

The Heroine's Journey, What's in a Name? Releasing Fear

Today I invite you to take a journey with me through the Heroine's Journey.

This is my journey. It does not necessarily need to be your journey, but my guess is that there are parts of my journey that are parts of every woman's journey.

The Heroine's Journey is different from the Hero's Journey. The Hero's Journey, of course, comes originally from Joseph Campbell. The Heroine's Journey is about releasing herself from all the patriarchal conditioning into which we women have been conditioned, and stepping into our own personal power and responsibility to serve this planet.

Some of you may have heard some of these stories before but not in this context. So, listen up because you are in a different place. The stories are being presented in the context of the Heroine's Journey, which gives them a different flavor. If you haven't had an opportunity to Google images for the Heroine's Journey, I encourage you to do that. It will give you an image of what I personally have moved through and perhaps a lot of the rest of you have moved through or are moving through now.

To begin with, here's a bit of background context.

As a child inhabiting a female body, I lived in a warm, loving family surrounded by grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. My parents were both teachers who had abandoned their own childhood religions of Methodism and Presbyterianism and adopted Unitarianism, because they were accepted into that community without having to make a commitment to any particular doctrine.

My father taught music at Central High School in Philadelphia. Classical music was constantly playing in our home. I hated it as a child. It wasn't till much later that I understood it and began to appreciate it.

My mother was an elementary school teacher. After dinner, we would sit around the table and play board games, or my mother would organize games outside among the neighborhood children.

In the summers, we took camping trips together as a family, or spent time together on the beach in Ocean City, New Jersey.

As a child, I took all these for granted and assumed that everyone had this kind of childhood. Now, I realize how very fortunate I was. This was not the norm for many others.

I loved school most of the time because it was fun and challenging. I was a topnotch student and always trying out new extracurricular activities: plays, courses, sextets, trios, editor of the junior high school newspaper, co-editor of the senior high school yearbook, swimming teams, both speed and synchronized swimming, and American Field Service summer exchange student to Berlin, Germany, during the Cold War.

But then, there were the dysfunctional events that shocked me that I didn't understand, given the beautiful little protective cocoon within which my parents had nurtured me.

Why in sixth grade did one of my male classmates ram his finger up my anus and then laugh with his buddy? Who did he think he was, invading my being without my permission?

Why did the junior high school teacher, responsible for the student newspaper, rewrite an editorial I had written on freedom of speech, and then insist on publishing it under my name? In outrage I exploded, "You wrote it! You put your name on it!"

Then I fled to the girls' room and sobbed for half an hour. Disrespecting a teacher was so out of character for me.

Then came high school. My mother, because of her own fears, had made it quite clear, in subtle ways, that my role in life was to find a husband, marry, live in a pretty little house with a white picket fence, have children, and care for my family — continuing the family tradition. God forbid that I should follow my own passions and interests and end up an old maid in a laboratory.

However, in high school, I almost never got asked out on a date. What was wrong with me?

I thought of committing suicide. I started dumbing myself down so boys would find me more attractive. They seemed to like the loud, stupid girls.

I have no idea what it feels like to live in a 16-year-old male body; but male friends have told me that, at that age, they spent at least half of their time thinking about sex. In a female body, at that age, I wasn't thinking about sex at all. I didn't even know much about sex, because my parents had never educated me. I was thinking about doing whatever I loved to do and fitting in with others.

(My youngest son, who has three teenage daughters, has commented that his job as a father is to protect his daughters from guys like him.)

I went to college, not to further my education, but to find a man who would marry an ugly duckling like me. I did finally fulfill my mother's wishes and married before I graduated from college. It felt as if it was my last chance.

On our wedding night, my husband was only interested in having as many orgasms as he could so he could go out and brag to his buddies about how masculine he was. Needless to say, I was not orgasmic. As hard as I tried to have an orgasm to please my husband, I just couldn't. Of course, I blamed myself.

Except for our sexual relationship, the rest of our marriage was relatively functional. I made sure of that by doing all the things society told me a good wife should do -- wash the clothes, cook our meals, keep the house clean and tidy, shop for food and household necessities, cut the grass, grow organic fruits and vegetables.

I worked and earned a bit of money until I became pregnant with our first son. Then I stayed home to give our three sons the same kind of nurturing that I had received as a child. We played games together and took walks together. I sang to them before they went to sleep and read them stories.

In the summers, we went to my husband's family home on Penobscot Bay in Maine. We sailed, we swam, we picked blueberries together, and sometimes we went to the beach in Ocean City, New Jersey.

My husband brought me flowers. We spent occasional weekends with both sets of parents, and during holidays, together as a larger family.

My personal call to adventure was a sudden, eye-opening, transformational experience, that I later learned I could call "a mystical experience." I wasn't looking for this experience and didn't expect it. It was a gift.

Here's the story.

I don't remember who came to my door. I don't remember what he said. I do remember he was angry.

I had just finished reading a book called *Summerhill* by an English schoolmaster, A. S. Neill. Its theme was freedom, not license. Each student in Neill's school was free to do whatever he wanted as long as the conduct didn't hurt someone else. The community Neill had created was a free, creative, loving, respectful, responsible interaction of unique human beings.

Recently, I had been involved in disciplinary battles with my preschool sons. The battles resulted in increasingly destructive behavior in them and increased frustration in me.

I decided to give Neill's methods a try with my own children and with other people in my life.

The man at the door wasn't hurting me. I decided to allow him to vent his anger. I didn't do it because it was something I *ought* to do. I did it because I *chose* to do it. I experienced acceptance of the anger and no desire to retaliate.

Suddenly, the anger stopped. Nothing changed. My house, the door, the living room, and the man were all still there, just as they had been five minutes before.

Yet everything changed. Suddenly, I understood the meaning of words I had been taught as a child in Sunday School. "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." That is from Matthew 5:39.

My five-year-old son began wetting the bed after his youngest brother was born. At first, I ignored the bedwetting. Perhaps it would disappear on its own.

When it didn't, I explained to Bill why he was too big a boy to wet the bed. He listened attentively, but the wetting continued.

I reasoned with him, threatened him, screamed at him, and spanked him. That is what my conditioning had taught me people did when somebody didn't do what they wanted them to do. But the wetting continued, and I felt angry and frustrated.

Neill frequently dealt with problem behavior by rewarding his students. Rewards for bad behavior didn't make sense, but nothing else had worked. Neill's ideas had worked with the man at the door. I decided to try them with the bedwetting problem.

The next time Bill wet the bed (I had no idea what I was doing. I just had a model to follow), I gave him a penny. He stared at me in confusion.

But the following morning, his bed was dry, and he never wet it again. My anger and frustration disappeared. What a powerful tool!

I began using Neill's ideas with neighboring children.

One day, two children were calling each other names in the backyard and threatening to fight. Instead of trying to stop them, I took each aside and asked him if he wanted to fight.

They both said the same thing. "I don't want to fight, but *he's* making me do it. *He's* calling me names."

"Do you want to fight?" I reiterated. "If so, go ahead and do it."

The boys mumbled to themselves and looked at the ground. They shuffled their feet and looked at each other out of the corners of their eyes. Two minutes later, they were playing happily together again.

What I was doing contradicted everything our patriarchal society had taught me, but it brought the peace and harmony I desired. Society had taught me to punish people for bad behavior, but

I didn't punish them. Society had taught me to resist evil, but I no longer resisted. Society had taught me to fight for peace, but I didn't fight. Instead, I simply detached from the anger and turmoil around me and allowed it to happen without responding to it.

The anger and turmoil dissipated, and my life and relationships worked. By allowing myself to remain peaceful and harmonious, everything around me became peaceful and harmonious.

I had always understood Matthew 5:39 as an unattainable moral commandment requiring subservience of my own needs to the needs of others. It wasn't that at all. It was extremely effective action I could take all by myself that benefited both me and others.

There was no self-denial in that action. There was nothing but self-affirmation and life affirmation. I had never before felt so free, so strong, so powerful, so integrated, so fully in control.

Nothing outside me changed. The only thing that changed was my own thoughts, actions and emotions.

What I experienced has been called a "mystical experience." As a child I had been taught to doubt, question, and trust my own judgment. My upbringing didn't include education about mystical experiences, but I knew that many religions included words about these experiences.

As I read William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and texts from Christianity, Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Hinduism, Plato, and existentialist philosophers, I could recognize my own experience in all the different words. It was as if different people were describing the same beautiful flower garden. Some talked about roses, some spoke of delphiniums, some noticed the color patterns, and some focused on the trellises and paths.

If I hadn't seen the flower garden and were just listening to the words, I would have thought that the people were talking about different things. Having seen the flower garden, I knew they were all giving verbal structure and form to the same underlying experience — just as our minds give form and meaning to the fixed lines of optical illusions.

I couldn't stop playing with these ideas. Was my life the same or was it different? Did I know or did I know nothing? I wasn't sure.

Are the religious words true or is each set of words simply a finger pointing toward the moon?

Is there a sense in which words are false idols?

Does the meaning of each set of words depend on the human consciousness that hears them and uses them?

Do words have meaning only in the context of particular experiences and mindsets?

Then, moving along the path of my Heroine's Journey, I moved into the "threshold to the unknown."

The unknown is a pretty scary place. But these experiences within the known world were so amazing that I had to tell others about them. The words came tumbling out of my mouth and were met with blank stares and uncomprehending faces. I was *talking*, but I was not *communicating*.

How could I use analytic, divisive words to communicate a unifying, holistic experience? That was the question that popped into my mind. It was like a Zen Koan. I felt driven to find the answer, but it was like trying to hammer a nail using a screwdriver.

That's when I crossed the "threshold of the heroine's journey" into the "unknown." I journaled. I wrote poetry. I wrote essays and stories. I asked questions.

Words were illusions dancing at a masked ball. They were only fingers pointing at the moon. They were not the moon of the actual experience.

Nevertheless, there *was* a moon behind the word illusions. There was a unifying, holistic experience. There was a human truth puzzle that could be put together. In fact, it had been put together over and over by person after person throughout history. Words were one piece of that human truth puzzle. Each person who solved the puzzle used different words to point to the solution.

I read voluminously in all the religious, philosophical, and psychological literature I could find. When I became totally frustrated with words, I began drawing images.

I paid money to mentors who claimed to have the solutions I needed -- Mark Victor Hansen, Robert Allen, Bob Proctor, John Childers, Marshall Sylver, Carolyn Myss, Jean Houston, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Joanna Macy, T. Harv Eker, Oscar Miro-Quesada, Mallku (a Peruvian shaman), Andrew Harvey, and Thomas Hübl. I learned something from each of them -- mastermind groups, circle work, the importance of commitment, breaking boards with my hand, eating fire, walking over a bed of hot coals in my bare feet, ropes courses where I jumped from the top of a 20-foot telephone pole after I climbed up and made a commitment to either release something or move towards something, bending a steel rebar with a partner using only our necks.

But I still didn't find the answer to my question. How could I use analytic, divisive words to communicate a unifying, holistic experience?

Moving along the path of my Heroine's Journey, I moved next into the "Road of Trials." The patriarchal society into which I had been conditioned had taught me, as a woman, to dumb myself down if I wanted to marry, support my husband regardless of what he did, be available for sex whenever he wanted it, not to think for myself, not to stand in my own power, be

committed to my family at all costs, and welcome daughters-in-law into my family as if they were my own daughters.

In the little, culturally-backward, South Jersey town, where my legal husband and I had migrated, we became good friends with my husband's boss and his wife, who also had three children. We lived ten minutes apart. We had many interesting conversations and did fun things together with the children. Getting together was much easier than getting together with blood relatives who lived two or three hours away. Without even realizing it, we were beginning to develop a different kind of family.

Then the boss read a book called *The Harrad Experiment*. He was excited enough about it that he persuaded us all to read it.

We talked about it for months. It was about group marriage and how, in intimate relationship with a new person, you could discover aspects of yourself that you never before knew existed.

We were fascinated and yet we were cautious, because it involved cross-sexual relationships. Step by step, we inched ourselves into what ultimately became a ten-year group marriage. It just seemed to develop organically.

The interaction became a deep lesson in the human psyche and archetypal human dynamics — far deeper than any of us had ever bargained for. It often felt like being on an emotional roller coaster with unbelievable highs and gut-wrenching lows. We were co-creating our own little community outside of the cultural norm, with nothing to guide us. We were exploring our unconscious and the Dark Night of each of our Souls.

My only motivation for becoming sexually involved with the other man was to figure out what was wrong with me sexually and fix it, so I could bring an “okay me” back into my legal marriage.

That never really worked. However, in my sexual relationship with the other man, I did discover a highly sensuous, sexy, playful part of myself that I had never before experienced.

Our relationship was never just physical. It encompassed mind, body, emotion, and spirit. It was free. For me, there was also an element of surrender, of being overpowered, and just letting go. It felt as if we were soulmates. Yet I had made a commitment to my legal husband, and together, we had brought three children into this world.

It ended for me when by soulmate and I were willing to separate and honor our original marital vows, but my legal husband and the other woman were unable to physically separate and fulfill their commitments to their legal partners. From hindsight, it seemed that both were sexually addicted, an addiction that fed feelings of low self-esteem. Both had always been abandoned by their partners. They were not going to abandon one another.

With my own focus on commitment, I tried to patch things together by suggesting legal divorces across the marriages, while still keeping the group marriage intact. That didn't work either.

As soon as I began living with the other man, my soulmate became my hell-mate. He was like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He unilaterally decided he no longer wanted to be involved in the group marriage. Then he began screaming at me because he said he wanted to make me angry. He heaved glasses into the wall and slammed his fist on the table.

There was also conflict over the male children. Whenever they got into a spat, this hell-mate would jump into the fray to support his only son, the youngest of all the children, against my sons. He was as abusive toward them as he was toward me.

I knew I had to get out, but how? I had been out of the job market for 15 years, caring for home and family as I had been taught to do. I had no independent source of income, and I had three young sons to care for.

The final straw came when the man I once believed was my soulmate began having an affair with another woman. Our sexual relationship had been powerful, but I had to get out. He clearly was not committed to maintaining the group marriage, respecting me and my children, and supporting all of us, as I had tried to support him.

I got out, using precisely the rage that my soulmate — turned hell-mate — had tried so hard to instill in me - a rage and passion that was directed toward freeing myself from his influence forever. In the middle of the night, directly behind his new mistress's car, I smashed the beautiful piece of pottery he had so lovingly shaped to symbolize our union.

All the people and support systems I had so loved and trusted had betrayed my trust. I was out on my own. Had I not had loving, caring parents to support me, I might have gone out and bought a gun and murdered both my legal husband and the other woman.

My legal husband had made vows to me. He had gotten me pregnant three times, and then, suddenly, he was no longer there to support me and our children. His affair with the other woman was more important than his vows, our marriage, our relationship, and our family.

It was a triple, emotional divorce, emanating from our attempted group marriage. I had tried so hard to hold everything together and meet everyone's needs, but discovered I no longer could. My trust in all three of the other adults had been so horribly betrayed. Nobody was there to support me as I had tried to support them. I couldn't do it alone.

I desperately struggled to survive. It was a very hard time in my life. I experienced disbelief, shock, deep pain, and rage over the disrespectful way my children and I had been treated. I was around age 40 at the time. All my childhood conditioning had been smashed. I felt as if I had been hit over the head by a two-by-four.

This was the nadir of my Heroine's Journey. This was my "Dark Night of the Soul." It opened up my next step on the Heroine's path – Atonement with the Father.

Others see me as courageous. I saw myself as simply fighting for survival and self-respect. The desperate position in which I found myself was a major factor in my decision to apply to law school.

I was accepted into Rutgers School of Law, Camden, the only school I could afford that was close enough for me to commute. For the first time in my life, I studied and organized until I had every tiny detail under control. I knew I would have to graduate with very good marks to even be considered for a job in a male-dominated profession. I graduated *cum laude* in 1980 and practiced law in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for 22 years.

Legally divorcing the father of my children offered me huge insights into the patriarchal structure into which I had been conditioned. As I asked myself the question, "Who am I, separate and apart from all these relationships through which I had previously identified myself," I also had to decide what name to adopt after again becoming single.

Today, the name I have adopted and use is Dr. Janet Smith Warfield. However, even that name has a meaningful story behind it and a slow evolution.

I was christened Janet Arlene Smith. My mother gave me the Christian name Janet because it meant "wonderful gift of God."

I have always liked the name Janet. I believe I *was* a wonderful gift of God to my mother since I was her only natural child. I had an adopted brother. However, I'm sure there were moments when my mother questioned her sanity in choosing that name.

There was a time when I was two years old. I discovered a bottle of mineral oil on the bureau and drank the entire bottle, except for what I spilled on my mother's brand-new studio couch.

There was a time when I was three years old. It was a hot July day, and it seemed quite appropriate to take off all my clothes, fold them neatly on the grass and run naked through the neighbor's sprinkler. My mother, bless her heart, still loved me.

I married before I got out of college, and I grew up in a generation of women who would never have considered *not* taking their husband's name. I then became Janet S. Traub.

Twenty-one years and three sons later, when my husband and I divorced, I went through a real identity crisis. I was Janet but Janet who?

I didn't want to keep my husband's surname. His values were not my values. Commitment really mattered to me, and apparently, he wasn't even aware of it. He simply thought he could have his cake and eat it too. It doesn't work that way.

What were my values and where did they come from?

I had always defined myself in relationship to the people in my life. I was my mother and father's daughter. I was my husband's wife. I was my sons' mother. But who was I separate and apart from these human relationships? What surname was appropriate to symbolize who I was?

My male lawyer told me I had only two choices in the divorce proceeding. I could either retain my husband's surname or I could retake my father's surname. It felt as if the law had decided I was either owned by my father or owned by my husband.

What had happened to all my maternal relatives? What had happened to all of my ancestors' maternal surnames? All had been erased by the law and my patriarchal conditioning.

Within the context of my legal choices, I chose to return to my father's surname. At least he had loved me, treated me respectfully, and never betrayed my trust. At the end of the divorce, I again became Janet Smith.

The name "Janet Smith," however, symbolized only a small part of who I was. My values came not only from the Smiths. They also came from my maternal ancestors, the Hoffs and Goffs and Perrys and Edwards and Wilkersons. I was so much more than just Janet Smith.

My mother's maiden name was Warfield. As I was ending my marriage, I was beginning law school. Warfield seemed like an appropriate name for a new lawyer. I filed the name change application the courts required me to file, and I became Janet Smith Warfield.

Those first few years after my divorce were challenging. Although I had a Bachelor of Arts degree from Swarthmore College, one of the best small liberal arts colleges in the United States, that degree was worthless in Vineland, New Jersey, a small culturally deprived town in southern New Jersey.

I re-entered the job market at \$1.50 an hour. My responsibilities were to make coffee, file, type, and draft pension plans. There were times when I had to count my pennies before I could buy a quart of milk.

I desperately needed my tax refund. Do you think the IRS would send it to me? Not until I drove my old, rickety Toyota 30 miles from Vineland to the Social Security Office in Bridgeton, the county seat, to change my name on the records of the Social Security Administration.

You guys don't have to go through all this aggravation. Why should we women?

I vowed I would never change my name again. I had worked too hard to get it.

However, several years later, I had a numerology study done on the name "Janet Smith Warfield." The results were one of the worst numbers you could imagine. They signified struggle and martyrdom. I was so tired of struggle and martyrdom. Again, I needed to change my name.

By adding "doctor" at the beginning of my name, which I could legitimately do because of the Juris Doctor *cum laude* I had received when I graduated from law school, the energy of my name changed to magnetizing and attracting people in.

I liked that energy a lot better. I discovered that by putting the "doctor" at the beginning of my name, people trusted me more. I somehow had more credibility in their eyes, and I received more respect.

I like the name Dr. Janet Smith Warfield. I plan to use it for the rest of my life — unless things change again.

(Here is) a quote from Epictetus. You can see how far back all these archetypal patterns go and how far back this Heroine's Journey and Hero's Journey go. "Difficulties show men and women what they are. In case of any difficulty, remember that God has pitted you against a rough antagonist that you may be a conqueror, and this cannot be without toil."

Several years ago, I participated in a personal growth workshop. Before the workshop began, the facilitator asked us to commit to several things -- don't chew gum, don't interrupt, be on time, do whatever we were told.

I didn't mind not chewing gum or not interrupting, and I always wanted to be on time. However, I absolutely refused to commit to doing whatever I was told without some clarification.

"From whom are we to take our direction?" I asked. "From any of the facilitators in the room," the lead facilitator responded. It wasn't an answer I could live with. Was it any wonder after the experiences I'd had? Moreover, history had taught me that human leaders directed their followers to murder, commit suicide, or lay waste to valuable human resources.

The facilitator refused to continue unless I agreed. The room turned surly.

Sue had paid a babysitter to watch her four-year-old while she attended the workshop. My refusal to commit was wasting her time and squandering her money. Sam had taken time off from work to attend. I was wasting his time and money by refusing to commit to do whatever I was told. Sue screamed that I was a jerk who was making her lose money. Sam began shouting and pounding his fists on the table.

The facilitators walked out, leaving me alone to face furious participants.

I was doing exactly what I was being told, but not by the facilitators and not by the other participants. I had gone to the workshop because I wanted to overcome fear. I was afraid of criticism, afraid of anger, afraid of what other people would think.

I was skeptical of the word "God." I couldn't believe in an old man with a long beard sitting on a cloud with a thunderbolt in his hand, waiting to strike me dead if I didn't do some vague, unclear thing he wanted me to do.

Before I entered the workshop, I knew that if I refused to do what the facilitators told me to do, I would incur the wrath of the other participants. I was terrified. I felt trapped between two impossible and painful choices. Was I going to give in to my fear of human wrath and capitulate to the desires of the facilitators, or stand alone and refuse to submit?

If I chose to stand alone, I knew I couldn't do it by myself. Faith is not knowledge. Faith is a choice.

If I were going to overcome terror, I needed help. I didn't trust other people. To whom could I turn?

In my living room, tears streaming down my cheeks — (I didn't want to ask for help, I didn't want to believe in something I couldn't understand and couldn't see, I didn't want to humble myself, but I knew I couldn't do it without support) . . .

. . . sinking to my knees on my living room floor, I cried out to something, somewhere, somehow — to something I couldn't see, to something I couldn't hear, to something I couldn't understand — "God help me."

Suddenly I was calm and centered. My fear was gone. I knew together we could do it.