

a compelling true story

OVER THE EDGE

How one woman learned to channel the Universe



CHRISTINA LOPES

OVER THE EDGE

How One Woman Learned to Channel the Universe

Christina Lopes

Graphic Design

Marcio Vitor

Editor

Julie Beun

Copyright © 2015 Christina Lopes

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Dedication

To Bernie, Idalina, and Carlos. Thank you for our journey together. How I love you.

Some names have been changed in order to protect the identities of those involved. All changed names are noted with an asterisk.

Introduction

Imagine standing on a stage in a filled stadium. Someone passes you a microphone.

You know that whatever you say will be heard all over the stadium and perhaps beyond. Now, imagine you can only say one full sentence before the sound is turned off. What would you say? What would be the most important thing you could tell a stadium full of people?

This book is about finding that one sentence. I now know exactly what I would say. But it has taken me years and a tremendous amount of effort to understand my message. I hope the words contained herein can serve as a compass of sorts—so that you may find your one sentence without traversing the same roads I did.

The truth is, finding that one sentence you would share with a stadium full of people may completely change their lives. But most importantly, it will change yours.

PART I: THE PRECIPICE

*“There are only two ways to live your life: One is as though nothing is a miracle;
The other is as though everything is a miracle.”*

Albert Einstein

CHAPTER 1: Little Miracles

When she was small, Christina Marie intuitively understood that everything was a miracle. All of nature fascinated her. As a toddler, she would disappear into the backyard of her California home, without anyone noticing. On one such occasion, her uncle went looking for her.

“Little Kool-Aid!” he shouted, using the pet name he still uses now. “Where are you?”

Eventually, he came upon her, squatting in the dirt, with her back turned to him. Suddenly, she stood up, holding something delicately in her hands. Looking up at her uncle, she held her treasure and asked her most pressing question: “How does the worm know where to go if she doesn’t have eyes?”

Even now, all these years later, my curiosity and love of the world around me—especially the natural realm—pervades my being. I can still feel my childish openness as if it were just yesterday. I lived life with endless enthusiasm, every new experience presenting itself as something extraordinary. Yet my open heart would also become the portal for things that would end up devastating my world many years later.

My earliest memory is one of my father carrying me in his arms while running around the house. I’m a toddler, wearing only a diaper. Around and around the house we went, my father leaping

from room to room, bouncing me violently in his arms. It was fun...and terrifying, because something was wrong. Terribly wrong. As Dad dashed and leapt, my horrified mother and godmother chased him, screaming in our native Portuguese for him to stop and put me down before he dropped me. "Put her down! Please put her down!"

Their fear became my own, although I suppose I instinctively knew my father was not okay. It was only later, when I was old enough to understand, that I learned the truth of what happened that day. Although normally a gentle and kind man, he also suffered from Type 1 Diabetes, which, when uncontrolled, led to severe bouts of hypoglycemia. The result was not only shakiness, anxiety and nausea, but a delirium and confusion that changed his personality. The rational, sensible farmer was replaced by an impatient, childish nightmare of a man who would spit in my mother's face as she desperately tried to feed him sugar cubes. And so, my first formed memory was colored by fear. Fear and I formed a bond that day, one that remained strong for many years. Now, I look back and wonder why I decided at such an early age to welcome fear as my trusted companion. Perhaps it was simply because my first memory proved to be a powerful imprint in my young brain. But by the grace of the Universe, Heaven, God (or whatever other name you may call it by), fear no longer holds me enslaved. It did, however, keep me shackled for more than 30 years.

Dad's frequent attacks would play a key role throughout my life. He was diagnosed with Type I diabetes when I was an infant, and although it was generally manageable with diet, lifestyle and daily insulin shots, he nevertheless struggled with it until it eventually took his life, at age 50.

It's difficult to explain why my father struggled so much with a disease that wasn't terminal. But he did. Looking back on his key personality traits gives me a small window into his inner world. Bernie—as his American friends affectionately called him—was a dashing man. He was athletic and could have easily been a George Clooney double. Their resemblance was so striking that for years after my father's death, I felt uncomfortable watching a Clooney flick. Added to his physical attributes were traits such as loyalty, warmth, stubbornness and a good old-fashioned Portuguese macho pride. In essence, Bernie looked good to the outside world and the idea that his body could possibly be fragile scared him. I guess what it all boiled down to was that my father was deathly afraid of being sick, so he completely ignored the disease that was slowly ravaging his body. Unfortunately, insulin-dependent diabetes isn't something you can simply ignore. So when Dad decided to pretend everything was okay, that left the rest of the family to deal with his illness.

From the outside, our lives seemed quite typical of the American dream. My paternal grandmother, whom I affectionately called “Vo” (a diminutive form of Grandma in Portuguese), immigrated from Portugal's Azores islands to California in 1959. I loved her fearlessness, rugged independence and her no-nonsense way of seeing life. Vo was the type of woman who could spend hours in the backyard gently talking to her beloved chickens, then suddenly show up in the kitchen with one of them, after a quick slaughter. “She stopped laying eggs, so now I'll make some chicken soup with her.” Just like that. But Vo also loved a good laugh, especially if it involved practical jokes that her children (my dad was legendary at them) played on others. It was through my paternal grandmother that I first learned not to take life too seriously. But

mostly I loved hearing, over and over, the story of how this short, feisty woman ended up in America.

Imagine it's the 1950s and you're a woman. Not just a woman, but a married woman with five children clinging to your apron strings. Now imagine you live on an island in the North Atlantic, 850 miles from mainland Portugal. The islands are a place of magical beauty, but also a part of an ancient Latin culture where machismo and patriarchy dictated how men and women interacted. What's more, you're poor and despite yearning for a better life, your options are very limited. If you were my grandmother Vo, would you do what she did next? After endless discussions, arguments and plans that involved a lot of anxiety for the future, Vo used her American passport, which she had because her father worked in San Francisco during the Gold Rush of 1848-1855. It sounds easy enough to achieve these days, but back then, a mother of five who left her entire family behind to seek her fortune was the subject of criticism and suspicion. In those days, only charlatans left their husbands and only weak husbands allowed it. But Vo didn't stop to think about those things. She packed her bags and, without knowing a word of English, boarded a plane first bound for New York. Somehow, she got lost at the airport, missed her connecting flight to San Francisco and relied on the kindness of a few strangers to get her to a hotel for the night. Vo was so terrified of being in New York. Surrounded by high rises and not even understanding what an elevator was, she spent the whole night sitting on her hotel room bed, without moving. The next morning, a hotel employee was kind enough to send her off to the airport again, where she finally boarded a plane bound for California. Once there, my grandma landed a job as the seamstress, making habits for a local group of nuns who operated a charity hospital in the Central Coast. And then, one by one, her husband and children joined her.

They worked hard, raised their children and later, helped raise us grandchildren from their house a few steps away from our own. Vo taught me Portuguese, how to cook and shared her recollections of her life in the Azores. My grandparent's home was always filled with music, good food, and laughter, all common characteristics of Azorean families.

Like my grandparents, my parents were hard working if uneducated people who were determined never to leave their children wanting. My father had lived in the US since he was a teenager, but Mama Idalina was "fresh off the boat." They had met in the Azores in the summer of 1976, when Dad came home on vacation, and dated long distance for a year before marrying in California. It was a completely different life for my mother, who was one of 14 children raised in abject poverty by her mother and her painfully alcoholic father. Before she arrived in the US, she'd worked long, tedious hours in a fish factory, her bare feet submerged in fish guts all day. For her, childhood was simply something to be withstood, but she would never be shy about using her experiences as a teaching tool for me and my brother Carlos. Through my mother, I learned of the burden and drudgery of poverty, the value of hard work and the even greater value of determination. My mom made a point of instilling in her two children that we could be whoever we wanted, regardless of where we came from. As I grew up and better understood the real strength she had, I knew that if she said I could achieve whatever I set my mind to, then I was absolutely going to listen to and live that truth.

Yet, behind the scenes of our regular family life was the omnipresent black cloud of my father's illness. I may never fully understand why, but he would not—or could not—better manage his condition. He neglected to monitor his blood sugar regularly, and at times, would inject himself

with the wrong amounts of insulin—triggering drops in glucose that would bring on the attacks. Even if he didn't comprehend the danger he put himself in, my mother and other adults in my life understood that a diabetic going through hypoglycemia for too long could simply slip into a coma and die. As a little girl, I didn't understand the medical aspects of his disease, but there was one certainty I felt deeply: I knew he was going to die a young man. I can't really explain how, at five, I knew this. I just did. And this "knowing" terrified me.

Of course, children can be very sensitive to energy around them, particularly the negativity that surrounded my father during one of his episodes. But sensing his fate went far beyond just 'a feeling I had.' Along with this "knowing", I had other quirks—I call them gifts now—that meant I could sense others' energy, could see and feel things that were not of this world and could understand that some people "carried" things with them that I didn't understand, but made me feel physically ill. Some children have imaginary friends and are quite happy about their encounters. Not me. I don't know what other children saw, but what I experienced terrified me. Perhaps it was because I already lived with the fear and anxiety of losing my father any day, but I realize in hindsight that I inadvertently attracted energies that were similar to my own. Without knowing it, my body was living the Law of Attraction.

The world of energy works much like meeting new people. Let's say you're at a party full of strangers and you strike up a conversation with someone. The conversation usually lasts if you find things in common to discuss. The other person becomes excited that you both share these common experiences and pretty soon...like attracts like. We bond more closely to those with whom we have lots in common. Likewise, when it came to the "world of energy" and my

experiences as a young child, my body was putting out a strong fear signal and as such, I was attracting the departed souls that identified strongly with fear. I would wake up in the middle of the night—a pattern that would occur more frequently as I grew up—terrified and suffering from wrenching stomach pain. I felt exactly like the little boy in M. Night Shyamalan’s movie, *Sixth Sense*. When I first saw the film, it struck a deep cord in me. It wasn’t exactly fiction to me. It was a pretty accurate description of what I felt in the middle of the night as a young child. In *Sixth Sense*, the little boy, played by Haley Joel Osment, wakes up and feels the temperature drop in the room before he sees the souls that have come to visit him. I don’t remember seeing souls in my room, but I felt a soul in the same way one can feel the warmth of a fireplace as you bring your hand close to the flames. Of course, this all makes sense to me now, but as a five-year-old, it just plain terrified me. Without making a commotion, I would quietly climb into bed with my parents. The only way to sooth my pain and fear was my father’s warm hand on my tummy. I was always in awe of Dad’s huge, sandpaper rough laborer’s hands. Yet only these hands could calm my nightmares.

By the time I turned seven, I began to understand just how broken our family was. The increasing frequency of dad’s attacks caused deep resentment in my mother. Mama was and is to this day an emotional hurricane. That is the first word that comes to my mind when I think of her. She has a soul that can move mountains and an energy so strong you can feel it from a distance. You can tell Mama Idalina is coming from a mile away because that’s how far her laugh travels. Boisterous, loving, kind, strong like a rock...and wildly passionate. But my father’s illness and his refusal to take care of his body caused a deep-seated, monstrous anger in her that I came to fear, too. I suspect she knew the love of her life was dying a little bit every day. She

knew the damage he was doing to his body and the suffering it caused. And she hated him for it. Her anger was most apparent right in the midst of dad's attacks. He would lose his mind, run away and refuse any attempts to give him sugar. She would chase him, screaming, nervous and angry. Even as a young child, I began to see how the combination of Mama's anger and Dad's craziness actually prolonged the diabetic attacks, rather than put an end to them. It was almost as though my father, in his altered mental state, could sense my mother's rage and reacted to it by provoking her even more. At times, my grandparents or aunt would rush over to help Mama deal with Dad.

Not surprisingly, the emotions created during Dad's health crises spilled over to everyday family life. Mere minutes after Dad would come out of a hypoglycemic upheaval, Mama would be quick to let him know just how angry she was. And the shouting would go on for a long time. My father's illness and his refusal to better care for himself was becoming a huge strain on their marriage. Sometimes, I tried to calm my mother down, just so the shouting would stop. I would slowly walk up to her and gently try to break up the fight by hugging her leg or letting her know I was there listening to it all. It was a clever little psychological trick for a small child and it did work, sometimes. But overall, my parents were too busy trying to keep their tumultuous marriage from falling apart to notice what all this trauma was doing to their children. My life felt like a land mine zone—a step in any direction could trigger an explosion. Unfortunately, all these observations and experiences laid the foundation for the development of my mental model and the closing of my heart.