

Reprinted from *Science of Mind* magazine, May 2003
with permission of Science of Mind and
Barbara Stahura (visit <http://www.clariticom.com>)

She's Still Dancing

An Interview with
Tama J. Kieves

By Barbara Stahura



In the mid-1980s, Tama J. Kieves was a young attorney who had graduated *cum laude* from Harvard Law School. As expected, upon passing the bar exam she jumped on the fast track and joined one of Denver's largest law firms. She was soon pulling down a six-figure income, driving the right car, wearing the right clothes, and doing all the things that fit the mold into which she had stuffed herself. But a soul-deep discontent tugged at her, leading to such unhappiness that she briefly considered suicide. She had always been drawn to writing and a more creative life, but, like many people, she allowed herself to be talked out of that life and into a more "secure" one. Then one day, sitting on a beach, she had her epiphany and, despite the fear, never looked back.

In 2001, she self-published her first book, *This Time I Dance! Trusting the Journey of Creating the Work You Love*, which became popular in the Denver

area. After she did a reading at the Tattered Cover bookstore there, her book found its way to the publishing company Tarcher/Putnam through an amazing series of synchronicities. They have since republished it under their imprint. Kieves says she never could have planned this. Instead, it happened because she had learned to wholeheartedly believe in her dream. The Universe did the rest.

In a time when more than half the workers in the United States say they are unhappy with their jobs, Tama Kieves has something valuable to offer to all who yearn to follow their dreams. Her website is located at awakeningartistry.com.

Science of Mind: Why did you go into law in the first place?

Tama Kieves: Basically, my family influenced me. Like many young writers or creative people, I was told, "What are you going to do with that? You can't make a living with that." So someone had suggested, you can write, go to law school. I'd gotten into Harvard Law School, and you don't say no to that. It never occurred to me that I could follow my own dream or my own desire. It was more the tried and true path. I grew up in a

New York Jewish family, and it was "Be an accountant or a lawyer, or marry one!" Or both. Many creative people face that kind of stuff. You're just shepherded into some practical career. In my family, if you said you wanted to be a poet or a writer or an artist, it was like you wanted to take heroin or something. That was really not an okay path.

Q: Do you think this process happens to most people, where their families try to guide them in ways they believe are safe?

A: Sure. I think our families do it, schools do it. The culture does it. They try to gear you to what they think is safe, to what is known security, or what they think is known security.

Q: Tell me about the moment you decided to leave your law practice. You were on the beach, eating your cinnamon raisin bagel. What happened?

A: That's a true story. I was really sitting on a beach. I was crazy in my law practice that week, just frustrated and trapped, and someone said, just get the heck away, go somewhere. So I went to California by myself. I remember sitting on this beach, watching the waves



To purchase "This Time I Dance" by Tama J. Kieves, go to scienceofmind.com or call DeVors at 800-382-6121.

crash, and I was journaling. I was finally relaxing and connecting a little bit, and I just had that intuitive knowing inside. First, I realized that this was the first moment I'd felt free, like me again, in an entire year. It was the revelation that, God, this beach is free and maybe I don't have to make a gazillion dollars and have some big-time job to lead the life I want. And I also remember that I *knew* I could pretend I didn't know, and that I'd be here again in 20 years. It was just one of those intuitive knowings. You know you have to go. And that was terrifying. It wasn't a peaceful, happy moment.

Q: You were only 25 when you experienced this crisis. That's rather young.

A: I think I had a mid-life crisis. I think I was really precocious. Now,

I'm so thankful that was true. But back then, I just thought, what's wrong with me? Everyone else can hate their job, but they can still do it.

Q: You've found your calling, for sure. What is it about a calling that's so persistent?

A: I think it's your inner voice. It's your love, the love inside you that needs to express itself. It's really your destiny that this is who you are, and who you're meant to become and what you're meant to be on this earth. And, like tulips and not roses, I think there is something that never feels completely right until you're listening to that voice. I always had that feeling of not being in my own skin, or just not being whole, not being totally at peace.

Q: One of the things that scares people who want to make this kind of leap is the "how." So why is the "how" not only not important, at least in the beginning, but also a big stumbling block?

A: I always tell people you're not looking for a map, you're looking for a fire. You're so right that looking for the "how" initially is one of the biggest stumbling blocks. To me, this is an inspired life, and it is a

dynamic process that reveals itself moment by moment or instinct by instinct. When you're looking for the "how," you're constricting that process. Look for your love first, that aching desire. Look for that haunting, whispering wish. But most people start looking at the practicalities too soon, like how can I make money at that? What if I don't have a credential for this? They talk themselves out of their love, which is talking themselves out of their strength to do it.

Q: Can you make this kind of change without a plan?

A: I always tell people you can't plan an inspired life. If you're really going to follow inspiration, it's not coming from your past experience. It's coming from your love, and you can't plan that. When I started writing, I wrote poetry, and that developed into writing a nonfiction book, and that led me to teaching and coaching. I kept discovering my creativity and love and the next steps to take. I could never have planned this life.

Q: What advice would you give to people who have a deep need to follow their calling, but if they make this leap, they may not have enough

money to buy shoes for the kids. It seems that single people, or people who are already wealthy, have an easier time of making this leap.

A: First of all, I think anything is possible when you have the deep desire to do it. I think it is asking your family to pull together and possibly restructuring the way you live. But I think the main thing is, if you're not living this, you're not living. There's a deadness that you're bringing to your household or your children. Parents often worry that they don't want to deprive their children of the newest Nikes because they're following their bliss. But you're depriving your child of your soul and a life force and role modeling that you can live what you're meant to live. Through all of this, there are transitions that people have to make. Sure, you might have to cut down on expenses. You might even get your family to pitch in. Leo Buscaglia told a great story of his Italian family and how they were very poor. His father would say, "We're only going to eat spaghetti this month because we can't afford anything else." But Buscaglia added, we grew up with music in our house, and we grew up with laughter. That's what I always tell parents.

Q: Are these kinds of callings only artistic in nature?

A: Absolutely not. They're creative. There are scientists who are outstandingly creative. Can you imagine the first scientist who thought of sending somebody to the moon? How crazy did that sound? Doctors are creative, engineers are creative.

Q: What about plumbers or house painters or parents?

A: Absolutely. I think raising a child is incredibly creative. I think a calling is love, however your love expresses itself, and however you're inspired. For each of us that's different. I actually interviewed a plumber years ago, and he made me interested in plumbing. He was so excited, and he had so much enthusiasm and so wanted to share his story. To me, that was such a teaching. If love is brought to anything, it's interesting.

Q: One of the journal entries reprinted in your book says that emptiness is not emptiness, but fullness repressed. Would you explain that?

A: I think that a lot of times, when people think that they're empty in the particular life they're living, they think they're empty,

period. But we're empty because we're denying what's there. I think the love is already there, the gift is already there, even the means are already there. But we're blocking it. There's a fullness I'm meant to experience in my soulful life, my creative life.

Q: You also wrote, "Desire will take you beyond every limitation. Unless you limit your desire." Why do so many of us defend our limits practically to the death? How do we finally drop them or get past them?

A: Sometimes you limit yourself so much, it creates that volcano effect where there's so much pressure you just have to bust out. It's like, God, I'd rather live with the unknown than live with this any more. So I think some of the letting go just happens organically. For me, the more I started following the things I loved, or the things I secretly craved, they came to fruition, or graceful circumstances happened to support me. It helped me to start believing it more, to trust that voice, inclination by inclination. Either you get so frustrated that you go beyond those limits, or you've tasted that love and seen it work, so you start trusting it more.



Q: A lot of us look at our life's purpose only in terms of what we do to make a living. But it seems to me that it's almost more about being rather than doing, about being your calling rather than doing it.

A: I am still awed that I literally get paid to be me, to be in experiences that I would pay for. I lead women's and "creating the work you love" retreats, and I meet fascinating, visionary people. And I get paid. I don't feel like I'm working. I feel like I'm sharing my love and being given to in every minute. The fact that I have an income from it just stuns me. I think it's what's natural, what's supposed to be. I think it's supposed to be this effortless. We all have these incredible gifts we're sitting on. I personally believe that the Universe will support you in where you're truly meant to be.

Q: Since our lives spring from our beliefs, how can changing our beliefs allow us to create the lives and work we desire?

A: That's everything! I tell my clients that beliefs aren't facts, but they can limit you like facts. For instance, I grew up believing that creative people don't make

money. I just assumed that to be true, so I never even pursued anything creative. Then one day I was watching this movie, and thought that this actress is being paid a million dollars, and she's creative. It busted that paradigm. It's opening up to a different paradigm, questioning every assumption you have. For instance, there's this assumption that I have to work hard and kill myself to make money. In following a calling, I think it's the exact opposite. Creativity doesn't come through hard work. It comes through relaxing deeper and deeper, and listening. So I think you start opening up to these other beliefs, and you start having these other experiences. To me, that really is the work of creating the work you love, changing those beliefs.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: Yes. I'd love everyone to consider this: if you're successful doing work you don't love, what could you do with work you do love? I always think, God, what could this planet be if everyone was working wholeheartedly? That's my excitement. I want to see everyone living their calling. •