

## Outrageous Openness—Arlington Street Church August 13, 2017 (Tina Rose)

A few weeks ago I had breakfast with a friend named Michael. We'd worked together in the early 2000s but had largely fallen out of touch except for his annual donation to my Pan-Mass Challenge bike ride. We shared intimate stories about our lives over the last five years. Near the end of our conversation Michael offered this quote from Bernard Malamud in *The Natural*:

*"We have two lives...the life we learn with and the life we live after that."*

Here is the life I learned with.

One day when I was in second grade, all the boys were running around at school recess saying "BAM!", "WHAM!", "BOOM!" I didn't join in. When I asked a friend what they were doing, he told *Batman* was on TV for the first time the night before. I had no idea what he was talking about. My family watched only one hour of TV a week—the *Ed Sullivan* show.

That October my mother asked me what I wanted to dress up as for Halloween. As a shy seven-year-old boy, I said Henny Penny from *Chicken Little*, one of my favorite books. My mother found a pattern, bought the fabric, cut, and sewed my costume. I remember the powder blue dress just above my knobby knees, white Bobby socks with ruffles, and a loaf of bread made with brown muslin. I felt so pretty and so happy to be dressed up like a girl.

While riding the bus to school, boys and girls teased me and really hurt my feelings. All the other boys were dressed in Batman costumes. It only got worse after the costume contest. I won first prize and a group of boys beat me up.

When I got home from school, I ran to my room, tore off the dress, threw it under my bed, and sobbed. My sister tried to console me, telling me how pretty I looked, and that the other kids were mean and jealous. It didn't help me feel any better. When my parents asked me at dinner how I got my black eye, I told them I'd fallen down on the playground. I was a pretty clumsy kid so they accepted my lie.

I went through the rest of my childhood and high school years as a nice boy. I played every sport imaginable to be accepted. I was quiet, well-mannered, and at the top of my class. While I had many friends who were boys through sports, my closest friends were always girls. I was drawn to their brains, their looks, their clothes, their talkiness, and their willingness to share their feelings. They always felt right to me.

While in college, I excelled academically, played soccer, was an editor of the literary magazine, and managed a movie theater. I was the model scholar-athlete in a small liberal arts college. My best friends remained women and I never told any of them about Henny Penny or explored my gender identity in any way. I was too scared, too ashamed, and too humiliated.

After college, I moved to Boston and had several intimate relationships with women before getting married to a former lesbian and having two children. We took a family vacation to San Francisco in 2007 and went to Pride. Perched high up on a light pole with my daughter on my shoulders, the floats streamed by. One float had Native American men dressed in women's clothing performing a ritual dance. It was as if someone reached into my chest and tore out my racing heart. Sweat started to pour off my body. "Daddy," my daughter said, "you're shaking a lot. Please don't drop me." "You're safe Hon," I tried to reassure her.

Has something like this ever happened to *you*? How did you *feel*? How did you *react*? What did you *do*?

When faced with life-changing events, we can have many different responses. I've distilled them to three phases that transcend my own spiritual journey.

- Phase 1. Denial:** convince yourself that what happened didn't really happen, or if it did, that it wasn't meant for you. This response is mostly motivated by fear and lack of acceptance. It's a classic defense mechanism. As the B-52s sang, "you're living in your own Private Idaho."
- Phase 2. Figure It Out:** acknowledge what happened and that it was meant for you, but you need to understand why. This is pretty scary and one way to reduce the fear is to study the heck out of it. This also keeps your reaction in the realm of your intellect, safe from your emotions. It's easy to let your brain lead and not your heart.
- Phase 3. Take a Leap of Faith:** embrace the event without knowing the consequences or outcome—trust your feelings. This response is based on self-love, intuition, and openness. You just go with the flow believing that everything will work out. You take the risk and accept the uncertainty.

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For two years after Pride I lived Denial 101. Though my business was flourishing, my children were growing fast, I was very involved in a faith-based spiritual community, and had a tight circle of close friends, I felt like I was perpetually walking under water.

To quote Talking Heads in *Once in a Lifetime*:

And you may find yourself  
 Living in a shotgun shack  
 And you may find yourself  
 In another part of the world  
 And you may find yourself  
 Behind the wheel of a large automobile  
 And you may find yourself in a beautiful house  
 With a beautiful wife  
 And you may ask yourself, well  
 How did I get here?

In October 2009 I faced my fear and denial at services for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. During the community blessings, I made a private commitment to explore what had happened in San Francisco. I told no one about my journey.

Following two years of intense private study in Native American history and literature, I learned that even though it wasn't part of my faith tradition, that I was a two-spirit, someone who combines female and male traits as a third-gender person. In Navajo the term is *nádleehí* (*NAHD-lay*) literally "the one is changing," in the sense of undergoing constant transformation.

After attending First Event in 2011, a conference for transgender and gender non-conforming people, I told the long version of my coming out story to my wife. Her response was immediate: "This is *your* journey, it's not *my* journey or *our* journey. I *never* want to be part of it. *Our separation is inevitable.*" I started to hyperventilate, cried hysterically, and ran away from the house at top speed. It was clear that my marriage of 23 years was going to end. After a year in therapy, we divorced three years later.

I spent a week in Santa Fe last spring. I rented a bike for a day of mountain biking. The route took me along Canyon Road known for its 150 art galleries. About a third of the way up, I looked to my left and saw a bronze woman in silhouette sitting upright on a bike. I had to stop. When I walked into the gallery, I saw a tall bronze female archetype. Her most striking aspect was her arms, narrow spindles stretched out wide like this.

Seeing this woman's arms, I started to weep aloud. I remembered Reverend Kim's words to me months before: "Think of all you do, Tina. You go out of your way to meet new people and make everyone feel loved all the time. It is your ministry to be welcoming."

After some time, the gallery's owner came up to me and asked "Are you OK?"

"Yes," I said quietly, "I'll be OK."

"Did you see the title of the work?" she inquired.

"No," I replied. When I looked down, there it was—"Welcome Home."

Given that I was on a rented bike and the piece cost \$12,000, it stayed in the gallery. 😊

Last summer I visited the offices of a client in Boston. While waiting in the reception area, a colleague walked by. We'd known each other for years and he typically walked with his head down and shoulders sloped, sort of like a human Eeyore. But that day his head was held high and his radiant smile was effervescent.

"Claudio," I said, "you look amazing! You're glowing!"

"Thanks for noticing," he gushed. "I need to tell you a story. Can you meet here at 4?"

Later that afternoon, we walked 25 minutes to the commuter rail. He talked almost non-stop. I did my best to keep up with his incredible story and 6-foot-2 strides.

He told me about having to fly cross-country for all-day, closed-door meetings at one of his company's major customers. The attendees were prohibited from using their phones or communicating with anyone outside the session. Everyone was told: "we're going to stay here until we get this all ironed out."

After 10 hours of grueling debate and eventual consensus, Claudio emerged from the meeting room and turned on his phone. It was lit up with email messages, voicemails, and texts. They started out with "Your wife has had an accident. Please call us ASAP." and ended with "As your wife's health care proxy, if we don't hear from you within the next hour we are going to make the decision about her life."

The last voicemail was time-stamped four hours before—the decision had already been made. Claudio sat there in a state of shock and disbelief, having no idea if his wife was alive or dead. He decided to walk to Baker Beach below the Golden Gate Bridge and meditate.

When Claudio called the hospital, he discovered that his wife had been rushed to the emergency room for open heart surgery. She'd survived the operation and was resting comfortably in ICU. They were reunited early the next morning.

I was absolutely stunned. "How could you do this?" I pleaded.

"I love my wife more than anyone," Claudio replied calmly. "There was nothing I could do to change what happened or her course of treatment. I needed to call in Divine Order and be guided to the outcome that had already been selected."

"That's crazy!" I blubbered.

“I know it sounds that way,” he answered. “You need to read *Outrageous Openness* by Tosha Silver. Then you’ll know what I mean.”

As soon as I got home, I ordered *Outrageous Openness*. Because of my profession, I read slowly but I devoured the book in two nights. Tosha Silver has been a yogini and astrologer for more than 30 years. Her stories are pithy, funny, poignant, and powerful.

This is Tosha Silver’s wisdom in the words of her intuitive friend Michael:

“Hold the question in your heart. Ask with complete focus and conviction for Divine Order’s guidance. Then let go and see what bread crumbs come for you to follow. If you don’t get an answer, just keep asking for a while until you do.”

Since reading *Outrageous Openness* I’ve changed my life. I start each day by reading aloud four self-affirmations and singing Debbie Friedman’s *Mi Shebeirach*, Prayer for Healing, then reciting the names of family and friends in need of healing. I’ve relied on Divine Order to live full-time as Tina Rose, guide me on a trip to Africa, downsize my business, and even find an overnight parking space in Brooklyn. ☺

My dear spiritual friends,

*“We have two lives...the life we learn with and the life we live after that.”*

At Arlington Street, we practice prophetic hospitality. I’d like to encourage us to expand this practice into a ministry of outrageous openness. I know we have the capacity. We just have to commit.

Define Divine Order however it works best for you.

Trust the Divine to take the lead.

Follow the signs as they are shown to you.

Open your heart.

Be genuinely accepting.

Engage people with your true, authentic self.

Welcome everyone with love.

Enjoy your spiritual awakening.

Find true happiness.

Amen.