

Chapter 16

“We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

— Thomas Paine

Stella couldn't imagine in a million years that she would be doing what she did—to have this opportunity presented in her life. It had all begun a few months earlier when she had gone to Stacy's to see the wedding pictures. She and Stacy had been sitting in the living room talking about her wedding when Stacy said, “You wouldn't believe where I was yesterday.” Stacy then told Stella about how her maid of honor had just bought a house and she wouldn't believe whose house it was. Somehow, Stella had known what Stacy was going to say. “Your old house you grew up in. You wouldn't believe that nothing has changed. Do you remember the place where you used to sit in the kitchen? It's the same. Nothing has changed.”

It felt so surreal that Stella couldn't say anything.

“Do you want to go see it?” Stacy then asked.

Stella didn't say anything for a while. She was thinking how much healing work she had done about her childhood, especially the time she was living in that house.

“Maybe,” she said. “Let me think about it.” She needed to think about whether she really wanted to go see the house or just keep her memories of the time she had lived there as it had been.

Stella texted Stacy a few days later to say she wanted to see the house, and after putting much thought into the opportunity, she said she wanted to see it on the next new moon. The new moon, according to myth, is a time of growing energy, newness, growth, renewal, and hope. It is a good time for making changes in one's life, such as ending bad habits or relationships.

Stella called Rachel to tell her about the situation, and they scheduled a session to help Stella create some clarity about how she wanted to handle going to her childhood home.

At the appointment, Rachel asked Stella what her thoughts were.

“I have done so much healing work around my childhood and specifically around the time of my life in that house.”

“Yes, you’ve done a lot of work with your childhood.”

“I was thirteen when we moved into that house. A lot happened there that took many years for me to heal. There is obviously something presenting itself for me to heal and let go.”

Rachel sat for a minute shaking her head. “Yeah, this is good, so let’s figure out what you need with this situation.”

Stella told Rachel about an image that kept coming up in her mind. “It was the white balloon incident at my brother’s funeral. The balloon never flew away.”

Rachel shifted in her chair and took a drink of tea. “What do you need to do in order to let go?”

Stella looked up. “I’m going to buy a white balloon and release it at the house.”

Rachel smiled. “Okay. When you get ready to go, hold the balloon and sit for a while. See what you remember about living in the house. Ask yourself whether you’re holding on to anything you’re not conscious of, and say, ‘Please help me to let go.’”

Stella sat up and looked at Rachel. “I remember I lived in that house from the age of thirteen to eighteen. Then I moved out, but I moved back in till the age of twenty-four. When I lived there, I felt lots of fear of being alone, not loved, and beaten. My mom was so abusive and my sister

always hit me; we got into many fights. My mom always ridiculed me and was not available emotionally. My parents got a divorce in that house. My beloved dog ran away. My sister moved out before I graduated from high school, and my brother died a tragic death.”

“That’s good information to work with when you sit with the balloon,” Rachel said, and then they said goodbye.

Stella prepared for that day. She got up early and went down to the local grocery store to buy a white balloon. She also got a light blue and a dark blue ribbon to symbolize a baby and a young adult. She bought her friend Stacy and herself Gerbera daisies. At home, before meeting with Stacy, Stella looked at the balloon tied to the dining room table. It was a typical Seattle day, cloudy and raining.

Stella had an hour before she needed to leave to meet Stacy at the house. Stella burned some sage and used her eagle feather to direct the cleansing smoke all over her body, which she had learned from Rachel. “God help me to stay grounded in my body so I can embrace anything that comes up so I can heal and let go,” she prayed. She gathered some cedar, sage, sweet grass, and a piece of bark off the birch tree in her yard; then she bundled everything inside the birch tree bark and wrapped the blue strings around it to make a bundle. As Stella waited in the house’s driveway, Stacy and Laurie, the owner of the house, drove into the driveway. Stella gave Stacy the flowers and gave her a hug; then she shook Laurie’s hand and chatted for a bit before Laurie unlocked the door to let them in. While Laurie opened the drapes in the living room, family room, and dining room, Stella couldn’t get over the stale, old smell of the house.

“No one had lived in the house for over two years,” Laurie said.

Stella walked into the foyer, holding the balloon in her right hand.

Laurie asked, “Why do you have the white balloon?”

Stella looked at Stacy. “Were you at my brother’s funeral?”

“Yes,” Stacy said.

Stella smiled. “Do you remember the white balloons we released that day?”

“Yes, why?”

“Well, that day my balloon didn’t release like everyone else’s did,” Stella said. “So while I felt like everyone else let go of Michael, I never did. Now I’m ready to do so.”

“Wow, you never told me that story,” Stacy said.

Stacy looked at Laurie. “Let’s go outside so Stella can have some time alone.”

They both left to sit in Laurie’s car. Stella stood in the foyer for a bit, and then her tears started up as she walked into the kitchen. The tears weren’t of loss; they were about the experience of coming into her childhood home after thirty years; she had never thought this would happen in her life. She took her time in the kitchen, mainly staring at the view. What a remarkable view the house had of the Olympic Mountains. She missed it so much. She went to her parents’ bedroom. She suddenly had a memory from right after her brother died. She had crawled into her mom’s bed one night to sleep with her. She wasn’t sure who needed whom that night, but it had been a painful time for both, and she hadn’t known how to comfort her mom or how to feel about her brother’s death.

Stella went into the master bathroom. She remembered the pink porcelain tiles all over the walls and floor. Even the sink and tub were pink. She went to the mirror and pulled the steel ring that fit so nicely onto one of the lights and remembered when her mom told her that just after Michael died, the steel ring had lifted up and dropped on the floor one morning when she was putting on her makeup. Stella had told her mom that it was Michael telling her that he was in the bathroom with her.

Stella went down the hall to the room next to the garage. She wanted to go into the garage, but there was an alarm system, so she wasn't sure whether she would set it off. The room had rocking horses painted all around the upper part of the wall. This must have been a baby's room. When Stella had lived there, it had been her dad's office, and he had spent more of his time there than anywhere in the house.

Then she went into Michael's bedroom. It was the best room in the house for the view of the Olympic Mountains. Stella spent the most time in that room. She remembered when her sister had called her to find the pot and money, and then the day after her brother had died when her mom went into his room and packed up all his clothes. And she remembered that night just after he died, when he came into her dreams and told her he was okay and rubbed her back—how it had all felt so real and how he had told her he was at peace. Stella thanked the heavens for that experience.

Stella walked downstairs where her and Lynn's bedrooms had been. She turned to the right just at the bottom of the stairs into the furnace room. She had always been scared of that room. Dark and dingy always gave her the creeps. Stella turned to the left and stepped down onto the

carpeted floor where the family room was. Right away, she thought of her dad sitting in one of the chairs. Robert was always in front of the TV on Sundays watching sports. Stella would lay on the floor with a pillow and fall asleep. Mainly, Stella was usually hung over from drinking too much the night before. The only window was below ground. The whole downstairs was three-quarters underground, so the only light that came in was close to the ceiling. It hadn't changed a bit, although the bar was gone and the door to the laundry room was replaced with one that didn't have a window, so it was very dark.

Stella went into Lynn's bedroom. When Lynn had moved out, Stella had made it into her bedroom. Suddenly, she remembered when her father had sat in the wicker chair and cried, asking her why her mother was divorcing him. Stella had felt so responsible for her dad's wellbeing. It was amazing that she had taken that on at such an early age.

Next, Stella remembered her boyfriends crawling into the window late at night after partying. She'd have sex with them while her parents were sleeping upstairs. Stella shook her head as she entered her old bedroom. The walls were as blue as Lynn's room was pink. She imagined the twin beds snuggled up against the north wall under the window and how dark the room was compared to Lynn's. The room had the energy of a dungeon, and it smelled and tasted musty. She went over to the window and could barely touch the bottom of the windowsill. No wonder she had felt closed in there as a teenager. Stella remembered how lonely, fearful, and anxious she had felt in that room. Stella could now feel some of the claustrophobia symptoms she'd felt in the room as a teenager, so she left the room and walked into the bathroom that Lynn and she had shared. The owners hadn't changed a thing; it was still forest green and had a bathtub/shower combination. Stella remembered sitting on the toilet, crying that day when Shirley came home to

find out that Michael had died. Stella had held on to her stomach and thought it should have been her. Immediately, her thoughts changed to how she no longer held that feeling about herself. All the work Stella had done with Rachel had given her the healing she needed to feel wanted and worthy to be alive.

Stella walked back upstairs and into the sunken living room. She remembered family holidays and hanging out with her friends, pretending they were in a band. Robert had hated when Stella used his record player. He would always tell her not to use his stuff. He used to come home drunk after work. One night, Shirley was gone somewhere, and Stella, Lynn, and Stella's friend Stacy were home alone. Her dad came home very drunk, walked in, and fell down the living room steps where her friend and she were sitting. His glasses flew off. Stella thought it was funny when her parents got drunk. They both entertained and drank a lot in that house. So did Stella.

The last room Stella went into was the family room, just off the living room. Even though it was a family room, she remembered it being a lonely place. None of the family ever spent any time together in this room.

As she walked through the house, Stella had been putting all the memories into the balloon for her ritual. Despite all the pain, abuse, and craziness that had gone on in the house, she felt grateful that it was such a lovely place to live. Stella walked back into the kitchen and had some sage left over so she placed it on the kitchen counter in gratitude to Laurie, Stacy, and this opportunity to heal any last thing Stella needed to let go of.

Then Stella walked outside to meet up with Laurie and Stacy.

“Nothing has changed in the house since I lived there,” Stella said.

“Did you see the cross from the church that your brother’s funeral was in?” Stacy asked.

“No, I didn’t know you could see a cross. Show me,” Stella said.

They all walked into the backyard as Laurie talked about how she was going to change the yard.

They stepped up onto the back patio just off the kitchen. This was one of Stella’s favorite spots in the whole house. Her friend Claire and she used to sleep outside on the patio.

“The whole eleven years I lived in this house, I never knew there was a cross you could see from the patio,” Stella said, looking out to see the cross.

Stella had one more thing to do. “Laurie, would it be okay if I stayed a bit longer?”

“Yes, of course,” Laurie said as she and Stacy walked out to the car in the driveway and drove away.

Stella stood on the patio for a while soaking up the view and thinking about the day of Michael’s funeral.

She walked down the cement steps to the lower yard as she had many years before, many times.

She stood in the place where she had stood thirty-one years before with the white balloon, and she recalled all the times she was scared, lonely, and anxious. The wind was blowing the broken clouds. A slight sprinkle splattered Stella as she thought about that day and remembered that white balloon.

She was not in a hurry, and she wanted to make the most of her experience. She let the breeze caress her and the sprinkles cleanse her. The wind came in with a force and whipped the balloon,

so she tightened her grip. She wasn't ready to let go yet. She asked herself whether there was anything she needed to let go of that she wasn't conscious of. She thought about how unworthy she felt in her family, how insecure, afraid of herself, of being alone, and not being worthy of love. Desperate for love, she took any abuse just as long as she felt loved and not alone. She put all these emotions in the balloon.

"I am not this person anymore," she said, over and over.

She gradually eased up on the string, feeling ready to let go. She faced west looking at the beautiful view and knew it was time to let go. She released the balloon. It flew up to the right, heading north, carried away quickly. She watched it till she couldn't see it anymore.

As Stella walked back to her car, she felt so grateful for the experience and the opportunity to walk through the house thirty years after she had been a pain-filled teenager and to come back full circle to let go.

Stella got into her car and yelled, "I am grateful. Thank you!"