



Edited by Jill M. Salahub

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Introduction

By Jill M. Salahub

As I put the finishing touches on this collection, it's almost a full year after the final post of the series was published. My intention was to have the ebook done much sooner, but as so often happens when we make a plan, life interrupts us with another idea.

I published the first Self-Compassion Saturday post on June 1, 2013. On June 27, 2013, my [sweet Dexter](#) died. We'd known for a year that he had an incurable cancer and we were going to lose him, but that didn't make it any easier. We'd been through a similar situation with our first dog Obi less than three years earlier, and that grief still lingered. And our Sam was sick with a mysterious condition that no one, not even specialists, could diagnose or tell us how to treat. We thought we might lose him too.

In the year since Self-Compassion Saturday ended, a lot has happened. I've had so many opportunities to apply what I learned from this project, to practice self-compassion. We got a new puppy, we finally uncovered the cause of Sam's condition and found a way to treat him, and I became a certified yoga instructor. I continued to search for answers and help in terms of my own health. Every time I set the intention to finish this ebook by a certain date and that date passed without a finished product, I was gentle and forgave myself. I cultivated self-compassion by failing, not beating myself up about it, and starting again.

As for the women who took part in the project, they've experienced their own losses, celebrations, and changes. Babies and books and new projects have been born. Relationships have transformed, some have ended and others just begun. Businesses have shifted and reshaped. Old offerings have been retired and new ones manifested.

As I pulled together all the intelligence and love they offered us through this project, I updated links or anything else that might cause confusion a year later. Other than that, I left it as is – a time capsule of so much wisdom and compassion. I hope when these women reread it, they might, as I did, see how much they've learned and grown since then, and maybe discover some new message that finds them where they are now and offers the exact insight they need in this moment. May we all know the peace and comfort and freedom of self-compassion, and continue to remind each other how to find our way back to it when we forget.

The Beginning

By Jill M. Salahub

June 1, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/06/01/self-compassion-saturday-the-beginning/>



You, yourself, as much as anybody else in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.
~Buddha

For just a minute, I am taking a deep breath and sinking into this moment. Eric is in the kitchen making pie crust — I've had a thing about pie lately, buying store made versions that claim to be Marionberry but aren't quite, and he wanted to make me a "real pie." Emeli Sandé is singing *Next to Me*, part of a mix I made myself on Rhapsody that I listen to while I write. Both dogs are asleep in their beds behind me. The window is open and I can hear the wind blowing, see the blue sky and bright green of my lilac bushes and the trees above. My hair is still wet from a shower, and I'm wearing clean soft cotton pjs and my favorite sweater.

sigh

I feel pretty content right now, in this moment. But I don't always feel like this. I struggle, I suffer, I smash myself to bits. There are old, habitual ways of thinking and being that no longer serve me, and yet I still act them out, get stuck.

It came to me recently that at the heart of all of my issues, underneath every irritation or sadness was one thing. And when I realized what it was, I felt a deep longing, an intense hunger to understand, to heal, to transform that suffering, and I knew that I was connected to a tribe of wise and compassionate women who could help me, if only I was brave enough to ask.



So I sent a request to them. It started like this,

Dear Beautiful You,

I said a prayer and took a deep breath before beginning this message to you. I am so worried it will come off like a creepy sales pitch or inappropriate request — it isn't. This email, this request is an utterly authentic wish from the deepest part of my heart, an expression of my ongoing longing to ease suffering, in myself and in the world, and to be of service. It isn't about my blog stats, building my own worth or value, or any other self-serving, self-fulfilling ego bullshit. This is not about little me, this is about Big Love. In

fact, it would be so much easier for me to not do this, to not ask, but I feel compelled to, and as Ram Dass said, “We are all just walking each other home.”

I am writing to you with a tender heart full of longing. I am writing to YOU because you are a wise and compassionate teacher, writer, healer, artist. I am writing because I have big questions and I think you can help me answer them.

“How can I help the harm that has been done unravel itself? How can I help others find their own wisdom, kindness, and sense of humor?” (Pema Chödrön actually said that, but they are also my questions). As a writer and a teacher myself, the spark for the enclosed request came to me as these things always do: I was curious and confused, felt a hunger to understand something.

I was struggling and went to a new doctor to seek medical advice, to determine if the cause for my suffering were in my body. The help I was offered, the “answer” I was given didn’t sit right with me. In fact, every cell of my body said “that’s not it.” That very afternoon, I left for a meditation retreat led by my dear friend and teacher Susan Piver. In that safe and supportive space of contemplation **the real answer, the true path, revealed itself: self-compassion.**

Great! – and yet, what is that, how do I do that?! Having been in a long term abusive relationship with myself, I don’t know how to be in love, to be loving, to fully and completely accept myself. The momentary sadness of not knowing faded when I realized I knew many amazing, wise and compassionate women who have been my guides already in so many other ways – I could ask them.

So I ask you, humbly and with such gratitude and love, **these four questions:**

- 1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it?** How would you describe or define it?
- 2. How did you learn self-compassion?** Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?
- 3. How do you practice self-compassion,** what does that experience look like for you?
- 4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand?** What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

As a writer and a teacher, part two of anything I learn is the strong desire to share it, the knowledge that if this is helpful to me there are others who also must need it. So my intention, my wish is to not only benefit myself from your answers, but to share them in two ways:

1. **“Self-Compassion Saturday,”** a once a week post on my blog that includes an introduction to your other good work, explains why I asked you specifically, gives your answers and link(s) to your work.
2. When all the answers I get have been posted, I’d like to collect them into a **PDF ebook that can be downloaded by anyone for free** – not a “follow my blog/sign up for my newsletter and get a free gift” thing, but a truly free gift to anyone who would benefit, an offering made from love.



This was the plan, kind and gentle reader: one post each Saturday until they stopped coming, and then I’d create an ebook – *this ebook* – including the whole collection of posts that anyone could download for free. These women’s willingness to be a part of this project, their generosity and kindness, has left me gobsmacked, so full of love and gratitude. Each response I received to the four essential questions was a gift filled with compassion and wisdom that I can’t wait to share with you again, here, now.

Mary Anne Radmacher

June 8, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/06/08/self-compassion-saturday-mary-anne-radmacher/>

Yesterday, I caught myself “shoulding” – “you *should* write this post early and have it ready to publish first thing in the morning, at midnight even, because people are waiting for it, and if not that, you *should* work on it first thing and publish it as early as possible.” I was able to stop myself because it doesn’t make sense for a post about self-compassion to be pushed, to be a should.

Instead, my morning looked like this: I meditated, wrote my morning pages, reread Mary Anne Radmacher’s latest book, took a long walk with Dexter, had a hot shower, and savored my breakfast — then I turned on my computer. I was able to “turn down the volume of demands and listen to the grace of the small, the silence, the whisper,” and I was “aware that my life is a walking poem, meditation, praise and prayer,” just like Mary Anne suggests in *Honey in Your Heart: Ways to See and Savor the Simple Good Things*. I know that she’d approve of the way I approached my morning.



I've written about Mary Anne before, describing the way in which I came to have an original piece of her art, made just for me. [In that post](#), I explained that she's an amazing artist, writer, teacher, friend. *I love everything she does*. Her quote "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow" has offered me so much comfort, helped me to see that being brave, showing up and being vulnerable isn't always a big event, a dramatic heroic action, but that courage could be quiet too, could be soft and gentle. She's been offering her work for over 30 years, has written at least 13 books and created countless pieces of art, and describes herself as an "Artist, Author, Actionista." She also has two of the cutest dogs on the planet.

Mary Anne's superpowers are creativity, generosity, and truth telling. She's an oracle, able to see and offer the truth in the most compassionate and creative way. She encourages and inspires with her words and her art. She's a healer, offering up wisdom wrapped in beauty to soothe and comfort, to ease suffering. She is one of the kindest, wisest people I know. Which is exactly why I asked her to respond to my four questions about self-compassion.

Because it's her nature to be generous, Mary Anne answered a few extra questions and included a Body Gratitude Practice, and had all of it to me within 24 hours of my original request. She sent me two versions of her answers, one short and one longer, and I confess kind and gentle reader that for the most part I'm sharing the longer version with you — it's just that good.



Bonus question: How can I help the harm that has been done unravel itself?

Forgiveness is the great unraveler. Forgiveness for myself for what I have done and would have been better to not have done; forgiveness for not putting my hand and shoulder to an opportunity that was mine to claim. Forgiveness is a gift first to myself. Foremost, to myself. To give forgiveness to myself, first, lets me forgive someone else. Then, not only does the harm unravel...it contextualizes differently.

Bonus question: How can I help others find their own wisdom, kindness, and sense of humor?

I find, connect and utilize/apply my own wisdom, kindness and sense of humor. I find it. I use it. And then I tell the story, "This is how it worked for me. I tried this – and I tried this – and finally, I tried THIS and it worked." Then, I ask questions. What didn't work for me might work for someone else, so that's always part of the story. It might look like failure but in my story it's something I tried that didn't "work."

A question you didn't ask but told a story about so I'm going to answer the implicit question..."Who do you think you are?"

For decades I've said, "What if I just pretended everything was easy?" And I asked myself the question, "How would I behave if I actually knew how to do this?" Famously [Neil Gaiman included that encouragement in a speech he delivered last year](#) – to simply act like someone who knows what they are doing. So much greater than the "fake it 'til you make it," mentality there's no fakery involved. In that context I am able to quiet my mind, remember and call to bear all the things I DO know, consider the various resources available to me...and often, in short fashion, taking advantage of synthesizing what I do know with what I know how to discover, I have resolved that which seemed unresolvable.



A BIRD
NEVER ASKS,
"AM I FLYING
CORRECTLY."
-mary anne radmacher-

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Following the model of my behavior toward the human I love and adore the most. Treating myself at least equally as well, if not better. The first time I heard a flight attendant instruct, "Place the oxygen mask on yourself first, before assisting others with theirs," the metaphor lit up. Immediately.

Listen to yourself. Listen to your truest, kind inner voice.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I am still learning self-compassion.

The consequences of not listening to my own instincts, of overriding the messages from my body, have been great. The books that helped me the most are: *How to Live in the World and Still be Happy* by Hugh Prather; *The Key: And the Name of the Key Is Willingness* by Cheri Huber. And I've read biographies of historical luminaries and taken heed of their great lessons.

While I do not wear a label, nor do I ever singularly identify myself this way – but I grew up with a menu of abuse. And such abuse so early in my life has given me a remarkable opportunity to

define how I deserve to be treated. It is an ongoing lesson. From an aha experience when I was 9 that led me to nearly break an abuser's jaw with the instruction, "Never again," to the legal document that I delivered to an abuser just a few years ago. It was the shortest letter I've ever written in my life. And it's the last thing I ever wrote to that source of mistreatment. What did it say? "No."

Because I am so empathetic it's tempting to put myself second, or last. To imagine that someone needs something more than I do. Now – I'm inclined to occasionally eat the last piece of something on a plate. I don't save the best for others: I share it with others, yes. But I use it myself.

This is what
you shall do...
squeeze the
precious goodness
out of the fruit
of your own harvest
and pour your own
cup full, first,
and then offer to
fill the cups of
others.

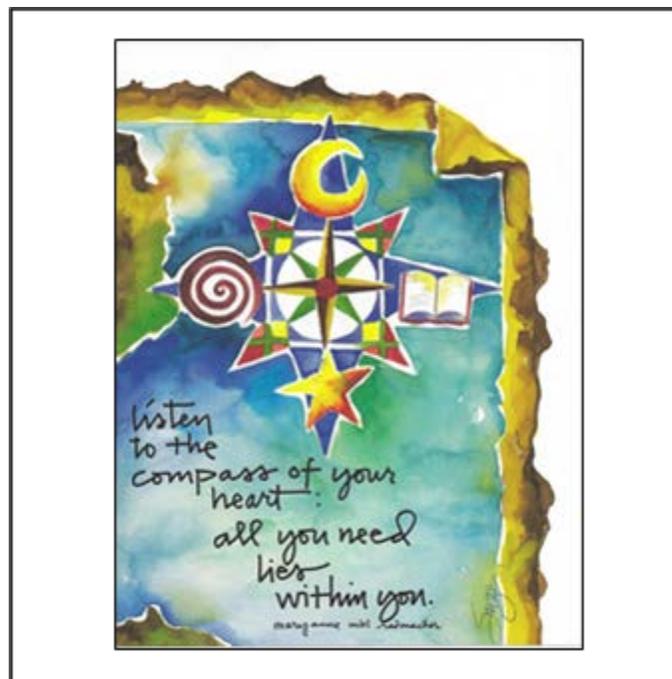
margannera@macher.net
from Honey In Your Heart

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I nap whenever I need to. I no longer use the word “deadline” in common exchange. I say, “targeted completion date.” With due respect to Yoda, I am now inclined to say, “I will try – and if it’s not going to work for me, I will let you know.” And then I do. Try. And say “no” if it’s not a fit.

I have a ruler that has the 12 measures of what is most important to me. If opportunities come to be that are AWESOME but are outside the scope of what matters to me in the moment...I lovingly say No. Without regret. Or apology. My “no,” given truly, is always someone else’s, “Yes.”

I actively live within my own story. It’s self check. “Is this your story or someone else’s story? Is this YOUR job or someone else’s job?” What joy I experienced when I recognized I was only responsible for – me! AND the companion realization to that is, “No one else is responsible for me or my happiness.” Blammo. Blame goes out the window. I own my stuff and I don’t blame it on others.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

4A. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand?

Yeah. This is a tough one. What I think I still need to learn hardly ever turns out to be what the next lesson is. Life has a way of dishing up whatever the next lesson is. So I can answer – that I still need to better understand how to notice the lessons before they hit me over the head.

4B. What is missing from your practice of self-compassion.

Dynamic physicality. I write. I create. I administer. I teach on line. That can read, I sit. I sit. I sit. And when I'm done sitting, I sit some more. The hula hoop I made is sitting in the garage. I dance to get my engine started in the morning. For minutes. Just for mental joy...not for body benefit. Oh, dang. I'll write it: e x e r c i s e. Yep. I try calling it playground time. Play. I am inclined toward stillness. And yet I know my practice needs movement. Baby steps. Big dog – I'm his person and I walk him. It's a self compassion trick...because THE DOG needs the walk. I go. So clearly plenty of opportunity for learning here.

4C. What do you still struggle with?

I learned five years ago that I have extreme sensitivity to gluten, eggs and cow-dairy. Just recently studying the Aryurvedic disciplines, the Kapha path is helping me manage my health and sensitivities in ways that make so much sense and are having very positive results. No nuts. Little red meat. Already embraced gluten-free, egg-free and cow-dairy free styles. The struggle? Sometimes I will willingly trade, against all common sense, two days of feeling great for ten minutes of a huge cheese cake slice. Or, half a cheese cake. My self talk improves the ratio of times I pass to times I succumb. "What are you actually feeding?" "Is the trade really worth it?" "Is there an alternative that will satisfy this craving that would serve you better?" Increasingly the answers to these questions help me make a more viable choice for myself. But there are times when only half of a Trader Joe's cheesecake will do. And slowly those times occur with less frequency.

In summary: So now I refer myself, and you, back to the whole harm and unraveling thing that I began with. My self-compassion is tied to Forgiveness.

Forgiveness. It's my newell post. My cornerstone. My balancing point. My net. My invitation to a more compassionate life.



I am filled with love and gratitude for Mary Anne, and especially thankful for what she had to say about forgiveness. To find out more about Mary Anne, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Buy some of her art or one of her books](#)
- [Read her Belief Net blog](#)
- [Like her official Facebook page](#)
- [Follow her on Twitter](#)
- [Watch one of her YouTube videos](#)

Mary Anne Radmacher's Body Gratitude Practice

This practice is a generous gift from Mary Anne Radmacher. For the practice, get comfortable, somewhere quiet and alone, and focus on each part of your body, saying thanks, sharing your gratitude.

Gratitude Bones

Toes: Thank you for lifting me up and helping me peer over fences, tall cupboards and possibilities.

Arches: Thank you for being so high and letting me know what kind of shoes you need to navigate the soil with grace and ease.

Heels: Thank you for being my balancing point and keeping me from going backwards when those unexpected Things are launched at me.

Calves: Oh, for the reach and the stretch. Thank you for working so well to connect and make the whole system run smoothly.

Knees: Great Director of Flexibility and Balance, Thank you. You are my change agent and Recovery Department. Thank you for getting me back up when I fall.

Thighs: Thank you for all the ways you accommodate, for all the shifts and sizes I pace you through and thank you for always standing up for me.

Hips: Thank you for saying yes when I wanted to learn how to throw a hula hoop. Thank you for hauling me around so consistently and for sitting down so gracefully.

Pelvis: Thank you for transitioning me into a different phase of my life. I am grateful for all the things I am learning from you about how to be a woman at this age of my life.

Waist: Thank you for giving me curve. Thank you for helping me bend and stretch. Thank you for centering my belly and joining my digestive system on this learning journey of what is right and what works for me.

Ribs: Thank you for protecting me. For being there for my fragile breathing mechanisms. Thank you for being my shielf.

Breasts: Thank you for being healthy. Thank you for adding line and dimension to my form. Thank you for your proportion to the rest of my being.

Back: Thank you for the strength, durability and resilience you demonstrate after all I ask of you. Thank you for complying with the posture I ask of you and for all the hours of stillness I require of you as a writer.

Shoulder: Thank you for what you bear. Thanks for your willingness to bend and not break. Thank you for allowing me to carry what I have chosen to carry throughout my life. Thank you for helping me bring words to the world.

Elbows: Ah, thank you for helping me work diligently. Thank you for your capacity to clean tough stains out of pans, clothes and my heart.

Arms: Thank you for helping me serve and love others. Thank you for your role in my writing life.

Hands: Thank you for being so small and doing such big things.

Fingers: Thank you for sticking with me even though I've placed you in harm's way time after time. Thank you for the way you dance when I am unable to.

Neck: Thank you for turning. Thank you for letting me rotate to see blessings I might have missed and harm that I've been able to miss.

Skull: Thank you for bearing the scars of your abuse with such grace and forgiveness.

Face: Thank you for your smile, your hydrated skin, your eyes that weep willingly for the pain of others and those lips that will deliver a smile to anyone, anywhere, any time.

Voice: Thank you for allowing me to raise up my voice on behalf of my own interests and the interests of others.

Toes to Head: Thank you for managing the pain and difficulty of allergy and joint issues and labels which I will not name but conditions that cause you pain. Thank you for receiving my gratitude and continuing to work with me to do good work in the work. Dear Sweet Body – You are the only one I've got and I am spending a lifetime learning how to love and care for you better every day. I love you and I thank you for the good and enduring service you provide me every second of every day.

love, mary anne radmacher – the animating force that breathes within your bones, cells, blood, DNA.

Andrea Scher

June 15, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/06/15/self-compassion-saturday-andrea-scher/>

If you are like me, kind and gentle reader, there are certain moments or events, certain people and experiences that have changed you, transformed you in the best possible ways. And if you are like me you carry the memory, the love and gratitude for those times and people tucked inside your heart forever, the most precious of things held close.

One of the people I treasure in this way is Andrea Scher. [I wrote her an open love letter](#) exactly one year ago, posted Saturday the 16th of June in 2012. That post even included the picture I use as the primary image for this project! I didn't know either of these things until I started writing this post today. This is the exact kind of magic that Andrea attracts, generates, inspires.



self-portrait by andrea scher

I've lost track of the number of classes I've taken with Andrea, but each one of them has been that particular kind of magic. The first [Mondo Beyondo](#) session I did, my first class with her, happened at the same time I started this blog, inspired me to finally start. That experience came full circle when Andrea invited me to be her teaching assistant for the most recent session of Mondo Beyondo. She has always been so incredibly generous, and her wise and compassionate coaching is helping me to create some of my own future courses, and beyond that to create a life that I am utterly in love with living. I am who I am right now in large part because of her support and encouragement. In the open love letter I wrote to her, I said,

Andrea Scher has been the sun at the center of a universe of amazement and goodness, the shiny middle that all the other bright and precious things orbit around.

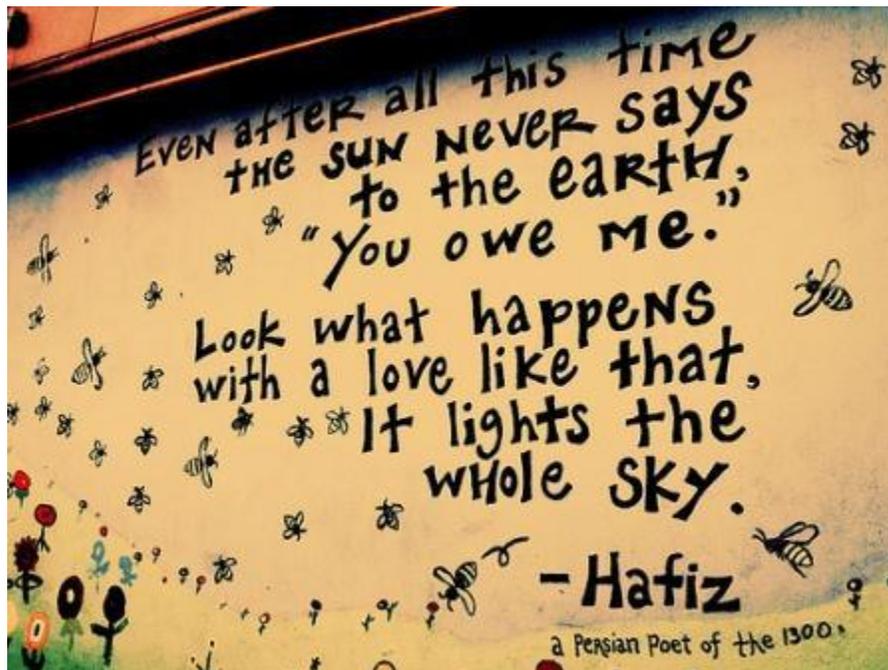


Photo by Mara

I found Andrea Scher's original blog, Superhero Journal, at a time when I was so brokenhearted, such a mess, so stuck, so tired. I didn't know how to keep going, where to even start. I was searching, my view clouded by grief, knew that I had abandoned myself and my dreams, but didn't know how to find my way back.

The person I am today: writer, artist, warrior, brave, open-hearted, funny, strong, joyful, sane, is possible in part because of Andrea Scher. She invited me to expand my idea of what was possible. She encouraged me, was kind and honest. She was constantly admitting the things that are hard and messy, while still pointing out what's beautiful and precious. She reminds me of this quote from Muriel Rukeyser, "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." Split open, and through the cracks, the light would get in (or maybe get out?).

I'm so happy to be sharing Andrea's answers to my four questions today.



andrea scher, taken by laurie wagner

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

I've heard that compassion means "to suffer with." What a gift, right? To not have to suffer alone, to allow somebody's suffering but sit right down next to them and maybe even hold their hand.

Self-compassion is learning to suffer with ourselves. It's extending the same kind of kindness we would to a dear friend. It's learning to sit with ourselves and allow our suffering, to hold our own hand.

Practically, this means that we can acknowledge when we are suffering and not push it away, or tell ourselves *it's not that bad*, or *you don't deserve to complain*... These are some of the things I used to tell myself, echoes of what some important grownups in my life affirmed. For me, self-compassion is allowing myself to feel my feelings (even if they make others uncomfortable) and letting them move through me. (They always do)

Then it's about using a kind voice to ask good questions: What would help right now? What do you need most? or What feels hardest?



image by jen gray

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

Mostly, I learned from going through hard things and NOT being particularly compassionate with myself. This kept me stuck so much longer than necessary.

I cultivated a kind inner voice when I became a parent. Once I became a mother I noticed what my own self-talk sounded like – *You idiot! You're always messing things up!* This was not a voice I wanted to pass on to my kids! So I practiced speaking really gently to my son. Over time it became a habit and I started addressing myself this way too. What a beautiful side effect of practicing non-harm and gentleness.

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Recently, I learned a beautiful exercise from [Kristin Neff](#). When you are having a rough moment, try this: Put your hand on your heart, close your eyes and say, “This is suffering.” Then take a breath and say it again.

It’s such a simple practice, but really profound.



self portrait by andrea, eyes closed

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

This is going to sound very unscientific, but I must have carved a deep neuro-pathway in my brain that goes like this: Someone gets annoyed or angry with me. I completely FREAK OUT and do whatever I can to make it better (including betraying myself and my truth in the process) and if I don’t get a response from them or they are still angry, I believe that I must be a horrible, broken and unlovable person who doesn’t deserve to be alive.

I know. Totally dramatic, right?

I suppose I am making progress because I have a consciousness around this string of thoughts. It's still very painful though... Next time, I'm going to put my hand on my heart and simply say: This is suffering.



You can see why I adore her so much, right? Since she sent me her answers, many times I have closed my eyes and put my hand over my heart. In that moment, imagining Andrea's kindness, her smile, contemplating my love and gratitude for her is a path towards loving myself, her light leads the way. To find out more about Andrea, to connect with her:

- Visit her website, [Superhero Life](#)
- [Read her blog](#), (no, seriously, you really should be reading her blog)
- Take one of [her ecourses or workshops](#)
- [Follow her on Twitter](#)
- [Like her on Facebook](#)
- [See her beautiful photographs on Flickr](#)
- [View her Instagram photographs](#)
- [Sign up for her newsletter](#)
- Check out her [Etsy store](#), where she sells a limited number of her amazing Superhero necklaces

Laurie Wagner

June 22, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/06/22/self-compassion-saturday-laurie-wagner/>

Again I caught myself this morning thinking “you should have these posts written earlier, ready to go.” But first there was meditation, a half cup of coffee and the writing of morning pages, and then there were dogs to be walked and I wanted to get to the Farmer’s Market before all the strawberries were gone. I let go of the should, gently set it down on top of the pile of mail I still haven’t looked at, certain that my dear friend and teacher Laurie Wagner, of all people, knows the importance of going on a long walk, taking a pause, focusing on the moment as it is, as it arises, and would completely understand how a strawberry is so much more than a piece of fruit.



Laurie Wagner is the creator of [27 Powers](#), “a writing teacher + coach, author of 7 books, mixed-media artist, fervent collage-maker, mother of two, and a one-time amateur racquetball champion.” [I’ve written about Laurie before](#), saying in that post that “Laurie’s energy is radiant, vibrant and raw, lighting up and electrifying the space, however virtual it might be. She is at once your favorite grade school teacher, most popular camp counselor, beloved childhood friend (the one who climbed trees and loved books), best girlfriend, and precious mother.” She’s recently dubbed herself “Tender Truth Serum, In Human Form” and I couldn’t agree more.

I get to finally meet Laurie in person in September, get to hang out with her three different times over the course of three months. I’ve been having dreams about it, and in each one, I am talking to someone else in a crowded room, turn to see her for the first time and burst into tears. When I imagine meeting her, there is a sense of intense joy, but also an odd mix of relief and sadness, as if there’s a part of me saying “where have you been? I’ve been waiting, looking for so long.” It’s enough to almost make me believe in reincarnation, like she was my guru, my beloved, or my mother in a past life and I’ve been searching for her ever since.

As a teacher, Laurie has a particular kind of magic, power, love. It makes me think of what Thich Nhat Hanh said, that “you must love in such a way that the person you love feels free.” Laurie’s teaching loves you in just this way. When I find myself in a moment of not knowing what to say, or being afraid to say what I know is true, all I have to do is imagine Laurie, touch in to her energy, and I am brave, free to write what is wild and raw and beautiful. I’m so happy to share her answers to my self-compassion questions with you today, so happy for you to meet her if you hadn’t already.



image by andrea scher

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Because I am imperfect, because I am flawed, I allow myself to make mistakes. I will bumble things and the wrong words will come out of my mouth. I will hurt you and I will hurt myself. But because my heart is good, I'll know that I never meant to. And it's this "never meant to" that enables me to forgive myself and to forgive you too. I believe in the words, "I'm sorry." What else is there to say?

My husband and I had a therapist who told us that the only two words couples need to say to one another are, "I'm sorry." So my husband and I made these little badges that said, "I'm sorry." Whenever we failed each other – which was daily – we held these badges out to the other. We didn't mean to hurt each other, but we knew we would. This is how we found compassion for each other and our marriage.



image from laurie's website

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I've always been incredibly hard on myself. My Father was hard on himself. We looked so valiant, so full of humility – but it wasn't for either of us. Sure we both had a desire to learn and to grow, but I think we were just as afraid that we needed to be perfect so we wouldn't get creamed by people. My desire to be perfect has a lot of FUCK YOU in it – as in "FUCK YOU – now you can't touch me." Anyone with an alcoholic parent will understand this.

Someone once said of me that I was the most tender, tough person they knew. I think that's true of me and age has helped me to become even a little more tender. There's just so much each day that I can't control and that I have to shake my head at. It's getting easier to let go because holding on – trying to get a perfect dinner on, AND get to the gym, AND meet a friend, AND edit those papers, AND be a good mommy is more and more impossible. Self-compassion for me might be emailing every appointment I have over a week and canceling everything. It

helps that I surround myself with wonderful people – people who are on the self forgiving path – people who love me – who don't want to see me cream myself because they know that that doesn't bring the best out of me, or you, or anyone.



image by andrea scher

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Recently I fell into the nasty habit of smoking cigarettes. It had been a rough spell in my life and one thing I know about myself is that I tend to reach for immediate gratification when I'm stressed. Coffee, alcohol, cigarettes, shopping. Not in excess, but those are my go-to's. Sure, I'll take a bath, or sometimes lie down, but I know myself. The cigarette thing was ugly and I knew it had to come to an end. So I blogged about it. I outed myself instead of holding it inside like

some cherished, slimy secret that I was going to feel lousy about. Outing it allowed me to come clean – not in a punishing way – but with compassion and understanding for myself. A lot of people wrote to me about their own tendencies to do something similar. We're all in the same boat, just different details. I'm not a bad person for smoking, it's just a bad habit.

Here's another:

Last week in my writing class I inadvertently hurt a student's feelings. She began crying, got up from the table, slammed a door and wrote an entire piece about how mad she was. As she read her piece my little tin heart was beating so loud. I was scared. I'd F'd Up – the part of me that wanted to be the best teacher in the world was very uncomfortable. It would be clear that I wasn't perfect. After she read, I simply apologized in front of the whole class and hugged her. What else could I do? I'm not perfect. But my heart is good. I make mistakes. I learn. What more might I do?



image by andrea scher

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Self-compassion is something that I get to practice multiple times a day. Every morning when I wake up, I place my hand on my heart and I say, “help me.”



I’m sure you can see, kind and gentle reader, why I am looking so forward to sitting in one of these chairs at 27 Powers. I’m not entirely sure I won’t burst into flames (immediately after bursting into tears), but I’m so willing to risk it. To find out more about Laurie, to connect with her:

- Visit her website, [27 Powers.](#)
- [Read her blog.](#)
- **Take one of her [Wild Writing](#) classes.** Seriously, if this is possible, for you to take one of her “face-to-face” courses, *you just have to*, I don’t know how else to tell you — just do it, you can thank me later.
- Take an ecourse with her, either [Telling True Stories](#) or [27 Days: Writing Prompts to Grow Your Powers.](#)
- [Take one of her Writers.com writing classes.](#)
- Take a workshop with her, such as [Traveling Writers.](#)
- Like [27 Powers on Facebook.](#)
- [Follow her on Twitter.](#)

Judy Clement Wall

June 29, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/06/29/self-compassion-saturday-judy-clement-wall/>

I will be tender with other people's hearts.

I will be fearless with my own.

~Judy Clement Wall

I have been deep in practicing self-compassion these past few days. The loss of our sweet Dexter offered an invitation to be fully present, experience the full measure of life, keep my heart open to the bitter and the sweet, receive big love from so many, honor all that is precious and impermanent, sink into the comfort of being connected, and be gentle with myself.

It seems so right that it would be Judy Clement Wall's responses I'm sharing with you today. She is one of my dear doggy loving friends (in fact, in her [Ten Things About Me](#) list on her website's about page, she says "I feel sorry for people who don't have dogs"), a woman who "gets it," a member of this awful club of those who've loved and let go. As I've said about her before, "In both moments of celebration and grief, Judy has offered her encouragement, inspiration, and support. I am so lucky, so grateful."



I've written about Judy before, "writer. doodler. love warrior." [In that post](#), I said,

I can't remember how I first encountered Judy's work, but I do know the first community project I took part in was her collaborative project with [Julia Fehrenbacher](#), [41 6-word Days](#) ... I immediately adored her gentle, kind, brave and funny spirit, and her ability to connect people.

Everything she writes ... invites readers into a conversation, into connection, to community. It might be her superpower, that and love, which is also her religion.

Judy always challenges me to open up a little more, to contemplate, to feel and to think. We have a lot in common: writing, dogs, hiking, and yoga. We also both apparently tend to be a little Lucille Ball-ish, slightly clumsy and adorably goofy from time to time. We both are in love with love. I think it's the answer to every question, and [she wrote a manifesto about it](#).

CHOOSE LOVE. In your relationships, in the art you create, the words you let loose, the causes you take up, be an example of what it means to love fearlessly (which is not about being fearless, but about loving through the fear).

In the gigantic, messy spectrum of human experience, ugliness is as easy to find as beauty; rudeness and intolerance as prevalent as compassion and generosity.

Right now. Today. Every day.
You choose which way to tip the scale.

The truth is, love is untidy. And yet there is nothing more worth having. It's often inconvenient and occasionally terrifying. Nothing more valuable to give.

Love doesn't happen to us, it happens because of us.

It happens when we are magnificent and badass enough to make it happen. In a world of cynics,

where snark and sarcasm hold sway over heart and soul, choosing love takes courage. It takes stamina. It takes us - earnest, hippie,

doe-eyed, bruised, broken, brave, openhearted

love warriors believing we can save the world,
one heart at a time.

jcw

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I admire Judy for many reasons. She's a mom, (dogs and kids), a wife, a yogini, a warrior of love. She's a shared project instigator, a master doodler, a practitioner of hiking, a seer

of beauty. But most of all, I admire and aspire to her writing success. She's both self and other published, (I've heard a rumor she's working on a novel, [among other things](#)), committed to her work, to engaging with the world and her experience, and sharing that with her readers, inviting them to do the same.

Since I wrote that post, Judy has also begun to pursue her art in earnest. She is simply one of the most loving and real, creative and playful, gloriously messy and brilliant women I know. When I think of her, I can't help but think of what Gandhi said, "In a gentle way, you can shake the world." I'm so happy to be sharing her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Once, when my son was little, he drew me a picture. I said I loved it, though I couldn't tell what it was. I started pointing out specific parts of the picture that I liked, and then he'd say things like, "See how I made the tail long?" and "I know she has spots, but I wanted stripes." Eventually, I figured out he'd drawn our Dalmatian and I declared it the best Dalmatian drawing ever.

Of course, there's no other way that story could have gone. I would never have risked crushing his budding creative impulses by offering anything other than praise and encouragement. We do that with the people we love. We see their imperfections and we encourage them to spread

their wings anyway because we were never expecting them to be perfect, and we absolutely know, with every fiber of our being, that they are capable of flight.

Self-compassion to me is when we turn that same sort of deepest truth and nurturing attention on ourselves. It's when we stop expecting ourselves to be perfect and then beating ourselves up (mercilessly!) for falling short. It's when we're patient with ourselves the way we'd be with a child or our best friend, knowing that they are worth all the tenderness we are giving them and so much more.

We need to act as though we believe
we hold each other's hearts
in our hands...



because, of course,
we do.

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www.judyclementwall.com

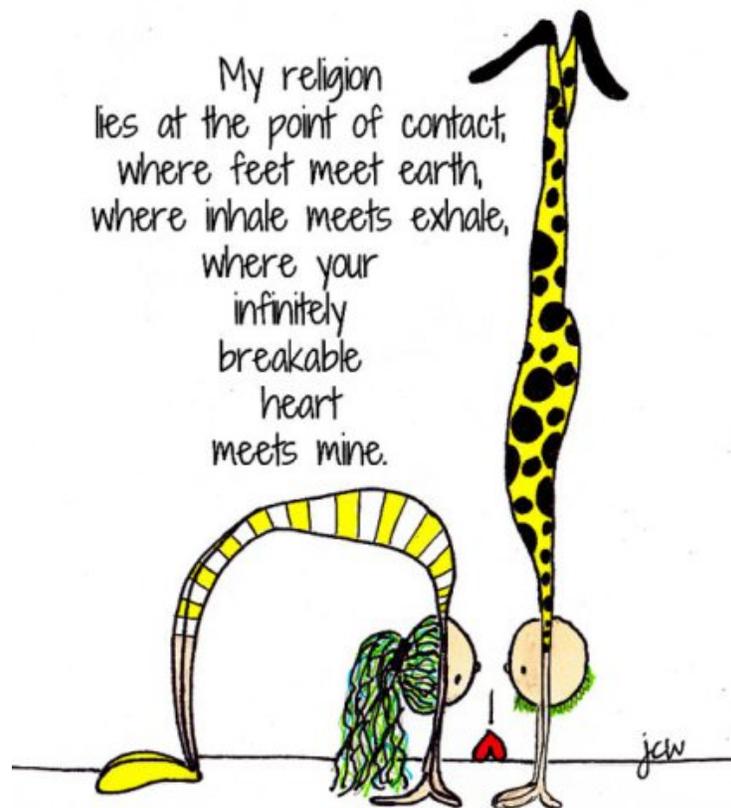
2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I guess I had a moment that set me on the path. At a very difficult time, I'd made some truly disastrous decisions, one after another, putting at risk the things in my life that are most important. The problem was that even after I'd realized the magnitude of my mistakes and was well into the work of repairing my life, I was still lost in my guilt and shame. I believed I

deserved every bad thing that happened to me, and, maybe even more damaging, I couldn't accept anything good.

In my moment of clarity I understood that if I didn't forgive myself – truly forgive myself – I would never be able to move on. Of course, the realization and the making it so didn't happen simultaneously. I still felt lost, not knowing how to get where I needed to be. I looked for teachers, guides, a path, resources. I read Eckhart Tolle, Martha Beck, Jack Kornfield, Sugar (Cheryl Strayed), and so many others. I devoured anything written by smart, soulful people talking about being human.

I took up yoga and meditation, and I wrote about my experiences. Over time, step by painful step, I accepted myself, realizing that (just like everyone in my life that I cherish) I'm exquisitely human, capable of fucking things up royally... but also of stepping into grace, gratitude and forgiveness.



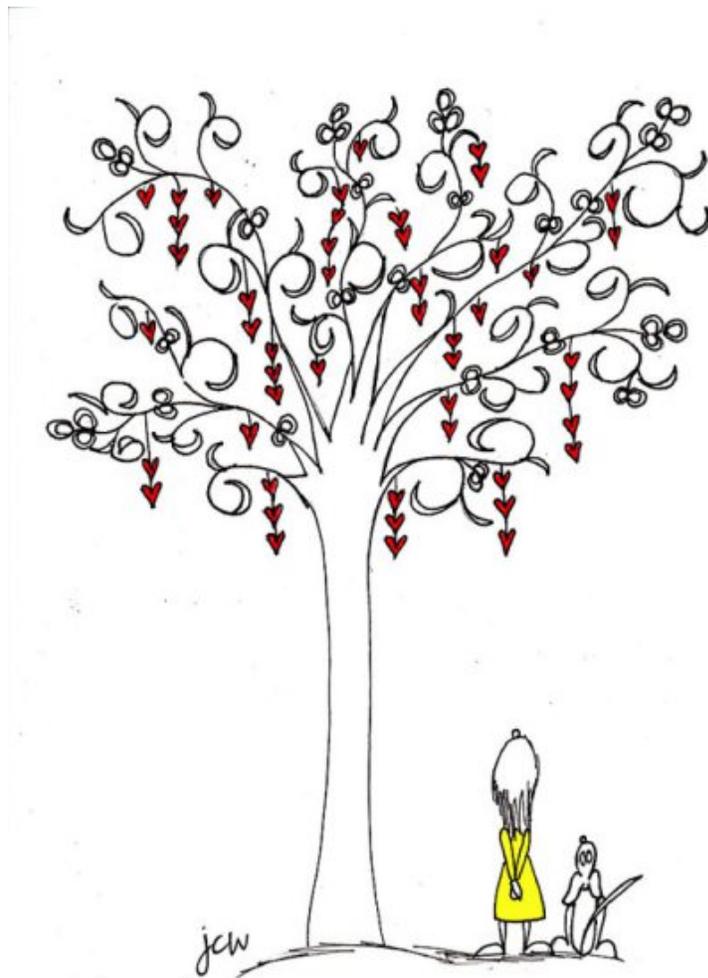
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3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I'm still learning this, but I think it's about consciously being a friend to myself. My tendency, and I think this is true for so many people, is to be incredibly hard on myself. Mean, actually. The voice in my head can be very vicious. And the problem with having a constant inner dialogue that is undermining and judgmental is that I start to look for love and validation externally, and that's like running on a hamster wheel, or trying to stand tall on shifting sands.

So I'm learning to be gentle with myself. Patient. Forgiving. I'm using the "What can I learn from this question" instead of berating myself for mistakes. And I try to think what I'd say to someone I love if they'd screwed up or been rejected or produced something that was less than perfect. I would never tell them (as I do with myself), "Of course it didn't work out. What made you think you could do that?" I'd love the crap out of them as they work their way through their disappointment and pain, and I'd tell them this is how life works. For everyone.

More and more, I try to love the crap out of myself.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I get better all the time, but I still struggle with not being enough validation for myself. I'll write a piece and feel good enough to submit it, but if an editor doesn't get back to me or rejects it (a fact of life for writers), I doubt the quality of my work, rather than assuming it wasn't a fit for that publication and trying again somewhere else, which is what I would tell any other writer to do. I'm using writing as an example, but the pattern of assuming I'm not (good, smart, savvy, talented, etc) enough exists in all parts of my life.

I think being self-compassionate requires me to value my own opinion, my own voice, as much if not more than I value the opinions of others. Unfortunately, that's easier said than done, but I'm learning. It's a practice. It involves doing things I love – writing, doodling, yoga, hiking, connecting with nature, building community – because I love them, and doing them consciously, grounding myself in a life that makes me strong.



I am filled with love and gratitude for Judy. Ever since I received her responses, I've been trying to "love the crap out of myself," and continuing to love the crap out of her. To find out more about Judy, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Read some other things she's published](#)
- [Shop her Etsy store](#)
- [Friend her on Facebook](#)
- [Follow her on Twitter](#)

Anne-Sophie Reinhardt

July 6, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/07/06/self-compassion-saturday-anne-sophie-reinhardt/>

Today is the first official day of the [World Domination Summit, \(WDS\) 2013](#). I am trying not to be jealous or feel sad when I look at all the pictures and updates being posted on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It's kind of like having to stay home from summer camp or missing a school field trip because you are sick, knowing how much fun everyone is having, feeling a little left out and sorry for yourself. And yet, I know it was the right thing for me to not go this year, that Dexter needed me here, that I need the time to grieve his loss, (and besides, I spent so much money on it last year, I really couldn't justify spending more, again, so soon).

One of the best things about WDS is the people you meet, the connections you make with those who are doing similar work and have similar ideas, who share your intentions and your experience. Last year at WDS, I was lucky enough to meet Anne-Sophie Reinhardt. Without planning to, we kept running into each other over the course of the weekend, sitting together and talking about the things we had in common. I didn't get to spend nearly enough time with her. She has the biggest heart, makes you feel immediately safe and at ease, and she has the best smile, the greatest laugh.



Anne-Sophie in a WDS hammock, 2013

Anne-Sophie Reinhardt is a body image expert, self-love advocate and the author of [Love Your Body The Way It Is](#). On [her website's about page](#) she says,

For the longest time, I was caught in a circle of self-doubt and self-loathing. **Now, I'm free, confident and happy with myself and my body.** My mission is to help you achieve the same.

And,

I write on, teach and live self-love and body-love. Sometimes, I even breathe it ... I believe that every single woman can find peace around food and her body. I dream of creating a world where women love themselves unabashedly, completely and guiltlessly.

I am so grateful for the work Anne-Sophie is doing, the difference she is making, to me and in the world. And I am so happy to be able to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

To me, self-compassion means having a binge and not beating yourself up. It means looking in the mirror and saying to yourself: Yes, love, your stomach isn't perfect, but I love you anyway. It means laughing when you make a mistake instead of going into self-attack and it means responding to your ever-present critic in the head with a loud and clear "Fuck You".

Self-compassion is a skill that every woman can learn. It's a process that you commit to and once you decide to go from self-attacking mode to self-compassionate mode, your life completely changes.

Self-compassion helps to heal broken hearts and wounded souls. It's the elixir of self-care and the golden heart of a self-loving person.

Self-compassion also means taking a bath at the end of a hard day, learning to say no when you're exhausted and hell yes when something really exciting. Self-compassion doesn't always feel good **to** you but it's always good **for** you.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

Big question. I think that I'm still very much on the path to learning self-compassion. I never had a specific teacher or even a guru, but through my recovery from anorexia, I've read a lot, sat in meditation for days, tried, failed and tried again. I've learned to first not act on the constant critic's advice and then I learned to respond to it in a different way. There were days when it was easy not to be so very hard on myself and there were and still are many days, where WWII is happening in my body and mind.

Two steps forward. One step back.

That's reality, life and a true self-loving path. If you can accept that, truly accept it, then you're one step closer to a wholly self-compassionate life.

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

My number one way of showing self-compassion is to nourish my body with healthful, delicious food. I've been negating myself food for 14 years and it's still my weakness. Another way to practice self-compassion is meditation. For about 8 months, I've been meditating every morning instead of running to the computer and letting the craziness of the day into my world. This lets me start my day with deep introspection and I always feel more balanced, which leads to being kinder to myself. I often treat myself to a mani/pedi when I'm in a big self-attack mode or I simply go for a walk in nature, which never fails to ground me and helps me to see what's really important. Also, when I had a fight with a loved one or I've made a mistake, I am kinder with myself as I used to be. It takes presence and practice in those moments, but the more often I do it the more intuitive a self-compassionate response gets.

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Lots of things. How to not be so hard on myself when my business doesn't do as well as I'd like it to go. How to be at peace even when I can't work out for a few days. How to be present and

grateful for being myself instead of always looking for the future. I still need to understand what complete peace of mind feels like, but I trust the process and I know that one day soon, I'll know or I won't. Either way, I'll be more grounded, happier and kinder to myself and others.



I am so grateful for Anne-Sophie, for her responses – so genuine, just like her. I love how she described self-compassion as “the golden heart of a self-loving person.” To find out more about Anne-Sophie, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#), voted one of the Best Eating Disorders Blogs of 2013
- [Read her blog, Fighting Anorexia](#), voted one of the 25 Best Eating Disorder blogs of 2012
- [Follow her on Twitter](#)
- Check out [her YouTube videos](#)

Susan Piver

July 13, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/07/13/self-compassion-saturday-susan-piver/>

Hold your experience with tremendous gentleness. Stay with yourself – always, always, always. Be kind, feel kindly, be loving... As you become friendly toward yourself, you see that actually you can trust your own mind and heart. From this trust and friendship arise unconditional self-confidence. ~Susan Piver

I have a confession, kind and gentle reader: When it comes to Susan Piver, I am not at all rational, can't be reasonable because I just love her too much. She is the dearest of friends and the wisest, gentlest of teachers. She's genuine and funny, courageous and tenderhearted. I have written about her before, was just [on retreat with her](#) in May, am hoping to see her at another in December. By way of her meditation videos, I sit with her almost every day. She is a constant and loving presence.

Susan Piver is the reason I was able to find my meditation practice, my voice, my courage, my self again after I lost [Obi](#) and then [Kelly](#) to cancer three years ago. I was so brokenhearted, so confused, and Susan's gentle teaching, specifically through [the Open Heart Project](#), helped bring me back to life, get me back on my cushion, start writing again, keep my heart open. Since then, her kindness to me has never ceased. [The day that Dexter died](#), she called to check on me, cry with me. As a practitioner, as a person I feel so supported by her.

On her website, Susan describes herself this way, "I'm interested in extreme self-knowledge, the Buddhadharma, relationships of all kinds, creativity, the Enneagram, and using every single day to become a more truthful version of who I already am." I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



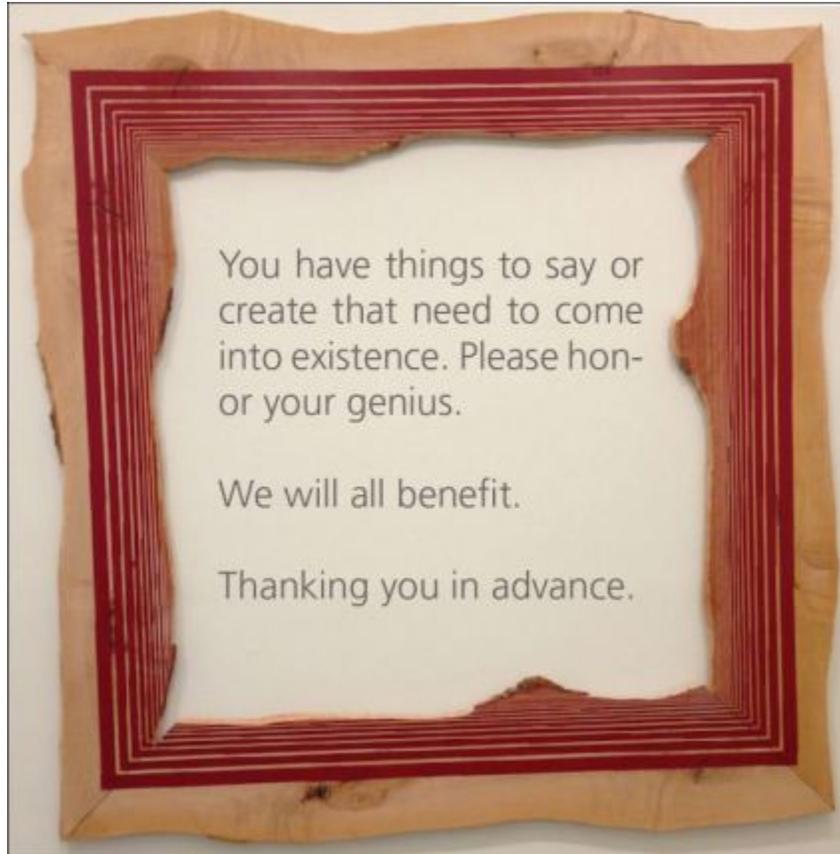
1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

I define it as the continual willingness to soften to your own experience and allow it to be as it is.



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I'm certainly still learning it and there have been many teachers, many guides. Sakyong Mipham has been of particularly profound influence. My meditation practice is my best teacher. The book *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior* has been a handbook for me in what it means to have self-compassion. Sakyong Mipham's new book, *The Shambhala Principle* is a fantastic guide to how and why self-compassion can actually create a peaceful world.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

It looks different from moment to moment. When I'm sad, it can look like crying sometimes but at other times it means giving myself a kick in the pants. The most important thing for me to remember is to stay present to my experience so I can be discerning about what self-compassion might mean in any given instance.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I am very hard on myself about what it means to be successful in this world. And too often I don't make self-care a priority. I know that as I continue to relax (as opposed to "trying"), self-compassion will naturally manifest.



I am so grateful for Susan, her writing, her teaching, her practice, her friendship. To find out more about Susan, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website.](#)
- [Read her blog.](#)
- [Become a member of the Open Heart Project.](#)
- [Read one of her books.](#)
- Read [articles she's written for Huffington Post](#), or [various other publications](#).
- [Attend an event where she's teaching.](#)
- [Friend her on Facebook](#), [follow her fan page](#) or [like her Facebook page](#).
- [Follow her on Twitter](#)
- Check out her videos on [YouTube](#) or [Vimeo](#).
- Watch her interview on [Good Life Project](#) or [Tea Talks](#).

Kerilyn Russo

July 20, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/07/20/self-compassion-saturday-kerilyn-russo/>

I am one of the searchers.

There are, I believe, millions of us. We are not unhappy, but neither are we really content. We continue to explore life, hoping to uncover its ultimate secret. We continue to explore ourselves, hoping to understand. We like to walk along the beach, we are drawn by the ocean, taken by its power, its unceasing motion, its mystery and unspeakable beauty. We like forests and mountains, deserts and hidden rivers, and the lonely cities as well. Our sadness is as much a part of our lives as is our laughter. To share our sadness with one we love is perhaps as great a joy as we can know – unless it be to share our laughter. ~James Kavanaugh

There are some people that when you meet them for the first time, you feel like you've always known them. You are comfortable right away, love them immediately. For me, one of those people is Kerilyn Russo. When I was at [World Domination Summit](#) (WDS) last year, sitting with [Rachel Cole](#) during a break between sessions, this woman came up to greet Rachel. They clearly already knew each other, and Rachel turned to me and said, “you two need to meet, should know each other.”

But somehow I already knew Kerilyn. As Rachel introduced us, and I looked at that big smile and those dimples, a feeling overwhelmed me, a sense of “There you are! Where have you been? I’ve been waiting, looking for you!” I felt so happy, so relieved, like I might cry. It was the strangest, best thing. We didn’t get to spend nearly enough time together that weekend, but I kept running into her, and every time I had that same feeling of “there you are!” and that sense of an immediate, easy connection.

Since then, Kerilyn and I have been able to stay in touch. We’ve Skyped in our bathrobes, talked on the phone about deep and important things, became pen pals (regular snail mail, just like we were 12 years old again). She is the best kind of friend, helping me to go deeper, asking the best kinds of questions, but also making me smile and laugh until my face hurts. I absolutely adore her. Her smile is one of the best things on earth.



Kerilyn describes herself this way, as a wife, friend, sister, and sensitive soul, (add to that mother-to-be, yay!). Interior Designer by day. Creator/Certified Life Coach of Married to a Chef, student of A Course in Miracles, lover of Reggae music, [amateur Greeting Card Designer](#), novice photographer, Highly Sensitive Person, Searcher, and swimmer of the deep. You can read more about what she'd say about herself on her [Who Am I? page](#) on her website, [Ancora Imparo](#), (which means "I am still learning" in Italian). I am so excited to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Self compassion, from where I stand TODAY... is the continual process of forgiving ourselves (and others) for what we THINK we/they did to us, them... and the world. We have forgotten who we REALLY are (UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE) and self compassion (or RADICAL self forgiveness) is a TOOL to remembering our TRUE state. When we unconditionally forgive and accept ourselves and those around us (much harder than we think, which is why it's so hard to maintain a feeling of self compassion)... we are remembering who we REALLY are and in that, our divinity.



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

What an exciting question! I love this one! My view of self-compassion has evolved as I have evolved and if it's okay with you, I am happy to share a little bit of how it has changed along the way.

As I began my spiritual (not religious) journey (hee hee, how many of us have said that?), I was eager and hungry to attempt to understand how the WORLD worked... what made it tick, underneath it all. The seen and the unseen. I soaked up books on energy, reincarnation, and spirit as a way of understanding what was happening TO ME in my life. Still at this point, it wasn't about how I had a part to play in it... it was like I was sitting in a theater... watching the movie about how the world worked, without my awareness of how I am a full blown contributor to it. I was unconscious to how my thoughts and actions toward myself was a

reflection of what I saw. I think my former organized religion conditioned beliefs about how it was out of my control still had its grip on me, and while I was aware there was more to this than just praying to God and going to church, I was still unknowing of how my participation had to do with what I saw in my life. HOW could I have self compassion at this point in my journey, when I still believed that the world was happening TO me, not because of me. The limiting beliefs that doing anything for myself was selfish and how dare I believe the world, still revolved around me. This was challenging because it didn't sit right with me, but I forged on... STILL feeling like I was still missing something.



When *The Secret* and Abraham (Jerry & Esther Hicks) came my way. Blew the lid off of that I had nothing to do with my outcome. I heard "As you think, so shall you be." And I was spiritually in shock for a while. WHAT? I have something to do with how my life looks? I am ultimately responsible?? As I got swept away in the loving current of this new philosophy... I was still quite unsure as to HOW to REMEMBER that it's TOTALLY in my control. It starts with how I FEEL. How I feel includes feeling good about HOW I feel about myself and the predicaments I find myself in my life. When I remembered this, I felt wonderful and when I didn't, I went back to that old thinking that it was outside of my control. (Those old beliefs really do have a hold on us... wouldn't you agree?) STILL... I felt there was still something MORE to this. These beliefs filled me up, absolutely, but they didn't answer the question about WHY the world (and still myself) were constantly in conflict, so I kept searching...



Kerilyn's sweet kitty, Pez

Not too long after that, I found A Course in Miracles and all my questions have since been answered (even in my resistance of them). As I became a serious student of the Course, I began to learn that there are NO answers outside of myself. "Seek Not outside yourself" is still one of the most powerful messages of the Course for me. It is ALL about me. The OPPOSITE of what I've been taught at an earlier part of my journey. It is ALL about my perceptions of what I see, my projections of my OWN inner thoughts and feelings, is what I see in my experience, the role RADICAL forgiveness plays and the process of UN-learning we all must do to heal ourselves, and experience TRUE love, which the Course says is all there is.

Based on the Courses teachings, we have not been taught love, but attack. The ego (the part of us that wants us to believe we're separate from everyone and everything else) has us brainwashed with thoughts of self hatred to keep us believing we're separate from everyone else. **SPECIAL.** Attack with everyone we see (whether we're aware of it or not) and everything we think... that includes our thoughts about ourselves.

NO WONDER we cannot sustain self compassion for long, we've been believing that we are not worth UNITY with anyone or anything, including ourselves. It's this belief that keeps us in that feast or famine vicious cycle. *Secret: To keep us believing we're separate, the ego has to give us good experiences (FEAST) to keep the pendulum of duality (GOOD AND BAD) in motion.

That is where you will find me. In the process of UN-learning those old messages, infusing them with a practice of RADICAL Forgiveness that even I cannot even fully grasp at this time, facing my resistance and regularly in forgiveness when I attack my brothers, and more importantly, myself.



Picture by Kerilyn, taken in Savannah, GA

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Self compassion (or what I call RADICAL forgiveness) is just that... a practice. It's a TOOL. I pick it up and use it when I need remember that have a CHOICE to make... continue to feel yucky, continue to not understand, continue to believe in my victimization OR to live from another way of being. It's totally up to me. Maybe one day I have to pick it up a handful of times, and maybe other days I have to **CONSTANTLY** be picking it up, hundreds of times a day. To ask myself, "Do I want to be RIGHT, or do I want to be HAPPY?" Challenging those beliefs of separation and lack and remembering my natural state of **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**. At this point in our evolution, we are not able to LIVE in that state of radical forgiveness (which is okay) but for me, I know it's at my fingertips... whenever I REALLY want to understand why I am feeling, the way I'm feeling. *Oh, and If I don't REALLY want to understand, that's okay too... I'll

want to forgive myself for not wanting to understand and keep on moving forward. Again, it's a CONTINUAL practice of forgiveness.

Oh, and how do I practice self compassion? Easy. I am constantly forgiving myself. Forgiving myself when I judge another to be wrong, when I judge myself as less than... and judge the world for what I see as "bad". Practicing self compassion is saying "I forgive myself, for I know not what I see/do." over and over again.

Why don't you try it now... Forgive yourself for something you THINK you or someone else did today. Forgive them or yourself in your MIND. That's all. No need for an outwardly expression of forgiveness. Go inside and FORGIVE. *And if you find it too hard to forgive... that's okay... forgive yourself for not being able to forgive. Let yourself or someone else off the hook today.



Kerilyn and Peter at their wedding, ([read more about their love story](#))

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Oh my goodness... What do I still need to learn? That my shift in perception (from conflict to peace) is a reflection of how often I practice. Practice a little, get little results. Let this philosophy fold into my day and I am able to be happier, more at peace. It's about CONSTANTLY practicing. Why don't I constantly practice? Because I think I'm here in this world, this dream,

ALONE. That I can “do it” myself. I need to learn that I am not and CANNOT do anything alone. (Remember the EGO has done a doozy on us, having us think we’re SEPARATE and therefore ALONE.)

I struggle with my resistance to really KNOWING this information to be true. We have been brainwashed a LONG time.. and I still have quite a bit of resistance toward unlearning. There are days when I want to seek for my specialness.. where I would rather be RIGHT than happy... where I feel where I have been wronged... and in that awareness I need to remember that I can always choose differently.. whenever I am ready to. The option is ALWAYS there for me, it’s a matter of my little willingness.



I am so grateful for Kerilyn, for her responses, (especially what she had to say about forgiveness), for her support and friendship and wisdom, her constant effort and curiosity and sense of humor, her big heart and big smile. To find out more about Kerilyn, to connect with her:

- Visit her website, [Ancora Imparo](#)
- Check out [Married to a Chef](#)
- Friend her [on Facebook](#)
- Follow her [on Twitter](#)
- Look at her pictures on [Flickr](#) or [Instagram](#)
- Read some things she's written, like [I am Enough](#), or [The Search](#).
- Check out interviews with Kerilyn, like [I Am Chef Wife Chic](#), or in this [So Dream Something podcast](#)

Rachel Cole

July 27, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/07/27/self-compassion-saturday-rachel-cole/>

My enoughness is infallible. unshakeable. unchanging. Even in moments when I feel not enough. I am enough, experiencing temporary disconnection from that truth. ~Rachel Cole

This is a tough one for me, kind and gentle reader. When I think about Rachel Cole, consider all the ways she's wonderful, all the ways I'm grateful for her, I feel tender and raw, get weepy. She is so special, so precious to me. I would not be here, wouldn't still be writing this blog, would not be doing this self-compassion project, wouldn't be living as deeply if it weren't for Rachel Cole. How do you thank someone for that?

You shine in your own particular way, that's how. You feed your true hungers, you do things that you never thought you could, you feel your fear and you don't let it stop you, you cultivate confidence and clarity, you seek out joy and ease in your life.



I was a very different person [when I first met Rachel](#). I didn't have much confidence, was so sad, stuck, starving in all kinds of ways, convinced that something was fundamentally wrong with me. Rachel and I worked together in various ways — a [Well-Fed Woman Retreatshop](#) (where [I learned a lot about myself](#)), a coaching session, her [Wisdom Notes](#), and [Ease Hunting course](#) — and a fundamental shift happened for me. I was brave enough to go to the [World Domination Summit](#), even though Rachel was the only person I knew. I had the confidence to

ask a group of wise and compassionate women to take part in this project. I am gentler and kinder with myself.

Rachel has a quiet, gentle yet powerful way of leading you to the truth. She is inspiring and supportive, fierce and compassionate, crazy intuitive and funny. She glows with energy and love. When I initially thought about doing this project, I knew she was one of the women I had to ask, and I'm so happy to be sharing her answers with you today.



image by Andrea Scher

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Self-compassion is a way of relating to one's self with a soft heart, empathy, and acceptance. I like to think of it as being at the heart of maternal love, not the love we received from our actual imperfect mothers, but the energy of pure maternal love. It is an embrace and a place to rest.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I learned self-compassion because self-loathing and self-whipping were killing me. I read and studied a fair amount of buddhist and spiritual philosophy, including: Cheri Huber, Sharon Salzberg, Tara Brach, Elizabeth Lesser, Geneen Roth, Eckart Tolle, James Baraz, and the like.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I practice self-compassion moment by moment. It lies in how I receive myself and what I'm experiencing. I practice awareness of self-judgement and my inner dialogue. I practice softening, allowing, embracing. The experience is energetic, emotional and somatic. It's subtle. It's not a button to push or switch to flip.



image by Andrea Scher

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I think the next level of self-compassion comes in practicing it in relationship with another. While we might be proficient and self-compassion when we're alone and untriggered, when we're in an intimate relationships new challenges arise. I wouldn't say it's a struggle so much as a rich new terrain to practice on. I am working questions like: how to maintain the depth of my connection to myself (a prerequisite for self-compassion) while also being connected to another? How can I show compassion for myself and another when we are holding different viewpoints or hurting? How can my own practice for self-compassion inform another as to how to relate to me with softness and kindness?



image by Andrea Scher

Rachel Cole is magic. “Coach. Retreat host. Instigator of ease. Hunger-satisfier. Well-fed woman.” If you get the chance to work with her, through an event or consulting or coaching or even just reading her blog, you will be encouraged and enriched. To find out more about Rachel, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Read her blog](#) — no, I’m serious: *read her blog*
- [Attend an event](#) where she’s teaching
- [Feast](#) with her
- Follow her [on Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)
- Check out [her pictures on Instagram](#)
- Follow her [on Pinterest](#)

Niight Wind

July 3, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/08/03/self-compassion-saturday-niight-wind/>

I've been practicing yoga for six years now. At first, yoga was all about my body (or rather my dissatisfaction with my body), and my intention for my practice was to stretch it, make it stronger and leaner, change it into something else. There was nothing spiritual or gentle about it. I was focused on resistance and control. Over time, and with the help of wise and kind teachers, I softened. I showed up, opened up, allowed and accepted, let go of my agenda and surrendered to the practice — and with that, everything changed.

Niight Rain Wind is one of my favorite yoga teachers, specifically because her “light hearted teaching style brings a focus on physical and energetic alignment, embodiment and creating a strong foundation.” For at least a year, she taught my Monday morning class, and I learned so much from her. There have been a handful of individual classes for me that were transformational, and one was a morning when I was the only person who showed up for Niight's class, so I got a private session. It was during that class that I knew the full potential of yoga, felt the connection, the union, the presence, the breath, the heat, the power.

Niight has the best energy, and is a joy to be around. She's consistently cheerful and encouraging. I've lost count of how many times her support, physical and emotional, enabled me to do poses I was certain I couldn't, to engage with the practice from a fresh perspective. I know the power of a headstand because of her, the release available in reverse bow/wheel pose. She never pushes you beyond your edge, but rather inspires you to reconsider where that might be, gently guides you to a new possibility.



Niight describes herself this way, “Niight Wind is a Yoga and Wellness Coach in Fort Collins, CO focusing on Digestive Health, Empowerment and Overcoming Trauma. She is a sought after speaker who has presented at Ignite as well as numerous Universities. Niight is a nature junkie and the creator of the Yoga Coaching for Runners Program.” Niight is also an amazing photographer.

To begin her answers to my questions, Niight shared this quote,

Self-Love is essential, for I cannot see the love in the hearts of others or in the world if I do not know it myself. The love I feel for the Divine echoes throughout my life and sets my course. Love is all around. ~Laura Alden Kamm

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

The first thing that comes to mind when I think about Self Compassion is being your own inner “perfect mother”. She is the one that tells you everything is going to be o.k. and can always see your beauty, and knows when to listen. We all have this inside ourselves if we listen, even if your real mother is not anything like this.

After really thinking about this question, I came to the realization that self compassion is very connected to self esteem and self care. To see self compassion from a more tangible point of view, we can look at the pillars of life: food, sleep and creativity. Keeping these in proper balance is a huge part of having self compassion. When these are out of balance it is much harder for us to function and yet we often deprive ourselves of these very important simple needs. There is one thing beyond this that can help us have more compassion for ourselves and that is having a purpose that lights up your heart. This doesn't have to be your job, but it could be.



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I learned self compassion from a lot of trial and error, and a lot of strong, but gentle people. The technique I use the most is self study. But, one of the biggest moments of finding self compassion, was a time that I was really upset. Riding my bike home from work, crying. I was sick of wasting my energy, just plain fed up. I realized that I had the power to flip that switch, to have compassion for myself and take back my power now, and at any time I wanted. It was a big realization that I was wasting my time and energy living in the past and beating myself up about it.

Reading and listening are completely different from doing the work, but a book that I love and always recommend around this topic is *True Love: A Practice of Awakening the Heart* by Thich Nhat Hanh.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I practice self compassion by being gentle on myself, and self inquiry and self study. If I look at a situation and see something did not turn out how I wanted, instead of beating myself up, I ask myself how would I change that next time? What was this really about? What can I do now to set myself up for “success” next time?

There is a reason that they call most things a practice, it is because you have to practice, it is not about getting to the perfect point, but getting better at dealing with situations, better with the inner struggles, creating a quicker reflex to turn to self compassion not doubt and blame. Self compassion comes in many forms for me: going to bed when I am tired, painting my nails, taking time for myself in nature, going for a trail run, saying no when necessary, the list goes on.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

The biggest thing I am working with right now is realizing that anger is fear, and when I am angry at others, it is fear, and the person is mirroring that to me. I then try to catch myself and move into a place of self love. The reason I say love for myself, and not love for that person is that it is much easier to love myself first, and radiate that. Where as in a state of anger it can be much harder to feel love for the person you are angry at, and you do not have the capability to change someone else. You can only change yourself. Anger and fear just waste your energy.



I am so grateful for Niight, for her wisdom, her teaching, her practice, her gentle presence, the joy she radiates. To find out more about Niight, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Read her blog](#)
- [Follow her on Facebook](#)
- [Take a class with her](#)
- [Be photographed by her](#)

Jennifer Louden

August 10, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/08/10/self-compassion-saturday-jennifer-louden/>

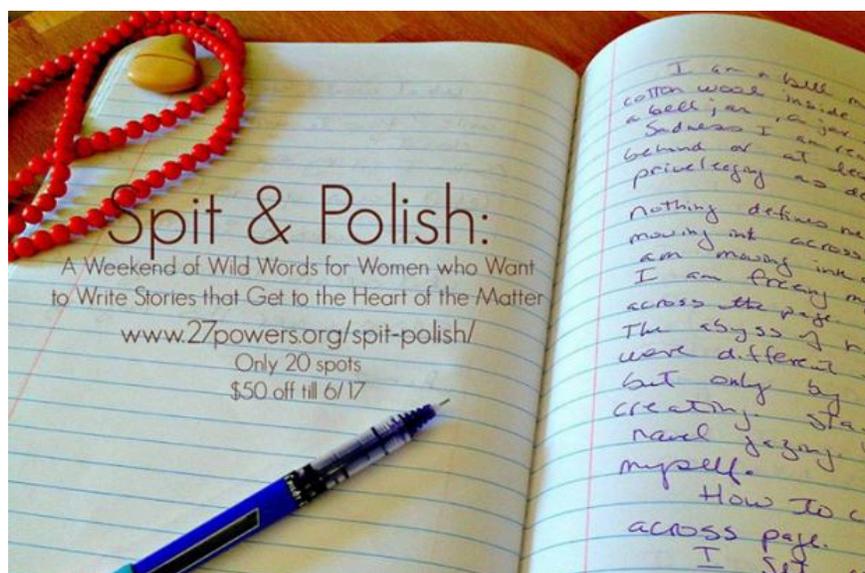
Jennifer Louden is one of those women who seems to have always been there for me. I can't remember exactly the origin of this being, but know that in some way it's connected to my discovery of Patti Digh's work, or maybe by way of Susan Piver. What I know for certain is that she is part of a constellation of women who have helped me on my way, comforted and encouraged me, are examples of courage, kindness, and joy.

I know the connection to Jennifer's work began with my life-rehab almost two years ago.

Sameet M. Kumar says in his book *Grieving Mindfully: A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss* that "grieving mindfully enables us to use the tremendous influx of emotional energy that comes from experiencing loss to nurture life," and that,

...with mindful awareness of your grief, you can move closer to the people in your life who matter most, and change habits or ideas that have been keeping you from living fully. Full awareness, especially in grief, of your patterns of thought, feelings, and behavior can take you from living with misery, fear, and discontent to living with openness and passion.

The loss of Obi and then Kelly started my life-rehab, my quest to live life with an open heart, and since the beginning Jennifer Louden has been one of my guides. First it was through her books, then her web presence (she wrote one of my favorite blog posts of all time, [2012 Predictions for You](#)), and last summer when I went to [World Domination Summit](#), I was able to meet her and tell her to her sweet face how much I adore her. Next month, I get to attend a writing workshop she's leading with [Laurie Wagner](#), [Spit & Polish](#).



Jennifer Louden has written six books on well-being and personal wisdom, has studied yoga and meditation since she was 12, is Mom to a beautiful daughter and two of the cutest dogs on the planet, is about to be married (next week, August 17th — wishing her so much love ♥), has been a long time mentor to teachers and creatives through retreats and workshops and classes and coaching, she is no stranger to grief but she is also a companion to joy, and she is a dedicated student of love.

On Twitter, she describes herself this way, “Best-selling author, coach, champion of creative joy, speaker, teacher of teachers, spreader of satisfaction, curious s-hero, and generally awe struck at it all.” She is my favorite sort of woman, wise and kind and make you laugh until your face hurts funny. I’m so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

For me it means dropping self-judgment every time I notice it – from eating too much chocolate last night to procrastinating writing my novel this morning to being envious of a friend this afternoon. It is the act of dropping my story that I am bad, wrong, less than, not spiritual, not progressing, etc. Yet If I make self-compassion a goal, I immediately lose access to the state.

It’s awareness catching the story and putting it down without any fuss.



Photo by [Darrah Parker](#)

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

Reading Tara Brach, Ramana Maharshi, Brene Brown, Rick Hanson, Rumi, Hafiz, Mary Oliver;
Meditating by relaxing everything and simply observing everything without getting attached to anything, loving kindness meditation, chanting ahem prema and really chanting anything;
Dancing, yoga, massage;
Parenting!

These have all given me glimpses of self-compassion. They are pointing out instructions to what I must then apply again and again.



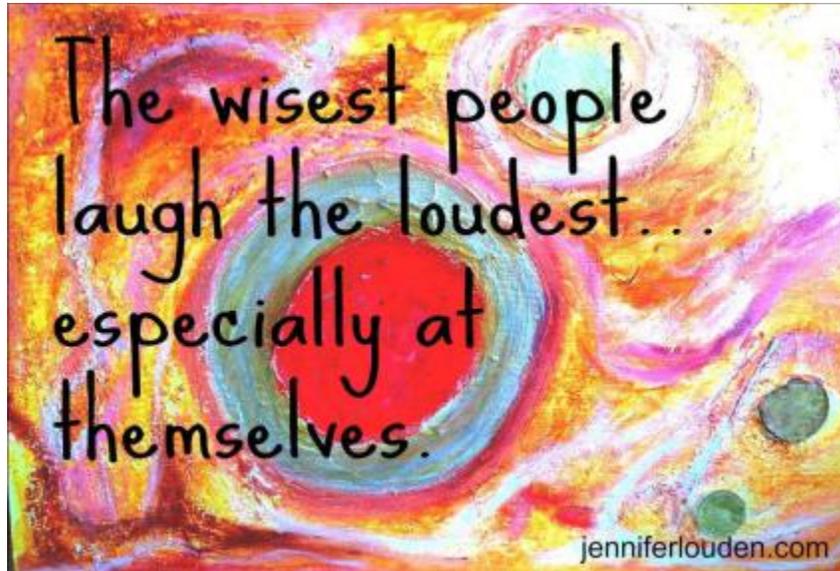
3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

See number 1. It's all practice and since my biggest trap in life is to believe I have nothing creatively valuable to offer the world and my deepest desire is to create, I get a lot of practice dropping the sticky place the self-blame and frustration that keep this story alive. I seem to have been born to learn to be compassionate with myself as the path to being creatively self-expressed. So compassion is my biggest ally and my most frequently forgotten ally.

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

To untangle myself from what I produce. The thought is something like, "I will practice compassion for myself once I get my work done and I decide it's useful to others. Then I will deserve compassion." I know intellectually my creative happiness and spiritual freedom live in me practicing self-compassion *first* but I forget a thousand times a day. Then I get overwrought and so frustrated!

It does not escape my attention that a large part of my work in the world has been to foster self-compassion in others through self-care. It makes me ruefully chuckle.



What I am learning is to inhabit the open space where all these stories fall away and being alive, breathing, being here to witness and experience life, is enough.

It's good to write this and remember that self-compassion is my path. Thank you for asking such rich questions.



Photo by [Darrah Parker](#)

I am offering the deepest bow to Jennifer, sending her much love, am so grateful to her for taking the time to offer a glimpse into her practice and understanding of self-compassion. I especially connected with the idea that, “my biggest trap in life is to believe I have nothing creatively valuable to offer the world and my deepest desire is to create.” *sigh* Me too, Jen. Me too.

To find out more about Jennifer, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Read her blog](#)
- [Do a retreat or workshop with her](#)
- [Be coached by her](#)
- [Get one of her books](#), (check out [her page on Goodeads](#) if you need help deciding)
- Follow her on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) or [Pinterest](#)
- [Watch her videos on YouTube](#)

Susannah Conway

August 17, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/08/17/self-compassion-saturday-susannah-conway/>

I believe that by being the best and most healed version of ourselves we can truly make a difference in the world. ~Susannah Conway

Susannah Conway is one of my favorite women, “Photographer/writer. Aunt. Author of *THIS I KNOW: Notes on Unraveling the Heart*. Born-again Londoner.” Every time I think of her, I can’t help but smile. [I’ve written about her before](#), told you that,

I started following Susannah’s blog and immediately adored her. She is consistently honest, open-hearted and funny, willing to share her “wobbly bits” along with the brilliant beauty of life. Her words and photography are gorgeous and authentic, and at times heartbreaking (in the very best kind of way, cracking you open to let in the light).

I’ve taken many classes with her, one of my favorites being [Blogging from the Heart](#). I’ve learned so much from each course, about how to live creatively, authentically, and how to compassionately share what I know, what I create. I hold her in my heart as an example of how you can live through (with) grief, how to sink deeply into yourself and from that place be your most creative, productive, authentic, funny, brilliant self, and how you can make a living doing what you love and in so doing be of great benefit to the world — even when you make mistakes, even as you struggle.



I was lucky enough to meet Susannah last summer at the [World Domination Summit](#), to hang out with her, to attend her reading for her book *This I Know: Notes on Unraveling the Heart* — which felt to me like a love letter to my own possibility. As I've said before, the book is a map of one woman's personal journey through bereavement and rediscovery of self, but it is also offered as a guidebook for those making their way along the same path, traveling through that same territory of loss. And yet, as Susannah says, this "is not a story about grief, although it informs everything I've learned about life. This is a book about unraveling the layers of our lives and exploring what we find in order to better understand ourselves, our relationships, and our path."



image by susannah conway, her beautiful hand, her brilliant ring, and her precious book

Susannah's book (as does all her work) embodies, through both word and image, the tender heart of sadness, not shying away from the reality of it, the truth that life can kick your ass but that we can also lean into joy and be softened by beauty, can and will encounter grace and know love. We may have tears streaming down our face or feel bad about our thighs, but with our eyes and heart open wide to both the brutality and beauty of life, we can heal, we can live a wholehearted life.

Susannah is every bit as smart, kind, and funny in person as you would expect her to be, while also managing to communicate that self online and in print. When you read her words or take her courses or watch one of her videos, you know you are connecting with a real, no bullshit person. I am so happy to share Susannah's perspective on self-compassion with you today.



image by susannah conway

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

To me it means extending the sort of kindness, gentleness and understanding to yourself as you would to a loved one, someone you love unconditionally.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

Well, first of all I should say I'm still learning it. Or rather, still practicing it, as I don't believe it's something I'll ever have down pat. It's a daily practice, and some days are better than others. Losing my partner in 2005 set me off on this path to self-compassion. Falling into grief and losing everything I had built around me, literally and emotionally, meant I questioned everything I thought I knew about the world and my place in it. Bereavement, and the resulting therapy I had for many years after, helped to take off my edges, basically. I think there is a moment when you're in the deepest depths of despair where you have to make a choice of whether you're going to save yourself and swim towards the surface, or just let yourself drown. I choose to swim, and from that moment on I started learning how to take care of myself. How to be KIND to myself, because everything else seemed so shit — I wasn't able to turn on myself anymore. That was the beginning.



image by susannah conway

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I try to be very gentle with myself. Not always easy as I have high expectations and am quick to slide into negative thoughts. I do a lot of journaling. I say no to things I really don't want to do (rather than doing them and feeling resentful). I eat well and am slowly learning to like the gym as I truly want my body to be strong and healthy — feeling physically well helps me on so many levels. As a self-employed person I have a tendency to work hours that are far too long, so I'm trying to take off a little more time here and there, just for more headspace and rest — that feels very self-compassionate. When I'm hormonal and feeling crazed I go as gently as I can, knowing that's the best way to look after my heart.

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Patience. In all areas, in all ways, in everything. Patience.

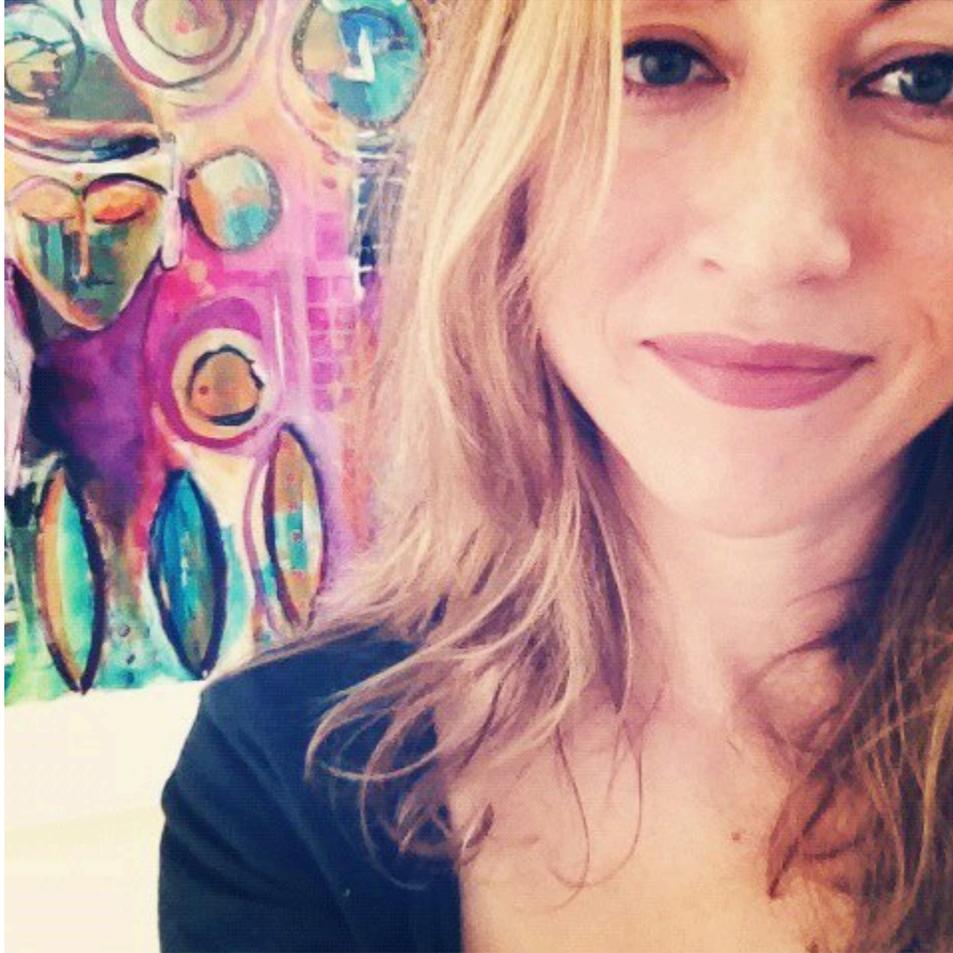


image by susannah conway

I'm so grateful to Susannah for sharing her perspective, especially what she had to say about self-compassion being a daily practice and the importance of being gentle with ourselves. She reminds me, yet again, that I can trust myself.

To find out more about Susannah, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Take an ecourse with her](#)
- View her images on [Instagram](#) or [Flickr](#)
- Follow her on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) or [Pinterest](#)
- [Buy one of her books](#)

Courtney Putnam

August 24, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/08/24/self-compassion-saturday-courtney-putnam/>

I am posting late today, kind and gentle reader. I went hiking with my boys this morning, a long and quiet time together, space and silence that I sorely needed. This post was waiting for me to write it, but I knew that if anyone would understand the choice to be out in the green instead, it would be my dear friend Courtney Putnam.



I haven't actually met Courtney in person, and yet she's one of my favorite people, a true friend. A few years ago, a piece of her art was selected for the cover of a reader being used in the English Department at Colorado State University, and the Composition Program director at the time, friends with Courtney's mom, told me, "you and Courtney need to know each other." We became friends on Facebook, and the connection was immediate and true. We have lots in

common, but more than that, Courtney is pure magic, pure medicine, full of courage and love and joy.

Courtney describes herself this way, “Solopreneur of Rising Bird Healing Arts in Seattle, WA. Massage therapist, Reiki Master, Intrinsic Coach®, artist, writer, teacher,” a Creative Healing Artist.

I told her when she emailed her responses to these questions, “As with every interaction, every time we connect, every time you touch or encourage or inspire me or make me smile, I feel the deepest longing, make a wish that we were closer, that someday, someday...” Some day we will meet, have a long conversation over tea, but for today I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you, a thing both powerful and gentle.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

I love that the word “compass” is nestled in that word compassion. So is the word “passion.” In self-compassion, the compass points to yourself; the passion for self-understanding is part of our mission. Self-compassion is self-love, self-empathy, self-mercy. Self-compassion is the act of saying YES to yourself, of sending the message “I matter,” and of experiencing self-love even when self-loathing has the louder voice.

For me, self-compassion is making room for all that I am, even with my struggles, illnesses, challenges, pain, and insecurities. Self-compassion says, “That’s okay, I still love you” to pain even when pain writes me a letter that says, “Dear Courtney, I hate you. Yours, Pain.”



TrustYourself by Courtney Putnam

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

The human body has been my primary teacher in my journey with self-compassion. The body forgives us, doesn't hold grudges, and is constantly working to create equilibrium for us. It does this naturally, innately, and autonomically. We don't need to ask our bodies to work on our behalf: it does so with complete humility and love.

I have been a bodywork practitioner for over eleven years, and I have had the honor of working with people and their amazing, wise, truth-telling bodies. What I have learned is that the body we inhabit knows only self-compassion and self-acceptance, even though our minds often

don't. We can be very hard on our bodies – not only in how we ask a lot out of them physically, but also in the way we think about and talk to them. And we can ignore the messages of the body completely, which makes the body's self-healing/self-compassion system have to work harder.



ScarMatrix by Courtney Putnam

The body is a barometer for how we are doing and in my work I see the deep interconnection between the mind and body. Our bodies want to be acknowledged. It's a very simple process, but sometimes hard to do because we have so many thoughts and feelings in the way – worry, anxiety, self-loathing, grief, sadness.

Here's an example of how self-compassion is my teacher and guide during my sessions:

When there is tension or pain, I place my hands where I feel stuckness and I ask my client, "What is here?" or "What is it like for you right in this spot?"

I hear answers like, “My grief lives here. It’s spreading like wildfire. It’s red. Burning, burning.”

I ask: “What does this spot want? Listen. Allow the messages to come....”

Client: “It wants air, moist cool air. It wants to cool down. It wants me to cool down. My grief needs room to breathe. It doesn’t like being contained in the fire.”

Me: “Let’s give this place cool, moist air then, okay? Imagine your next breath is cool air filling your whole chest, soothing everything.” [I place my hands on my client’s diaphragm and ribs.]

Client: [She breathes a few times. The body receives the acknowledgment of the pain, of the hot grief, the constriction — and in response to the attention and intention, the breath deepens, the heart opens. Tears flow.] “I have more room now. The red is turning green with pink on the edges.” [Another big breath surfaces naturally.]

Me: “Now what does this spot in your body have to tell you? What are you noticing?”

Client: “I hear ‘Thank you’ coming from the grief. And the grief isn’t burning through me. It’s more like it’s flowing like a river. It’s cooler, softer.” [My client’s body whole body softens.] “I also hear that I’m okay, even with this grief, right in this moment I am okay.”



LetEverythingGo by Courtney Putnam

The body loves to be heard and our act of listening deeply and asking what our bodies want or need to tell us is self-compassion embodied.

Compassionate transformation happens when we notice + ask what is needed + listen + breathe in what is needed.

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

My self-compassion practice has many incarnations, including ...

... asking my body what it needs and then obliging its request

... dancing to KC and the Sunshine Band in the living room wearing sequins and feathers

... napping with my cat Selkie (in the middle of the day, even when it is beautiful out)



Courtney and Selkie

... crying while creating mixed media collages and listening to Sigur Ros

... writing YOU ARE OKAY in dry erase marker on my bathroom mirror

... reciting these mantras when I feel anxious: “ride the wave, it will pass” and “just be with it, don’t resist”

... saying “no” to going to an event or party



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Oh goodness, there are oceans and caverns and mountains I still need to learn when it comes to self-compassion. For starters, it is much easier for me to help others with self-compassion than it is to help myself. Helping my clients, my friends and my family with self-love and self-healing comes naturally, but when it comes to my own self-nurturing, I have to work at it. I know a lot of people in the helping professions would agree with me on this. We often give and give and neglect to receive. We can fray at the edges, feel the weight of other people’s problems, and exhaust ourselves. We neglect to ask for help or to take the time to give ourselves the same attention we give to others. I have to be very attuned to my own body’s messages – and learn to take breaks, say “no,” or ask for support from others. As of this writing, I am giving myself a huge helping of self-compassion: I am taking a summer sabbatical from my bodywork practice to recharge, recalibrate, and soak up some self-nurturing time. I hear my body gently whispering *yes yes yes*.



I am so filled with gratitude and love for Courtney, for taking the time to share her responses, for doing the work she does, for being just who she is. As I told her, I so needed to hear her talk about the body being connected to the practice of self-compassion, and when I read this the first time, “We don’t need to ask our bodies to work on our behalf: it does so with complete humility and love,” it made me have to pause and cry a little.

To find out more about Courtney, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Read her blog](#)
- [Take an ecourse with her](#)
- [Buy her art](#)
- Watch one of [her videos on YouTube](#)

Tammy Strobel

August 31, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/08/31/self-compassion-saturday-tammy-strobel/>

This is going to be another one of those introductions, one of the ones where I tell you that I can't remember exactly how I first discovered Tammy Strobel's work, specifically her blog Rowdy Kittens. If I had to guess, it was probably through Susannah Conway, maybe she shared a link or something, (here's an interview Susannah did with Tammy last year, [My Creative Life: Tammy Strobel](#)). Or, it might have been Courtney Carver of [Be More with Less](#) who shared a link to Tammy's site. What I can tell you for sure is that I've been reading her blog, following her work for the past few years, and I have so much respect and love for her.



Tammy did a lot of work to simplify her life, to create the perfect one for herself. You can read all about her transformation in her book *You Can Buy Happiness (and It's Cheap): How One Woman Radically Simplified Her Life and How You Can Too*.

Once, Tammy Strobel and her husband were living a normal middle-class lifestyle: driving two cars, commuting long distances, and living well beyond their means. Now they are living the voluntary downsizing — or smart-sizing — dream.

Tammy lives in a tiny house with her husband and cats, spending her days reading and writing and teaching and taking pictures, contributing wisdom and creating beauty — essentially doing whatever she wants, but also what helps. She says,

[L]iving simply isn't about becoming an ascetic; it's not about denying yourself pleasure and joy. It's not about austerity. Instead, it's about building a life steeped in the only precious gifts that can bring lasting happiness: time, freedom, and community. The focus is on life, not stuff.



photo by Tammy Strobel, her tiny house

I did meet Tammy last year at [World Domination Summit](#). She won't remember it because it went something like this — she was volunteering the first day, answering questions and giving people their name tags and shwag. I saw her at the table, walked up to her and said, "Are you Tammy of Rowdy Kittens?" She answered yes and smiled, and then someone else was asking for her attention and she turned, probably not even hearing me tell her how much I love her blog. It was actually one of the moments when I thought to myself, "why did I come here?," the introvert in me wanting to run away home, skip the whole thing.

A little over a year later, and I have a space where I share people like Tammy with you, kind and gentle reader, my own little tiny corner of the world where I can invite people like her into a conversation about things that matter, where we can connect, be comforted and inspired. I wasn't afraid this time to "talk" to Tammy, didn't feel like I don't belong. My small life is deep and wide, linked to a vast space filled with folks wise and kind. Along the way, from there to here, Tammy Strobel has been a constant inspiration, a source of wisdom and comfort to me. I am so happy today to be sharing her perspective on self-compassion with you.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

I define self-compassion as being kind to myself and accepting who I am — flaws and all.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I learned about self-compassion from my parents, close friends, and from my husband. They are my teachers. I try to follow their example because they are incredibly kind to themselves and to others.

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Unfortunately, my inner dialogue isn't always kind or accepting. When I catch myself engaging in negative self-talk, I remind myself that I am enough, that I'm doing good work, and that I have friends and family who love me.

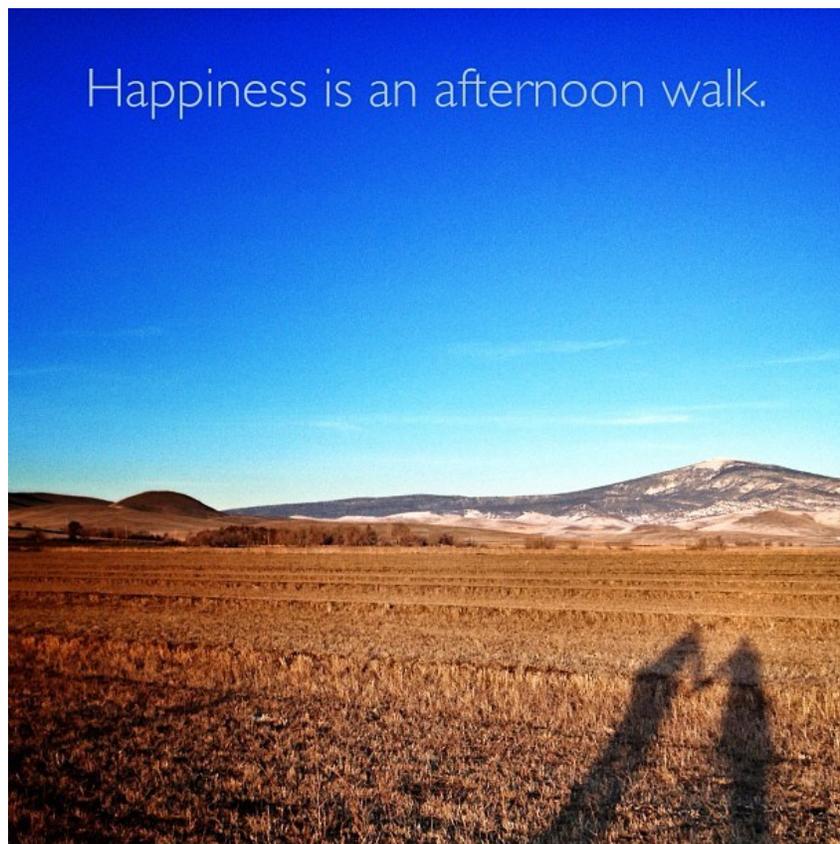


photo by Tammy Strobel

Happiness isn't a stroke of luck. It's something you have to practice every day. How? By choosing activities that spur your curiosity and engagement with the present moment.

~Tammy Strobel

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I struggle with negative self-talk and have a lot to learn about self-compassion. Looking toward my loved ones and using positive mantras to stay on track helps me stay centered and grounded.



selfie by Tammy

I'm so grateful to Tammy for taking the time to respond to these questions. In all of her work, everything she shares, I am constantly reminded to practice self-compassion, to allow joy and rest, to know that even in chaos, connection and comfort are possible, and that as Mary Oliver says, all I have to do is "let the soft animal of your body love what it loves." To find out more about Tammy, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#) and [read her blog](#)
- [Look at her pictures](#), (seriously, if you are feeling down, need cheering up, want to see something beautiful or cute, the fastest way to do so is look at some of Tammy's photos)
- [Follow her on Instagram](#), or [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) or [Soundcloud](#)
- [Take an ecourse with her](#)
- [Buy her books](#)

Kristin Noelle

September 7, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/09/07/self-compassion-saturday-kristin-noelle/>

I am so pleased to be introducing you to Kristin Noelle's perspective on self-compassion today, kind and gentle reader. She is every bit as kind and gentle as you, is the most generous, warm-hearted person. Time and time again she has offered me inspiration and comfort, freely and without ever having met me. Just yesterday, [she made a video Trust Note](#) that was exactly what I needed to hear.

Kristin describes herself this way, "I'm a trust coach. I write, speak, teach, make art, and listen deeply, all to help trust grow," because "I see trust as our world's most potent source of transformation." She describes her Trust Tending work as "nourishing Life beyond fear."



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

When I think of self-compassion, I often hear in my mind a line from Sarah McLachlan's song "Adia": *We are born innocent*. And then further, *We are *still* innocent*. We make messes of things *absolutely*, and hurt ourselves and one another in all sorts of ways. But at heart, I believe we're each, given our genetic make-up and life experiences, doing the best we can.

The more closely I look at the harm we cause and the messes we make, the more I see scared, childlike parts of us just responding like children do. Which elicits something so different than

judgment for me. I feel sadness about the fear, and sometimes anger at all that causes fear to take root. But my basic stance toward those scared, childlike parts is kindness.

Self-compassion is me extending this kindness, and this confidence in my core innocence, to my own self – even when I wish my feelings or actions or nature could be different.



art by Kristin Noelle

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

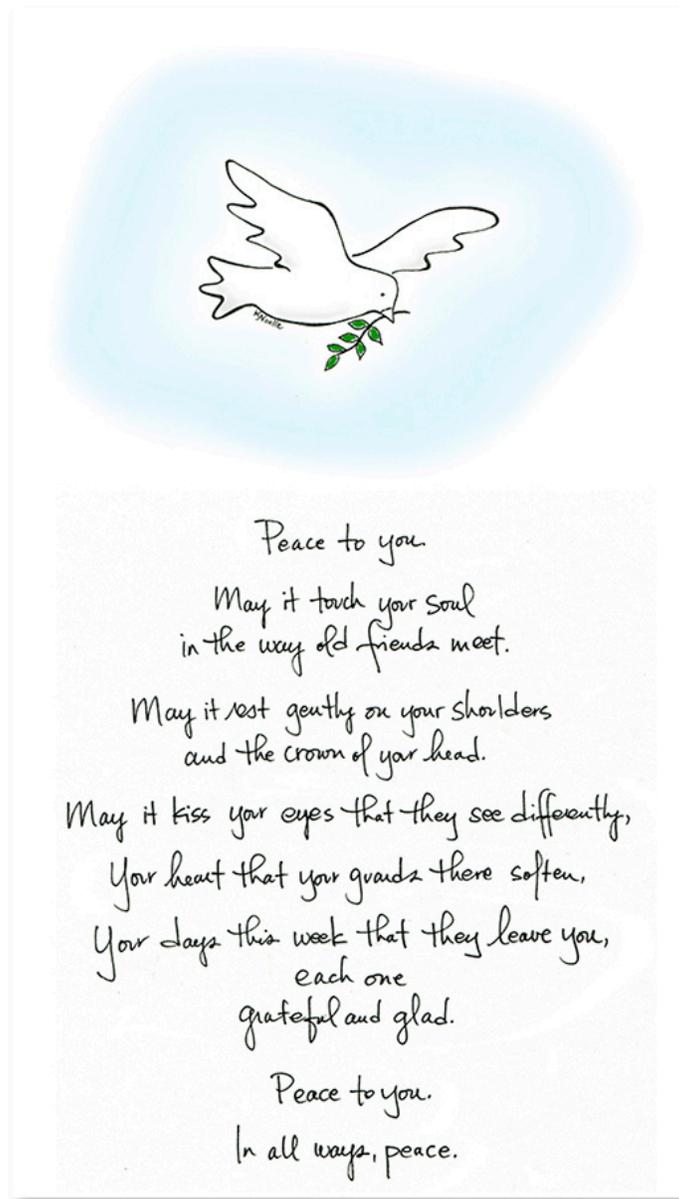
In my early twenties (I'm nearing 40 now), I suffered the loss of my childhood faith. By that I don't mean faith *in general*, but a particular worldview I'd known and been devoted to since childhood. That loss so befuddled family, friends, and mentors, that I found myself, quite shockingly to my good-girl self, making a choice between maintaining the approval of so many I cared about, and honoring my own soul. I chose the latter.

Something about that experience cracked me wide open. It was so unexpected and painful, and preceded by such pure-hearted devotion, that I felt like my eyes got totally remade. Instead of the lines I'd previously seen around "good" and "bad", "holy" and "profane", I started to see the childlike innocence in everyone around me: in myself, as I pursued truth and integrity the best ways I knew how; in those around me at the time, whose religious identities and experiences caused them to think me gone astray; in those who had no context to understand or appreciate the misery my loss of faith was causing me.

I more readily saw with eyes of compassion than ever before.

Through that time and all these many years since, many authors and teachers put words to this deep innocence I started to see, deepening my sense of it. These included poets David Whyte and Mary Oliver; novelists Shusaku Endo, Chaim Potok, Paulo Coelho, Sue Monk Kidd; memoirists Etty Hillesum, Will Campbell, Karen Armstrong, Anne Lammott, Rachel Naomi Remen; philosophers Rene Girard, Jacques Ellul; psychologists/psychotherapists Carl Jung, Richard Schwartz, Carol Dweck; Buddhist/spiritual teachers Pema Chodron, Jack Kornfield, Adyashanti, Meher Baba.

I'm sure I'm forgetting more folks who have shaped me deeply.

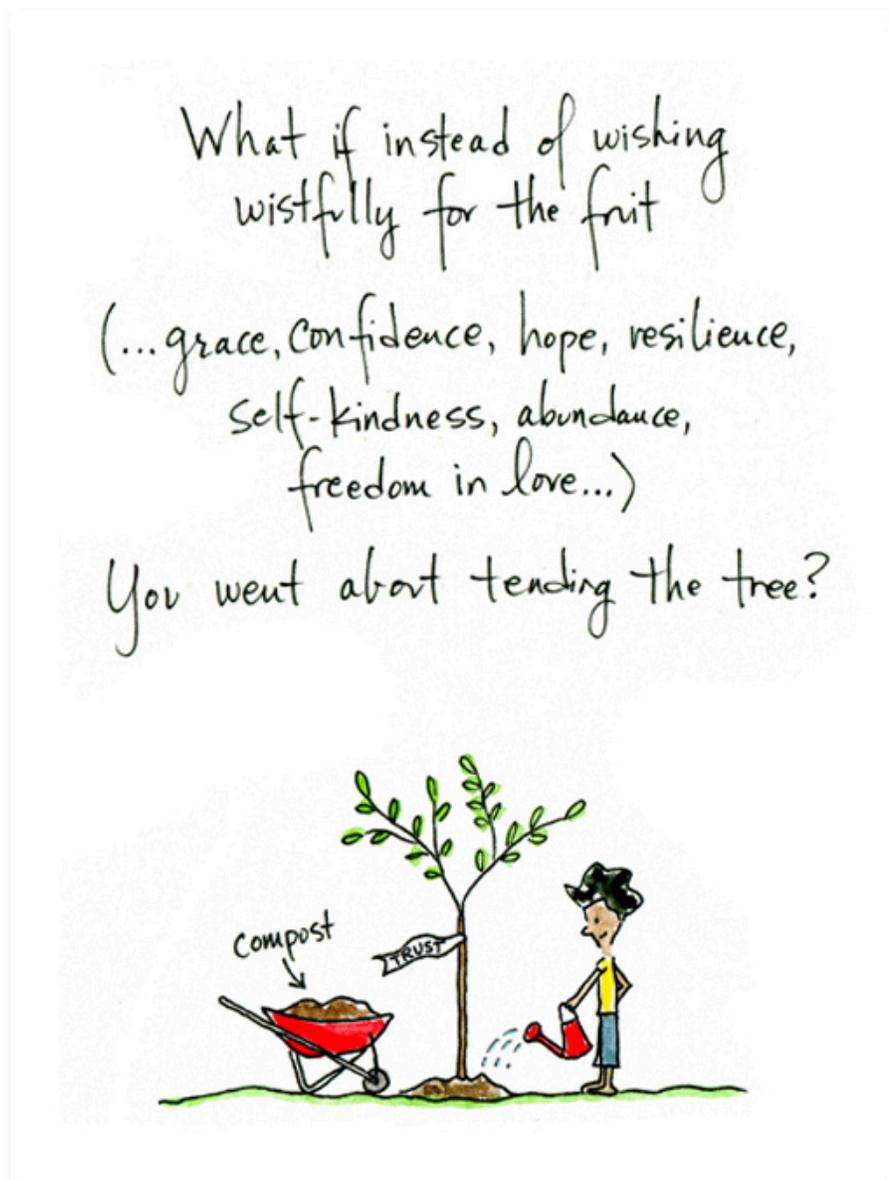


art by Kristin Noelle

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Self-compassion takes many forms for me, but I think they all begin with consciousness – getting conscious of judgmental, critical, or shame-based thoughts about myself. The more I practice awareness, even when I don't follow up on that awareness with self-kindness, the more I feel myself changing. I feel much more resilient now than I was five or ten or even one year ago, for example – much more able to shift out of non-compassion and into compassion once I notice myself lacking it.

I consider thoughts like, “Huh. I'm being critical of myself right now,” totally worth celebrating.



art by Kristin Noelle

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I struggle to accept my pace a lot – related to goals around work, goals around my yard and home, changes I'd like to make in habits and relationships. My pace feels slower than I'd wish it to be. I imagine myself looking back on the me of today with so much compassion for the shame I feel around that, and the suffering that my impatience with myself causes me.



I don't know about you, but I feel calmer, more peaceful simply reading Kristin's answers, looking at her art, seeing her kind smile — this is the impact her work, her presence, her offerings always have on me, and why I am filled with so much gratitude and love for her, today and always. To find out more about Kristin, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website, read her blog](#)
- [Sign up for her Trust Notes](#), (*no really*, sign up, they are magic, medicine)
- [Take an ecourse with her](#)
- [Do a Deep Listening Session with her](#)
- [Read and share her Letter from the Universe](#)
- Follow her [on Twitter](#) and [on Facebook](#)

Anna Guest-Jelley

September 14, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/09/14/self-compassion-saturday-anna-guest-jelley/>

Most likely, I first heard about Anna Guest-Jelley and her Curvy Yoga from Rachel Cole. They are teaching a retreat together this weekend, [Wise Body, Wise Hungers: Yoga & Coming Home to Our Desires](#), which I'm sure is every flavor and shade of fabulous.

Anna is one of the kindest people I know. She is one of the people who — even though she'd never met me in person — reached out to me when my Dexter died, offered comfort, (she has two of the cutest dogs herself, another reason I adore her). She gently guides my yoga practice from afar, with her blog posts and videos and newsletter and emails, reminding me that not only are modifications for my body acceptable, they are absolutely necessary, that yoga is truly for *every* body and I can trust myself. She is one of the reasons I decided to start yoga teacher training, made me feel it was possible, that I was allowed. She reminds me again and again that I am loveable, that I have the right and even the responsibility to love myself.

Anna's bio: "Anna Guest-Jelley is the founder of Curvy Yoga — a training and inspiration portal for full-figured yogis and their whole-hearted teachers.

As a writer, teacher and lifelong champion of women's empowerment and body acceptance, Anna encourages women of every size, age and ability to grab life by the curves. And never let go."



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Self-compassion is synonymous with gentleness for me. It means showing myself the same kindness, care and empathy I show to others. If anything, it means showing myself even more than I show others because if my reserves aren't filled, it's challenging to share from a true, not resentful place.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I learned self-compassion by walking (and continuing to walk) its path. I have had so many teachers along the way – books I found at the exact right moment, kind words from friends, role models who I both know in person and don't, support from therapists, dear yoga teachers, and the encouragement of my husband and closest friends.

I never had a lightening bolt moment, although I've had lots of ah-has along the way. I haven't found this to be a path of suddenly "getting it" and being done. Rather, I've found fits and starts, two steps forward and ten steps back.

What this has given me is resilience. What I know now about self-compassion that I didn't at the beginning of my journey is that it's always unfolding. So now I greet ten steps back as a teacher on the path (even if I do get pissed about it at first!). I have enough experience on the road at this point to know that it's not linear, and that's okay.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I become hardest on myself when I'm stressed about other people's expectations in some way. After years of creating a habit of channeling that stress into a body project of dieting or otherwise deciding to finally become the perfect person I've always wanted to be, I now go much more gently.

The first thing I do is notice. Without awareness, I can't get very far into self-compassion. So once I've noticed that I'm having a judgmental thought, such as "You better lose at least 20 pounds before next month," I can pause.

In that pause, I can ask myself if this is really true. This is something I learned from Byron Katie, whose work has been really helpful for me. Of course, 99.99% of the time, my judgmental thought isn't true. Of course I don't have to lose weight before next month, no matter how many reasons my mind can invent why I "should."

I feel a big relief when I can remind myself (which isn't always) of this. Because from there, I can say to myself "Oh, right. You often feel this way when you're stressed. So what need isn't getting met right now? Or what can you shift off your plate? Or what just needs acknowledging?"

This is my self-compassion: telling myself the truth with love and kindness. It's not fancy, but it has changed my life. I say that with no exaggeration.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Oh, so much! I've been actively on this journey for about six years (and less actively so for about eight before that), and I feel like I've barely scratched the surface. I mean that in the best way possible because what has been true for me so far is that every time I find a new level of ease with self-compassion, something else reveals itself as needing attention.

So much of it still feels challenging to me, though. As much as I know the back-and-forth of self-compassion is part of the package deal, I still sometimes wish I had to go through the process above less often, that it somehow could become more organic and effortless for me. And perhaps it will. But I also know that when part becomes more easeful, another becomes more challenging.

The day-to-day of self-compassion is challenging for me, too. Like many people, I find it difficult to keep up with the practices that most support me – yoga, meditation, writing. I'm just as likely to hop on the computer directly after waking up, lost in a haze of email and social media, than I am to hop on my meditation cushion or yoga mat. But when that happens, I try to remind myself that this, too, is part of the practice.

I'm grateful for the evolutionary nature of this process because I see it as healing. It feels like the work of my lifetime – to care for myself just a bit more with each passing year, and in doing so to perhaps raise the slightest possibility for others that they could do the same.



I so grateful to Anna, for taking the time to answer these questions, for continuing her practice and then gently guiding others in the same. To find out more about Anna, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- Follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)
- [Watch her videos on YouTube](#)
- Grab her free [Quick Start Guide](#) “to get your yoga on today!”
- [Sign-up for her newsletter](#) to keep up to date with all things curvy and yoga.

Laura Simms

September 21, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/09/21/self-compassion-saturday-laura-simms/>

I think I first discovered Creative Career Coach Laura Simms by way of Rachel Cole, (or rather my default when I can't remember exactly is to blame every good thing on either Rachel or Andrea Scher). I immediately was drawn to Laura's smile, her sense of humor, and quickly discovered that she is wise in the gentlest, clearest possible way. She is impossibly sharp *and* soft.

Meeting Laura for the first time at [World Domination Summit](#) two years ago went on my personal blooper reel for that event. I ran into her during a break between sessions, went over and introduced myself, and proceeded to stand in front of her telling her how adorable she is for what felt like ten times in a row, and then not knowing what else to say, I just walked away. Luckily, I got a chance to redeem myself the next morning at breakfast, (although at the end of that meal, after sitting next to her and chatting like a totally normal person, I did follow her into the bathroom — I had to go too! — and tell her again as we stood at the sinks washing our hands how unbelievably adorable she is).

Laura didn't hold it against me, and when my Dexter died, she was one of the people who sent me a note (*real mail!*) to tell me how sorry she was, (she'd lost her sweet bunny not too long before that). She is genuinely kind and compassionate, and it shows up in everything she does, whether a stunningly accurate blog post, silly Facebook status update, honest video, or through her work supporting clients in crafting purpose-driven careers — she is brilliant, both shiny and wise. I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

I think self-compassion is kindness, gentleness, and acceptance. It's love, empathy, tenderness.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

Many, many books have helped me with self-compassion. The Dalai Lama has so many good books out, and I love *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz.

There is a moment that sticks out most for me as a turning point, though. Maybe 4 or 5 years ago, I was feeling really down on myself about something, I don't even remember what now. I was near tears, and my husband was comforting me.

"Seems like you're being pretty hard on yourself," he very gently said.

I nodded.

"Do you expect anyone else to live up to the standard that you've set for yourself?"

And I didn't. I had set this impossibly high, unrealistic bar for myself that no one could consistently hit. That realization really changed how I judged myself.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Letting myself fail. Not having to be right all the time. Letting myself off the hook if I've tried my best and things didn't come out like I wanted. A lot of it is forgiveness. I get to be a mortal. I don't have to be better or stronger than other people. I get to just be a fallible, wonderful, person like everyone else. It means I'm not special, but in a good way.

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

That sometimes I need to do stuff that I don't feel like doing to truly take care of myself. Self-compassion is not just about me feeling good and getting what I want. In a way, it's like me being a good parent to myself. Sometimes that means doing the exercise or cooking the meal when I don't feel like it, because it's really the best thing for me.

And, sometimes, I think I shouldn't need things that I do. I shouldn't NEED to take a break. I shouldn't NEED to ask for help. But I do need them, and accepting those needs and getting them met instead of suppressing them feels like I'm honoring and taking care of myself.



adorable!

I am so grateful to Laura, for taking the time to answer these questions, for making me smile, making me think, making me feel like the whole glorious mess is completely workable. To find out more about Laura, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- Follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)
- [Watch her videos on YouTube](#)
- Follow her on [Pinterest](#)
- [Buy one of her books](#)
- [Work with her to craft a purpose-driven career](#)

Kat McNally

September 28, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/09/28/self-compassion-saturday-kat-mcnally/>

I first found Kat McNally's blog when she hosted Blogtoberfest last year. I immediately liked her, and the more I read of her work, of her life, her joy and her struggles, the more that affection grew — the more we connected, the more I adored her. She has many of the same doubts I do, puts forth the same kind of effort, is utterly amazing but doesn't always see it for herself.

Kat is a mirror for me — I know for certain how completely wonderful she is, so when she questions that, when her trust in who she is falters, I think to myself "if Kat can be such a wonder, and still struggle, not always be sure, and yet I can see her so clearly, love her so much, maybe I might be able to also learn to do the same for myself." In loving her, knowing her worth, seeing through her confusion, I am able to be more gentle, more kind with myself.

I've told Kat many times that someday, someday I will sit across the table from her at a coffee shop and we'll talk about everything and nothing, make each other laugh, maybe even cry a little, and I will be able to adore her in person — I just know it, (she lives in Australia, so it will take a little extra effort, I admit). For now, I am happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you, (plus some extra special, exciting news).



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

For me, self-compassion is about learning to show my self the love and kindness I would show to my family and dearest friends. It is also about being open to love and kindness and openness from my self during my most painful, shameful and lonely moments.

Self-compassion feels spacious and calm and at peace with what is... even if the *what is* doesn't look like what you hoped it would or think it should.

I am developing a definition of self-compassion that starts with gentle but clear boundaries, especially in my parenting, supported by practices such as breathing and calming mantras to stay present to strong feelings that arise without being overwhelmed by them.

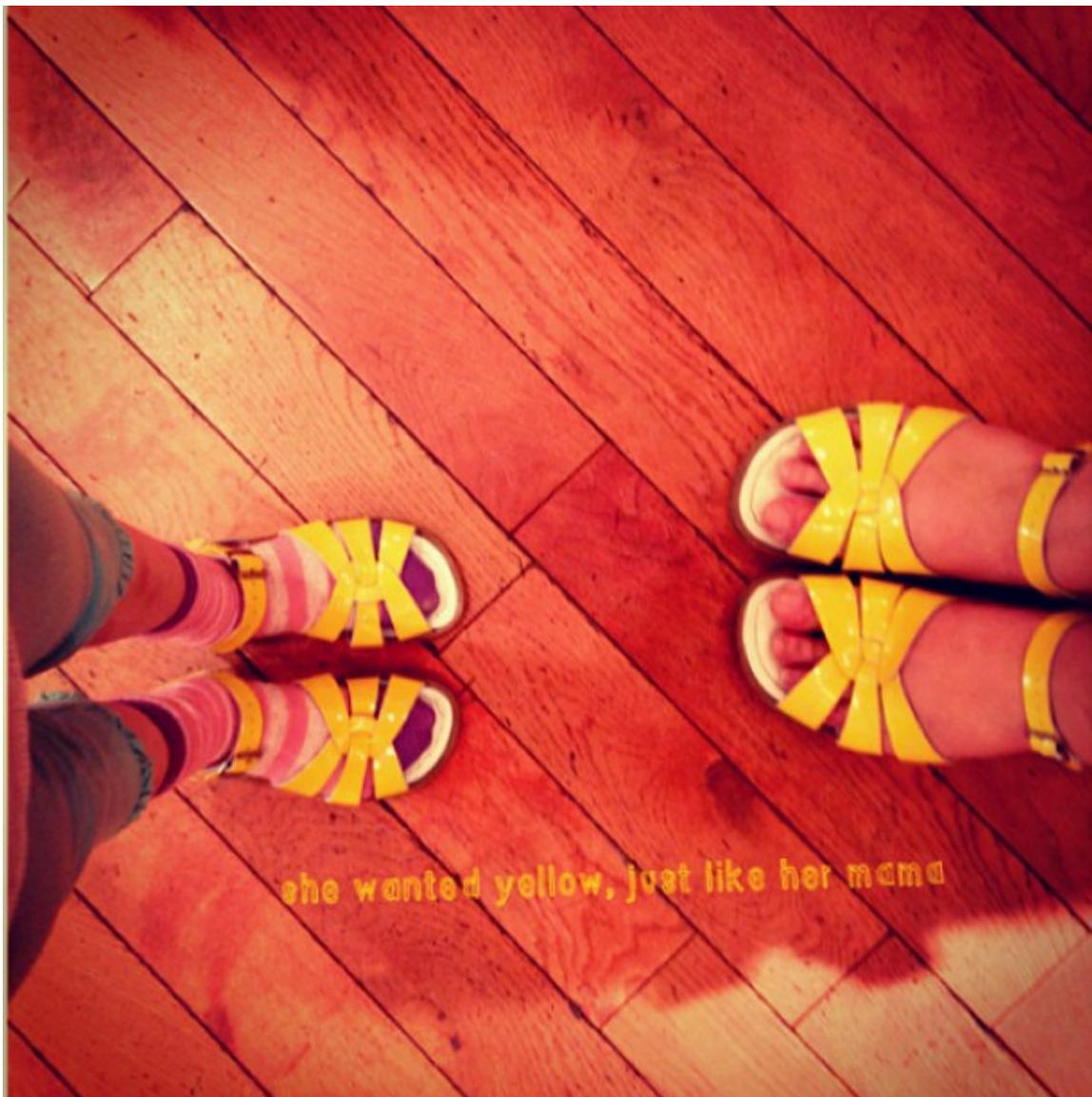


2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I only developed a clear understanding of what self-compassion means for me very recently. Working with a compassionate and trusted therapist was the most profound and effective path to this new level of insight.

But a big part of my “enlightenment” was also facing the reality that an aha! moment is one thing, but staying open *in the moment* to choosing a new response to an old anxiety is very much another.

I consider myself a work in progress when it comes to self-compassion and am hopeful that my journey will give my daughter the courage to do her own investigations when she is older.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I have a very recent example of this! Just this weekend, we returned from a family holiday in New York City. Now, I have long known that I am something of an anxious parent. My parents were anxious parents, as were their parents before them. But being away from home – somewhere as populous and busy as New York City, no less – made me realise just how deeply ingrained my anxieties are, and how much they underpin the daily routine I have constructed for my self and my family.

One day, the effort of grouching at an independent little four year old for wandering off in hectic Manhattan crowds became too much. My husband held me as we sat in the park next to the Natural History Museum and I cried. In that moment, I realised just how more relaxed I was when my daughter remained in her stroller, and how often we used the stroller at home when we really didn't need to. My justifications had been pretty valid: flagging focus and energy levels after kindergarten, and greater efficiency when running errands. But I also saw the reality that containing her brought some comfort: if she was sitting, then she wouldn't trip and hurt herself; if I could control the pace at which we moved, there would be less opportunity for disagreements and meltdowns.



Now, obviously there was a common sense aspect to this i.e. I had every right to be cautious about a little person getting lost in a crowd in New York City. After all, New York City is not Melbourne, Australia (and there is cause for caution in Melbourne, Australia at times, too).

But in that moment, I got caught in the push-pull of my anxieties that she'd get lost, hurt or abducted verses the voice that told me I was holding my daughter back by keeping her restrained. So, either way you looked at it, I was an awful mother.

Once the moment had passed and I was able to breathe my way through to a quieter space, I saw that so many of my anxieties were based on "worst case scenarios" handed down to me by my parents. I saw myself walking on eggshells every minute of the day. It suddenly didn't seem so strange that I had suffered adrenal burnout over the past few years, or that we've had so much difficulty conceiving a second child.



Suddenly, I felt flooded with compassion for the woman who was just so relieved when her daughter napped or sat happily eating in her high chair or watched TV. Suddenly I understood why that those moments were lifelines for a new mama who, just for a moment, needed to *not worry* about whether her daughter was safe or happy. I also felt a deep gratitude for my

parents, knowing that they had raised me with even more intense “worst case scenarios” handed down by their parents (the latter of whom had lived through civil war, the Second World War, extreme poverty and violent occupation of their homeland).

Since returning home, I have been working on gently dismantling the iron grip of my anxieties and redrawing some of the boundaries on my daughter’s behaviour. The stroller has been folded up and put away. There are greater limits on TV time. I still require my daughter to hold my hand at times but I am allowing her to walk and wander a little more and, increasingly, use her scooter. Her exhilaration as she glides on her scooter is palpable! And gorgeous to watch.

There is still a gnawing in the pit of my stomach that she is going to trip and fall. Sometimes, my therapist’s mantra “*You can’t plan for catastrophe*” feels like a lifeline.

Maybe my daughter will fall and maybe she won’t. But if she does, she will learn from first hand experience that I will always be there to hold her when it hurts.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

To be honest, it feels like my true work is only just beginning.

Up until now, I had read so many personal development books, used writing and art as therapy, taken e-course after e-course, chosen powerful words to guide me through the year, talked with dear and trusted friends over many glasses of red. But it was only through the painful process of deep excavation with a therapist – then using the tools she had given me to *really* see my self – that I understood what self-compassion truly meant for me.

Feeling compassion for a friend, and acquaintance, even a complete stranger (even someone I don't especially like!) comes easily to me. Feeling compassion for my self "in theory" or when everything is calm and thriving in my world is also relatively easy.

But being gentle with myself when I am in the throes of anxiety – times when my fight-or-flight mechanisms kick in and I am less likely to give myself permission to slow down and reflect, and am also rather prone to making rash decisions and lashing out verbally – that takes a lot of work. And a huge part of that will be practicing self-compassion when I don't get it right.

It's exhausting... but as exhilarating as flying down your street on your scooter as a four year old.



Kat emailed me recently and asked me to add this: P.S. Now, many weeks after returning from our incredible holiday, I can finally share that our long-awaited second child has made his/her presence felt! At the time this post is published, I will be just on 17 weeks pregnant. And I know, as sure as I know anything, that the soul work Jill invited me to share here was critical in helping me create the emotional and psychical space to welcome a new soul into the world. For that, I am so grateful... to my support systems, to the universe, to my self.



I'm so happy for Kat, so grateful to her. To find out more about her, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- Follow her on [Twitter](#)
- [See her art on Flickr](#)
- Follow her on [Instagram](#)

Barbara Markway

October 5, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/10/05/self-compassion-saturday-barbara-markway/>

This week's post is a little different. Before starting this series, I had never “met” Barbara Markway, didn't know much about her even though I had seen her Self-Compassion Project. Three weeks after I published the first Self-Compassion Saturday, she sent me an email to tell me that she had a Google alert for self-compassion and in that way had found my blog. She explained that this was the kind of thing she wrote about a lot, if I ever wanted her to do a post.

How cool is that? Of course I said “yes, please.” And that makes this post completely unique — everyone else I sought out, asked, begged to contribute, but Barb found her own way here because of our shared interest in the subject. [Her biography on Psychology Today](#) describes her this way,

Dr. Barbara Markway, Ph.D., is a psychologist with over twenty years of experience and the author of four books—three on social anxiety/shyness and one on marriage. Her first book, *Dying of Embarrassment: Help for Social Anxiety & Phobia*, was named one of the most scientifically valid self-help books in a study published in *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice*. She has appeared on *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, and featured in the PBS documentary *Afraid of People*. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, *Prevention*, *Essence*, *American Health*, *Real Simple* and *Web MD*. She has been heard on radio shows across the country. Dr. Markway's recent interests include self-compassion and she writes about her own experiences at [The Self-Compassion Project](#).

I'm so happy Barb reached out to me, so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

I really like psychologist and researcher Kristin Neff's 3-pronged definition of self-compassion.

The first component is self-kindness, which is what most people probably think about when they think of self-compassion. It's about talking to ourselves in a kind, gentle way and offering ourselves the support we need.

Another aspect of self-compassion is recognizing our common humanity. In essence, acknowledging that everyone is flawed: this is part of the human experience. It helps to remember that you're not alone in what you're feeling.

The third component is mindfulness: being able to recognize, in the moment, that you're suffering. It's amazing how much negative self-talk goes on just under your awareness.

It's been really helpful to me to focus on all three of these aspects of self-compassion, not simply the self-kindness part.

It's also been helpful for me to remember that self-compassion is not the same as self-esteem. Self-esteem is a positive evaluation of oneself. In contrast, self-compassion is not about

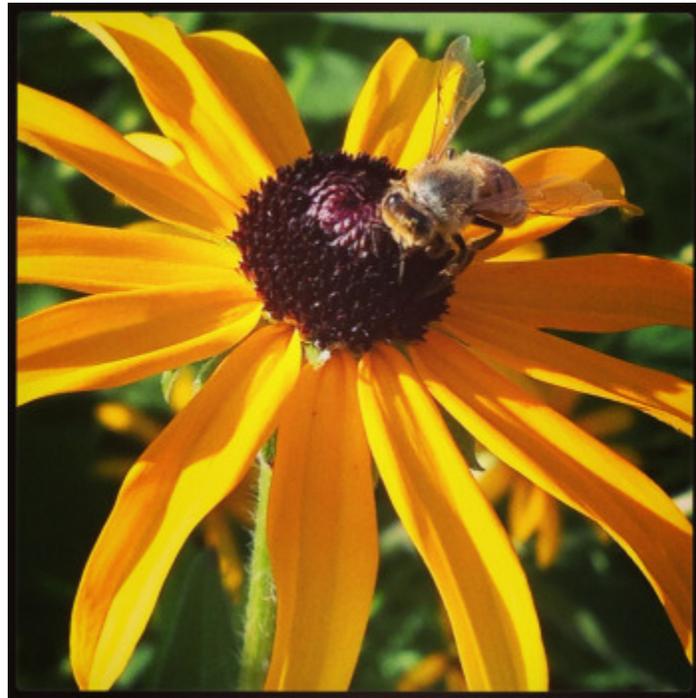
evaluating yourself at all. It's about how you relate to yourself. What a relief that I can offer myself self-compassion, even if I don't like myself at a particular moment!



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

What brought me to actively studying and practicing self-compassion was the approach of my 50th Birthday. It was New Year's Eve, December 31, 2011 and my 50th Birthday was a month away. I realized that if I had to pick one word to describe my life up to that point, it would be "tortured." I was never satisfied with myself. I frequently thought I hadn't accomplished enough. I easily became overwhelmed with emotions. I was sensitive to the point that it was painful. I was prone to despair, alternating with diffuse anxiety. And to top it all off, I didn't have a lot of fun in my life—mostly of my own choosing. When I read Gretchen Rubin's book, *The Happiness Project*, I skipped the chapter on fun. I also suffered more than a little shame thinking that all of my training and experience as a psychologist should have made me a bit less of a mess by this point in my life.

So on a whim, I stayed up late December 31, 2011 and started a blog called, *The Self-Compassion Project*. I've used a lot of resources to learn about self-compassion since then. I highly recommend Kristen Neff's book, *Self-Compassion*, and Christopher Germer's book, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*. I love anything by Tara Brach or Sharon Salzberg. I listen to and watch a lot of podcasts.

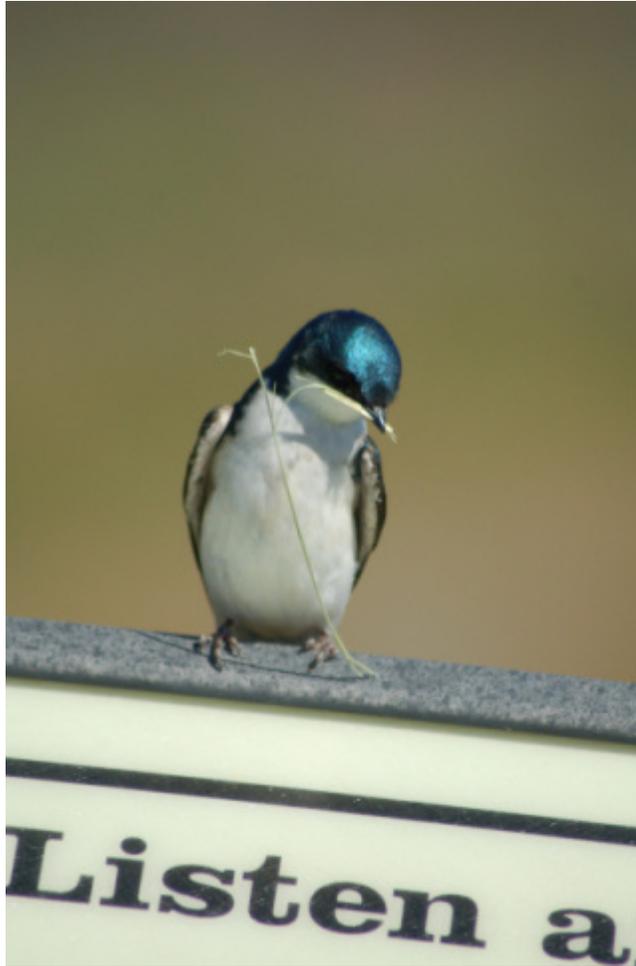


3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I use some specific techniques, most that I learned from Kristin Neff's book. One technique I use daily is a gentle touch on my skin (maybe touch my forearm with my other hand) while I say something reassuring to myself. The touch actually releases oxytocin and sets off a calming response in the body. I discretely do this at work when I'm stressed. At home I may give myself a big hug!

Another thing I do is combine the self-compassionate touch with a phrase or self-compassion mantra, such as: "This is a moment of suffering; suffering is a part of life; may I be kind to myself and give myself what I need."

I do a lot of informal mindfulness practice. I never used to take breaks—it was always work. Now I go outside and simply appreciate the beauty around me. This helps me connect with a greater good, and I end up feeling softer and gentler with myself. I have really gotten into bird watching.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I still struggle with giving myself compassion around issues of chronic pain. I've had several back surgeries, and several other health issues, but a definitive diagnosis is elusive. Toni Bernhard's book, *How to Be Sick*, and her blog on Psychology Today, *Turning Straw into Gold*, have been enormously helpful, though. But I'm not nearly as gentle as I could be with myself around issues of pain.

Then, there are several things I've learned, but I know I'll need to keep relearning them!

One is that even though I love the name of my blog, *The Self-Compassion Project*, this isn't something I can neatly do in a year and check it off my to-do list. Self-compassion really isn't a project in that sense. (Oh, how I love to cross things off of lists!)



Also, I realized that, in a way, I was trying to trick myself with self-compassion. I said I wanted to be nicer to myself, but I really meant, “I want to change myself.” I thought learning to be self-compassionate was going to change my personality. Somehow, I’d magically become an easy-going, interesting person without worries. I also hoped that life would be easier, I wouldn’t feel things as deeply (sometimes I’m so raw), and I wouldn’t cry as much. DIDN’T HAPPEN. Well, I do think I worry a little less... :)

Related to the above, I need to learn not to take everything so seriously—even self-compassion. Sometimes the best thing I can do for myself is watch a Seinfeld rerun and simply laugh.

I could go on and on about what I still need to learn, so I’d better stop now. Thank you so much for including me in this series!



I'm so grateful that Barb reached out to me, made the initial contact, and have enjoyed getting to know her better — she is *so kind*. To find out more about her, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- Follow her on [Twitter](#)
- Read [the interview she did about her project](#) on Psychology Today

Julia Fehrenbacher

October 12, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/10/12/self-compassion-saturday-julia-fehrenbacher/>

As promised (threatened?), this week's post is unique, it's a video of me and my dear friend Julia Fehrenbacher talking about self-compassion. When I invited her to be a part of this series, she was teaching the first session of her ecourse, Getting Naked, (an online SoulClass, "Shed the excess. Come back to YOU."), and we decided the conversation would be something she could share with the class as well. Those of us in her course were the first audience, but I also wanted to share it here, for three very specific reasons.

1. It is an important, genuine conversation.
2. As a video, for some you it will be the first time you've seen me "live," moving and talking. *gulp*
3. I wanted you to see the kind of loving presence that Julia offers as a teacher. This video is just a tiny sample of how she shows up for her students, for life.



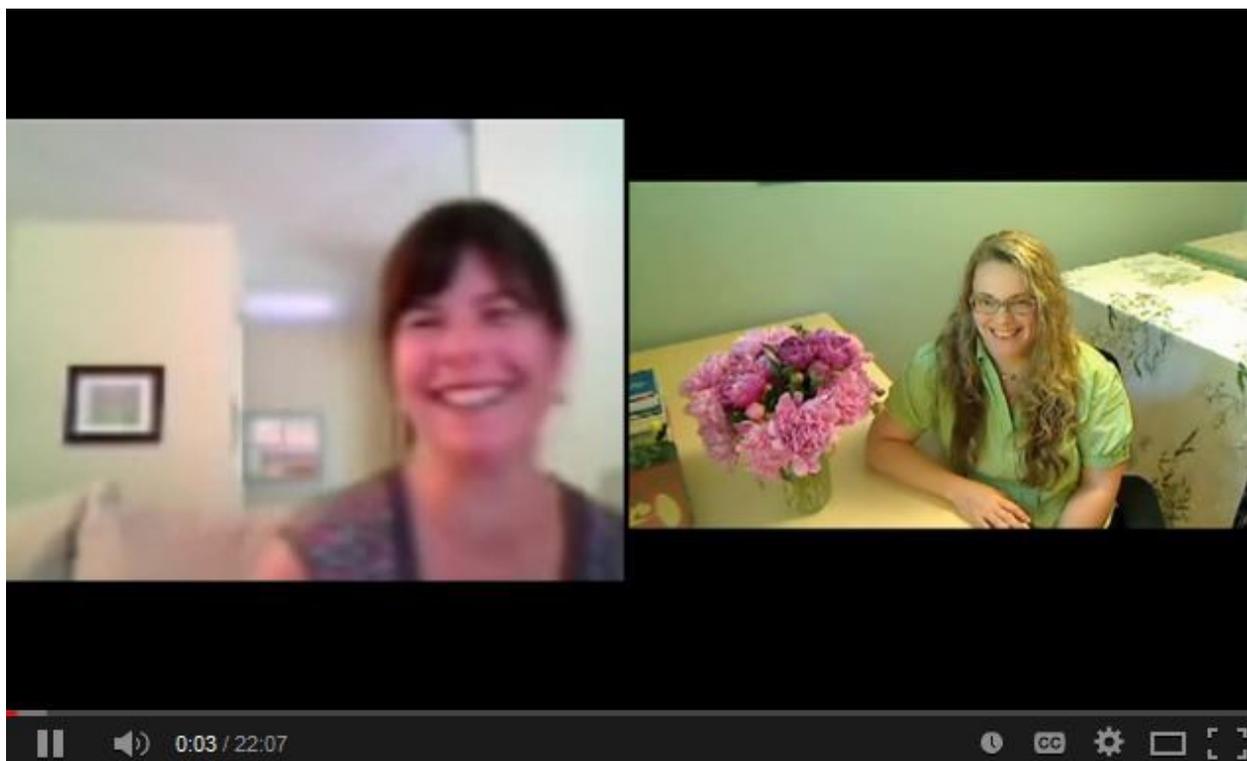
Some back story: I don't remember exactly how I first found Julia's blog (sorry, I know this happens a lot — I blame the particular magic of the internet), but do know that one of the first things we did together was [41 6-word days](#), which was hosted on Judy Clement Wall's old

website, A Human Thing. I immediately adored Julia’s honesty and her kindness, her willingness to be vulnerable, and over time have only grown to love her more. I was lucky enough to meet her, (read more about Julia and the first time we met in [my open love letter to her](#)), and she’s even more wonderful in person.

Making this video was a lesson in self-compassion for both of us. First, the conversation was actually almost an hour long, but there was a technical glitch about 20 minutes in so that the rest of the video had no sound. This was initially so upsetting for Julia, who tried so hard to fix it, to figure it out. I told her after I first saw it, “I’m not worried about this AT ALL. We got so much good stuff there, and maybe it’s even better that it’s shorter? The place to stop at isn’t as tidy as you might like it to be, but it’s still good,” and in the end, Julia saw it as “an opportunity for SURRENDER/self-compassion.”

This video, this conversation for me was a particular sort of medicine. As I told Julia, “something magic happened for me watching it — I really saw myself, not in that self-critical, shamed way I usually look, but really saw that I’m pretty okay. I was thinking as I watched it about how my students and people I work with usually really like me, and I could see why. That was an extra bonus gift I wasn’t expecting.” When I watch it now, I can smile at the way I was so obsessed with peonies at the time that I had to have them in the shot, don’t have the best spot for making a video figured out yet and really wanted something beautiful in the frame with me, how they took up half the screen like a silent third party in our conversation.

Link to the video: <http://youtu.be/zCDPGqKAHtk>





Before sharing the video that first time, Julia and I attempted to summarize what came after the sound cut out. Julia said, “the part where we cut off is right where you are saying that it’s people’s quirks that make them that much more lovable,” and I remembered,

What follows that is more discussion about how an aspect of self-compassion means discovering your own weird, being exactly who you are and knowing that is the foundation of your strength and what you have to offer, and rather than rejecting what isn’t perfect or what is flawed or wrong or broken or not good enough, you practice acceptance and gratitude for who you are and everything that is.

Then we talked more specifically about how each of us practice self-compassion: getting into nature, creating art, writing (one aspect of this being morning pages, in which you do a “brain dump” just writing whatever comes up, whatever shows up, whatever is really there, without judgement or editing), yoga, meditation, etc. We also talked about how it is so important to just show up, not try to control things, allow what wants to happen, to

make the offering and then move on to make the next offering, to trust the process and be present.

I don't know about you, kind and gentle reader, but I think this video, this conversation was the most perfect kind of brilliant mess. I am so grateful to Julia for creating it, for inviting me to do it and letting me share it, for having this conversation with me. It was a really big deal for me to make a video and share it with you all, and I'm so glad it was Julia who helped me do so. To find out more about Julia, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- [Schedule a coaching session with her](#)
- [Buy her book](#)
- Buys some art on [her Etsy shop](#)
- [Follow her on Facebook](#)

Jamie Ridler

October 12, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/10/19/self-compassion-saturday-jamie-ridler/>

I have been practicing with Jamie Ridler for awhile now – [Full Moon Dreamboards](#) and [Wishcasting Wednesdays](#), as well as meditation through the [Open Heart Project](#). Her prompts, encouragement and support, the opportunity for contemplation and creation that she shares always helps me to go deeper, to expand my knowing, to soften and be kinder to myself, to go gently with a sense of delight and ease. When her mom got sick, she asked me to write [a guest post for her blog](#) that helped me to clarify my understanding of my own specific practices. Jamie has a magic blend of kindness and creativity that is medicine to me.

I was lucky enough to meet Jamie in person. She told me I had mermaid hair, gave the best hugs. What I remember most distinctly is that the feeling of being in her physical presence was like being next to a live wire, a powerful and warm crackle of energy and magnetism ripples off her, makes you want to lean in, wake up, pay attention, catch fire.

Jamie Ridler is “a creative living coach and the founder of Jamie Ridler Studios. From coaching to workshops, from podcasting to blogging, Jamie’s work helps women find the confidence and courage to discover and express their creative selves so they can be the star they are.” I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

The most intimate relationship we will have in our entire lifetime is with ourselves. No one hears our hearts the way we do. No one knows our hurts the way we do. We are the sages of our soft spots and our edges. Self-compassion is showing up to that relationship with honesty and with love.

In the movie *Frida*, Frida Kahlo reveals the scars on her body to Diego Rivera. Without hesitation he kisses them with passion. In that moment something in her, and in us, softens. We yearn for that moment. We want to be seen, accepted and loved, scars and all. Doing that for ourselves is self-compassion.



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I think I learned self-compassion from the outside in. When I was growing up, whenever I was frustrated or angry with someone, my mom encouraged me to put myself in their shoes, to try and understand that everyone is doing the best they can. Somewhere along the line I understood that that meant me too.



Life can be hard. There is so much beauty, love and wonder but there is also loss and pain and heartbreak. As I have lived through my own pain, from losing a brother to cancer at a young age, to moving shortly thereafter and feeling desperately alone, to the recent passing of my mother, I've decided that life is hard enough without my help. I will do my best not to throw the salt of self-cruelty into the already painful wounds. As best I can, I'll choose love.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

I cultivate self-intimacy.

I spend time with me. I write morning pages and go for walks by myself. I take myself out for coffee and on photo safaris. I sit in meditation and see my poor mind working so hard to try to “figure it out”. I try to know myself and to be good company to myself. I try my best to be a person I feel good about and then I try to forgive myself when I don’t quite manage it. In all cases, I do my best to speak to myself with honesty, kindness and love.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I can get wildly impatient, judgmental and despairing when I feel like I’m not blooming fast enough, damn it! There is so much that I want to do, see, create, experience that I can be relentless in my self-demands – and I get mad when I can’t keep up! I can burn my energy out, fuelling myself with adrenalin and caffeine and fast, nutritionless food thinking that, at least for a time, it will help me get farther faster. Nope.

I see this struggle as my journey to grow my self-compassion so that I can hold with love both my desires and my limitations. I’m still working on it.



I am so grateful to Jamie, for taking part in this series and for so many other kindnesses. I absolutely adore her. To find out more about Jamie, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- Listen to her Podcast, [Creative Living with Jamie](#)
- Follow [Jamie Ridler Studios on Facebook](#)
- Follow her [on Twitter](#)

Jennifer Matesa

October 26, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/10/26/self-compassion-saturday-jennifer-matesa/>

I first found Jennifer Matesa’s blog, [Guinevere Gets Sober](#), when I was doing some internet research on addiction. I don’t remember the exact thing I was searching for, could have been as general and nonspecific as “addiction,” as it is an ongoing theme in my life, something I am always working with.

I was immediately struck by the fierce honesty of Jennifer’s writing, like a wind so strong you almost can’t keep your eyes open or breathe, that in the end clears everything out, makes you feel clean and alive, *awake*. She was able to verbalize things I knew in my gut, had experienced, made me feel sane around something that can feel so crazy, so out of control, so threatening and desperate.

The more I’ve gotten to know her, read her work, the more I adore her. We have a lot in common — dogs, meditation, writing, and teaching, and oh yeah, addiction. She is also an amazing artist, a loving and present mom, a beautiful mess of a human, and a total badass. I am so glad to share her with you today, specifically her perspective on self-compassion.

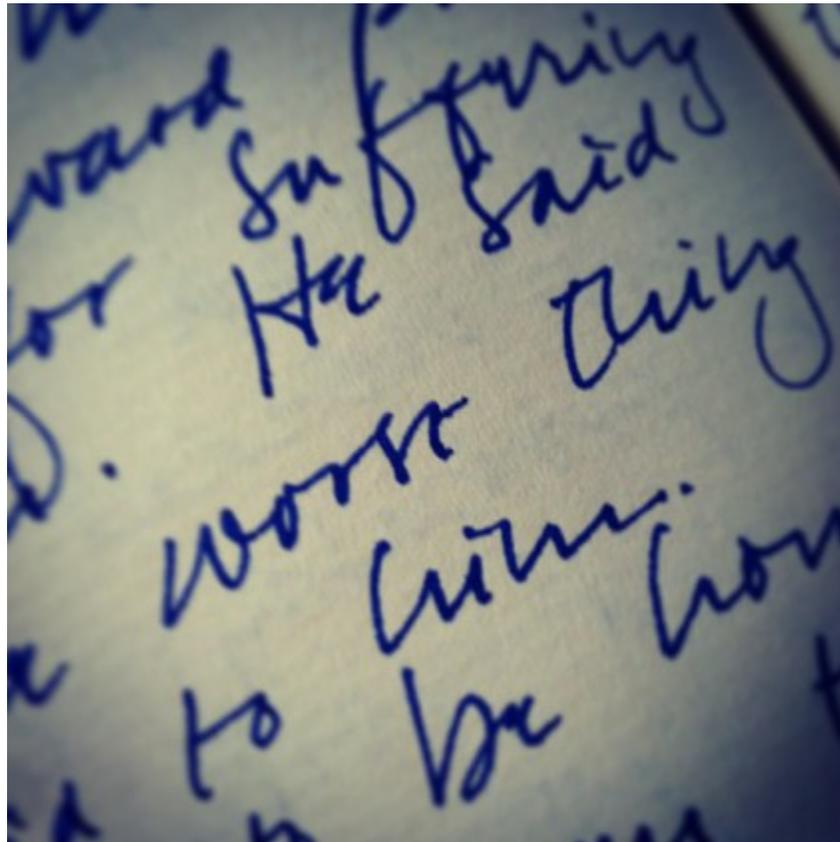


1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

In modern parlance, the word “passion” means strong feeling, more colloquially strong sexual feeling, but the root of the word is a Latin word meaning “to suffer.” So we get Christ’s “passion,” his trip to the cross, for example. So if we add the prefix *com-*, the word to me means “to suffer with.” And that’s a hard job to do—when someone is suffering, to suffer along with them.

We all know that life is about suffering. Even when it’s about joy, it’s about suffering (see below). Most of us want to know that we’re not alone in that suffering. And because it can be hard to establish a truly loving community—even a community of two, say in a marriage—humans will go to great lengths to numb out the suffering, using food, drugs, booze, gambling, sexuality, exercise, you name it. We put something into our bodies that makes us not-care. Today we have really top-shelf designer chemicals, including designer sugars, that can help us numb out.

So really the bottom line, the existential problem here, is that we all face life and its joys and challenges alone—and even joys can make us suffer, because the edge of true joy is so sharp (see even further below). And we know joy won’t last. But we want to make it last, or we want to numb out our fear of it not-lasting.



I write a lot about addiction and recovery, I report from the body, and I've come to think of drug-use and addiction as self-abandonment. When I'm in my addiction, [I abandon myself](#). This is one of the most powerful ideas I've learned.

Self-compassion is an antidote. Self-compassion asks me to be my most reliable companion on the spiral staircase of life. I may have other companions along the way, but only my Self will be with me 24/7.

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

For me it's an ongoing project. I grew up in an alcoholic family that was by turns crazy and preternaturally calm, as in the calm before the storm. I learned first to ally my feelings with the crazy-makers, to take care of the people who were going nuts so I could try to hold off the downpour. Of course, this is an impossible project—an anti-rain dance. People call this “codependence.” I've started calling it self-abandonment.

I'm learning self-compassion on a day-to-day basis by practicing the principles that helped me detox off a shitload of painkillers five years ago. I never, ever, ever thought I'd be able to quit taking those drugs, I was on such a high level for so long, and after years on them I had no idea how to live without them. (More and more these days, physicians and addiction professionals are claiming that folks like me are sort of genetically unable to live without drugs, which I'm happy to offer living proof is wrong.) I have a community of people around me who are able to live chemical-free and, at no charge, they've passed down the principles that allow them to do this. Without practicing those principles, I'd either be dead or in prison. The basis of those principles is deep, authentic self-love.



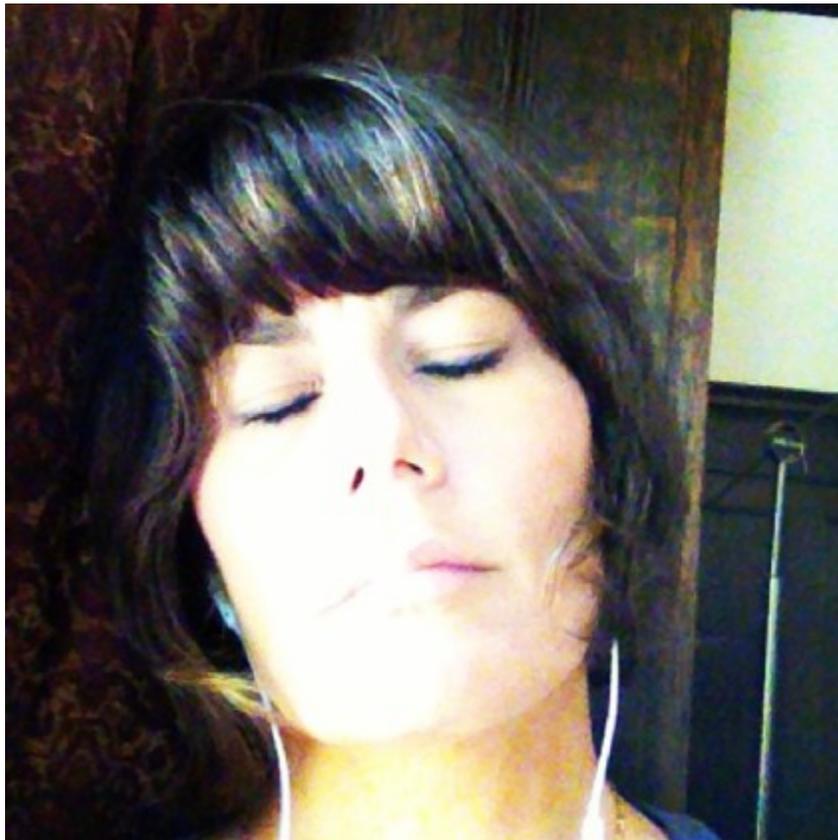
By “practice” I mean just that. Like a kid who has to practice his piano scales for half an hour a day. Like a kid who has to stand in front of the ball-feeder and hit her forehand. It’s spiritual fitness, it’s just practice. Which means I need to expect to hit a few foul balls. Which is such a relief after expecting myself to bat .1000 for the first 40-some years of my life.

I’ve read Stephen Mitchell’s translations, and Pema Chodron and Thich Nhat Hanh. But I’m more grounded in literature. Shakespeare (both plays and sonnets), Karen Armstrong, Mary Karr, David Foster Wallace, Terry Tempest Williams, Kathleen Norris, Adrienne Rich, Toi Derricotte, Sharon Olds, and too many others to choose, including anonymous stories of people who have found moments—sometimes long stretches—of self-compassion. I also love children’s books. Roald Dahl, Russell Hobbs, John Burningham. Quentin Blake’s *Zagazoo* is one of the most amazing stories of self-compassion I’ve ever read. The characters in his many books practice accepting their own idiosyncrasies and oddities and beauty and sadness, living inside the light places and the dark ones. I’m glad to have read them to my son when he was a little boy. I believe they shaped his consciousness.



I’ve had many moments of clarity. Quite often they’re small moments that carry great power. I’ll tell you a story about the most recent one. This July I visited New York City and Fire Island. So I have almost four years sober, and five years off drugs that could have killed me, and I drove to Manhattan with my new road bike and met up with a friend who’s an athlete with 30-some years sober. He also grew up in an alcoholic family, and we have a lot to talk about. He took me

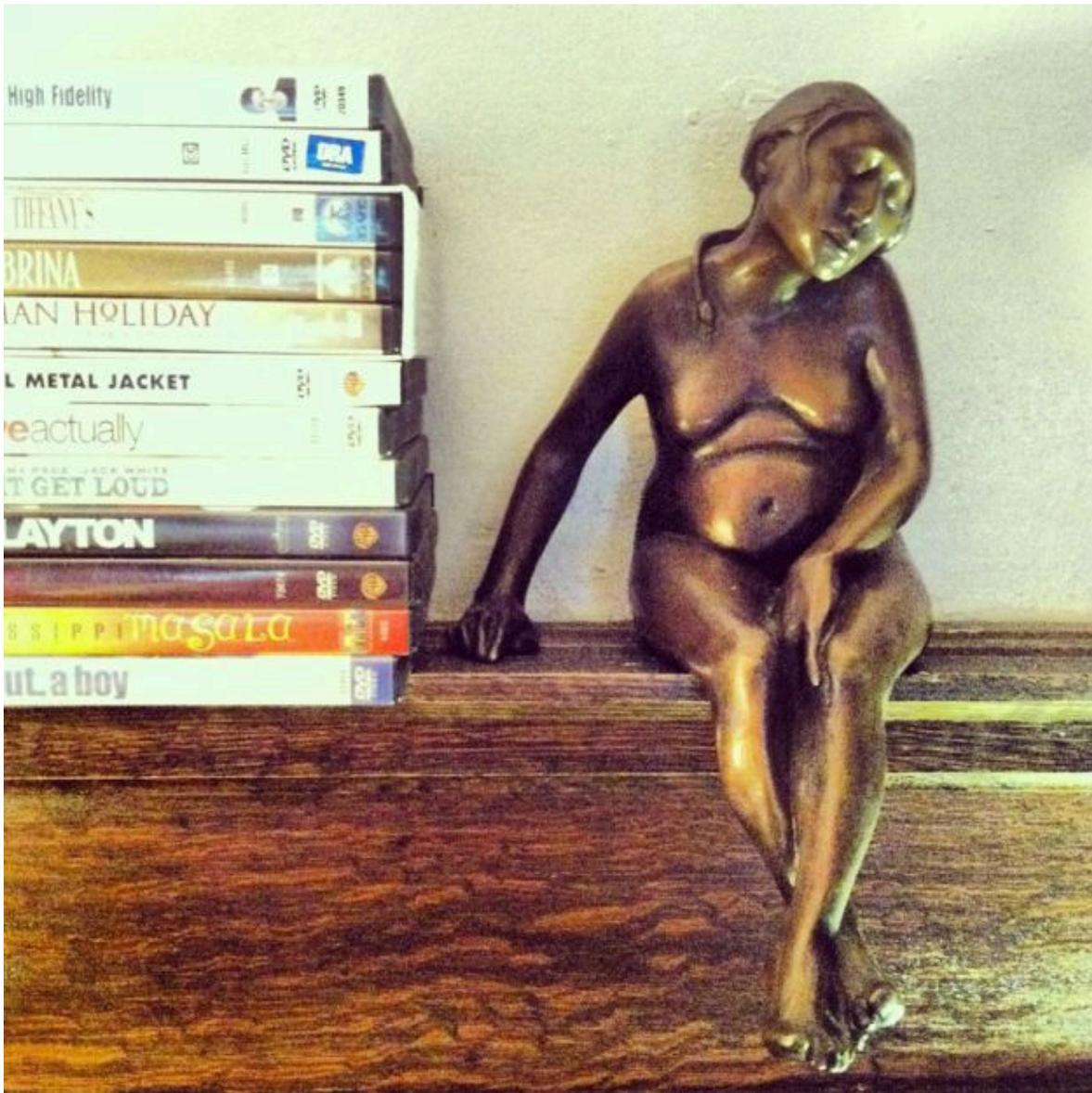
on a 12-mile nighttime ride through the city, starting in West Harlem, through Morningside and a couple circuits around Central Park, then finally down the length of Fifth Avenue from 59th Street. The Fifth Avenue stretch was three miles—on a Saturday night, prime club-hopping time, no bike lane, yellow cabs weaving in and out like swarms of bees. I relaxed into following this person I trust and at one point nearly got squeezed by two cabs fighting for a spot at the curb. My instincts saved me. I realized that, at any moment, a cab could take either one of us out for good. Yet there we were, speeding down Fifth Avenue on a clear Saturday night, completely present and aware, telling stories at red lights, choosing to do something with our bodies other than drinking and partying and spending tons of money, and of course there's no language that's not cliché to describe the gestalt of the scene — “center of the universe”? “heart of civilization”? *the core of the Big Apple*, blah blah blah. I thought, “We're out of our fucking minds!” And then I thought of watching my mother die at 58 of lung cancer from a lifetime of chain-smoking, I thought about her abusive childhood that was more damaging than mine, and I thought about how she'd never done anything like this in her life. *Not anything like it*. She was living in a deeper insanity than I do. The next day I stepped onto a ferry to Fire Island and I'd left my car and my bike in the lot on the mainland, and I had just a few necessities, and a close friend was coming to meet me at the dock, and as I sat on the top deck watching the sun set and the fog roll in over the sound I felt enormous joy in my chest, white-light, as if my ribs would rip apart.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Here's the important part of the story I just told: at the moment I felt that joy, my mind told me, *You don't get to feel this*. That's the divide that happens, the moment when I have a choice about whether to practice self-compassion. *I don't get to feel this*. But when I sank back into my body, when I allowed myself to feel what my body was feeling, I realized, *I'm feeling joy. It's real*.

The body does not lie. That's why I say I report from the body. All my books and a lot of my other stuff is about that. My [new blog](#) does that, and so will my forthcoming book.



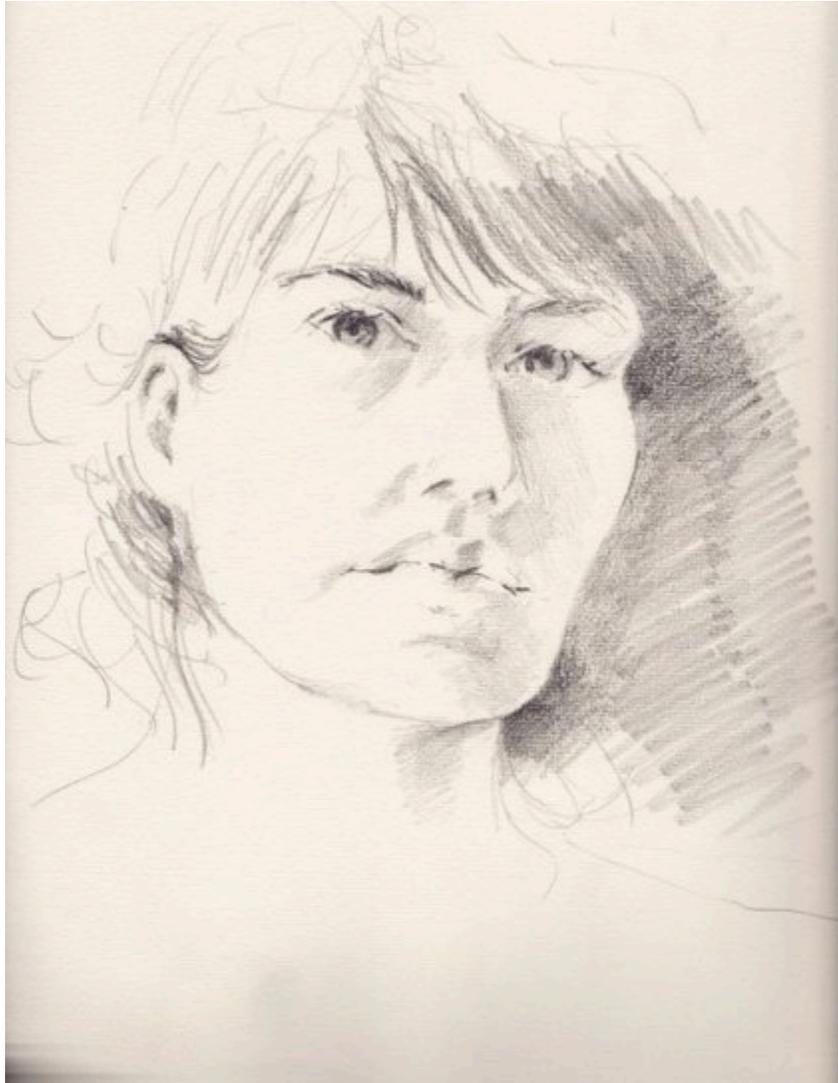
Bronze cast by Roxanne Swentzell, Santa Clara Pueblo, N.M.

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I struggle with understanding what's real and what's not real. I live a great deal of the day in my head. As a kid I learned to deal with family stress by making up stories, or imagining myself into other people's stories—either in books or the lives of other real people. Because much of the time Real Reality was intolerable. So I just Made Up Shit. I made up my own reality, and I lived there for a long time. This instinct is as old in me as my heart is. I still have pajamas and a pillow in that space.

I mean, this is normal to an extent. Human imagination is divinely designed to relieve us of the pain of reality, and it's also there to enlarge human experience through creativity, the making of art and the expansion of perception. Imagination is very old: the cave paintings at Lascaux and Altamira accomplish all that stuff. I'm reading a book about the evolution of singing, and it turns out we learned to sing not only as a survival tool to scare the lions away but also as a method of moving into trance, into our own imaginations, into contact with emotion and spirit. Singing helped change the shapes of our bodies and minds; it helped us ask the first question. No other ground-dwelling animal sings. Human beings need that experience of expansive perception. But craving it, using imagination compulsively to break from reality, using it to the point where you can't tell reality from unreality is, in its further stages, I think, called psychosis!

So my self-compassion practice today is about distinguishing reality from my imaginings and fantasies and fears. What helps is meditation, prayer (whatever that is), and checking in with people I'm pretty sure are sane and healthy and relatively content.



self-portrait

I am so grateful to Jennifer, for taking part in this series and for continuing to write, work, and live in a way that makes things clear, showing up for what is hard, for what hurts, and finding a way through it, offering up her experience, her path as a map to others. Jennifer is working on a new book about physical recovery from addiction to be released next year, and is a 2013 fellow at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. To find out more about Jennifer, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#)
- **Read her original blog**, [Guinevere Gets Sober](#), “An award-winning, top-ranking addiction blog offering news, reviews, and straight talk about addiction and recovery”
- **Read her new blog**, [Recovering the Body](#)
- **Read [one of her books](#)**
- **Follow her [on Twitter](#)**

Sandi Amorim

November 2, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/11/02/self-compassion-saturday-sandi-amorim/>

I don't remember how I first found Sandi Amorim's work. I do know that I immediately adored her. She is equal parts fierce and soft, someone who both challenges and comforts me. She was part of the A Year With Myself project that I took part in during 2012, started by Cigdem Kobu, and that fall, I did Reset. Revive. Restart., a collaboration between Cigdem and Sandi.

I got to meet Sandi when I went to [World Domination Summit](#). The story of that initial connection is a bit of magic that I will keep with me always. On the first day, I went to a meet-up hosted by [Farnoosh Brock](#). I was keeping my eye out for Sandi, because I knew she was supposed to be there too. In my pocket was a heart-shaped rock I'd found on the beach. When I found it, I thought to myself, "I'm going to take this and give it to Sandi." What I didn't know is that for years Sandi has been collecting heart-shaped rocks. So when I finally saw her, I went over, told her who I was, hugged her and sat next to her — and I mean *next to her*, even though we were meeting for the first time, I feel like I needed to be as close as possible, stopped just short of crawling into her lap — and handed her the rock.

She gave me the funniest look. At first I thought I had somehow offended her, done something wrong. She finally said, "How did you know I collected these?" I laughed, relieved that I hadn't upset her, and said, "I didn't. I just knew when I found it that I wanted to bring it to you."

As a coach, Sandi is "An instigator. The spark to your flame. Ruthlessly compassionate. I'll do whatever it takes to have you shine." I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Whenever I'm in doubt or curious about what a word actually means, I go straight to my dictionary – a nerdy habit I've had since childhood – and what often amazes me is how watered down or altered many words become over time.

com·pas·sion: a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering

Brene Brown says, "Until we can receive with an open heart, we are never really giving with an open heart." This quote made me realize that even though I've come a long way with self-compassion, it's a practice that needs ongoing nurturing. I'm quick to do what I can to alleviate the suffering of others, but sometimes what I need for myself is completely hidden from my view.

My greatest challenge and learning from this practice is that self-care and compassion has to come first – not after I've taken care of others, or done my work for the day, etc. but as my first priority.

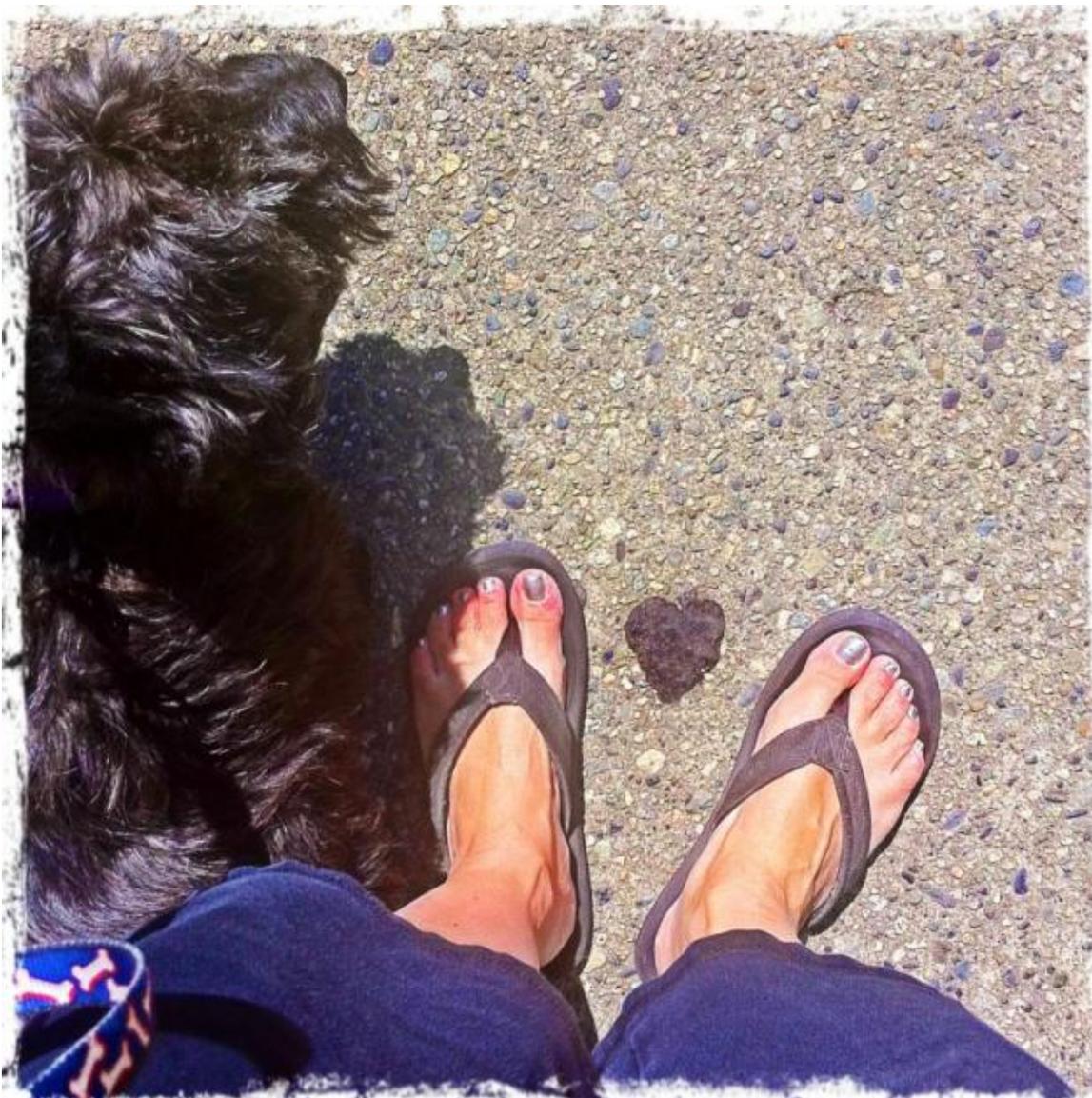


2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

One of my first mentors said to me many years ago, "If you treated others the way you treat yourself, you'd have no friends." I've never forgotten the truthful sting of his words, and it's both haunted and guided me throughout my personal growth journey. Is it handled? No, but I'm more aware of it now than I've ever been. The tools I use to nurture this mindfulness include meditation, writing, photography, and silent retreats. Of all of them, it is silence which has been my greatest teacher on compassion, both for myself and others. There is nothing quite like being alone with yourself after a few days of silence. It is, for me, the space where self-compassion is most natural.

Another teacher has been my body, and it has been a patient and persistent teacher. The lesson was loud and clear – if I don't listen the first time it communicates, it will keep sending more, increasingly intense messages. For most of my life I took my health and body for granted, so when it began sending the messages that something had to change, I paid no attention. The impact of this was huge, and it's taken a major shift in self-care to restore my energy and well-being. It was a hard lesson to learn, but looking back I can appreciate it now as it woke me up to what was needed – that strong desire to alleviate suffering (in myself) from the definition above.

My dog Tarty has quickly become a new guide on this journey of self-compassion. She is unapologetic in putting her needs first, and in respecting her needs, I am learning to take care of my own.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

After I turned 50, I began taking a daily self portrait to document what I call 'the year of living 50' and the experience has been profound. More than looking in a mirror, when I sit with an image of myself – some days dressed and ready to greet the world, other days bare-faced and bed-headed – I'm confronted by my own humanity and how harshly I've judged myself over the years. Being with myself in this way has been difficult – and exquisite. When I look in the mirror now after a few months of this practice, I see a woman worthy of love. A woman I love.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Some days I feel obsessed with the need to understand why this is such an ongoing struggle, not just for myself but for most women I know. The only way I know to understand is to keep moving forward myself, to keep peeling back the layers, and keep exposing the tender heart within. What's missing? Patience. Always patience.



I am so grateful to Sandi, for these responses, but also for her wisdom and her friendship, her fierce love and presence in the world. To find out more about Sandi, to connect with her:

- [Visit her website](#), where you can find out how to [work with her](#) and read [her blog](#)
- Follow her [on Facebook](#)
- Follow her [on Twitter](#)

Cigdem Kobu

November 9, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/11/09/self-compassion-saturday-cigdem-kobu/>

I first encountered Cigdem Kobu's work by way of an amazing project she created in 2012, A Year With Myself. That fall, I did Reset. Revive. Restart., a collaboration between Cigdem and Sandi Amorim. I am excited in the years to come to take advantage of the support she offers women solopreneurs — she describes that work this way,

I help quiet-loving women solopreneurs build a unique online business with more ease and less stress so that they do their greatest work and earn a lot more doing what fulfills their hearts. I write, I teach, I design e-programs, build websites, connect people, and create peacefully supportive communities. And I teach other creative people (in plain English) how to do the same. I believe business is fun when it nourishes your heart first and that building a business is the best way for deep personal growth.

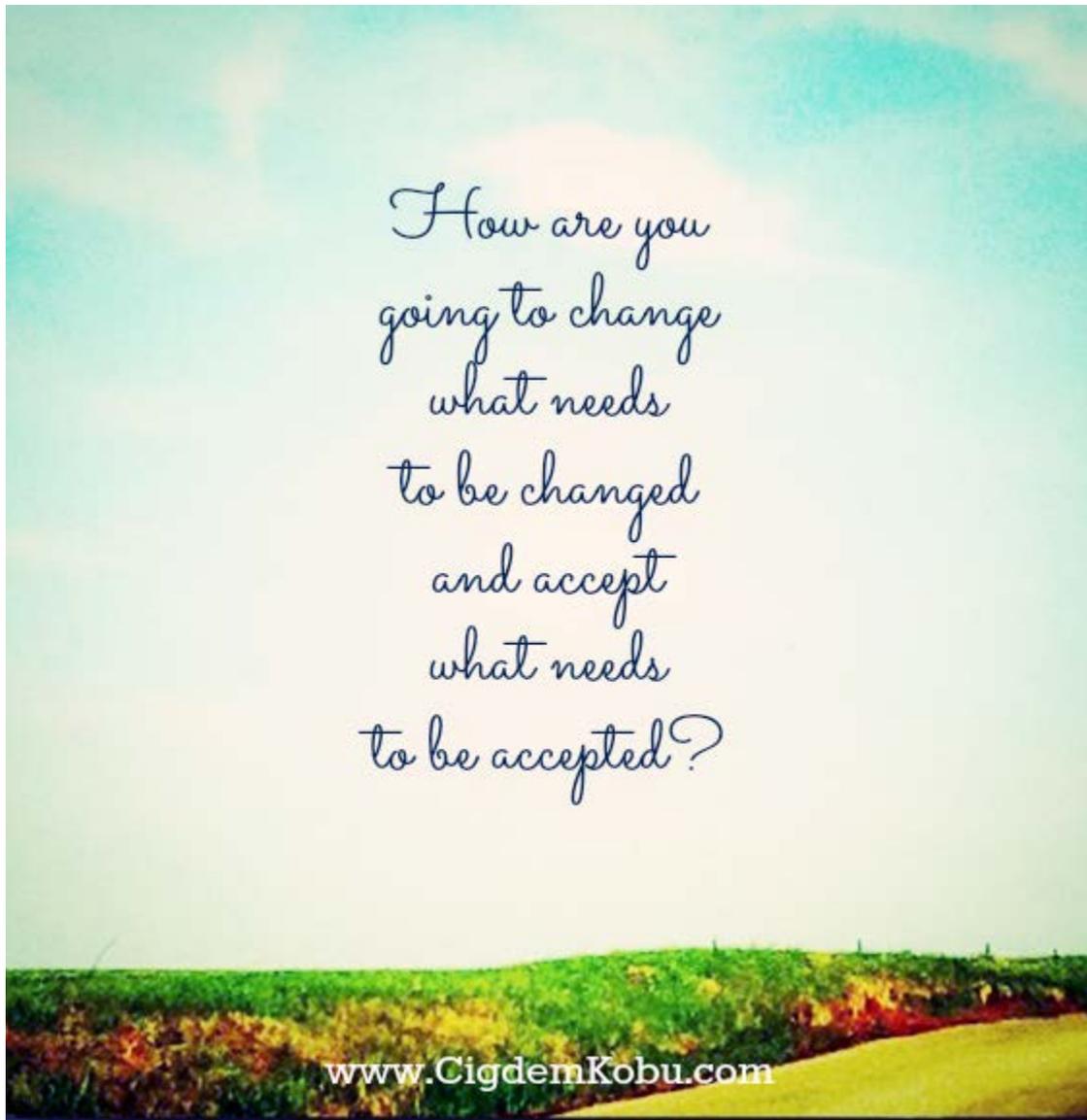
Everything Cigdem creates is infused with a particular tenderness and strength that is unique to her. She creates safe and supportive spaces where women are able to discover their own power, a fierce love energy that is so essentially feminine. So often, culture attempts to strip women of this power, to bind and restrict them, and Cigdem offers a way out, a “cease-fire,” freedom.

Cigdem is a writer, business advisor and teacher who pursues peaceful triumphs in life, work and art. She also runs the [Progress Lounge](#), a peaceful business haven where she helps introverted women solopreneurs build a sustainable and joy-filled business that fits them like a glove. I am so happy to offer her perspective on self-compassion with you.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

For me, self-compassion is keeping a caring, gentle eye on my most important needs and desires – big or small and inner or outer – and giving myself the permission to do more of what brings me ease and energy, and less of what drains me.



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

It's been a long process. And it's a work in progress. Along the way, my guides were people, books, experiences, journeys, and the lessons that come from recalling, untangling and understanding the past. My past, my family's past and the past of the world we live in.

Other guides?

Perhaps, rediscovering and remembering over and over again that we're all deeply connected and that compassion and self-compassion, and loving yourself and another or the Earth cannot be separated... Also, finding out that this nugget of truth is one that I must remind myself of day in day out.



www.CigdemKobu.com

Estimate your energy level each day
and adjust your day/week/life
in order to maintain a balance
of supply and demand.

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

(i) I focus on noticing.

I watch, I observe, and I lean into myself. Self-compassion cannot be thought apart from self-discovery and self-understanding. Everything I do whether related to personal or business growth is deeply connected with self-discovery and the deeper alignment that it makes possible. And for that, the first step for me has always been noticing.

(ii) I allow myself to spend as much quiet and alone time as I need to feel energized.

I'm a hard-core introvert, and if I don't get my daily quiet and me-time, I can get really cranky – toward myself and others. So quiet solitude is what I MUST HAVE for self-compassion – first and foremost.

For me, and many introverted people, white space incites creativity, quiet is a source of energy, and solitude is rich with possibilities. I've learned to appreciate and safeguard all three and summon those qualities in every environment I craft for myself and my kind.

(iii) I encourage myself to say “no” when “yes” is not what my heart desires.

Saying “no” has always been one of the most difficult things for me. It took me very long time to learn to say “no” when I really don't want to say “yes.” It's still something I'm learning to get better at.

By nature and because of my upbringing, I hate conflicts and making people upset. Isn't that true for so many of us women? So in my life, I've ended up saying “yes” to so many things even though my right answer was, in fact, a big “no.”

Now I'm a little better at saying no. But just a bit better :)

What I still have to learn is to say “no” the way my dear friend Tara Rodden Robinson says in [The Reliability Manifesto](#): “When I speak my ‘no,’ I do so with love and courage. Therefore, I say ‘no,’ plainly, without squirming, apologizing, or making superfluous explanations.”



www.CigdemKobu.com

It's OK to slow down.
It's OK to take slower and smaller steps
toward your destination.
Your natural rhythm rocks.

4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I think today I'm a little better at self-compassion for my inner self. But I still have space to grow in the way I give my compassion to my body and care for my physical being. Honestly, I suck at it these days.

I used to be better at it in the past. I love my business so much that it doesn't feel like work at all. But this also causes me to forget to take enough breaks, and I sometimes get caught up in doing more, more, more.

I do a lot of writing and creating in front of the computer. And when I don't take enough time to rest and move, this quickly starts affecting my physical health.

So I have to keep reminding myself that it's OK to slow down, and that it's OK to take slower and smaller steps toward my destination. My natural rhythm rocks. All I have to do is notice and remember. And also, stand up and move.

Like you always say, this is also about "practice, which means showing up again and again with an open heart." :)



I am so grateful to Cigdem, for these responses, but also for her honesty about her own experience and her support of women as they make their offering to the world. To find out more about Cigdem, to connect with her:

- Visit [her website](#)
- Take her free e-class [The 12 Entrepreneurial Laws of Joy and Ease](#)
- Follow her [on Facebook](#)
- Follow her [on Twitter](#)
- Pin her [on Pinterest](#)
- Circle her [on Google+](#)

Lisa Field-Elliot

November 16, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/11/16/self-compassion-saturday-lisa-field-elliott/>

I first discovered Lisa Field-Elliot's blog and photography by way of Susannah Conway. I was instantly drawn in by her aesthetic, so beautiful, dreamy and deep, soft around the sharpest edges, elegant but raw. Reading her blog posts is like being visited by an oracle in a dream or going on a vision quest, a healing ritual, magic and medicine, a gentle and complete surrender to wisdom and grace delivered with such compassion.

Her vision is poetic but brave, facing the truth directly, going deep. She is “a witness, narrator, liaison, photographer, interpreter, whittler, language-miner, image facilitator, poet, and ally.” My regard for her only grew knowing she had a dog, loved and lost him, and then courageously entered into that relationship again with another beast destined to break her heart. I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

I believe self-compassion to mean truly honoring, and allowing for, our own suffering. To be with the hurts, the uncomfortable, the longings and the hungers, and to offer value and substance to these experiences. More than that, to go further and to respond, in kind, to what the self is really wanting and needing. To ask, and then to answer, without any payment in the form of shame or greed, guilt or assumed indulgence.

I believe this to mean allowing for the unpredictable nature of being human. It means being kind. It means allowing for plans to change, for the mountains to call, and for rest and retreat to be taken freely. It means beholding beauty as our birthright and our longings as legitimate. It means loving the self as much, or more, than the other.



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

For me, the embodiment of self-compassion has come through a lifetime of self-discovery, and validation from those that have come before. I was born porous and open, and with that constitution, came a sensitivity to simply living. When we struggle inside, we seek to know the

way through. Along the way, I found the paths of yoga and Buddhism provided vivid maps and frameworks for what it means to be compassionate and to value self-care and inquiry. Teachers have shown up throughout my life in women's groups and retreats, spiritual circles and in friendships. Poets like Kahil Gibran, Mary Oliver, Hafiz, Rumi and Ghalib have lit my path. Writers and healers like Tara Brach, Elizabeth Lesser, Pema Chödrön, and Martha Beck have made tremendous offerings toward my understanding, and valuing, of loving care for myself.

Mothering has, perhaps, had the greatest influence on my experience of self-compassion. The sheer abundance of responsibility implicit in the raising of children has brought me to my knees over and over again, pushed me to the edge of understanding my capacity to love and to lead, and simultaneously depleted and overflowed my reserves again and again. I had to learn to trust and care for myself, to model what it means to listen to my body, my heart, my instinct. Out of absolute necessity, mothering begs for self-compassion.

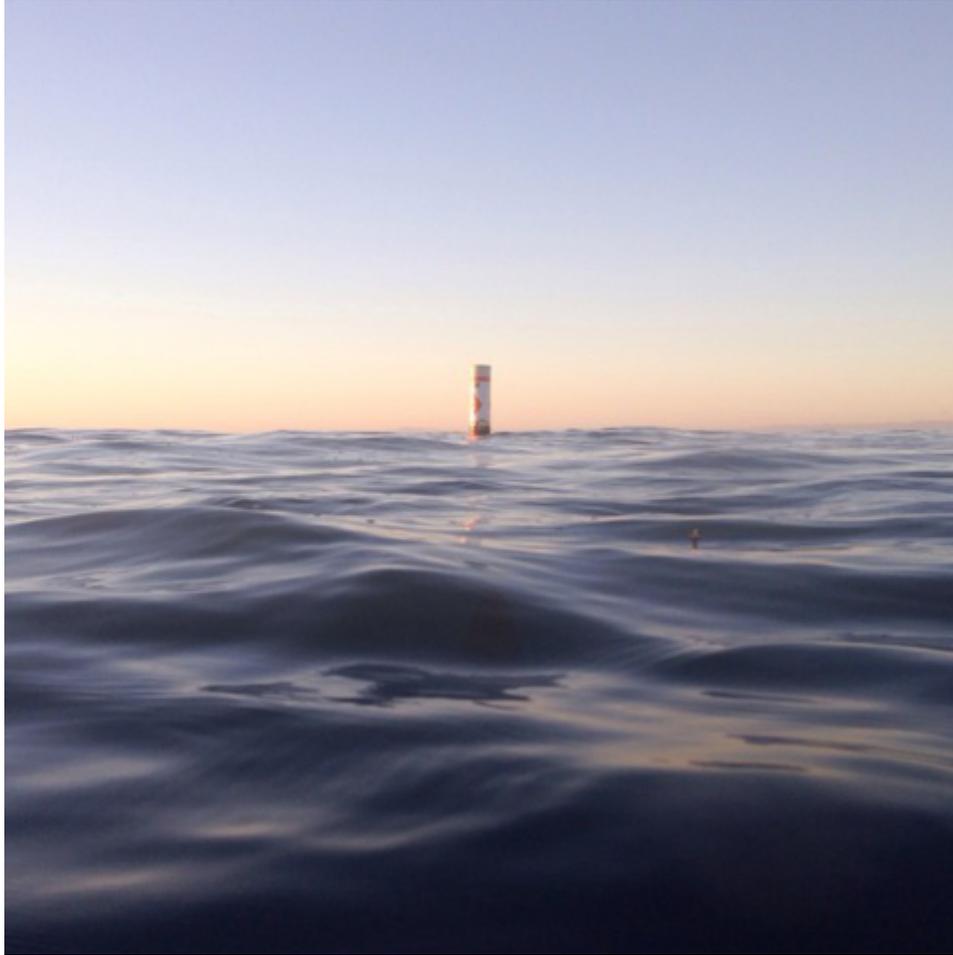


3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

For me, self-compassion is an underlying theme in all that I do. I have had to learn to listen to my body's requests for each day—for rest, for movement, for nutrition. Likewise, I have had to be tuned into my need for stimulus and inspiration, balanced with my need for silence and retreat, for nature and nurturing.



So, what does this look like? In short, it looks like flexibility. It looks like being willing to change plans if something doesn't feel right. It looks like saying no to an opportunity if my body responds with a knot in my gut. It looks like taking the time to feed myself well, to exercise, to stare at walls when I am overwhelmed. It looks like PERMISSION to respond to whatever comes up inside of me, in the most gentle, kind, and loving way possible—as I would for my children, or anyone else that I love.



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I still struggle with the question of whether or not I am giving enough of myself to the world. I struggle with the days that my body clearly begs for respite, and I know that there will be disappointment on the other side of my choice to care for myself, and I must choose carefully what will create the greatest cost and benefit. I also struggle with adapting my longings for a quiet, rhythmic existence to the anything-but existence of life in a family with active teenagers and a puppy! Sometimes, being compassionate is simply listening and acknowledging, even if the situation cannot be changed. It isn't always doing, but rather allowing for what comes up—and this is what I am still learning.



I am so grateful to Lisa, for these responses, but also for being an example of feminine power, a particular blend of gentleness and courage, wisdom and compassion, soft but strong. To find out more about Lisa, to connect with her:

- Visit [her website](#)
- Follow her on [Twitter](#)
- Follow her on [Facebook](#)
- Delight in her beautiful boards on [Pinterest](#)
- View her luscious images on [Instagram](#) and [her website](#)

Marianne Elliott

November 23, 2013

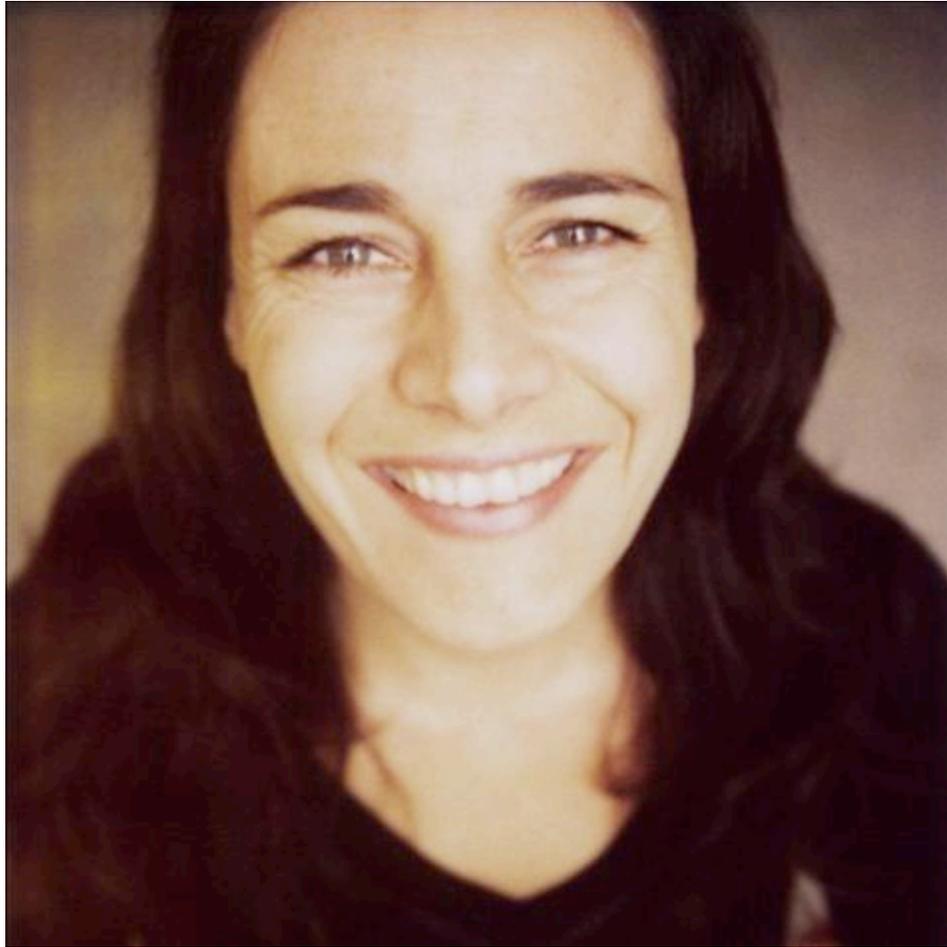
<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/11/23/self-compassion-saturday-marianne-elliott/>

Marianne Elliott is a writer, human rights advocate, and yoga teacher. Trained as a human rights lawyer, Marianne worked in New Zealand, East Timor, and the Gaza Strip prior to her time in Afghanistan, where she served in the United Nations mission (2005-2007). Her memoir *Zen Under Fire*, tells the story of her work in Afghanistan and the toll that work took on her and her relationships.

Marianne writes and teaches on creating, developing and sustaining real change in personal life, work and the world. She created the 30 Days of Yoga online courses to help people establish and maintain home yoga practices to support them to do their good work in the world. At the holidays – more than ever – we need practices to keep peace with ourselves and others. Marianne created her Zen Peacekeeper Guide to the Holidays to help you find a calm, compassionate path through the holiday season.

I first discovered Marianne Elliott by way of Susannah Conway, at least I think that's how it happened. It's hard to tell for sure, because however first contact happened, it quickly became clear that many of the other bloggers, teachers, artists and healers whose work I follow have a connection with her in common. However it happened, I immediately was drawn to how she blends activism and practice, manifesting gentleness as power, showing that soft is strong.

I was lucky enough to meet her at [World Domination Summit](#), to take a yoga class with her. Her energy is simultaneously calming and energizing. She may not be the first person who suggested the idea but she's the first person I really heard and understood when she talked about the yogic principle of balancing your effort with ease, a concept that has helped me make and sustain an important shift. Along with Anna Guest-Jelley and my local teachers, Marianne has inspired me to enter yoga teacher training. I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you, kind and gentle reader.



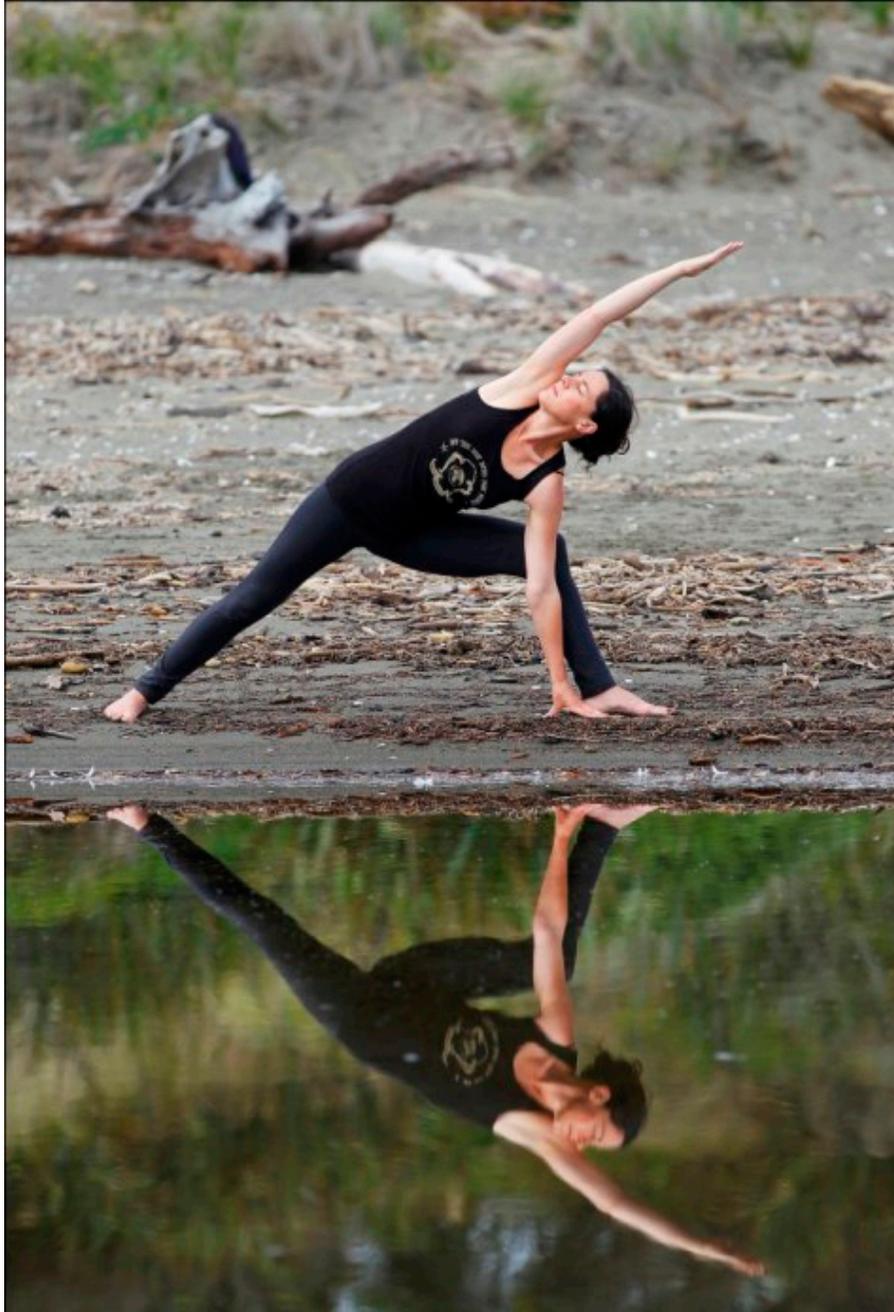
1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

It's simply being kind to myself – meeting myself, whatever my emotional, physical or psychological state, with loving kindness. As simple, and difficult, as that!

2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I think the first teacher to really speak to me, through her writing, about self-compassion was Pema Chödrön. I was in Afghanistan at the time and suffering a lot. It took reading Pema's books to see how much of my suffering was being caused by my own harsh judgements of myself, and the mean commentary I had running in my own head.

My meditation teacher [Peter Fernando](#) helped me learn self-compassion both through his own kindness – towards me, himself and everyone else I watched him interact with – and through meditation practice.



Another wonderful teacher for me has been [Sharon Salzberg](#) who teaches loving kindness meditation and practice. I've recently had the gift of getting to know Sharon as a friend as well as a teacher and she really does embody the kindness she teaches.

Today, thanks to teachers like Peter and Sharon, I practice [metta \(or loving kindness\) meditation](#) regularly as way to cultivate compassion and loving kindness towards myself and others. Here is a [link to a free recording of a metta mediation](#) which I'd love to share with anyone who is interested in trying the practice.

3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

It's a practice of softening towards myself, of connecting to my own heartfelt desire for my own well-being, and finding a source of gentle, sweet kindness towards myself – even when I've made a mistake. Metta meditation has helped me cultivate the capacity for this, but it still doesn't always come easily.



Here's an example: let's say I've just 'messed up' in some way. Maybe I made a mistake that caused another person some stress or inconvenience or pain. There is a learned tendency in me to be harsh with myself, and often I'll feel that rough edge of judgment rushing up on a hot wave of shame.

My metta practice can help me pause, in the moment, and connect to a sweeter, gentler place in myself. I can find compassion for myself and extend a hand of friendship to myself, just as I might to someone else. Initially I found that the kind voice in my head sounded a lot like my teacher, Peter, but these days it sounds more and more like me – just a kinder, gentler me than the version that used to rule to roost inside my head!



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

Some days the mean voices are faster, louder and more insistent than my inner sweetheart (as another teacher of mine, Natalie Goldberg, likes to call it). I'm not sure this is because anything is missing from my practice of self-compassion, except perhaps consistency! It's an ongoing process – to strengthen the voice of the inner sweetheart, being a kind friend to myself in my messiest or darkest moments. But I feel confident in the transformative power of the metta practice.



I am so grateful to Marianne, for these responses, but also for her presence in the world, awake and compassionate, alive with intention, and for her willingness to work towards easing suffering, in herself and in the world, to show up with an open heart. To find out more about Marianne, to connect with her:

- Visit [her website](#)
- Buy her book, [Zen Under Fire](#)
- Do a [workshop or retreat](#) with her
- Take one of [her courses](#)
- Schedule a [mentoring session](#) with her
- Follow her [on Facebook](#)
- Follow her [on Twitter](#)
- Follow her [on Instagram](#)

Sherry Richert Belul

November 30, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/11/30/self-compassion-saturday-sherry-richert-belul/>

I first met **Sherry Richert Belul** in an online writing class, [Telling True Stories with Laurie Wagner](#). In her profile picture, she was wearing a bright orange hat and feather boa, and the pieces that she wrote for class were sharp and sweet, beautiful and heartbreaking and true. After class was over, I kept bumping into her around the web, always loving our interactions. She is the brightest light, this one.



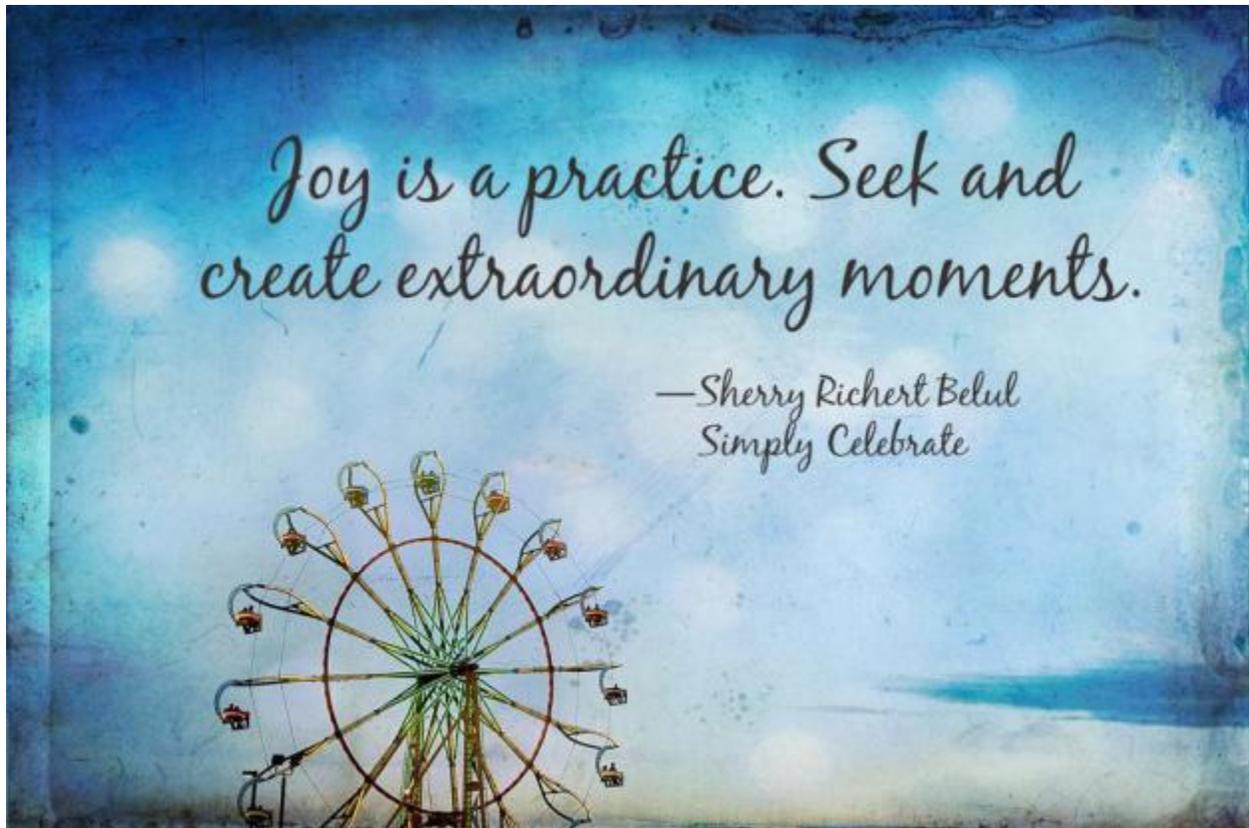
At some point, we became real friends. Sherry is the very best sort of friend, kind and generous, openhearted and full of joy. One of my favorite things she does for me is send me ninja poems where she records a short message using her phone, reads me a poem and says sweet things, and then she emails me the sound file. There is almost nothing better than a voice mail ninja poem love bomb from Sherry.

She even made it onto [my vision board for 2013](#), in the most magical happy accident. I was selecting pictures, and cut out one from Taproot that I didn't realize was her, was just a woman at a bright blue typewriter wearing a snazzy hat, an image illustrating an article about one of my favorite poets [Maya Stein](#), a picture about which I said, "that hat looks suspiciously like one

owned and worn by my good friend Sherry Richert Belul. If it's not you, Sherry, please don't tell me. The thought that it might be her/you, that she/you might represent the friendship and support of a collective of kindreds, of like-minded artists and warriors, of all those in my tribe, including all my kind and gentle readers, gives me so much joy." She later commented and said "but it is me!" and I knew that I would somehow get to meet her in person this year, which I did — twice!



Sherry Richert Belul is an ordinary gal seeking poetry, color, spontaneity, and connection in everyday life. She and her company, Simply Celebrate, offer unique experiences through products, services, stories, adventures, and a community that helps people wake up to all the joy, spontaneity, color, and connection that is available in every moment. Her mission is to "Turn ordinary days into an extraordinary life!" and through her work, she "offers products and practices that help people celebrate ourselves, the people we love, and the shape of our lives — even when none of it looks the way we had imagined." Her practice is celebrating the ordinary, unwanted, and unexpected. (And everything else that comes along). "Joy is a practice. What can you celebrate in this small moment of your extraordinary life?" I am so happy to share her perspective on self-compassion with you today.



1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Self-compassion is that way we whisper, "Oh honey" to ourselves while we wrap Grandma's frayed purple quilt a little tighter around our scared body. It's the way we quickly take it back when we mistakenly say "you idiot" to ourselves. It's what inspires us to ask for a re-do and murmur, "That's okay; anyone could have made the same mistake." Self-compassion is having the spinach-pineapple-mango smoothie instead of the cinnamon roll 'cuz we know what really nourishes. It's saying no even when our best friend pleads, because we are over-booked and over-committed and over the idea of thinking we need to sacrifice ourselves for someone else. It's saying yes to the lime green nail polish, to that crazy notion, to his kiss, to the giddy risk. Self-compassion is the way we look in the mirror and wish the wrinkles weren't there, but change our focus to how damned sparkly our eyes are. Self-compassion is having the patience to listen, listen, listen to that all-knowing Self deep inside of us — because there are no rules, pat answers, should-be's, or this-is-how-it-is's; there is just this moment, this is what's calling to me. There is this collection of me's inside of me, and the desire to help all of them feel safe and warm and vital. Self-compassion is that feeling of "I'm here with you, no matter what." It's letting ourselves love the rose and gold fingerless gloves, the smell of cotton yoga blankets, the sound of our son's silly songs, and our own plump toes. Self-compassion is drawing the circle around us bigger and bigger and bigger, to accept it all: all the glitter, all the dance, all the mud, and all the mess.



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

I learned self-compassion from my cat Tiger, who used to try to jump to the high shelf and sometimes missed. She'd look at me, give a little sniff, wash her face, and walk away, tail held high. Next day, she'd try that jump again. Best I can tell, she didn't beat up on herself for the fall. And she just kept attempting to go where her instinct told her to go.

I learned self-compassion from my Grandmother, who had none. She'd shop for size 18 brown or gray shapeless dresses, all the while berating herself and her body. I always wished she'd buy herself something flowered, silky, or sexy.

I learned self-compassion from a guy sitting outside his little house at college. While everyone else was boozing it up at frat parties, he had dragged a comfy armchair outside in the warm spring air and was reading "The Tao of Pooh." He was all alone, but seemed to be about the happiest person I'd ever met.

I learned self-compassion from every honest soul I've ever met. From the seventy-year-old woman who wouldn't let herself have even the smallest slice of cake for fear she'd get fat.

From the sixth-grade girl who slumped her shoulders in sorrow. From the middle-aged professor in Indiana who set off in a brand new direction, despite his age and great fear. All the people who abandon themselves and don't abandon themselves are my great teachers.

For the past 20 years I've been soaking up self-compassion tools and tricks from my spiritual teacher, Cheri Huber. Cheri starts with "There's Nothing Wrong with You" and takes us on a journey to discovering absolutely everything that is right with us, which happens to be everything we are.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

Like many of you, some of the go-to practices I use include yoga, meditation, dance, hot baths, hot sex, and hot tea. But here are a few favorite practices that aren't so obvious:

Recording and listening: This is a practice I learned from Cheri Huber. Basically, you know how Squawky Polly is always yammering in your head about what you could've done better or how you should be or "what's da matter with you?" Well, recording/listening (R/L) is the antidote to that. R/L is turning on a recorder and saying all the things we wish our best friend/lover/mother would have said to us. It's our own voice using the words we know we love offering us the

compassion and wisdom that exists always, always, always within us when we quiet enough to hear it. Because it is such an awesome tool, I'm hoping Jill might let me share a link to [Cheri's book](#), which outlines this practice.

Sending notes to strangers: It sounds counter-intuitive, but one of the biggest and fastest ways to offer myself compassion is to write a note to a stranger. I've launched several small projects in which I've asked folks to tell me if there are people in their lives who are going through a hard time and need a little kindness. I swear to you, as soon as I pick up the pen to write to these folks, I'm writing to myself. Yep, it is that crazy cosmic thing that happens when I just feel utterly connected energetically. So I am writing to someone's mom who is depressed and hopeless because she broke her hip again. And while I am writing to her, I am absorbing all that love and compassion into my own bones. I feel it. Can't explain it, but I know it.

Wearing clothes that make me feel like the me who wants out. Some folks might think that clothing is kinda silly and shallow. But for me, it is a straight shot to self-compassion. There's a part of me who wants to be alive and expressive in a certain way. Offering her the chance to wear artful clothes is like opening a portal to possibility and joy. It's like one of my [all-time favorite poems by Kaylin Haught](#), full of "yes, yes, yes." For you it may not be clothing, but maybe it is the art on your walls or the music you listen to or your flower garden. It's that invitation.

Allowing poetry to sooth and thrill. Speaking of poems ("yes, yes, yes"), learning poems by heart and living with poetry in my life are like insta-compassion. Poetry links my crazy bouncing ball of a spirit to all the other humans out there who are experiencing bliss or grief or confusion or depression. One poem I've learned by heart to say to myself whenever I am lost and sad is this [Hafiz poem](#).



4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

For me, the answer to this question is buried within the question itself! In my own life, a lack of self-compassion often comes in the form of looking for what's missing or what's wrong. It slips in like this, "You need to earn more money. You need to lose a few pounds. You need to be more generous." So at the risk of being confoundedly meta — I'd have to say that what I most need to learn and practice, moment by moment by moment is turning my attention away from any question of "what's missing" and replace it with a focus on "what is." The recording and listening practice I mentioned above is one of the best ways to do this: simply underscoring all the things I'm grateful for about myself and all the things I love about my life can usher in profound feelings of compassion.

This journey of self-compassion is most definitely a lifelong adventure. I feel INCREDIBLY lucky to be able to explore this with you, Jill, and with all these other amazing women writers, teachers, and artists.

P.S. Here's a little story about self-compassion and this piece of writing. Ole Squawky Polly mind wants to tell me that this isn't good enough. That I missed the mark. It wants me to feel bad about something. But what I know is that I tried my best to be present and to write what wanted to be written. I showed up, let life live through me, and now it is done. Self-compassion is turning away from that squawk-squawk and simply seeing what the next moment holds, which is ... lunch. No reviews, no regrets, no what-ifs. Ahhhh.



I am so grateful to Sherry, for so so many things. Her simply being in the world, truly unedited Sherry, gives me such comfort, so much joy. To find out more about Sherry, to connect with her:

- Visit [her website](#)
- Read her blog, [Cherry Blossom Soup](#)
- Sign up for her [Simply Celebrate newsletter](#), (really, you should — she's always cooking up some kind of magic)
- Follow her [on Twitter](#)
- Follow her [on Facebook](#)

Jill Salahub

December 7, 2013

<http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2013/12/07/self-compassion-saturday-jill-salahub/>

Today's post is an act of self-compassion, as it will be the final one in the series. When I first got the idea for this, I was going to call it the "Summer of Self-Compassion" because I thought it would be that small, that brief. But then so many of the women I asked to participate said "yes" that I decided to continue until I ran out. When the end got near, I briefly considered asking more women, because you all were appreciating and enjoying it so much, because we all were learning so much, getting so much out of it.

And yet, when I got still and quiet, asked myself what I really wanted, what to do next, the clear response was to finish, to create the ebook and move on to the next project. So today, I have spent the morning reading back through all the posts, soaking in all the wisdom there, feeling so full of love and gratitude for these women. My responses to the same set of questions I asked them are an act of gratitude, an offering, a contemplation of what I've learned. With self-compassion, I am honoring this experience and letting it go.



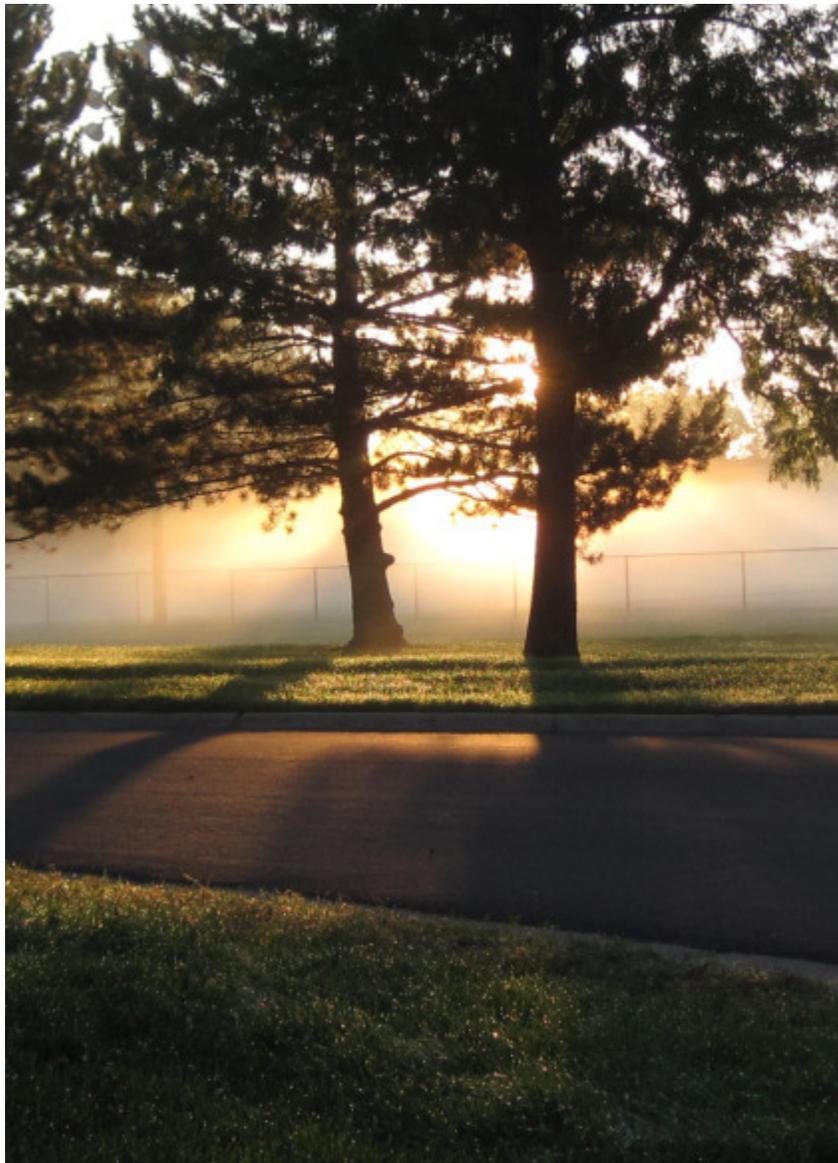
another picture from my photo shoot with [Andrea Scher](#), which was a practice of self-compassion

1. What does self-compassion mean, what is it? How would you describe or define it?

Self-compassion is to “suffer with” myself, to stay with an attitude of non-judgment and gentleness, to nurture and soothe myself. It’s the ability to be present no matter what arises, to not abandon myself. It means honoring my experience and truth: how I feel, what I need, my body, my desires, my longing, my hungers, my values, all I have and all that I wish for.

I define it as the continual willingness to soften to your own experience and allow it to be as it is. ~Susan Piver

It’s simply being kind to myself – meeting myself, whatever my emotional, physical or psychological state, with loving kindness. As simple, and difficult, as that! ~Marianne Elliott



2. How did you learn self-compassion? Did you have a teacher, a guide, a path, a resource, a book, a moment of clarity or specific experience?

From this series, from the brilliant and kind women who agreed to participate — I learned from them before this series and through it and expect to continue being a curious student of how they do it.

I learned from books, workshops, classes, retreats, podcasts, and videos by Tara Brach, Brene' Brown, Pema Chödrön, Geneen Roth, and Anne Lamott.

I learned through practice, by staying open and being with what is true, being present for my experience as I meditate and move through yoga poses, as I show up and write day after day no matter what, as I have lived with and loved and even let go of my dogs.

From being in relationship with others, seeing how we generate suffering from a place of confusion and hurt, and also how we can love and heal each other, the power of kindness and acceptance and presence.



3. How do you practice self-compassion, what does that experience look like for you?

In a bigger sense, self-compassion practice for me is centered in awareness, mindfulness. This means showing up, being present, and staying open. It is about cultivating a sense of curiosity. For example, if someone says something, and I feel hurt or angry, I am curious about that, try to discover what triggered me and why, and what I need to be able to experience it and let it go, be with it without generating even more suffering.

At a more basic level, it means checking in with myself, seeing what I might need or want. For example, am I hungry? If so, what do I want to eat? It means checking in with my needs and desires, and responding when action is warranted. For example, if my feet are cold, I put on socks. That might sound dumb to someone who naturally responds that way, but for someone like me, someone who spent so many years denying myself, smashing myself to bits, that sort of care, awareness of a need that is met with a quick and appropriate response is something new, something I'm learning and have to practice.

I practice self-compassion moment by moment. It lies in how I receive myself and what I'm experiencing. I practice awareness of self-judgement and my inner dialogue. I practice softening, allowing, embracing. ~Rachel Cole

It's a practice of softening towards myself, of connecting to my own heartfelt desire for my own well-being, and finding a source of gentle, sweet kindness towards myself – even when I've made a mistake. ~Marianne Elliott

More and more, I try to love the crap out of myself. ~Judy Clement Wall

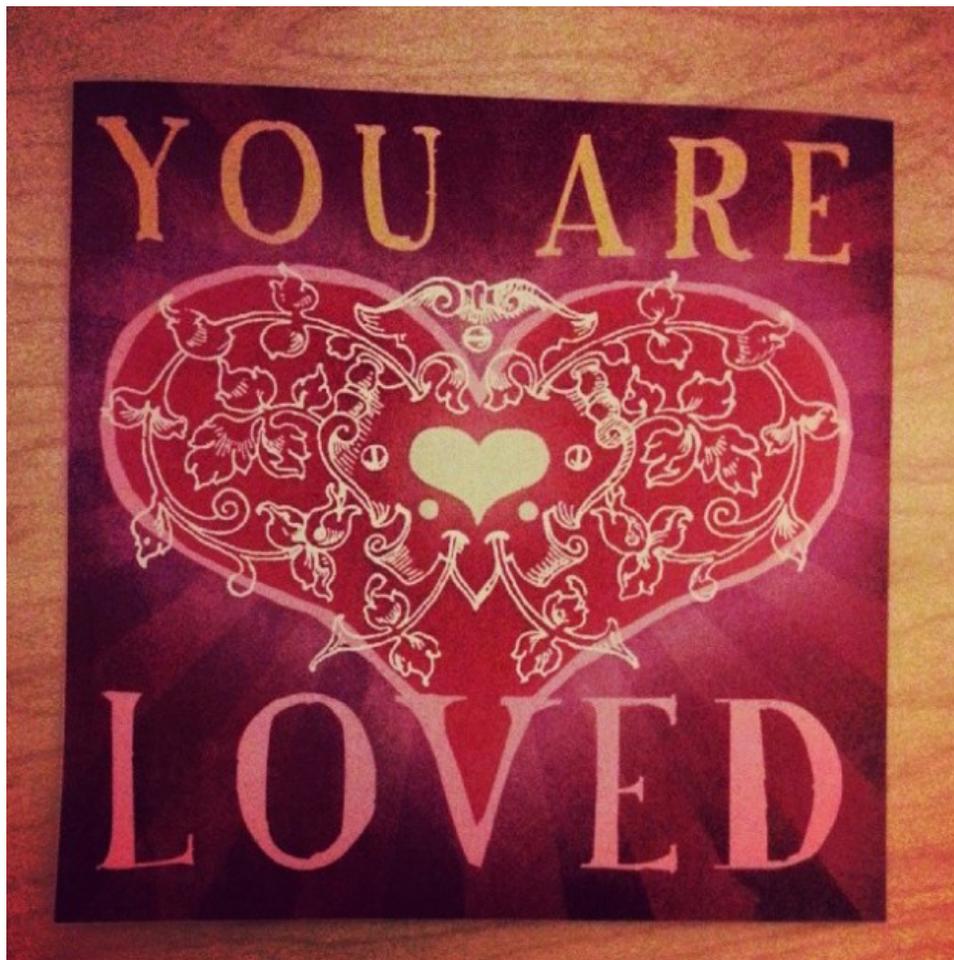


4. What do you still need to learn, to know, to understand? What is missing from your practice of self-compassion, what do you still struggle with?

I still struggle with trusting myself, having faith that what I want is allowed, okay, acceptable. I struggle with thinking it's more important to please others, meet their expectations than to care for, to satisfy myself. I still need to learn to trust that I am worthy, that I don't have to wait for permission have the life I want or earn the right to be here. I need to understand that I am loved, lovable no matter what. I struggle with self-criticism, being way too hard on myself. I still need to learn better strategies for self-soothing when I'm feeling overwhelmed, tender and raw.

I can get wildly impatient, judgmental and despairing when I feel like I'm not blooming fast enough, damn it! There is so much that I want to do, see, create, experience that I can be relentless in my self-demands – and I get mad when I can't keep up! I can burn my energy out, fuelling myself with adrenalin and caffeine and fast, nutritionless food thinking that, at least for a time, it will help me get farther faster. Nope ... I see this struggle as my journey to grow my self-compassion so that I can hold with love both my desires and my limitations. ~Jamie Ridler

I am very hard on myself about what it means to be successful in this world. And too often I don't make self-care a priority. I know that as I continue to relax (as opposed to "trying"), self-compassion will naturally manifest. ~Susan Piver



I am filled with so much love and gratitude, for the women who took part in this series, for my kind and gentle readers, for the infinite number of “do-overs” and fresh starts available to all of us.