

Deciding to Die Midstream to a Life You've Always Known, or The Year Of Sleeping Dangerously

an excerpt from *This Time I Dance!*
by Tama J. Kieves

TWO MINUTES AFTER YOU MAKE YOUR GRAND entrance into a bold new life, don't be surprised if passion and anticipation give way to a divine sludge. It's like the second you fly the coop, you land in this vat of emotional pea soup. Now home and alone, liveness slows to listlessness, a maddening drop in energy. Should this happen to you, know that you are not crazy or alone. You have just entered the transition zone. Congratulations. Collapse is progress.

After I walked out of my high-paced, breathless career, I functioned at what seemed to be two notches above the living dead line. I waited tables, bought groceries and fed my cat. But I slept for what seemed to be unnatural numbers of hours. My mind revved up like an eager sports car engine racing with the need to create a new and improved life. But I found my physical self dragging around the apartment in slow motion in my underwear in the middle of the day and then taking naps to recuperate. I felt like a beached whale hungering for the sea. I ate bagels and cream cheese and leftovers and lunchmeats instead. Guilt took finky little notes about my attraction to the refrigerator and read them over in my head.

It didn't take long before I found myself haunted by rattling questions and rude images of wast-

ing away in oblivion while the rest of the world drank lattes to go. Would I just exist in limbo now? Was gazing at my walls for hours "following my bliss?" Just how much could I eat anyway? And how would I pursue "the hero's journey," if it took me three hours to get up and brush my teeth? "Oh, this is great," I thought. "I've wrecked a Rolls Royce career so that I could grow as wide as a Buddha and contemplate the daisies on my quilt."

This is what I think now. I think we experience a form of higher-powered paralysis to protect us from getting in our own clever way. I think most of us would skip soul searching, and start job searching and that is not the purpose of this time out of ordinary time. You did not

leave a job to find a job, but to find yourself, the queen you locked away, while you served lesser things and others' kings. So in this slow down, melt down phase of your journey, you have the opportunity to sort through the layers of your self and decide which ones travel on and which ones to shelve. The fire we seek will burn through old roles. We will lose our well-told stories to find our whispering soul.

I slept because I mourned the death or loss of an identity. My Leaning Tower of Pisa had finally crashed. And while I wanted to be positive and enthusiastic and all that, all I could see was dust and ash. Then, too, I slept because the process of excavating the real me out of the rubble required emotional devotion and concentration. Each week when I trudged to therapy, I'd learn more about that creative little girl whose dreams hadn't fit the dreams of an emphatic and pragmatic family. Surprisingly, her tears of alienation still waited within me. They had waited while I marched off to law school, and then worked a maniacal career and said, "Not now dear, not now."

Well, now had come with a drum roll, a violin, a toll, and a vengeance. The world doesn't approve when we cry. Pain embarrasses our efficient society. So I hid in bed, my own private retreat center in the middle of the city. I had my cat for on-call healing sessions and I burned rain-scented incense and candles. It wasn't quite an executive spa, but I figured it was better than an institution.

But every moment I "rested," I never felt more restless. I yearned to plunge into another career, a definition, live my life's purpose, turn into an Action Jackson, and assume my place in the busy, dizzy world I saw outside my window. I hadn't wanted to just leave something, but to leave for something. But the "something" remained mysterious. I could not pierce the veil. I could barely read the mail. When friends or family called and asked, "So what are you doing these days?" I did not have the knowledge to know that I was undoing.

This undoing process works like painting the interior of an old house. First, you clean the walls, sand them down, and patch them up, or else you paint over the old infirmities, the same warps

This Time I DANCE!

TRUSTING THE JOURNEY OF
CREATING THE WORK YOU LOVE



Tama J. Kieves

How One Harvard Lawyer Left It All to Have It All!

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"Every act of creation begins with an act of destruction." — Picasso

"Letting go is death. People think leaving a job is about leaving a job. It's about leaving a life, a history, a context, a cubbyhole, the only person you knew how to be, and the one everybody loved."
— A journal entry

and clumps of history. If I'd run out and grabbed another career without delving into where I had betrayed myself the first time, I'd have ended up with a new color of wet paint over the same pattern of bumps and desperately limited opinions about myself, my dreams, and reality. So as much as I wanted to get started on a new career, all I could do was get started on a new philosophy or mythology of who I was and who I was to be.

In retrospect I can tell you that the "doing" of our chosen work comes easy. It is this time of undoing that requires every ounce of strength, vision, and persistence. It is meeting the dream-slashing and faith-bashing denouncer, and journaling, praying, and processing your way back to your true-heartedness, the part of you that dreams your dream and knows the shortest path to the quickest stream. Every belief that ever held you back from your desires will now come forth and stand before your door. This is what this time is for. It will make you stand in your strength like you never have before.

You might think this psychic show-down slows you down. But that's because in the old way of doing things that created lives we did not want, we insisted that actions furthered us more than feeling our way through healing. But on this inside-out, inspired path to true work, the relationship we have with ourselves is more important than anything else. There is nothing else. All work we love comes from the love we give ourselves.

Months down the road, my grieving and self-exploration gave way to curiosity and wonder. The naps with a life force of their own ended. Stabs at creativity and expression began. The juice returned and the breath-stealing adventure before me unfurled its shapely red cape. I have almost never felt as small or lost since.

Today I speak in front of crowds of people, but that doesn't take near as much fortitude as undoing an intact identity, deciding to die midstream to a life you've always known. I know who the real hero is. I owe every triumph I experience to a tender part of myself who, years ago, got under flowered quilts, yawned, and surrendered to a process that didn't look like progress. It took that kind of inner revolution, maddening and frightening, for me to discover a unified self that moved with love and prowess.



The author is a Denver-based creativity and life/work coach who facilitates workshops throughout the country. More information about Tama J. Kieves is available at www.AwakeningArtistry.com.

'Anyone can do this...'

In a Q&A with *EVOLVE!* editor Debra Hiers, Tama Kieves explains how to find that dream job



*Tama J. Kieves, an honors graduate of Harvard Law School, left her law practice with one of Denver's largest law firms to write and to embolden others to live and breathe their most meaningful self-expression. She documents her experience in **This Time I Dance!** with humor and refreshing candor. In a way, readers will be treated to their very own personal coaching session in the pages of Kieves' book.*

DH: Tama, your book is about creating the work you love. And it is also about living life as an artist. In your introduction you share a very broad definition of the word artist. I wonder if you could comment on how these two streams come together?

TK: To me, "artists" and "dancers" are those who listen to their soul and express their love and imagination in the world. Creating the work you love is a healing and transformative process, not a linear job search or tidy five-year plan. You can't plan an inspired life. My book is about "trusting the journey" of following your inspiration. That means learning to undo negative beliefs about ourselves and about what is "realistic," and daring to trust the promptings of our hearts. The wonder of creativity is that you give birth to something new, different, effortless and authentic. You will discover opportunities, direction, and resources that literally did not exist before for your fearful, constricted self. The inspired self dances in a different world.

DH: Have you ever met someone who is already tuned into his or her creativity and, say, decides to go to law school? Does this career transition go the other way as well?

TK: I think the decision to go to law school can be a very passionate one. I am never advocating one kind of career over another. I am encouraging individuals to listen to the leanings inside them. Everyone deserves work that is a passionate expression of themselves. Some individuals will find their love and creativity in the practice of law or in fixing spark plugs or in homemaking or in starting a greeting card business or in feeding the homeless. I believe the healing of our planet is when each of us is doing the work we came to do, unleashing our natural talents and unlimited capacity to love.

DH: Over the last two years we've seen a loss of jobs from companies going out of business or downsizing. A new trend shows a large number of jobs being exported to cheaper labor markets overseas. Those who have been laid off are struggling to find work, and those who have jobs are hunkering down, fearful of losing them. What advice can you share for these uncertain times?

TK: Creating the work you love is ultimately the most secure path. I always tell my clients, "If you're this successful doing work you *don't* love, what could you do with work you *do* love?" Many people hang onto jobs they hate and it drains them, causing performance and health problems, not to mention depression, unhappy relationships, and poor self-esteem. When you follow your passion, you have boundless energy and the competitive edge of genuine creativity and genius. Plus, opportunities gravitate to those with fire in their eyes. Life honors you when you honor your gifts. Also, I think that many people are now being asked to "employ themselves," use their talents to create new livelihoods. On my path, I found myself doing work I wouldn't have found in a job description. It didn't exist before. No one was hiring someone to help people

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"discover and trust the voice of their souls." But I followed and valued my gifts and then the world valued them too.

Finally, everybody wants to feel secure, but they are often only looking at the dollar sign. When you are doing your true work, you uncover a peace of mind that is unshakable—no matter what uncertainties prevail.

DH: *There's a chapter in your book titled "It takes an Intermission to Give Birth to A Mission." Skeptics might seize on this to say "Sure, if you've got the financial means to take time off and ponder what comes next." But how does it work for someone who really can't afford to be without an income?*

TK: Many people can adjust their lifestyles and give themselves some measure of freedom if they see the value and tremendous opportunity of it. You know, when there's a will, there's ten ways. But an intermission doesn't always mean you have to leave your job or responsibilities. It does mean taking space in your life away from your familiar identity or roles. It means getting naked. That could mean going to a retreat or it could mean meditating and journaling in your room. An intermission is mostly a mindset. It's the decision to create space

in your life to listen to your true self, explore new territories, and feel your feelings.

DH: *Can anyone really do this?*

TK: Yes, I believe anyone can do this because I believe everyone has love inside them and strength and resources beyond their imagination. But I do not mean to say that it's easy with bells and whistles all the way. This is a path that will ask you to transform all your old and limiting beliefs about yourself, listen to your own inner authority, trust yourself as you have never before done. It takes time, love, and fortitude.

DH: *How does one get started? What's the most important step for people to take in creating the work they love?*

TK: The most important thing you can do is *listen* to what you love. Give yourself permission to go for your "wild want," not your "mild want." I fought my desire to write for years thinking it was a pipe dream and I should find a more "sensible" desire. But if you want to live an inspired life, you have to *listen* to that whispered inspiration, not your rationalization. I see so many clients jump too soon from listening to what they love to trying to figure out how it would make money or how they would do this in the

world. They want a map. I tell them to look for a fire. If you find the fire, everything else comes.

DH: *How do you prime yourself for success in the face of obstacles and roadblocks? How do you keep going?*

TK: Cultivate a loving voice within you. *This Time I Dance!* is really about how to start being your own advocate—trusting in your own journey. It's the critical voice within us, the naysayer, that drains our energy, not our mother, not the bills, and not events. My whole career transformation has been about learning to have faith in my creative voice. I've learned that the voice of my heart is the voice of something higher and wiser that knows an intuitive, miraculous way through anything. It took me 12 years to write this book and I would have stopped a thousand times along the way if I had believed the "voice of reason" which taunted and criticized me. Many creative people do not follow through on their inspirations because they stop trusting their own inner voice. They start listening to the voice of the world. They start relying on facts, figures, and appearances, instead of the deep knowing within them. Obstacles only stop us when we stop believing in our love. ☉