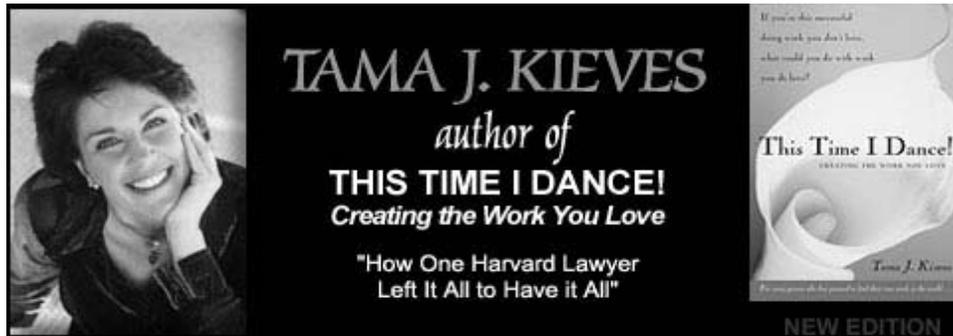


An Interview with Tama J. Kieves, best-selling author of This Time I Dance! Creating the Work You Love, How One Harvard Lawyer Left It All to Have It All (Tarcher/Penguin, 2003) (See Tama's web site for details on her book, her writing courses, workshops, online courses, and more-- and sign up to get a free copy of her guide "Find Your Calling Now" and her monthly email newsletter at www.AwakeningArtistry.com)



Tama J. Kieves was trapped in a well-paying job. A Harvard-educated lawyer, she earned a big salary, but was starving to death on a soul-level. She needed out—and not just the few days she managed to spend on a California beach. She needed out *permanently*. In a move that left colleagues and family members in a state of shock, Tama quit and began the long process of creating her life as a writer. Her book describes her journey to creative wholeness, with great candor and self-revealing truths born of her moments of self-doubt, despair, and foolishness. But here's the kicker: she wrote the book *before* she knew the "happy ending," including a book deal with the publisher of her dreams. *This Time I Dance* is the story of Tama's leap of faith into the creative unknown with only her inner voice to guide her.

FaithHopeandFiction: It still amazes me that you wrote this book as you were living into the life that you hoped to have.

Tama Kieves: I wrote this book as I was going through my transition of becoming a writer. I was reading all these self-help books, and they were all about the "five easy steps" and "30 days to an easy life." I wanted a book that told me what to do when I was scared and doubting everything. How do you get through the process and "leaps of faith" then? I wanted someone to tell me *their* story of how they stayed true to a path, even when they felt fear. I wanted more real-life, personal examples. Also, I write to heal myself, to explain life to myself. I knew that if I could convince myself to keep going, I could convince anyone. So I started writing that book.

FHF: One of my favorite parts of the book is when you decide to go out in your dramatic cape and hat—looking to all the world like an *artiste*—and then you run into one of the partners at the law firm. My heart ached as I read that. So many of us long to declare—in words and actions—that "I'm an artist," but the world seems to pass judgment.

TK: Most people in the conventional world don't understand the creative journey. Most people think that creativity is frivolous or even self-indulgent. They don't understand

what it feels like to need to express yourself in this way. Therefore you must believe in yourself before the world does. Dare to seem foolish, even to yourself. It takes so much courage to follow these compelling instincts. You must trust this amazing journey...even before there is visible evidence. You will feel awkward or embarrassed at times, and the world will often ask you for facts and evidence that you don't have yet. So many co-workers and relatives might want to share their dark advice with you, as in, "Oh, my God, you should know what happened to Cousin Harry!" (And you think, oh, please tell me...) A lot of people aren't living their dreams, and they will often, in some way, in the name of "safety" or "protection" intimate that you should not live yours. You have to learn to trust your own sacred instincts and to listen to the voice within you that is a voice of love and not a voice of fear.

FHF: I can relate to that! As a writer, I don't need any more negative voices, thank you very much, I have enough in my own head that I have to "drown out" with positive ones. What also struck me about your story is that you had to go it alone—yes, with the support of friends, but without coaches and personal role models.

TK: I left the law practice in 1986, and back then it was definitely not normal to leave your career. It was not conventional to be in transition. This was before all the coaching programs and support groups that we have now. In some ways, it's funny; I have always craved a mentor to guide and nurture my path. But instead, my journey has been one of "you're going to trail blaze and then *you're* going to be the mentor for others." I guess you teach what you need to learn. And so I ended up writing a book for myself and to be a "paper mentor" for others because I wanted them to have the support, love, and perspective they needed to stick with this powerful path of living your dreams.

FHF: After you wrote the first edition of *This Time I Dance!* you self-published, and the book—largely on its own—made its way to number three on the bestseller list in Denver. Then in 2003, it was published by Penguin under the esteemed Tarcher imprint. What can you share with us about that part of the journey?

TK: I spent 12 years writing, loving, and crafting this book and believing in it... without an agent, a publisher, or a contract. I kept having this inner voice that told me I was meant to do this, and that the book was meant to go somewhere. Now that can make you feel like a scary person: I'm listening to an inner voice! But I self-published it originally and then I got a dream email from out of the blue from the "fairy godmother" who had read the book. She was a VP of Publicity at a major publishing house in New York and was in the midst of her own career transition, and had found and fallen in love with my book. She thought it was the best book she'd ever read on finding and living your calling. And she offered to help me get it published by a major publishing house.

FHF: What did that moment feel like, when suddenly after having not much more than your own inner voice for counsel, you receive an email from a mysterious helpful stranger?

TK: Pure disbelief! I read that email a billion times. I teach “A Course in Miracles,” which is all about living in love instead of fear. When I sent that email to my A Course in Miracles friends, they were all crying and cheering with gratitude. But all my New York friends were saying, “Honey, it’s a scam. This woman is going to rip you off.” It was so funny!

In the midst of it all, I was having this weird, slowed-down feeling of “I always knew this was going to happen.” My logical mind kept asking, “Is this really happening?” and warning me not to get too excited. But somehow I knew this or something like this would happen. I knew that you can’t put all your love and devotion into something and not have it go somewhere. If you show up in love and excellence, sooner or later the world just has to respond.

FHF: The story behind the story—how the book came into being—is a perfect example of the writer’s journey. It requires equal parts of inspiration and perseverance, along with the deep belief in yourself that you were meant to do this.

TK: When I first self-published the book, I believed it was going to go somewhere. I had gone through so many challenges to put my work into the world. But then, I couldn’t help asking myself at times, “what if I was wrong?” It was terrifying to lay everything on the line. It wasn’t only that maybe the book wouldn’t do well. It wasn’t only having “wasted all those years,” plus the disappointment, embarrassment and all that horror. For me the really scary thing was, what about the voice that I had trusted? If I couldn’t trust my own heart, if I couldn’t believe in my own instincts, now what would I trust in?

People always ask me, if the book hadn’t gotten picked up and published and done well, would I still feel as passionate about encouraging others to follow their dreams? And always, I say yes. I have to tell you, that self-publishing my book was the greatest act of self-love I have ever known. It was so fulfilling to listen to my own instincts and to respect my talent, that by the time Tarcher/Penguin bought the book, in some weird way it was irrelevant. I had already found my own legitimacy and self-respect. I had already owned my own gifts.

FHF: You’re not just a writer, but also a teacher. I laughed out loud at your story of your humble beginning of mumbling and stumbling your way through explaining what your course would be about and ultimately saying it would be “fun.”

TK: My whole career happened organically that way. In my “grand plan,” I dreamed I would become a best-selling author and travel and speak and do individual coaching to nurture people’s souls. But I had it backwards. I started teaching the classes before I ever finished writing the book. It all started because I wanted to know other people in transition, others on this wild kind of adventure, others who wanted to express their creativity in the world. I started to hold support groups so that I could be a part of them. But as it grew I began to realize that I had a gift for facilitating and teaching. I started offering workshops and then participants would give me ideas for other workshops.

They'd say, "Would you do a workshop or retreat on 'this'?" I would say, sure, I can do that.

With the career coaching and writing/book coaching, I had never even conceived of this. It started out by people asking me if I would work with them individually. This was before coaching was a term like it's used now. I found I had another calling in this because I loved supporting other people's dreams and helping them discover their own brilliant path to success. Now this is what's really great about this kind of creative career: all my gifts interlace and feed each other. There's a real coherence and symphony to all of it, something I never imagined. The teaching inspires the writing, and the writing has helped me as a speaker. And coaching channels all of my experience and keeps me in touch with the pain and frustration people have with living their dreams. Then I have more to write and speak about. It may seem like three different paths: writing, lecturing and coaching, but it all comes down to the desire to express, inspire, communicate and share.

FHF: The dearest part of the book for me is when you describe walking into a bookstore and there, on the shelf, is the book that you wanted to write—only someone else had written it. You nearly gave up. Then you shared the wonderful advice from poet Maya Angelou, whom you heard years later, who talked about trusting herself at a difficult time in her life, saying, "*He would not have carried me this far to let me down now.*" Or as you put it, "Love does not call us to the dance, only to deny us chances... Love does not tempt us to leave what we know, only to leave us without direction, resources, synergy, and flow."

TK: When I went home that day from the bookstore I came the closest to completely giving up. I journaled that night because that's what I do when I feel crazy and sad, and I kept writing: "You have to trust, you have to trust, you have to trust" and "what is it going to feel like knowing that you gave up on your dreams, that you didn't dare to live them all the way through?" It's one thing if the world rejects you; it's another to reject yourself. I call these moments "choice points on the journey." They represent the ultimate choice you will have to make over and over again. "Are you going to listen to the voice of fear inside you or the voice of love inside you?" I am so grateful I continued. I receive emails from readers all around the world telling me how much they love *This Time I Dance!* and how much it's inspired and helped them to discover their own dreams. I think what if I had turned back in that moment? I wouldn't have only darkened my own life. I would have failed to light thousands of other paths.

FHF: I love the way you write, with the rhymes within prose sentences. You have a great talent. What do you advise people who might have some talent for something or they want to be a little more creative, but it's probably not going to be their life's work or passion?

TK: I always encourage people to follow their creativity wherever it takes them. Your creativity is your strength. You have no idea where it will take you. I think most people

are so much more talented than they know. They've only tapped one tenth of what they can really do. There's genius under those doubts!

But sometimes some forms of creativity are just there for fun and fulfillment and aren't your life's calling. I like painting, but I don't have the drive to make it my mission. I don't have the hunger to read everything on famous painters and study every technique. That's the difference. With a calling there's always a hunger. It never goes away. When I teach my writing classes I meet people who say, "I knew I wanted to write when I was 5 and now I'm 70." There is a consistent calling. You wouldn't have the love and passion and drive if you weren't meant to do this. You wouldn't have the hunger that hunts you and tugs at you. So if you have that hunger, then I believe you have a calling and it's not just a hobby. You are destined to experience something truly transformational with it, if you give yourself to it.

Then there's the whole money thing. People think their creativity is just a hobby, because they don't believe it will make money. But I don't believe in the concept of the starving artist. That's a horrible myth. Artists are meant to thrive. If you look at people who make the most money on the planet, they are people who are following their dreams. I was a starving attorney. I made a lot of money, but I was totally starving. I meet people who say, "But I have a good job." I don't want people to just have a good job. I want them to have a GREAT LIFE. I want them to live their calling. I want them to experience the fullness and grace of their true self-expression. I do not think that we were incarnated at this time on the planet just to pay bills. I don't think that at all.

FHF: So what is the next iteration of your calling as a writer and as a teacher?

TK: It's more of the same. I am working on another book, which is how to wildly succeed at your calling. The first book was all about creating the work you love and the second is about taking it to the next level. It's everything I'm learning as I expand my reach. I love getting this work out to people. I love traveling all over the country offering workshops and retreats and meeting fellow creative adventurers. I love creating a creative family of thousands of individuals who are banding together for support and inspiration and joining my Awakening Artistry family. (at www.AwakeningArtistry.com) I love offering my online classes, email newsletter, and all the different ways I get to interact and help encourage other wild and fabulous souls on this path. I love knowing that I am part of that moment that helps people step into their true calling in this life. And I love continuing to discover, express, and grow my own creativity!

FHF: And all the while, you are listening to your inner voice, the one that speaks to you with love and not with fear.

TK: I wouldn't be alive without that. The original title of my first book was *This Time I Dance! Trusting the Journey of Creating the Work You Love*. (Tarcher/Penguin has now shortened it to *This Time I Dance! Creating the Work You Love*) That's what it's all about: the journey of TRUSTING. I'd experience these signs, openings, shifts, or miracles and then two days later I'd be scared out of my mind again and doubting

everything. It's all about trusting the path through the unknown. Most people find it easier to trust an "expert," to trust someone else, rather than to trust their own inner voice. But that's what it's all about. That's what the journey of creativity calls us to in the end. I thought that this journey for me was all about becoming a writer, but instead it's really been about learning to trust myself, trust my heart, trust my instincts and trust the Universe or God. It has turned into an outrageous, divine, spiritual journey for which I am unspeakably grateful. I'd love everyone to know this experience in their lifetime.