

# The Gift of Knowing

*you*

Discovering  
the Power  
of Your Story

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The internal critic often quickly ruins self-esteem, developed after some reckless and painful word claimed from some factor in our past, and the scoreboard maintains a tally of the triviality that sustains such a declaration!

—James Nussbaumer

Dear Reader,

When I was 8 years old, one day while helping me with my homework, my father said, “You don’t know the answer? What are you, stupid?” One mean-spirited rhetorical question altered the trajectory of who I was supposed to be and how I valued myself. It is my earliest memory of where my downward spiral of insecurity, self-doubt, and emotional turmoil began. But it also served as the foundation for my resilience, the reason I developed my internal cheerleader voice, and the basis for my self-love and the self-care I practice today.

While questions can be disruptive, they can also be the vehicle for personal discovery that allows the truth of who we are to surface so we can evolve. By asking myself questions, I was able to view my story through various lenses, helping me understand the bigger picture, heal my emotional wounds, and transition into a place of forgiveness, appreciation, and contentment. My answers enabled me to create a life rooted in thankfulness, with an appreciation and reverence for life’s tiniest moments. The process required my stillness, focus, and the tenacity to reverse the rage. Questions are powerful; they can open doors to our destined greatness.

The questions presented in this book are a springboard for you, the reader, to begin examining your story through different lenses. The acknowledgment of all our experiences, our backstory, can add value to our lives and serve as inspiration to others. Inspiring you to reflect on who you are and what truly matters is my gift to you.

*Love and Blessings,*  
*Joselyn*

“

There is no greater gift  
you can give or receive  
than to honor your calling.  
It's why you were born.  
And how you become most  
truly alive.

—Oprah Winfrey

## CHAPTER I

# PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

The greatest gift you can receive is the knowledge of who you are. *The Gift of Knowing You* is intended to spark the realization of your truest essence, giving you clarity on what makes you who you are, unlike no other. Discovering how you see yourself, recognizing your personal greatness, and realizing your life purpose are the objectives of this journey. The only requirement for you to receive this priceless gift is your willingness to dwell within.

In this book, I will guide you through a creative process of discovering who you are from the inside out. You'll recognize what captivates your attention and why. The questions scattered throughout the book are intended to spark internal dialogue as you travel along your discovery journey. You will also find creative play and exploration activities. Creative self-discovery is not about making stuff; rather it's about finding a mode of self-expression that speaks to you. It's listening to your inner voice. It's getting lost in the doing. It's about providing food for your soul and creating the pathway to your authentic self.

The "we" in the pages that follow refers to you and me because I'm on a journey right alongside you. To help you navigate more easily, I share parts of my personal journey thus far. Keep in mind, life journeys are ongoing,

a continuum, an evolution, and a testament to a fulfilled life.

Before we embark, let's consider three important factors that will help maximize a successful journey. The first is mindfulness. Mindfulness is being present with your thoughts and feelings, while being aware of what's going on around you. It's the ability to stay focused on what you are doing as you are doing it, independent of your life circumstances. Past hurts, worries, and responsibilities are kept at bay as you process each moment. The past is the past, and the future is yet to be. The present moment is the equalizer that levels the playing field. Regardless of economic status or the level of success achieved, the present moment is all any of us truly have.

Perhaps mindfulness can be better understood by providing a few examples of what it is not. It's not completing your morning routine and later wondering, "Did I ...?" (fill in the blank with any of your morning tasks). It's not getting to your destination and wondering how you got there. It's not formulating your response while another person is still talking. It's not replaying past moments or anticipating future ones.

Instead, mindfulness is disengaging from autopilot and bringing your awareness to what is unfolding before your eyes in real time. Bringing your awareness to the present moment is the easy part. Staying in the present moment can be quite arduous, as there are so many distractions vying for your attention. How you remain in the present moment is an individual strategy that can develop over time. Exercise 1, at the end of this chapter,

offers suggestions to help you begin flexing your mindfulness muscle.

The second factor is self-awareness. According to Merriam Webster, self-awareness is “an awareness of one’s own personality or individuality.” Collectively, your personality, emotions, strengths, weaknesses, beliefs and motivations comprise your individuality. When attuned to each of these areas, you are in the best position to understand who you are and operate in a way that serves you. You know exactly what you are thinking, what you are feeling, and most important, you know why.

The foundation of self-awareness rests on your ability to be vulnerable and examine your experiences. This might be difficult. It might involve reliving a painful part of your life. Although it’s challenging to reflect on unpleasant experiences objectively, they can offer great insight into who you are today. The more you connect the dots between the past and present, the more self-aware you become.

Another important factor of self-awareness is being aware of the impact your words and actions have on others. In real time, you are cognizant of their facial expressions, verbal responses, and body language. These observational cues can offer insight into the quality of your interactions and the degree to which you are received.

Our ability to self-assess and self-monitor lessens the chance of knee-jerk reactions. Reactionary responses, behaviors, and unexplained emotions can cause distress, uneasiness, and inner turmoil. It can allow unsettling and

unproductive thoughts to run rampant. With self-awareness, you are operating from a place of mental clarity, giving yourself the headspace to navigate life with intention. Self-awareness is like a muscle. To strengthen the muscle requires mindfulness and honest self-assessment. The more you exercise it, the stronger it will become.

The third factor that will help you along your journey lies in your ability to question yourself. Questions are powerful. They encourage thought and reflection. As you question yourself, be mindful and aware of your reactions and how you respond. Your responses to the questions in this book can provide you with your roadmap for living your authentic life.

Like questions, quotes are powerful too. They help solidify an understanding capable of leaving an indelible imprint on your mind and, even more important, a lasting impression on your soul. I have included quotes throughout the book to inspire and encourage you to be on the lookout for other meaningful quotes as you travel along your journey.

With mindfulness, self-awareness and self-reflective questions, the process of self-discovery is easier. You are in the best position to identify what's important, what matters, and your unique recipe for harvesting your joy. As you grow and evolve, your recipe for joy will likely morph and change as well. As you strengthen your connection to "self," you will also find that ordinary moments become extraordinary. Are you ready to begin your gifted journey of discovery? Let's start with the first of three major questions: Who are you?



Self-awareness is our capacity to stand apart from ourselves and examine our thinking, our motives, our history, our scripts, our actions, and our habits and tendencies.

—Stephen Covey

## EXERCISE I

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### FLEXING YOUR MINDFULNESS MUSCLE

One of the best ways to begin exercising your mindfulness muscle is to turn off your autopilot. Here are a few suggestions that will help you reinforce your connection to the present moment:

- Brush your teeth or write with your nondominant hand.
- Change the order in which you put on your clothes.
- Take a new/different route than you normally would to your next destination.
- Count how many different smells or sounds you encounter on your next walk.
- Acknowledge and document any daily experiences that make you smile.
- Consider keeping a mindfulness journal centering on a goal you want to achieve. Schedule a few minutes in your day to write a short entry that focuses on your reflective thoughts, progress, and feelings as you work toward your goal.

Switching up your usual routines will help you to stay focused on what you're doing moment to moment.

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Mindfulness isn't difficult.  
What's difficult is to  
remember to be mindful.

—John Teasdale, Research Scientist

“

At the center of your being  
you have the answer; you  
know who you are, and you  
know what you want.

—Lao Tzu

## CHAPTER 2

### WHO ARE YOU?

If you were asked, “Who are you?” would you be able to respond without referencing family title, marital status, job title, life responsibilities, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or any other common descriptor? What would you do in lieu of family, career, and financial and life responsibilities? Shop till you drop, travel, volunteer? And after you tire of retail therapy and traveling the world, then what? Not sure? Guess what? You’re not alone.

It’s easy to get attached to our job titles and life roles. Think about when we’re out socializing. Our name, connection to the host, and vocation are the usual conversation starters, as in the following example:

“Hi, my name is Eileen. I’m Barbara’s sister.”

“Hello, I’m Adrienne, nice to meet you. Barbara talks about you all the time. You live in New York, right?”

“Yes, I’m a stay-at-home mom of two boys who keep me busy 24/7. How about yourself?”

“Barbara and I used to work together.”

“Oh, are you a teacher?”

“Not anymore. I left the classroom to take on an administrative role. I have two children. My son is a junior, and my daughter is a senior in high school. Hard to believe my husband and I will soon be empty nesters.”

Without realizing, we place ourselves in neat little boxes and categories so that the rest of the world instantly knows who we are. When we do this, we stifle, limit, and lose sight of the most unique and interesting parts of ourselves. Not only do we lose, but the world loses too.

When our everyday tasks don't align with who we are, we disengage. Autopilot kicks in. Life becomes blurred, and we lose sight of the importance of each present moment, one by one. Unfulfilled moments turn into unfulfilled hours. Unfulfilled hours turn into unfulfilled days. Unfulfilled days turn into unfulfilled years. Our connection to our self erodes. We might accomplish a lot, but it doesn't necessarily resonate with our soul.

What are some indications that you've lost that connection? Your responsibilities have turned into mindless routines rather than welcomed opportunities. You feel as though you're existing rather than thriving, or a piece of your puzzle is missing. Knowing who you are and what inspires you has become a distant memory. A part of you lies dormant, yearning for something more. And for some, it's possible the puzzle was never completed; the connection was never made and will need to be

discovered for the first time. If you're experiencing any of the above, a discovery process is in order to eliminate the void. Your unique specialness is waiting to be discovered or rediscovered by you.

Think about what is important to you, what you want to bring to the world, and the impact you wish to make. How do you want the world to be different because of your existence? What is your unique something that you, and only you, can offer? Where do you find joy? Exploration, growth, and evolution are paramount to establishing and maintaining a personal connection with our self. Celebrating who we are and nurturing our unique qualities every day are requirements for personal restoration. Unsure what that extra special something is? Welcome to the first major stop on your self-discovery journey.

## **Connecting with What Makes You Uniquely You**

The qualities that make you unique are the greatness within you. But sometimes our greatness gets dismissed or devalued. Other times, our greatness gets buried, untapped, or ignored, and we must work to bring it to the surface. Gifting yourself your full attention allows you to develop a relationship with your inner self, giving you the opportunity to identify the special qualities that make you who you are.

The conversation between Eileen and Adrienne at the beginning of the chapter would be quite different if the exchange moved away from their life responsibilities and focused more on how they self-express and connect to

who they are by engaging in activities they love. It would sound more like this:

“Hi, my name is Eileen. I am Barbara’s sister.”

“Hello, I’m Adrienne, nice to meet you. Barbara talks about you all the time. You live in New York, right?”

“Yes, I do. What a fabulous top you’re wearing. The color palette is so beautiful. Would you mind if I snapped a pic? I would love to add it to my inspiration wall.”

“That’s right, you paint. With all the inspiration you probably encounter walking the streets of New York, I am honored that my top inspires you. I was in New York not too long ago, and I was mesmerized by everything. I went to the Museum of Art and Design. Blown away. I didn’t want to leave.”

“Oh, that’s my favorite museum!”

“I’m including it in a piece I’m writing.”

“You’re a writer?”

“Yes, my urge to write was a natural extension from my journaling practice. Journaling opened me to all these story ideas swirling around in my

head. I felt this unrelenting push to explore those ideas and do something with them. I'm attending my first writers' group next week. I can use the feedback and desperately need to be in the company of other writers."

"That's so wonderful! But how do you find the time to write with your demanding job?"

"I squeeze it in as best I can. I think about content ideas while I'm commuting to and from work. Sometimes I research plot settings during my lunch hour. That way, when I sit down in the evenings to write, it just flows."

"Nice."

"And what's your secret, Ms. Stay-at-Home-Mom? How do you find the time to paint with your two active boys?"

"Well, I've tried a lot of things, but what works best for me is waking up before everyone else. The house is quiet, I'm rested, and, like magic, the paintbrush just dances along the canvas."

"Well, I am just going to have to check you out on Etsy."

"And I look forward to reading your book one day."

“I’m going to be in town for a couple more days. Have any suggestions for creative places to visit?”

Did you notice that the conversation now revolves around activities, like painting, writing, and exploring? When you move beyond the day-to-day responsibilities and talk about what inspires and motivates you—what makes you uniquely you—it sparks a very different conversation and allows us to connect on a deeper level. Next time you’re out socializing, how about initiating a different conversation? What topics can you discuss other than the usual conversation starters, like in the first exchange in this chapter? Think about what inspires you. Maybe it was something you read or an experience you connected to deeply that changed your perspective on life. Or perhaps you started a new hobby or activity or just achieved a goal. Challenge yourself to go beyond the usual surface talk.

We can nurture our relationship to self by stepping away from our familiar life roles and embrace the uncertainty of new experiences. Whether it’s elevating our conversations, entering a competition, taking a class or attending a talk outside the realm of our usual interests, or organizing a gathering around a shared interest, we can spread our wings and explore and create new ways of being. Remaining mindful of our thoughts and feelings as we navigate through these uncharted territories, we gift ourselves the opportunity to gain additional insight into who we are.

## EXERCISE 2

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### ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY ASSESSMENT

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Think about your present-day responsibilities, activities, and tasks. As you engage in your life activities, do your best to be present with how and what you are feeling and whether it elevates you. Do you look forward to some and resent others? It might be helpful to write them down along with a brief comment about how each one makes you feel. If you're a numbers person, consider rating each responsibility with respect to the personal satisfaction you experience carrying out each role on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most satisfying and 1 the least satisfying. If you dislike certain aspects of your job or family life, be honest. The purpose of this exercise is to begin extracting accurate clues about how your present-day validates (4s and 5s) or detracts (1s and 2s) from who you are.

You can download a “Role and Responsibility Assessment” worksheet at <https://joselynsmith-greene.com/book-downloads>.



“

You can't really know  
where you are going  
until you know where  
you have been.

—Maya Angelou

## CHAPTER 3

### WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

**A**fter you assessed your life responsibilities by completing Exercise 2 in Chapter 2, you likely gained insight into what aligns with who you are and what doesn't. How about life in general? Do you look forward to each day, or do you feel like you're just doing time? Even when everything is falling in place and you're achieving your life goals (e.g., graduation, job, marriage, children, promotion, homeownership, entrepreneurship), you might still feel a residue of emptiness lingering inside. A range of reasons could be to blame, but sometimes it's because your backstory affects your present story. To benefit and learn from your backstory and understand where you are now, you need to be mindful of where you've been. This is something I know about all too well, because once I allowed my backstory to overshadow my joy.

#### **Backstory Reflections**

I was in my late 20s when I began reflecting on my backstory. I was sick and tired of feeling and reliving the emotional upset that occurred at the mere mention of my father's name or by being in his presence. My father was a stranger to me.

As I mentioned previously, my earliest memory of the discord between my father and I occurred when I was

around 8 years old. He was helping me with my homework. When we came to a question I was unable to answer, my father's response was: "You don't know the answer? What are you, stupid?" The tears welled in my eyes, and my young brain soaked up his comment like a sponge. I spent years trying to prove him wrong and convincing myself that I was worthy of his esteem.

My father was kind to the outside world and abusive to his immediate family, yet brilliant at maintaining the facade of a happy family. Abandoned by his mother, he was raised by a foster mother who was physically and emotionally abusive. My father's unresolved pain and anger prevented him from achieving any sense of normalcy as a parent. He had the innate ability to poke at my insecurities—to make me feel ugly and less than. It was an uphill battle as I struggled to deal with the emotional abuse. I desperately wanted and needed him to be my cheerleader, but it wasn't until much later that I realized he was incapable of this.

I feared my father. I can't remember a time when his presence didn't trigger an unpleasant visceral reaction; my stomach would clench and my chest would tighten immediately in his company. You never knew what would set him off. One day, when my father came home from work, he became enraged because the bedroom I shared with my sister was a mess. Yelling at the top of his lungs, he slapped his hand so hard on the desk that when he lifted his hand, it was covered in blood. It was that kind of constant insanity and misplaced aggression that rocked my young world.

His belittling and inappropriate remarks continued to fuel my insecurities. It was exhausting trying to figure him out or develop enough armor to shield against his unkind words. As I grew older, his presence began to incite disgust and anger in me. It hurt too much to be around him, and I began to count down the years when I could escape to college.

### **The Mother Who Couldn't See**

In addition to the tumultuous relationship with my father, I didn't feel like my mother was in my corner, either. Even though she witnessed his sharp tongue, she would tell me not to upset myself. How could I not be upset? How was I supposed to dismiss his hurtful words? She didn't see or realize the effect they were having on me. I started to suppress my feelings, and the rage inside me was often unbearable.

When my mother went back to school to pursue her graduate degree and worked full time after graduation, I was overburdened caring for my younger brother and assuming the household responsibilities. While my friends were socializing and participating in after-school activities, I was running home to take care of him. If my brother wasn't fed and his homework completed by the time my mother arrived home, it was a major problem. By the time I finished attending to him and cleaning up the dinner dishes, it would be very late. I stayed up into the wee hours trying to complete homework assignments and keep up with my studies. I often operated on three to four hours of sleep. My home responsibilities coupled

with my learning challenges made life difficult. To my dismay, I allowed my mediocre grades and standardized test scores to define me. No matter how hard I tried, my efforts never translated into the grades I wanted to achieve or deserved. It was a constant blow to my self-esteem. I felt defeated, angry, and alone.

Living in an unhappy home, saddled with way too much responsibility and no release or means to decompress compromised my health. The constant angst kept my stomach tied in knots. The result was many trips to the doctor and a litany of medical tests. At one point, I was diagnosed with colitis and prescribed mild tranquilizers. I took them, but they didn't provide the relief I desperately needed. No medication could repair the emotional pain I was suffering. At one of my lowest points, in desperation to stop the pain, I swallowed a handful of the pills, hoping not to wake up. But I did.

## **The Road to Healing**

It took me years to unravel, dissect, and understand the emotional trauma I endured. I was tired of feeling rage when I thought about my childhood. I knew I had to deal with the pain, address my brokenness, and work on forgiveness. I journaled my way through a lot of the hurt, read self-help books, and practiced the spiritual healing practices like forgiveness and self-care presented on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Collectively those three things saved me. There will always be reminders or triggers that cause the pain to surface. The word "stupid" always makes my stomach clench. My reaction is a conditioned response.



And the day came when  
the risk to remain tight in a  
bud was more painful than  
the risk it took to blossom.

—Anais Nin

But with mindfulness, I can acknowledge the discomfort, then let it go. The work to remain whole never ends.

Not too long before his death, I could sense my father coming around. Perhaps it was a sign of his self-reflection and self-forgiveness coming to light. As foreign as it was to hear, he would utter words of encouragement in my direction, but it was too little too late. After spending my childhood watching him empower and cheer on others while desperately trying to be the source of his esteem, his kind words fell upon deaf ears. I had already begun perfecting the craft of being my own cheerleader to survive the rage and emotional rollercoaster I had been on for so long.

I continued journaling and making peace with my broken past. I wanted to be better, not just for myself but for my children as well. I have been truthful with my children about my childhood struggles and unhealthy relationship with my father. I wanted them to know that darkness doesn't have to last forever; light is inevitable if we allow it in. It is only when forgiveness reigns that your heart can begin to heal.

Journaling encouraged self-reflection and self-awareness, opening the door to realizing and understanding my emotions. You become aware of what's important, what matters, and what you value. You realize your strengths and your weaknesses and what motivates you. You get to the heart of who you are, strengthening the connection to your inner self. What I love most is that self-reflection affords me the headspace for my creativity and thought processes to soar without limits.

## **A Revelation**

When I reached adulthood, I realized your personal best is all that matters. What I know now is that every individual blossoms in their own way and time. For me, it was during my graduate studies at New York University. Married, expecting my first child, working full time, and taking a full course load, my plate was full. Finally, my grades reflected my efforts. My graduation was one of the most defining and affirming experiences in my life, a true indication and measure of who I am. I was never so proud to walk the line with my first-born son in tow. I was my own victor.

My graduation from NYU was the first one that my father attended. He conveniently went missing for my high school and college graduations. Looking back, his absence was for the best, as it gave me the opportunity to enjoy those milestones without upset or pretense.

The irony of my educational challenges is that my father struggled in school too. I didn't find that out until after his death. When I perused his college transcripts, I was in disbelief. Had he been able to reconcile his own tumultuous childhood and come to terms with his own backstory, perhaps it could have made the difference in our relationship and eased my struggles as well.

## **Peace Starts Within**

What matters most is how we reconcile unpleasant life experiences. We can choose to allow the pain to consume us and lead us down a self-destructive path, to lash out at others, and/or rob ourselves of a purpose-driven life.

Or we can transform our pain and make a better life for ourselves, our loved ones, and the world. Choosing to ignore or wallow in our misery will leave us vulnerable to self-medicating with drugs, alcohol, food, gambling, shopping, hoarding, or any other activity that offers us a temporary escape. Choosing to acknowledge and deal with the pain requires self-care, self-love, and forgiveness. Finding a way to reconcile destructive thought processes, whether it's from professional help, spiritual guidance, or simply putting pen to paper, is a conscious decision. As uncomfortable as it may be, it's necessary to feel and acknowledge the pain in order to ascend out of our darkness, heal, and use our experiences in service to others.

I wish my father's emotional abuse wasn't part of my story. But it is. At the beginning of my healing, I realized I had to make a choice. I could allow it to eat me up and remain bitter. Or I could use it to fuel my transformation. Today, I affirm, "I'm worthy and I matter," even when I'm not feeling it—in fact, especially when I'm not feeling it. I know hope and faith will see me through. I know what I need to do to get me through life's not-so-great moments. By doing all the above, I was able to redirect my journey.

### **Stepping Stones to Transformation**

The purpose of Exercise 3 at the end of the chapter is to help you uncover the elements of your personal backstory. It is our backstories that make us unique. Because of my own struggles in school, I have devoted a significant amount of time volunteering in both my sons' schools. I felt compelled to be a voice for "underperforming"

students and initiate dialogue about self-esteem whenever possible. All students deserve to feel good about themselves regardless of their academic abilities. This connection between my backstory and my volunteer efforts is a perfect example of how to use painful experiences as stepping stones to serve others.

Perhaps you have heard Oprah profess her love for her fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Duncan. She had a tremendous impact on Oprah. Ms. Duncan instilled confidence in Oprah, making her feel she could take on the world and igniting a spark of lifelong learning. Oprah channeled her confidence, inspiration, and desire to teach into an iconic talk show—and became the teacher she always wanted to be. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and later the OWN network, has provided Oprah with the platform to educate viewers all over the world.

Singer and songwriter Christina Aguilera has been forthcoming with her childhood experiences. She grew up with a father who abused her mother. Witnessing the abuse left her feeling powerless and afraid. Her backstory is why Christina vows never to be financially dependent on a man and why she is proactive and vocal about domestic violence issues today.

Acknowledging, processing, and using our story is an important part of our journey. It requires us to self-reflect and evaluate all our life experiences. That means that we should not only recognize our “defining moments,” but also make peace with the hurt or disappointments we have suffered and any obstacles we have encountered as well.

### EXERCISE 3

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#### SELF-REFLECTIVE THOUGHT PROMPTS

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Your reflections are an opportunity to identify your defining moments, what you think is important, and what has had a great impact on your life. They are also the stepping stones to discovering who you are. Write a journal entry for the following questions about your childhood and early adult years:

- What's the hardest thing you ever had to do?
- What are you most proud of?
- What's your greatest accomplishment?
- What's an experience that changed you?
- What broke your heart?
- What's your greatest obsession?
- What's the hardest thing you have endured?
- What achievement showed you what you are capable of?
- What's the most important lesson you learned?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Who's your best friend and why?
- What's your favorite memory?
- What's your worst memory?

You can download the above “Self-Reflective Thought Prompts” at <https://joselynsmithgreene.com/book-downloads>.



The greatest gift that you  
can give yourself is a little  
bit of your own attention.

—Anthony J. D'Angelo, Author