

It's Your Life—What Do You Allow?

Alan Seale



It's a beautiful, crisp late August morning – the kind here in upstate New York that reminds you that autumn will soon be here. I'm sitting under a willow tree at the edge of Chautauqua Lake, the water is lapping gently on the rocks and the early morning mist is hovering over the great expanse of water. It's quite a mystical sight.

I've returned to this specific spot under this tree for a few days nearly every summer since I was 14 years old. Now at 53, that's just shy of 40 years that I've been coming back to sit under this willow where the land juts out into the lake. I've sat here to watch the sunrise and for morning meditation, laid on the grass for afternoon naps, rested in the stillness of dusk, and basked in the light of the full moon reflected in the lake.

Chautauqua is a sacred place for me, and here beneath this willow is for me a true power spot. It has been since my teenage years. Chautauqua (www.ciweb.org) has been one of the few constants in my life. It's my spiritual homeplace. And as time goes on, I recognize more and more the importance of coming here at least once a year. To walk these grounds and spend time at my power spot is to locate myself in the ongoing time line of my life. Chautauqua is where I first understood the importance of solitude and reflection in my teenage and college years. It was here that I was first introduced to symphonies, opera, ballet, concerts, and deep thinkers. And I continue to marvel at the program of artists and lecturers that appear on its stages each summer.

But back to my power spot. Although I'm a pretty reflective guy and have a very good grasp of the big

picture of my life, there is something very important to me about coming back to this particular spot – a spot I have known and that has known me for almost 40 years. I always gain a greater perspective on my life when I am here. It's like a conversation with a trusted friend who has known you at the deepest levels for many years, except that this power spot has no attachment to or opinion about how or what I think, my decisions, or my actions. It just lets me be, and reflects back to me my thoughts, presence, opinions, and actions in often astounding ways.

The theme of that reflection these last few days has been: What have I allowed to determine what does or does not happen in my life? "Allow" is the key word here, for during these days, on even deeper and more profound levels, I am recognizing my choices as reflections of what I allow and do not allow to hold power in my life.

While I acknowledge that there can be many reasons why something does or does not happen, many of which I cannot outwardly control, I do have the power to create the energetic conditions that would be most conducive to particular outcomes. Yet creating those conditions can sometimes still be the sticking point. Here at my lakeside power spot, I find myself reflecting back over times when I allowed truly extraordinary things to happen – times when I recognized the potential of the moment and rode its great energetic wave into a wonderful new experience or accomplishment. Hand in hand with those recognitions, however, have also come realizations that there were times when great things were trying to happen, yet because of my fears of change, the unknown, what people would think, how someone would react, or whatever, I either blocked the wave or just didn't get on. I allowed the opportunity to pass me by.

I am not one to hold onto regrets. As I look back, I can find the gift or important learning that has come with everything that has happened in my life and every choice that I have made. Even if the learning is just the realization that I could have made a different choice, that is valuable. I'll think twice before making a similar choice again. In recent years, even when I make a choice or take an action that I'm not very proud of, the learning is usually immediate. I'm always looking for the gift or the learning.

This summer at Chautauqua, my power spot is reflecting to me some subtle yet powerful fears lurking inside that, if I continue to allow them to, could ultimately create significant energy blocks to new opportunities. The question is: Do I allow these fears to dictate what I will or will not let happen? Or do I walk into those fears, look them in the eye, ask them what they need, and then address that need, thereby transforming the fear?

For me the answer is clear—I must walk into the fears and engage them in conversation. The amazing thing is that as I invite the fear to talk to me, I often discover that I've created a story out of assumptions or past experiences that are no longer relevant, and that the fear is a big smokescreen. Or I discover that there is an emotional wound that I have not yet acknowledged—a wound that can, in fact, heal with very little catharsis or drama if I'll just listen to what it needs and respond from a place of love. So simple—so much grace. The only power the fear holds is the power I give it. It has no power on its own, yet I can easily get caught up in the assumptions I make about it.

This is not a new concept, I'm sure, and is not so hard to grasp. The greater challenge in our fast-paced world is creating the time and space to examine what is working and what is not—what we are allowing and what we are not. Time and space for self-revelation and discovery is more critical now than ever for us as individuals and as a society. We need time and space that, without agenda or attachment to outcome, can honestly reflect back to us the truth we've been living. When we are willing to acknowledge the realities that we are creating and living, we can discover the aspects of those realities that we're proud of and want to celebrate, as well as the ones that give us pause or make us squirm. It's okay that they make us squirm! The fact that we are squirming is telling us that there are gifts to be unpacked within that discomfort.

So what do you do? How is the best way to respond? With an attitude of curiosity, compassion, and non-judgment, start unpacking and see what you discover. Let yourself just "be" with whatever comes up. Engage it, embrace it, love it, and ask it intuitively what it needs for you to know. And then respond. Heal the wound, let go of the assumptions, re-write the story, choose with clarity and intention what you allow to create your life.

I'm so grateful for this reflective time at Chautauqua each year. I am grateful for great experiences and accomplishments I've allowed myself to participate in, and I'm grateful for the reflection and awareness that helps me see what I allow to get in the way. I've done some great work here in my spiritual homeplace this year and I return to Rochester having recognized the truth about those fears that were standing in the way. I was letting them create a big story. Not any more. My inner reality has shifted, and excitement and commitment have replaced the fear.

How about you? What do you allow to create your life? When was the last time you paused to reflect in a place that was powerful for you and could reflect your inner being without attachment or agenda? We allow and don't allow things in our lives all the time—beliefs, fears, experiences, opportunities. As summer draws to a close, give yourself some time to take stock of your recent choices. What is and isn't working? What needs to shift? And then act on that awareness. Live into the potential that's waiting for you now.

Many blessings,

Alan

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info@alanseale.com
www.alanseale.com
(585) 473-9793



Soul Mission Profile—Lori Wynters

Awakening the New Paradigm

by Johnathon Pape



Lori Wynters leads a deliciously diverse life. Although she was trained as a psychologist, her background is also rich in theatre, dance, and music. This fed her interest in how the creative process can transform our lives and shift our consciousness leading her to complete an MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts at Goddard College,

where she now teaches. “Art was a great bridge that was left out of my formal training in psychology,” Lori explains. Her unique spiritual path provided another layer. “I come from the Jewish tradition. My upbringing was steeped in Kabbalistic tradition but before Kabbalah was trendy - definitely pre-Madonna! It was a daily practice where the quickest path to God or Spirit was through music and dance.”

Lori continued to nurture her passions, allowing them the freedom to develop and intermingle. She still teaches for Lesley University where she previously served as National Faculty in the Creative Arts and Learning Division for the past 12 years. She is a graduate of the Centre for Playback Theatre, a globally practiced improvisational form of storytelling theatre that works with the real life stories of participants and audience members to promote understanding and dialogue. She was invited to teach Playback Theatre in Cuba in 2001 with Teatro de los Elementos, exploring community stories that often go untold. Subsequently a film documentary was later developed focusing on HIV and AIDS in Cuba. Her love of movement and contemplation led to certification as a yoga instructor in the Kripalu and Amrit traditions and ultimately led her to a new adventure.

About four years ago, Lori and her family relocated to High Falls, a picturesque town in the Hudson Valley of New York. Her husband, Wylie, is a master

woodworker and together they created a beautiful studio space next to their home called “Offerings from the Side Yard,” where Lori teaches classes in yoga, contemplative movement, and art. Shortly after they opened the studio, Lori hosted Alan in a *Soul Mission * Life Vision* workshop. It was there in September of 2005 that Lori discovered her soul mission - *I wake up and free*.

“I feel blessed that we live in this part of the Hudson Valley. There are so many people here who are committed to shifting the dominant paradigm. It’s like Buckminster Fuller said about change, that the most effective way to change is to create a new paradigm so that the old one becomes obsolete. It feels like that’s what is happening here. Things unfold in wonderful ways.”

All the different flavors of Lori’s life have created quite a banquet, and knowing and living her soul mission has definitely added to the feast. “It has invited me to deepen into my own knowing and value my practice of ‘waking up’ and ‘freeing.’ Of course this is as true for me as it is for my students, advisees, clients, and colleagues. After I agreed to do this profile I thought, ‘oh goodness, what really is different for me since three years ago?’ I’m still teaching courses in holistic education, psychology, somatic studies, integrated and expressive art modalities, composing music and singing, coaching and parenting...but it’s with greater joy, fluidity, awareness, breath, playfulness, and fuller presence. Ah! and with greater compassion and willingness to risk and step daily into the knowing that I connect with others in that holy and playful place. Yes, that is what has shifted. And that place of returning and coming from compassion, ease, grace, & playfulness is the place of challenge and continuous awakening for me as a teacher, coach, artist, and mama.”

Johnathon Pape: Being a theatre professional myself, I’m fascinated with your work in Playback Theatre. Can you tell us more about it?

Lori Wynters: It was founded in 1975 by Jonathan Fox, Jo Salas, and colleagues here in the Hudson Valley, and now there are companies all over the world. It is being used in places where deep care and connection are needed, from urban centers and rural communities in the United States, to the communities still recovering in New Orleans, to Israeli/Palestinian dialogue, and the Tutsis and Hutus after the Rwandan genocide. The method and practice allows us to share and hear each other's stories. It is through our personal stories that we know who we are, but all too often we keep that part of ourselves private. Sharing it helps us be seen and witnessed. It is a place where we feel connected to each other and dissolve the myth of the "other." I think we desperately need to hear each other's prayers - or we'll end up hearing each other's war cries.

JP: *It must have been very powerful to use this technique among people living with HIV in Cuba. Talk about "wake up and free!"*

LW: Yes, there was a lot of stigma associated with HIV there, as there is in many places. I'd really love to return to Cuba. I experienced a strong spiritual life there, made manifest through art. My experience was that "Art" was the spiritual language in Cuba.

JP: *That's so interesting. So much of the story told about Cuba in this country is about our government's image of Castro and how repressive his regime is.*

LW: Well there's a very organic transgression of boundaries between the sacred and secular there. There the billboards aren't advertising Mountain Dew or anything like that. Instead, some of them feature the work of José Martí, their national poet! I'd love for my family to be able to experience living in that space for awhile. I am honored to accept an invitation to teach Playback Theatre there again. Since 2001, many Playback Theatre companies formed, so the need to tell our stories is vibrant and strong.

JP: *Speaking of your family, how has your work in Soul Mission * Life Vision impacted them?*

LW: Wylie has really stepped into his potential as a fine woodworker in the Hudson Valley. And the way he and I parent our 5-year old daughter, Hannah, is completely informed by waking up and freeing. The work through Offerings from the Side Yard has blossomed in such a way that we've been playing around with the idea of it developing into a charter school or learning institute - something like that. "School" feels too constrictive and bureaucratic. It all

ties into parenting. We want to find a place for Hannah's education that really keeps the creative magical spirit alive. It is challenging to find, even here. There are pockets of wonderful programs but nothing that exists in one place. Maybe what we need to create is a school without walls that I direct or work in with other people. And part of that (totally interconnected) is about me stepping even more into my spiritual leadership.

JP: *That's a very exciting prospect! What else is waking up, freeing, and manifesting in your life these days?*

LW: I've been giving attention lately to the idea of our family living in Israel/Palestine in the next year or two. Israel/Palestine has always been a place of "home" for me, both because I have a connection as a Jewish American and my inspiration around nourishing co-existence rather than the historical differences that created boundaries of separation. There's a Waldorf school there committed to Arab, Jewish, and Palestinian co-existence and thriving. This is appealing to our family as we ourselves are inter-faith and bi-cultural. I've applied for a fellowship with the Mandel Institute for Educational Leadership in Jerusalem. It would bring our family over there for a year.

JP: *WOW!*

LW: I learned about this opportunity from a close friend who is an Assistant Rabbi at a congregation in Woodstock. She's doing the fellowship now. The program is for people in educational leadership as well as rabbis. You present your vision and then you meet with mentors and colleagues for 11 months to help support the manifestation of your vision as well as study Hebrew and Arabic. I'm particularly interested in the question of Jewish spiritual life, ancient traditions, and contemporary assimilated life in a blended family and how you make space for that. In the U.S. there is such a unique expression of that. There's something very important about these incredible traditions that honor our god-spark within. What are the ways we make meaning from the preciousness of our identity and traditions and find the place of connection with each other's traditions in this modern society? It's an important question for blended families, and perhaps ultimately for a peaceful co-existence between different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups living together.

JP: *I certainly hope the fellowship comes through. It sounds like an amazing opportunity for your whole family. "Wake up and free" really seems to permeate your daily life. Are there other ways that it has come into play recently?*

LW: I recently stepped down from my National Faculty position with Lesley University. While I have experienced great relief and spaciousness to step into the next opening of my creative power and interest, I also feel a perceived loss of identity. I think of the "Identity Shield" exercise in *Soul Mission * Life Vision* and how useful that is to tune into the energy under those categories of ego. I'm not so comfortable at the moment about that, so I know it is a marvelous indicator of an exciting movement and opening. Who am I if I'm not supported by the flashing lights of a faculty position? How do I take my presence and practice as an educator, artist, and coach out into the world supported by me and the divine rather than an established institution? Alan's point of stillness practice and my contemplative practices and prayer from the Yogic, Buddhist, and Jewish traditions remind me of who I am at the core, at my essence. And that knowing is infinite, has no beginning, no ending and can't even be judged. When I tune into the emptiness and spaciousness inside, then the manifestations of my work in the world come from that.

I have a few different manifestations of this now. I'm completing a chapter on Playback Theatre and the power of the spoken word for the Expressive Arts anthology. I'm working on a publishable study with the Psychology Department at SUNY New Paltz exploring the relationship between play, the creative process, and the physiology of our immune system. I am leading a young people's sacred music choir in the Hudson Valley, spanning many spiritual traditions. I'm also continuing the "Nourishing the Soul of the Teacher" Conferences (www.essentialleadership.net), and offer workshops on the transformative power of play and the creative process, as well as a private practice.

JP: *What do you carry with you from the process of Soul Mission * Life Vision?*

LW: Well I adore this question because are so many pieces I carry from this work. I'll choose two. First is my daily practice of listening, what I like to call holy listening. And it can be through sitting meditation, dance, yoga practice, aikido or music – but it is when I carve out 'solo' time to listen and be guided by that god-spark and source place within. I used to think,

"I can do this in a group or when I'm singing songs with Hannah." While those experiences can be quite transformative with that collective energy and consciousness, there is also something particularly precious about time alone with God each day – that is quite subversive in our contemporary culture or modern life. The second is the extraordinary power of transformative work in a group with the support of meaningful connections. While I love working individually, my passion is with groups of people.

JP: *What has been your greatest challenge to living your Soul Mission?*

LW: My own internal doubts, whether they come from popular culture, family of origin, lineage, or whatever – there's that presence. But it's not a presence that stops the flow of excitement and enthusiasm. I just have to make sure I carve out that quiet time to tune in to truth. This modern world is tricky. It doesn't allow for stillness and silence – and that's a challenge. Raising a child in this mega-sound bite, fast food culture is challenging. It takes a lot of intention and attention...and trust that we each have our inner wisdom guide. We have to honor our need for stillness and quiet and time to be who we are. Being connected to nature is part of that and taking the time for gratitude. It's important to give thanks because I also forget and can get tranced-out by consumer culture. We give thanks through words, gestures (my daughter loves that one!) and songs, traditional or spontaneously composed at every meal.

JP: *What is the most important thing you've learned about yourself since claiming your Soul Mission?*

LW: God wants us to be HAPPY! And that's up for revision as the days and weeks go by. We have to value joy and play. *Wake up and free* – I have no other choice now. I can't go back; there's no other place for me to go. If I don't *wake up and free* I don't feel good inside. As a teacher, I know that one of the most powerful ways to teach is through who we are. We project the nature of our soul into the world. We teach who we are!

JP: *What would you say to someone who is considering doing Soul Mission * Life Vision ?*

LW: Do it! Do it even if you've already done similar kinds of work, and **especially** if you are a facilitator, teacher, or leader in any capacity. It will deepen and enrich your leadership abilities, brighten, ground, and shine your way of moving through the world.