is a member of the Intentional Creativity™ Guild and a Path of Self-Love guide. She lives in Centennial, Colorado, with her husband, son, and two very spoiled hounds, where she pretends she lives at the beach, even though she is landlocked. You can find her online and in-person offerings at amusedwomanstudios.com.