

*An excerpt from:*

# *Awake in Angelscape*

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## *Preface to a Journey*

I had a normal life until about thirteen years ago. Growing up just outside of Philadelphia in an average South Jersey neighborhood, I graduated from East Carolina University at twenty-one with a BA in psychology and a minor in child development and education. I married my college boyfriend and landed a career in day care management. By the time I was twenty-four, I was a director of a child care center with my own child on the way. I stayed home for a couple of years to raise my daughter and then made the career hop to facilitating workshops for day care providers. I certainly thought that I would have a normal suburban life when I grew up. Somehow, I ended up *here* instead. I could probably fill up a whole book on how I ended up from normal to here, but that is for another day. Still, it's probably important to some of you to know more about my journey before you let me take you on yours.

My father was born and raised a nice Jewish boy in New York City. My mother was born a Catholic in Munich, Germany, during World War II. Dad became an educational psychologist and Mom worked in a factory. Despite their widely different cultures and backgrounds, they fell in love and created a family together. My brothers and I were parented under all the warm-fuzzy, self-esteem enhancing child development theories that were all the rage in the early 70's. We had chores, responsibilities, and we were expected to be decent people and to follow the rules of the house. When we didn't follow the rules, we were grounded instead of spanked. They weren't perfect parents

and we weren't perfect kids, but as far as families go, I consider myself blessed and lucky to have been born into that one.

My household was not a religious household. My father had a strong Jewish culture surrounding him as he grew up, but for whatever reason, he did not continue that as the head of his own household. The only time we ever attended temple services was when my brother had his Bar Mitzvah ceremony. (My grandfather insisted, under the threat that he did not want to die before seeing it.) We did celebrate some Jewish holidays like Yom Kippur, Hanukah, and Passover; but we also exchanged presents on Christmas Eve, colored Easter eggs, and went trick-or-treating. We *were* the elusive children everyone envied during the holidays.

Other than incidental trips to Friday night service at my friend's Catholic Church (her parents dropped us off at the skating rink after the service), I had very little exposure to organized religion or spirituality. We were, however, a multi-culturally friendly family. It was common for me to see a mixture of religions, cultures, and ideas as part of a normal backdrop of my life. No one talked about angels as far as I remember. No one talked about God unless it was a holiday. Celebrating religious holidays seemed more for tradition than to cultivate spirituality. All that aside, my parents were kind, compassionate, and fair-minded people. They taught those ideals without the mooring of a strong religious background.

I did have a few paranormal experiences as I was growing up. I saw a couple of ghosts and had one or two precognitive dreams--nothing too outrageous. Nevertheless, those brief moments of weirdness did introduce me to the concept of a concurrent spiritual reality just out of normal sight. Even though my experiences scared me, I also found them undeniably riveting. I would have gotten a degree in parapsychology if I had seen any hope that I could do that as a career and actually pay bills after college. Instead, I followed my father's footsteps into psychology and early childhood education. It seemed a more reasonable choice.

I was close with both of my parents, but my father and I were more similar in temperament. My mom was the perfect feisty counterpoint to our general calm. Dad was a very eclectic and out-of-the-box thinker. He had one of those divergently divergent minds (redundancy intended). He saw patterns and relationships between things that others missed and was a dog-with-a-bone researcher. I remember always being interested in what kind of work my father was into and I was often his faithful sidekick.

When I was a teenager, my dad became involved in research and development that dealt with measuring imagination. It was used to predict the probability of a person persisting in tasks related to post-hypnotic suggestions or other assigned work. The better and more vivid the imagination, the more likely someone would persist until the goal was achieved. People with a hazy grasp on their goal often quit trying before they succeeded. Those people needed more encouragement and assistance to endure and persist in the steps necessary to complete their goals.

His research partner was a hypnotherapy instructor and the work was developed using that framework. I was fifteen years old when I completed my beginners' hypnotherapy certification (which made me all sorts of fun at sleep over parties). I was nineteen when I completed my advanced hypnotherapy internship certification (which made me all sorts of fun at college parties). I learned about the use of imagination and altered states of consciousness when most people my age were watching music videos. I chucked what I learned into the "bigger things are going on" file that I already had in my mind and kept on walking. I honestly did not anticipate that there would eventually be a purpose for that growing file.

So what happened? How did I go from facilitating and writing workshops about child development to writing books about cooperative spiritual energy work? Life happened. Well, more specifically, a *fight* for life happened. In 1995, when I was twenty-six years old, my father was diagnosed with cancer. It was a funky kind of cancer that had metastasized from the cartilage in his knee into his lungs. He was given six months to two years to live. The moment before I got that phone call was probably the last normal second of my life.

True to my father's love of research and problem solving, we hit the books like a couple of speed-readers on espresso. I probably have spent enough hours researching and cross-referencing alternative cancer therapies to have gotten a degree somewhere. I was willing to look anywhere I needed to look to find something--anything that might make a difference for him. I stumbled into the realm of energy work during my search to find something helpful. I began with a healing modality called Reiki (ray-key). It is a form of hands-on-healing. I took a session for myself to try it out before taking the classes to become a practitioner. It seemed exciting to me. I could feel the movement of the energy very clearly. It was warm and tingly and it made me feel deeply relaxed. I immediately took the training classes to become a practitioner so that I could work on my father.

The training program for Reiki involved receiving a series of *attunements*. The attunements were used as a way to clear out the energetic channels of a person's system, like a plumber would snake clogged pipes in a house. The energy was described as *Universal (rei) Life Force (ki)*. This concept is essentially the same as the Chinese concept of *Chi*; such as in the practice of Tai Chi. The main difference is that a Reiki practitioner volunteers to be the plumbing through which the energy flows to get where it is needed. I learned that Reiki could be used to direct universal energy to those who were depleted of it, such as with illness. Bingo. I had a father who was definitely feeling depleted and who wasn't about to get up and do Tai Chi on his own. At least it was something new to bring to the table. There wasn't time to be picky.

Dad took my overtures in Reiki like a trooper, though it was clear that he cast a doubtful eye in its direction. He tossed Reiki into the same category as hypnotherapy; just another tool to convince the brain that something was possible. He called the heat he felt through my hands a "hyperthermogenic hallucination", which of course is not even a real term, and I told him so! Still, to his credit, he let me do my thing. I think he knew that I was in desperate need of not feeling like a helpless observer. He knew his illness was hard on me too, and he was a good papa.

As time passed, he did eventually conclude that the Reiki helped relieve some pain and relaxed him. Other than pain and anxiety relief, I have no idea if the Reiki helped with his longer than expected life span. I can say that the time I spent doing Reiki work for him wasn't wasted. They were moments spent in extreme awareness of the preciousness of life. We didn't have to talk about it; I just had to put my hand where it hurt and let the energies run. It was elegant and simple.

I might have viewed my experience with Reiki as a temporary sojourn into alternative healing, but it had an unintended effect that was impossible to ignore. Over the course of a year, it literally blew open my psychic centers and threw me into some kind of rapid consciousness expansion. I can guarantee you that I didn't see that coming! The Reiki attunements apparently cleared my energy channels a little too well! I went through a very uncomfortable time where I felt like I was on a triple dose of cold medicine every waking moment. I went to work one day at the university, after having a strong expansive shift over the weekend--cured two headaches and had contact with two different co-worker's dead relatives. I could barely finish a sentence because of all the movement in the air around me. *Crazy*.

It was simultaneously miraculous and bone chillingly terrifying. I mean, really. I was at *work*. A populated university office building is hardly the place to be having that kind of high strangeness. It was as if the boundaries that normally separated me from everything else had just melted away. The backdrop of the room was no longer a collection of separate individuals and things; it became a larger interplay of brisk action that spilled over into the spaces in-between. I was not on any substances of any kind and I was born too late in the 60's to claim an acid flashback. No one snuck peyote into my oatmeal. Whatever happened to me was generated from within. I just had no idea that the term "in the blink of an eye" was literal. Imagine my surprise.

I might have gone to a psychologist to help cope, but I knew there was no possibility of getting out of there without being labeled as schizophrenic, delusional, or psychotic. (Do you know that there is no category in the diagnostic mental health materials that even *allows for the possibility* of an authentic mystic or spiritual experience?) I had a background in psychology myself and knew there was no history of mental illness in my family. Plus, my experiences mostly involved others who witnessed the phenomena; some who considered me the next best thing to aspirin. I knew it wasn't my imagination, and for better or worse, I felt I needed to learn how to cope with it on my own.

What the heck do you do then? Where do you go? What do you do? I was a newly separated young woman who was juggling a toddler, a career, a dying father, and a flaming case of spiritual expansion that didn't give a flying fig *what* it inconvenienced. It was an extraordinarily difficult time. I muddled through as well as I could and eventually quit my job, got remarried, and moved to Asheville, North Carolina. I reoriented to the expanding perspective by placing myself in contact with others who shared the same or similar strangeness. Normal is relative to the company you keep--and Asheville is dripping with people that are my kind of normal.

My father died March 22, 2000--a solid five-year fight. I was devastated. I thought I would be able to interact with him with my newly opened senses and awareness, but that was *not* the case. I learned the hard lesson that spiritual or clairvoyant gifts do not necessarily manifest in ways that you wish they would, or think they would. They are what they are. You either accept them and move forward, or stamp your feet like a petulant child who wants something better. Dad did manage to "send me an email" months later. My printer spontaneously spit out a happy face and heart symbol one day. It was not exactly Western Union, but you take what you can get.

With my father gone, I refocused the point of my explorations. My on-line business, which I started once I moved to Asheville, was selling Reiki friendly supplies. It put me into contact with a constant parade of other like-minded people. I made one friend in particular, Lyn, who was a wonderful counterpoint to me. She was organized, structured and well grounded--all the things that I decidedly wasn't. Our process of batting things back and forth, from divergent/intuitive to convergent/logical, was extremely productive for many years. It was through our early collaboration that I developed the skills to create conceptual tools, clarify intention, develop energy work processes, and even to identify what things seemed most important to address in a healing process. I absolutely did not create the work in *Angelscape* in a vacuum. There was a vigorous exchange of innovation and refinement with many people over many years for me to conceive of this book.

The use of tools and spiritual helpers permeates the *Angelscape* work. My own journey with tools and spiritual helpers followed a path of development that reminds me of child development. For example, a child moves through stages of development in little steps of greater understanding through play and practice. S/he manipulates concrete objects before making abstract leaps in thought. Playing with wooden blocks isn't just busy work to a child, it teaches spatial relationships, social skills, problem solving, motor skills, and so on. The pathways created in the brain from playing with those wooden blocks are some of the same pathways that math skills travel upon later. Play and exploration are critical steps to higher functioning because you see what works and what doesn't. You also develop the logic and problem solving skills to make the sort between the two. However, in the same way that playing creates new skills, if a child doesn't eventually move to more complex stimulation that challenges him/her, s/he fails to progress.

Spiritual development, if engaged fresh and without a set religious framework, seems to be a constant progression of resolving a challenge/question that updates what you thought was true, to something *more* true. Sometimes the new replaces the old and sometimes it just expands upon it. My concrete "toys" were my rocks and as many spiritual guides as I could gather. Heck, I even talked to my rocks as if they *were* spiritual guides. The rocks were an effective way to play and explore and gave me something to touch and hold onto while sorting out information. The multitude of spiritual helpers gave me a stage and players to maintain a dialog with my spiritual reality. Eventually, when I realized I was really just playing my way

through novel experiences, I moved my focus to purely conceptual tools and a God-specific spiritual framework.

I have to admit, however, I still like my rocks, especially when I need to comfort myself. They are like my father's ratty old vest coat that I wear when I need a hug from him. Sometimes having something solid to touch is important. If you want to hold a rock and it helps you to feel better, hold a rock. We may need help to function in a spiritual or energetic reality, but since we can't know when actual interaction picks up from our own imaginations, it is best to assume that we are *just playing*. We play, however, with practical purpose and--just maybe--the process itself allows for the occasional brush with authenticity. We simply must hold loosely to it like a butterfly that lands unexpectedly upon our hands. Truly blessed and divine moments have a *feel* to them, not a running ticker on the bottom of a screen that explains them. To me, those moments feel like everything finally makes sense, every little detail, every little nuance, and that everything is also *okay*. Of course, the butterfly flies away, and typical human confusion settles back in, but the experience itself can change you for the better if you let it. That is a precious gift.

So, in a nutshell (nut possibly being the operative word), I essentially learned about functioning in a spiritual landscape by playing--and sometimes--by stumbling, fumbling, and falling down. Some of it was fun and some of it was decidedly *not*. Some of it was graceful and inspired, and some of it felt like screaming down a mountainside on a runaway bobsled at midnight. Nevertheless, every baby step led to a new understanding or experience. Everything mattered--the good, the bad, the silly, and *especially* the lessons that left me in an emotional heap. Apparently, emotional crisis is a better accelerant in growth than comfort. I used to joke that someone should have warned me about that little fact in advance of committing to this path. So consider yourself warned: *Comfort is not the goal of a spiritual journey, growth is*. Growth is sometimes a big pain in the rump when it pushes you into another zip code from your typical "feeling groovy" comfort zone. Luckily, there seems to be pauses between the real screamers. And please, whatever you do, do *not* say, "Nothing can surprise me anymore." Just trust me on that one. No matter how high your "weird ceiling" is--you can *always* be thrown right through it.

Sometimes you just have to go loose, ride the bobsled down the mountainside, and have faith that you will still be in one piece when the dust settles. Sometimes, that is all you *can* do. I basically took one-step at a time

and decided to have faith that the light at the end of the tunnel was something more like God than a train. *That* is how I got from normal to here. I was an ordinary young woman who was looking for a way to save her father's life. Instead, I found myself deep in the heart of a vast unknown territory without a map or instruction manual. I managed to jot down the discoveries and a rough map for others, just in case it might be helpful. Of course, being lost can often be the best way to learn your way around. If you have a decade to spare, and don't mind extreme mountain sports, you can certainly figure it out on your own. There is nothing special about me except for the decision I made not to run screaming from the building. And like the bumper sticker says, "You don't *have* to be crazy to work here, but it *does* help."