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Claire Perkins

Turtle Soup

The Creative Journal Expressive Arts program, developed by Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D.³, is one of the many synchronistic opportunities that arrived at just the right time to prepare me for and help me through the loss that was to come.

I found the program as I was searching for the next step in my life and work. Reaching a stage of total burnout, I had left my career in computer programming in the late 90's. I was tired of working for a paycheck instead of doing something I could be passionate about. I was very interested in the connections between science and spirituality, the implications of quantum physics, and consciousness as a creative force. I returned to school and completed an interdisciplinary studies degree in religious studies and philosophy, with an emphasis on bridging science and spirituality.

As I was gearing up for final exams and graduation at the end of 2002, my mother became very ill. She was diagnosed with kidney failure and was put on dialysis. During the first part of 2003, I was deeply involved in caring for her, so I didn't make much progress on developing a new career path. As the summer of 2003 arrived, I was determined to get back on track with creating my future.

The work that most interested me revolved around human development and potential. I wanted to find an avenue through which I could teach people how to follow their hearts to find fulfillment in life. The teacher always teaches what she herself seeks to find.

I stumbled across Dr. Capacchione's work when I found her book, *Visioning: Ten Steps to Designing the Life of Your Dreams*⁴ during the summer of 2003. The amazing process outlined within the book combines the art of collage with journaling to create a powerful, tangible, organized path for activating the Law of Attraction, which says that we attract into our lives the things upon which we focus. I was determined to follow the steps in the book to create a vision for my own future.

When synchronicities appear in my life, I've learned to tune in. It is the Universe's way of getting my attention and signaling that I'm on the right path.

Just before I created my first Visioning®⁵ collage, I had a powerful dream.

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Turtle Soup

I'm sitting on top of a box. There is a turtle inside and I think about catching him to make soup. But the turtle is pushing up on the lid of the box trying to get out and it's scaring me. I'm afraid to reach in. I am calling for someone to help me get the turtle. They are telling me to just reach in and grab it. But I am afraid. If I get off the top of the box, he'll come right after me and devour me. I get very scared and start yelling for help. I wake up yelling.

My thoughts after the dream were that something in me was boxed in—something that I was both drawn to (wanting to make soup, which would nourish me) and terrified of (will I eat the turtle, or will it eat me?). I thought this had to do with the real me wanting to follow where my heart would lead despite all the practical considerations of income and security. Was I ready to walk the talk? Or was I willing to stay in the box of status quo and comfort zones?

Two days after the Turtle Soup dream I began to gather magazine photos and phrases for my first collage. The very first magazine I picked up was an old issue of *Science & Spirit*. Opening the magazine at random, I saw an article titled “God, Physics and Turtle Soup.”⁶ I was delighted and intrigued to see the theme of turtle soup begin to repeat itself. The photo of the turtle from that article became a part of my collage. I placed him coming from behind a tri-fold screen that I labeled with the phrase, “Out of the Box.”

There was much more to the collage, of course. All of it focused on my vision for my future life's work. It included images of teaching, writing books, working from the heart, opening to Spirit and finding success, joy and fulfillment.



I spent a long time on this first collage—much longer, I would learn, than is necessary or even desirable. I was pretty stuck in my left brain, analyzing every image and word, laying things out in little disconnected groups. The process is meant to take no more than a day, and can be done easily in as little as two hours. As I've worked with Visioning® over time, I've discovered it's more effective to work fast and let the images guide you rather than the other way around. It is meant to be a truly right-brained, organic process. At any rate, I spent about a week, a few hours each day, completing my first vision.

The day that I finished the collage, the Daily Guide entry in my *Science of Mind* magazine told a fable about a man named Chuang-tse, who was relaxing by the river one day when one of the king's men came along and invited him to take an important, prestigious and well-paid position at the castle of the king. Chuang-tse asked the

messenger if it was true that the king had a rare 2000-year-old tortoise that he kept in a silk-lined box in the castle. The messenger said it was true. Chuang-tse then asked the messenger whether he thought the tortoise would be happier in the silk-lined box or wallowing in a mud hole. The messenger replied, in the mud, of course! Chuang-tse told the messenger to leave him alone, because he would rather flap his own tail in the mud than be trapped in the castle. Thanks, but no thanks to the job!⁷

So, here was the turtle again, encouraging me to get out of the box and stay out of it. With a trilogy of turtles in a week's time, I knew that I must be on the right track.

The Visioning[®] process was amazing. The collage I created gave me such a feeling of clarity and excited expectation for the road ahead. After using the book to create my first collage, I knew this would make a terrific workshop that could empower everyone it reached. It was exactly the kind of work I would love to teach.

I searched for more information about Dr. Capacchione, the author, and found she offered a certification program called Creative Journal Expressive Arts (CJEA): an intense year of study to train and certify instructors in all of her expressive arts and journaling techniques. This was an impressively broad body of work that went far beyond the single process of Visioning[®]. All of the processes were geared toward self-discovery, personal growth and healing. I knew right away I had found the next step on my path and I signed up for the first available start date, which was October of 2003.

A few months after I completed this first collage, Cameron was arrested on charges of selling crystal meth to an undercover agent. The sale had actually taken place almost a year before, but that's the way undercover operations work. They want to follow the trail as far as it will take them before blowing their cover.

Even though Cameron had been trying to turn his life around (he'd moved into a halfway house and was attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings) his past was about to catch up with him. Crystal meth is classified as a dangerous substance, and rightly so; it is one of the most addictive drugs out there. Cameron was charged with selling crystal meth in an amount three times the threshold level, making his offense a Class 2 Felony. Even as a first offense, that

could carry a very hefty sentence. For now, he was in the county jail awaiting arraignment and trial.

Visiting a child in the county jail is no picnic. It is one of the most demeaning and heartbreaking things I've ever done. Sheriff Joe Arpaio, the Sheriff of Maricopa County and overseer of the county's jails, has gained national notoriety as the toughest sheriff in America. He prides himself on dressing prisoners in pink boxers, feeding them green bologna and housing them in tents. This was the system in which Cameron now found himself.

There is no sense of human dignity there. It is as if simply being *charged* with a crime is enough to strip you of all your rights. The idea that one is assumed innocent until proven guilty is a myth. Being related to someone "inside" means you are just as bad. Waiting to get in for a visit can take hours. You have to remove all of your jewelry and dress according to a strict dress code: no sleeveless or low cut blouses, no shorts or short skirts. You get to sit across a table from your inmate, but no touching is allowed. Guards are posted all around the visitation room and your conversation is monitored.

I only visited twice. I just couldn't handle it. If it was this hard just visiting, I couldn't imagine what it must be like being detained inside.

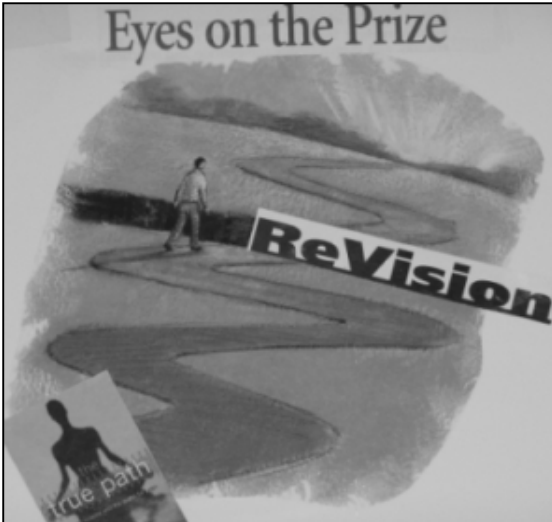
At first we thought it best not to post bail for Cameron. We thought that maybe he needed to stew in his own juices for a while and really think about what a mess he'd made of his life. But we learned that the court system moves very slowly. If he had to stay in jail until his sentencing, it could be six months or more. After attending some of his preliminary hearings, I also became aware of how differently a judge looks at an inmate in a jumpsuit and handcuffs versus someone in street clothes facing the same charges. Eventually we put our house up as collateral and posted bail.

In the months of summer and early fall, I had dream after worrying dream about Cameron: Cameron being chased by the police, Cameron hiding in a crawlspace, Cameron accidentally shooting himself in the head. There were other dreams that I didn't relate to Cameron that may have been warning me just the same, like the one where I started out on a journey from an airport and ended up bringing flowers to a funeral.

I was just beginning a journey, a journey to personal freedom and authenticity. It is sadly ironic that just as I began to climb out of my

box, Cameron was sinking ever deeper into a box from which he would never escape. Somehow my freedom and his bondage were all entangled. Both my freedom and his would come with the price of his death.

Was that the only way it could have happened? I don't know. I only know that's how it did happen.



Interestingly, one of the images in that first collage showed a winding pathway with a big, black chasm breaking through the path about halfway to the glowing light at the end of the journey. At the top of the image, I had glued the phrase "Eyes on the Prize."

At the time it meant to me that I might encounter a few obstacles on the way to my destination, but that I could choose to persevere and keep my eyes on the goal. Looking at it now I see yet another precognition of the very dark journey awaiting me, a journey that would begin with Cameron's death, which would occur almost exactly half way through my CJEA training year.

When I look at that image now, it is the word "ReVision" that jumps out at me. Cameron's death would lead me, over time, to look at *everything* differently.

