

# Compass- Directed Moments

A year of ordinary moments guided by my personal compass,  
fueled with courage, and laced with extraordinary self-growth



REBECCA ROSE THERING

# *Introduction*

Hey there! I'm Rebecca, and in the fall of 2016 I made a personal compass to guide my actions and decisions. Since turning my focus to living my values in everyday occasions, I now find more joy and fulfillment in my days, and can look back and see just how much I've grown personally.

In this ebook you'll find a collection of stories—each sharing a moment in which either my compass helped me to stretch the edge of my comfort zone out a centimeter further or illuminated an area where I had room for growth.

The moments took place all over—from a zero-waste household in Minnesota to a small farm in Italy—but were instances you'd find in any given day: waiting outside of a gas station, talking to a taxi driver, dealing with personal conflicts at work, etc.

I'm sharing this writing without a paywall so that it may more easily reach anyone who is curious about this journey. In exchange for this creation, you can pay what feels right. Rather than having you pay upfront before you know what's inside, go ahead and read the whole book first. Then on page 52 you'll find a link where you can pay what feels good.

I'm glad to have you here! Thanks so much for reading.

Warmly,  
Rebecca

Hello again,

September 10, 2021

It's Rebecca—still—but the Rebecca from September, 2021! (The person who wrote the rest of this ebook was Rebecca v. 2018).

We are different in many ways. The creativity which I was planting and nurturing during the time written about in this ebook is now a solid pillar in my life. I've been on a journey with grief since 2019, which has greatly shaped my past three years. What I'm planting and nurturing today is spirituality, a connection to the Earth, a lens of love.

I cannot keep a PDF current, as each day we are changing, nor is there space to fully explain the shifts in perspective since this was written. But there are two shifts I must mention here.

One of the biggest changes in my understanding since writing this ebook has been learning of **somatic experiencing**. You'll notice that in the stories to follow, often my body reacted in strong ways even when my mind knew it wasn't "logical." Sometimes this meant tears, a stress spot in my left shoulder pinging, or my voice cracking. At the time, I thought this meant I had to "work on" my "issues" with authority.

Now, though, I know that my body holds trauma. (All humans have trauma, by the way. Some is big-T Trauma and some is little-t trauma.) So when my body had those reactions, my nervous system was simply doing its job, keeping my body safe in the way it knew how. I've also learned that I'm a deep-sensing person, which affects how I experience... well, everything. (Some folks resonate with the term Highly Sensitive Person, or HSP.)

The incredible piece is that we can heal and retrain our nervous systems through somatic experiencing. I was introduced to all of this by [Molly Caro May](#) and her workshop "Story Mammal." Molly's work is transformational, and her way is intentional, kind, slow, wise, and in rhythm with the Earth.

The book ["Call of the Wild: How We Heal Trauma, Awaken Our Own Power, and Use It for Good"](#) by Kimberly Ann Johnson has also been pivotal to this new understanding.

So, if I were to retell these compass stories today, I would share more of the sensations I noticed in my body—without judgment, without feeling I had something to fix. I'd write with my somatic experiencing lens.

The second shift worth sharing here involves my most recent compass. Almost a year ago, I began meeting online weekly with three women, as a Shamanic book club of sorts. In January, one of these

women led us on a journey to discover compass directions for the new year. Meeting and welcoming the directions was a ceremony, an embodied experience.

Weeks later I painted my directions onto a paper compass. Since then, from time to time I pick up the wheel, physically turn to face a direction, and breathe in that quality deeply. Slowly I move one by one around the circle, turning to face each direction and breathing in each quality.



Overall, this most recent compass carries a much freer feeling than the personal compass I made five years ago. And I suppose that's the heart of this second shift: **a spiritual lens**. A personal compass can be infused with grace, presence, compassion, and spirit. It can be used with the breath, with deep inner connection, with prayer, with energy, with Goddess/Universe/the Great Spirit.

That's not the tone of this ebook, but if you are interested in more fluid, recent creations made with heart, you might like [my handwritten zines](#).

All right, and now I wish you joyful reading. May you receive whatever you're meant to receive from this creation.

Love and light,  
Rebecca (v. 2021 ;))



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## *Background on Making the Compass*

Every new year I make resolutions. Starting in 2015 I changed my approach and selected three areas of focus rather than a long bucket list of things I wanted to accomplish. It worked well, so in 2016—where our story begins—I used that same structure.

For context, here's where I found myself at the start of that year: I had moved to France just three months earlier to live with my then-boyfriend Damien, who I met earlier in the spring when I was taking French courses at a language school in Montpellier. (He's French.)

December hadn't been a great month—I had doubts about the core of our relationship, and when Damien got a job in Rodez 2.5 hours away, he stayed there Monday through Friday and drove back on the weekends to stay with me in the apartment we were renting from his friend's mom.

This left me alone during the week in a small foreign town where I had no friends, and my online job (editing/writing for a language-learning startup) kept me indoors at my computer for most of each day. I certainly kept myself busy with projects (studying French, sending snail mail, making holiday letters, etc.), but spending that much time inside my own head (and indoors!) didn't feel good. That was December.

We eventually found an apartment to rent in Rodez and moved there together on January 3, 2016. I was hopeful that the new surroundings would help renew the flat, hollow feelings I'd had inside.



*Moving to Rodez with a packed car*

In anticipation of this rebirth, here were the areas of focus I chose for the new year:

1. Volunteer\*
2. Learn calligraphy
3. Live out my values

\*Halfway through the year I changed this one to French.

The third area of focus certainly wasn't a S.M.A.R.T. goal, but I had been seeing recurring values and themes during my 2015 year-end reflection which I wanted to illuminate so they could spark action.

Which values did I want to live out? Here are the quotes/thoughts I'd gathered at the time to guide this resolution:

*Starting is more important than succeeding.*

*Your job is to share what you have to offer from where you are now.*

*Purpose comes with practice.*

*Done is better than perfect.*

*Live a life driven more strongly by curiosity than by fear.*

*Argue for your limitations and you get to keep them.*

*Everything is progress. When you take action, you learn, you build skills, you get freer. When you stay still, your doubts fester.*

And here are some of the qualities I wanted to possess:

- **Connected** - Find a community
- **Creative** - Create, share, take risks and fail
- **Helpful** - Share things that help others
- **Confident/Assured** - Less comparing, be vulnerable
- **Curious** - Actively pursue curiosities

In my notebook I made a chart each month where I could track things I wanted to do each day—like going outside, stretching, reading in French, or practicing calligraphy. Each day of the month was a line, so I would just put a checkmark in the box that correlated with the day and activities I'd done.

To keep my third resolution in focus, I dedicated a huge column to my values. Across the top I wrote "confident, connected, creative, helpful, curious, assertive," and within that column I would jot down events where I had exemplified those qualities.

For example, when I went to an art gallery in town, I wrote it down under "curious." Next to "confident" one day, I wrote that I had talked to the man who worked at the kebab shop and the woman who worked at the grocery store. (It took extra courage for me to strike up conversations in a language I was still learning!)

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Here are a few more examples from February:

- Practiced driving stick for an hour. (Curious, confident)
- Bought a tea strainer and two types of tea leaves at a tea shop in town, after asking the lady working a bunch of questions about making the switch from tea bags! (Confident, curious)
- I actually have a page in my notebook now titled "Curiosities," where I jot down random things I wonder or things I want to know more about. I then go back later during "down time" and spend a small chunk of time looking into one. (Curious)

And so I continued tracking such occurrences in my notebook, day after day, month after month. Looking back, this practice must have really had me thinking about my "why" when I chose to spend time on things. When I spent time blogging the entire process of getting my year-long French visa, for example, I wrote down the action under "helpful." By sharing that information in a blog post, I could help others go through the same process—and I wanted to be a helpful person. Seeing this "why" fueled me to finish writing that post.

In March I broke up with Damien, which was harder than I could have imagined—probably magnified by the fact that my whole base over in France had been Damien, his friends, and his family. With time, I got on my feet, found a room to rent in Montpellier, and went on constructing my life around my newly-identified values.

That summer, while living in a beautiful, historic city just 15 kilometers from the Mediterranean Sea, I finally took notice of the stress spot on my left shoulder—which had made itself known the last few months.

I noticed my lack of excitement each day.

I noticed how much time I spent in front of the computer screen, working.

I noticed that I wanted to live in a world without pop-ups and click-bait titles, but at my job I helped create them.

I noticed the dull emptiness that had moved in throughout May and June.

I noticed that my days lacked face-to-face interaction, which increased my worry/stress while working—as emails were never accompanied by a genuine smile, a warm tone, or an understanding glance.

I decided to leave my virtual job—for a variety of reasons—and give myself unplanned time to have a Personal Sabbatical.

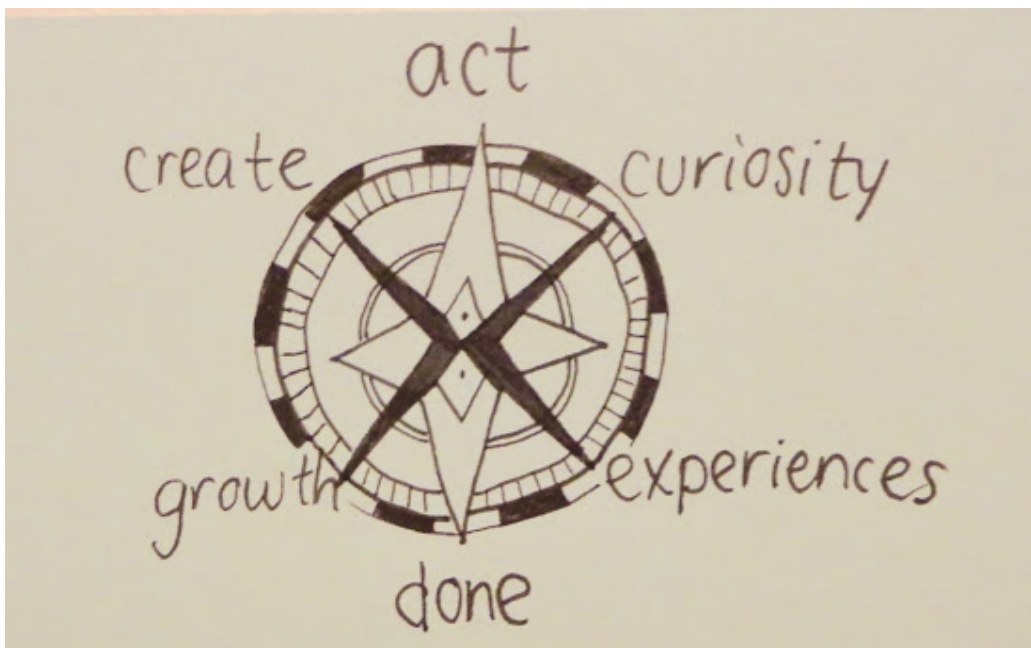
I wasn't sure what it would look like or what I'd end up doing, but I knew that there were things I wanted to do, learn, and experience which I couldn't do while tied to a daily online job whose work was now dragging me down and draining my energy rather than filling me up. It was not an easy choice to make, but in my core I knew it was right.

That's the short version of how I came to find myself in August of 2016 thinking about how I'd measure my "success" with so much unstructured time ahead of me. I wanted some type of -ometer to see how well I was progressing on my path.

And that's how my personal compass was born.

I again looked at the themes which kept on arising, I thought about the kind of person I wanted to become, and I considered how I wanted to spend my time during the following year.

It resulted in the following compass:



## *My Compass Directions*

Here's what each direction means to me and why it was chosen at that point in time.

### **Act > Think**

Something I often struggled with was that my mind would be so concerned with efficiency and/or highest quality whenever I had an idea of something to do/make.

*Which will bring about the greatest results? What's the best way to do this? If I choose to focus on x, what will I be missing out on by not having picked y?* I wondered.

These ideas of "greatest" and "best" made me freeze.

Here, I'll give you an example that dragged me down for many years. The constant question that dominated my thoughts was:

*How can I best use my skills to make the biggest positive impact in the world?*

That's a pretty intimidating question, isn't it? No wonder it always used to scare me away from taking any action! Instead, I would sit back and let my mind consider things like:

*Do I get certified to teach, and teach at a public school somewhere in the US?*

*Do I help English learners online?*

*Do I learn about prison systems and try to change America's criminal justice systems?*

*Do I try to improve the quality of public education in the states?*

*Do I help immigrants and refugees?*

*Do I inspire others to listen to their curiosities and to not let fear win, so they can go on to make positive changes as well?*

*Do I try to share the health benefits of a whole food plant-based diet, and the dangers of processed foods and industrial farms?*

*Do I teach learners about foreign languages and cultures, so that ultimately we can have more compassion for and connection with humans who are different from ourselves?*

*Do I get more involved in the secular community, and fight for separation of church and state rights?*

Etc. Etc.

I would think, think, think about all the possible feats I could try to accomplish, but was never able to answer my (terrifying) question, understandably so. Logically I knew that taking action towards any of these pursuits would create way more of an impact than simply thinking about them, but the thoughts still paralyzed me.

**(Side note:** Over the past two years I've realized this was the very wrong question to be asking myself, and I no longer feel burdened with this topic which followed me around for so much of



my young adult life. I now feel fulfilled by following my compass and looking for joy and ways to be of service in everyday moments.)

That was a mega-example, but there were many smaller moments in my life where taking action would have saved me from worry, and would have taught me a lot more than I'd ever learn by bouncing around inside my head. So to me, the inequality *Act > Think* was a reminder to take more action rather than festering in thoughts.

## Curiosity > Fear

This direction is quite self-explanatory and went hand in hand with taking action: I wanted to pursue my curiosities instead of letting fear hold me back.

This involved becoming aware of what I wanted to know or explore, as well as recognizing when fear was keeping me from asking a question to a store clerk, opening a door I wasn't sure I could enter, or putting up flyers at a university, for example.

## Experiences > Things

Over the years I've also gotten into minimalism—which, despite popular misconception, is not about owning only x number of items, but rather being intentional about what you bring into your life and aware of what gives you joy, what you use, and what you value.

I've moved abroad for a year-long stint four different times so far, which has gifted me with the task of whittling everything I own down to a suitcase or two. This was always refreshing and educational, as no matter how much I left behind, each year there was always something (or several things) I'd brought along which remained in my suitcase or at the back of a dresser drawer untouched all year.

When I walked the *Camino de Santiago*—a pilgrimage across Spain—in 2014, I only had my small college backpack with me. Inside was one change of clothes, so each day I would alternate between what I was wearing and the clean set in my pack. I was surprised at how immediately I forgot about everything I had left at home. I ended up thriving with so few possessions; I quickly adjusted to what I *did* have and felt incredibly free without my usual number of physical things holding me down.

I made *Experiences > Things* a compass direction because I wanted to remind myself of these lessons I'd learned. I also got a lot out of experiences that were tied to my values, but my tendency with money was to save rather than spend. So this direction also served as a push to go

ahead and spend that money on the bus ticket, on the oil painting class, on the musical, because these were experiences I enjoyed.

This year (2018) I've put a focus on sustainability, so this compass direction now has me becoming even more intentional about the things I bring into my life. I try to ask myself questions like, *Where was it made? Were the makers paid a living wage? What substances are in this? How was it made? How is it packaged? Can this item return to the earth at the end of its lifetime, or will I have to send it to a landfill?* Etc.

## Create > Consume

*Create > Consume* was another topic which had increasingly entered my awareness during the two years leading up to the creation of my compass.

Basically, I wanted to be spending significantly more time creating than consuming.

Here's how I chose to define each of those verbs, using sample activities:

Creating	Consuming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Writing (journal, blog post, poem, story, letter, zine, jokes, etc.)</li><li>● Painting</li><li>● Calligraphy</li><li>● Recording a podcast</li><li>● Decorating envelopes</li><li>● Cooking/baking</li><li>● Playing an instrument</li><li>● Reading books*</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Watching TV/movies</li><li>● Watching YouTube videos</li><li>● Social media</li><li>● Browsing the web</li><li>● Reading blog posts/Medium</li><li>● Listening to a podcast</li></ul>

It's nice to relax to a TV show or movie every now and then (Hello, "Broad City"!), and I love reading blog posts. Plus lots can be gained from "consuming" and appreciating others' works—films, standup, art, writing, music, etc. (Not to mention that consuming in the target language is absolutely vital for language learning!) So I wasn't trying to wipe out all consumption, I just wanted to make sure I was spending more time creating—hence this guideline.

\*I put "reading" under "creating" because it feels just as worthy a pursuit as cooking or writing a poem. You can soar on autopilot while watching a documentary, for example, but reading a book requires your complete focus over a longer span of time. Plus so much goes into the creation of a

book, such that it feels different from a blog post or magazine article. The tie to creation might not totally be there, but reading books didn't seem to fit with the consumption side and I wanted to spend more time reading, too.

## Done > Perfect

As mentioned earlier, I have some learned tendencies which overvalue high-quality work. It feels like I've made loads of progress in the past decade, but I still naturally lean towards working on something longer and polishing all the details when I would really learn the most by releasing it into the world as version 1.0.

Working for a startup for 2.5 years definitely helped push me in this direction. At work, we were always releasing and fixing bugs later, or in my case on the marketing end, publishing when it was "good" instead of never publishing and trying to reach "perfect."

One of my tasks at that job was to write the 15 weekly newsletters which went out to our subscribers. Now, I'm not the type of writer who can just bang something out when there's a deadline. Sometimes I can't think of anything clever to say, or the ideas just aren't flowing. But I had one day each week in which these newsletters *had* to get written.

At the beginning I would struggle with the task, often dreading it. But since I was forced to return to it week after week, I learned that these were going to be read once (if ever) and then forgotten. It didn't have to be the most polished, creative writing I could muster. I sure still tried hard, but over time it got a little easier to sit with something that felt sub-par to what I was striving for, because in the grand scheme of things it was better for me to finish the newsletters and spend the time on a different marketing strategy.

So that fall when I pinpointed this direction, I wanted to continue further down the same path—to bring that start-up mindset into other areas of my life.

## Growth > Comfort

Finally, I wished to push the edge of my comfort zone so I could continue to grow. This one doesn't require further explanation, and is also clearly tied to several of my other compass directions.

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And it was with these six directions leading the way that I stepped into the unknown and began my Personal Sabbatical.

My French visa expired at the end of September, which is when I took the bus to Madrid and flew home from there. It was much cheaper to fly Madrid - Chicago than to fly from Montpellier, and it was even cheaper to buy a roundtrip ticket than just a one-way... so I did just that! I booked a return flight to Madrid at the end of January 2017—which I could either use or not when the time came.

## 2017: The Personal Sabbatical

I'm going to give a brief rundown of the year here, just so you have a bit of context for the stories to follow. After returning to my parents' home in the fall, I serendipitously got involved with a local non-profit English group, where I tutored English to adults in the community.

When the new year hit, I did end up taking the return leg of my flight back to Madrid and spent three months in Europe on a tourist visa. I began in Madrid visiting a few friends, then spent a month and a half in Italy, stayed with a friend in Munich, and finally visited Damien in Montpellier before heading home. (If anyone's wondering how I funded this, by the way, the details are all laid out in my ["Real Talk About Money" post](#).)

Then I lived with my parents, during which I grew my first garden in their backyard, participated in [a local public art project](#), read tons of books from the library, and generally had calm days.

In July I volunteered as a counselor for Camp Quest in Minnesota. I worked with [Meg Kissack](#) during the month of August and created my personal website. And at the end of the month I joined American Conservation Experience (ACE) in Arizona, where I served a 6-month term as an AmeriCorps volunteer.

Phew, it's a lot when you cram 12 months into a few short paragraphs! But now when we slow it down in the next section, place and timing should make more sense.

# Compass-Directed Moments

To illustrate how I tapped into my compass to guide my actions, I'm inviting you to step into several moments with me, which took place throughout 2017. We'll move chronologically, beginning in January and ending in December.

## Self-Permission Cards

Near the end of 2016 I read Keri Smith's fun book "How to Be an Explorer of the World," which included a hand-drawn "License to Explore" on one page. I snapped a picture to remember the license, as it had sparked the idea of self-permission cards. They could give you permission to be creative, to be endlessly curious, to fail—whatever you needed to hear.

Soon my imagination went wild, picturing these cards catching on fast, eventually becoming real, durable cards—like driver's licenses with photos! My mind flashed to Mathias Jakobsen of *Think Clearly*, who had [made his own deck of cards via Kickstarter years earlier](#), so something like this wasn't out of the question. But it was far beyond what I could do at that moment. I was letting my thinking get ahead of my acting, and dreaming up the perfect scenario instead of creating something.

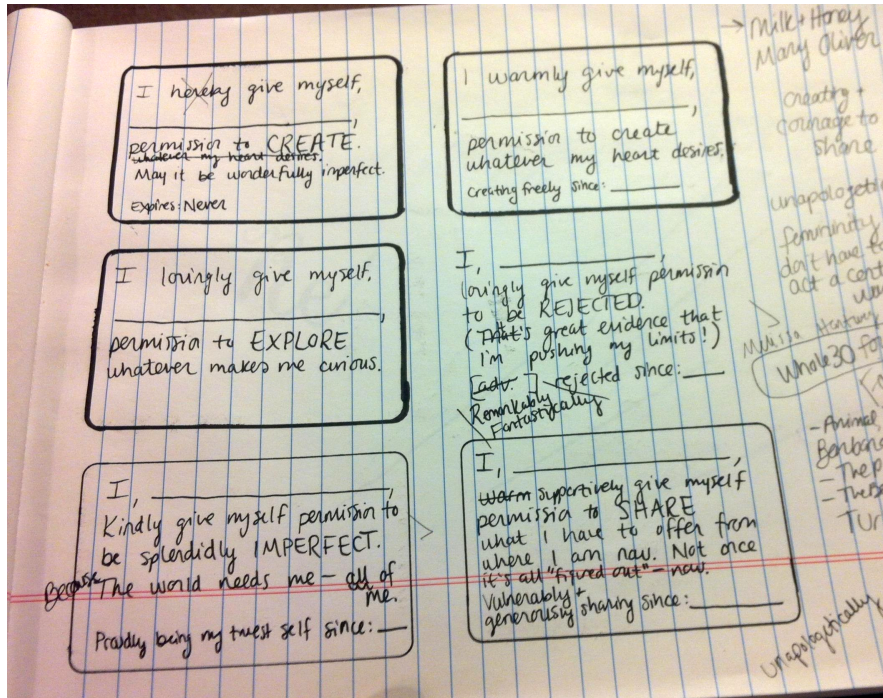
A few days into the new year, I was reading [Elin Lööw's reflection blog post of her Fear Year](#) when this passage absolutely pounced at me:

*I feared to pick the identity creative, because I was scared others wouldn't agree. I longed for an invitation, a stamp of approval, a paper that said*

*"Elin Lööw has qualified as a creative."*

*But there was no such paper. I wanted to be a creative, a writer, an artist. I wanted to be brave. In 2016, I stopped waiting for permission and guess what? Nothing bad happened at all. I just turned into those things I'd dreamed of being.*

Something clicked inside and I knew I had to make those cards. "There can be an invitation!" I wanted to tell Elin, "Just make a self-permission card! We can give ourselves permission whenever we need it." So I grabbed a notepad and began to brainstorm possible sayings for such cards.



That same night I had a ladies' art night planned with friends, so I brought along the notebook to see what they thought. At this point in time, it would have felt normal for me to ask what these friends thought of the whole idea in general. ("Would anyone actually want one of these? Is the idea stupid?")

But that night, I consciously chose to ask questions which assumed I *was* making the cards. ("Which of these words/phrases resonates with you?" "Would you include an expiration date or not?" etc.)

This was a shift for me, a slight change in thinking and action. (And tiny 1% shifts are woven in deeper when we note and celebrate them.)

The next day I pulled out a piece of paper and pen and got to it. In under an hour I had a page of self-permission cards made. I scanned the page to save it as a PDF, made a copy, and then began to cut.

Next I got out my watercolors and masking fluid to make colorful backs for the cards. Again, it didn't take too long. I took a few pictures along the way, did some more cutting and gluing, and then they were made!





The next day I wrote up a blog post outlining the process, added photos, linked to the free PDF card templates, and then [published it to my personal blog](#). Boom. Out in the world. Created. Done.

Although it was a seemingly small action, the significance of this change in thinking was huge. It's one of the moments where I could argue that I was moving towards *all* the directions from my compass. While *Act*, *Create*, and *Done* might be easier to see, I was still very much engaging my *Curiosity*, leaning towards *Growth*, and having an *Experience*. And the choice was no-doubt guided by my compass; my first instinct had been to keep the idea in my mind and imagine a perfect version of it.

Making these cards also paved the way for future creations that January, lowering resistance when I [made and shared my first notecard story](#) mere days later, for instance.



## Painting in O'Hare

At the end of the month I took the return leg of my flight back to Madrid for three unplanned months of wandering with [my backpack](#). I brought along my travel watercolors and new watercolor journal, determined to paint throughout the journey. I had just bought these watercolors three months earlier (the first paints I've ever owned!) and had only used them a few times each month, so I had very little painting experience at this point.

Once I'd arrived at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, gone through security, and reached my gate, I still had two hours until boarding. At first I was going to pull out my Kindle and read, but then I realized this was it: a chance to paint. Even though I didn't know what I was doing. Even though I knew the result wouldn't be anything to write home about. (But why would it be, if I hardly had any hours of sketching experience in the first place?) And even with all of the potential onlookers sitting around me at the gate. I was going to paint!

But first I needed water. So I went to a nearby coffee shop and asked if they had a small paper cup. This was already pushing ever so slightly against my comforts, because I put myself in a position where the man could have easily said "No, I'm not going to give you a free cup if you're not buying anything!" But he didn't. He kindly gave me a small paper cup with a smile—exactly what I needed! I thanked the man, took the cup, and stopped at the nearest drinking fountain to fill it up.

I got back to my seat and realized I'd have to move down to sit on the floor in front of my chair if I wanted to dip into my water without spilling. So I spread out on the floor and began drawing what was in front of me: people sitting in the chairs, a TV up on the ceiling, a gate number in the hallway.



I got lost in the painting and forgot where I was or what the people around me were doing (aside from the people in front of me who I was painting—I kept on wondering, *Do they know I'm staring at them? Do you think any of them know they're getting painted right now?*).

When our boarding time approached, I dumped the water back out at the drinking fountain but saved the cup. Little did I know, I would end up using that cup for my paint water for the next three months straight.

So yes, spoiler alert: I *did* go on to fill my notebook with sketches everywhere I visited, but that might not have been the case if I hadn't done my first travel sketch so early in my travels. I had to get the first one done, to bite the bullet and paint something whose result was nothing to praise, to paint in public even though I didn't know what the heck I was doing, and simply not be concerned with what others might think. *If they mistake me for an artist and then are surprised at my lack of skill, so be it. I'm a beginner! (And proud of it!)*

And although the artistic level in my first sketch was nothing to rave about, the act of making that sketch in the airport was absolutely something to be proud of. There is a beginning to everything, even though we hardly ever see this side in the media. It's courageous to do something you've never done before, see that it's crap, and then continue doing it anyway. I wanted to be travel sketching, so I had to start somewhere. And that somewhere happened to be at my gate in O'Hare.

## *El Taxi*

My flight arrived to Madrid without any problems, and before long I had emerged from the metro and was surrounded by that familiar city smell again, which always brings me back to the two years I called Madrid home.

One day that first week I set out to visit the city's Public Art Museum, an outdoor exhibit of sculptures which I had never seen before. I packed a tasty salad lunch and then headed out on foot to enjoy the sunshine and above-ground happenings. I found the open-air museum easily and finished walking through the sculptures probably within 10 minutes of arrival.



Since the beautiful sun was still out, I sat on a nearby bench and pulled out my salad. Time for some prime people watching! To my right were the sculptures, along a set of stairs under an overpass, and to my left on ground level was a busy street, *Paseo de la Castellana*, whose curb closest to me was completely lined with taxis.

My eyes quickly became captivated with those taxis; it was as if they were putting on a puzzling little show just for me to unlock. The cabbies waiting in line would get out for a smoke and chat with each other, but as soon as a passenger appeared, the first taxi in line would take off and everyone else slowly rolled up one car's length.

It was a Tuesday afternoon at the end of January, though, so they weren't getting passengers that quickly. In fact, I started wondering how long it would take the taxi farthest back to get to the front if they continued getting passengers at the rate I'd been witnessing. I was dangerously close

to spending my whole afternoon watching these taxis to obtain whatever information I could through observation, but then my eyes noticed something else.

One of the taxis just a few yards to my left had a big "J" written on its side, behind the passenger door. But the taxi in front of it had an "M" in that same spot. I began to work out what these letters could mean.

It felt like this was something I used to know, but had since forgotten. The words "*joven*" and "*mayor*" had immediately jumped into my mind, meaning "young" and "old," respectively. *But why would there be a taxi for old people and a separate taxi for youth?* That didn't make any sense, couldn't be it.

By now I was done eating my lunch and ready to move on with an afternoon wander walk. The taxi driver of the third car in line was still on the sidewalk smoking, so I thought about asking him about the letters.

Moments later I nixed the idea, but then I caught myself and thought of the compass notecard sitting in the pocket of my journal. *You know what?*, I said to myself, *This is something you're curious about, and you have the right to know. Be curious and take action, just ask!*

So on my way towards *Castellana*, the street I would cross, I stopped in front of the smoking taxi man and asked him my burning question.

As soon as he told me the meaning, I *knew* this wasn't the first time I had heard this fact: It's the letter for the day of the week that the taxi is not in service. So, for example, if you see a parked taxi with a "J" on a Thursday (*jueves*), then you shouldn't wait nearby because it's the taxi's off day. Aha!

"Thank you, I was just curious," I told the man in Spanish.

"It's good to be curious!" he said with a hearty laugh.

I got out of the conversation pretty quickly after I had my answer, but I walked away with a wide smile. Not only had I moved closer towards my directions of *Curiosity* and *Act*, but the man seemed tickled that this foreigner had asked him such a question. And on top of all that, he only affirmed my views of curiosity—that it's good to be curious!

I had only walked half a block down the street from the front of the taxi line when I saw a scene I definitely wanted to paint: the ABC mall.

So it was there, still in view of that line of taxis, that I sketched my next entry into my watercolor journal:



So far you've seen three examples of moments when my actions matched the directions of my compass. But for each "success" story, if you will, there were just as many times where I made decisions that *weren't* in line with my compass.

These moments were just as important, though, as they highlighted where I had room for growth. They illustrated for me the distance between where I was and where I wanted to be. I tried (and continue to try) approaching each such learning moment as one would approach thoughts during meditation: observing them without passing judgement, offering myself grace and self-compassion.

After my week revisiting the familiar in Madrid, I bought a flight to Italy, where I unknowingly would spend the next month and a half. It was in this *Bel Paese* (Beautiful Country) that I saw clearly where I had room to grow.

## I'd Like a Refund, Please

During the week I spent in Rome, I did what I've done (and loved) for years and years while solo traveling: I stayed at a hostel. What was different about this particular hostel, however, which I learned upon check-in, is that the rooms were split up into two buildings.

So rather than being in the part of the hostel with the 24-hour front desk, my room was a short walk down the street and around the corner, up on the second floor of an apartment building—meaning we had regular Roman residents behind all the other doors in our building.

The next road bump was that there was no kitchen in my apartment unit, like I had expected. We had a commons area with a couch, tables, electric kettle, and small fridge—but no sink, stove, dishes, or any of these meal-prep basics. Just off the commons room was an empty, closed-in reception area with a counter and desk, no receptionist. A phone was sitting out on the guest's side of the counter, though, with the number for the hostel's front desk.

I called the number and asked where the kitchen was. The woman on the other end told me to leave our unit, go down to the first floor of the building, and use my key card to enter the door that says "Melissa's Guesthouse" (Note: Our hostel was not named "Melissa's Guesthouse"), and then I could walk down the hall, past the rooms and use the shared hostel kitchen in the back of that apartment.

I was perhaps more annoyed that no one had told me any of this pertinent, non-intuitive information when I checked in than I was at the slight inconvenience of having to carry my food/dishes up and down between floors and apartments for meals, or to make myself a cup of tea to drink up in my apartment.

So that was our basic setup. From what I could gather, there were only three other rooms there besides my four-bed female dorm. One was right across the hall from my room, and two were off of the common room. The first night was fine, but I awoke with a full-on cold the next morning—yet somehow still managed to shower and make it to a 10 a.m. walking tour.

By the end of the tour it was a bit chilly and it was sprinkling on and off, so I was more than ready to be back in a warm bed. That evening I watched a documentary about the *Camorra* back in my room at the hostel, which I was sharing that night with three nice, calm female travelers. Sometime after 10 p.m. I went to sleep.

At 3 a.m. I woke up to shouting.

The shouting was in French: male voices, more than two.

*Ugg, dang drunk people. How are they this loud?*, I thought.

A little while later, one of them started belting a song at full volume. *Are you kidding me?*

Then at one point, this singing turned into strange wails—incoherent howls. I couldn't imagine what might have been going on out there. Perhaps they were drunk, but it was clear early on that this wasn't just drunk banter. This was different from anything I'd ever heard.

One of the voices clearly became aggressive. The tone and severity of all the shouting were sharp and argumentative. My body was fully awake, on edge, heart beating fast.

Suddenly I could hear things being thrown around—it sounded like the common room was getting destroyed. The shouting continued, with severe voices.

"*Arrête ! Arrête ! Arrête !*" (Stop! Stop! Stop!) one of the male voices shouted over and over, on top of all the others.

But the main voice was upset and the others could not constrain him. He was going berserk.

Shouting. Wailing. Arguing. Shouting. Wailing. Arguing.

All of a sudden there were fists pounding on *our* door.

Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam!

So loud, so loud.

Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam!

He rattled the door knob violently.

*What will he do if he breaks in?*, I wondered.

Punching. Wailing. Shouting. Aggression. Danger. Not safe, not safe.

Had it merely been standard inebriation, we could have shouted at them to shut up and go to sleep. But in this case, opening the door was not an option; we were flat out terrified.



Despite having been wide awake due to the noise (and nature of said noise), I was still somewhat drowsy from being awoken that early. All I could think was that somebody needed to call the police—these guys were going to hurt someone (or each other).

Suddenly the phone in the old reception area started ringing off the hook.

Ring ring ring. Shouting. Punching. Wailing. Ring ring ring.

*How can we get help?* We couldn't use the phone because that would have involved opening our door to go out where they were.

Ring ring ring. Shouting. Punching. Wailing. Ring ring ring.

*What can we do, what can we do.* I considered pulling out my laptop to send an urgent email to the hostel's email address.

Ring ring ring, ring ring ring.

I composed the subject line in my head: "URGENT - Help! Call Police for Annex Building."

But I was tired and shaken and frozen in fear. I didn't want to get out of bed to pull out my laptop. I wanted to get some sleep. I wanted to feel safe.

I checked the time on my phone: 4:45 a.m.!? I had been awake, in fear, listening to this madness for almost two hours??

Aggressive shouting pierced the air. More objects got thrown around.

This went on, and on, and on.

Then it got a little quieter, as if the men were farther away. It was at this point that I thought to record an audio file on my cell phone. I should have done it earlier, as it was much harder to hear now, but I pressed record and left it running for a few minutes.

The final memory I have of the night is when I heard someone knock on their door. A man's voice said something like, "Please be quiet. Go to bed." *Was he working at the hostel? Or was it someone else on this floor? Either way, why did they wait so long to say something?* After that the French guys quieted down enough for me to eventually fall back asleep.

In my dreams that followed, the police came and resolved everything. I felt so relieved. In my mind I recounted again and again what had happened. After a few hours of sleep, though, I was so disappointed to discover that the safe outcome had all been a dream.

Sometime after 9:30 I finally got up and talked with two of my roommates who were still there. One had heard the guys go in and slam the elevator door in the hallway for a period of time in the night. She'd also heard them as early as 11, but wasn't sure if they'd then left for a few hours or stayed in.

One thing was certain: Any retelling of the night's events—in writing or verbally—would not do justice to what we'd heard and experienced. I knew then that any attempt would not paint the full story, the harshness of the shouts, the slushy sound of those wails, the fear we all felt—but I would tell it as best as I could.

As the three of us girls were talking, I knew I needed to say something to the front desk. I didn't want to stay another night with those guys in the apartment! Suddenly we heard them—those same French voices—but this time they were loudly laughing and talking from their room across the hall. *Is this for real?*

I hadn't even brushed my teeth yet, but as soon as I heard their laughter I threw on some clothes and shoes, spit out my nighttime retainer, and walked over to the main office to talk to whoever was working.

I didn't have a plan of what I wanted to accomplish or demand, but I was not going to stay in that room if the Frenchies were booked multiple nights. (*Shouldn't they be kicked out anyways?*) In general I haven't been great at demanding things from customer service reps, which I attribute to my avoidance of confrontation coupled with my efforts to be flexible, patient, and understanding of others. But I knew I had to stand up for myself in this situation and at least share my complaints.

When I walked into the reception area, two staff people were talking to a young man at the counter. "Yes, I understand. I'm very sorry," said the man, with a French accent.

"So you must pay 120 euros for the door" said one of the staff. "Normally it's 150."

"How much? One five zero?"

"You pay one twenty. One two zero."

The staff people told him that this couldn't happen again. "If it happens again, you'll be kicked out. You and your friends must be calm tonight."

"Okay, okay, yes I understand. We will be calm."

*This is the only punishment they were getting?! They were allowed to stay more nights?*

"Look, we got emails from people at three in the morning, very scared. Do you want to see? I can show you these emails."

The French guy peeked around behind the counter at the computer screen.

I was a little surprised to find out I hadn't been dreaming with my email idea; many others had been awake in their rooms and actually did it!

"We're very sorry. Okay, we pay for the door and we are calm."

I couldn't bring my unslept, unsafe-feeling self to say anything while Mr. France was still there, but as soon as he left, the two men behind the counter turned their attention to me. "Sorry for the wait, how can we help you?"

"Actually, I came because of those guys," I began, my voice raspy as my cold had gotten worse with the lack of sleep. (And as you'll learn in this and other stories, when I don't get my 8-9 hours of sleep, my body makes tears ever so easily. It's a biological response that I can't turn off, which is one main reason sleep is so important to me.)

So before I even knew it was happening, I was tearing up and my voice was becoming even shakier as I briefly recounted to them how terrible a night it had been—that we had been scared and trapped, and it was much worse than some drunk partying. They had been violent and aggressive (and apparently had broken the bathroom door?).

"But you said they're staying more nights?" I asked in disbelief, well aware of the answer.

Listening to me was the Front Desk Guy and another man who seemed more managerial. Mr. Manager was very kind and apologetic, really trying to smooth things over. He told me they had never had someone like that stay with them before either, and that the hostel was charging them for the door they'd broken.



If anything happened that next night, they would kick them out, he said. I wasn't falling for the charm and care that Mr. Manager was oozing out through his Italian accent, and my sleep-deprived, fear-stricken body was still expressing unsettled feelings through tears.

Then Mr. Manager said he could move me into this building for the rest of my stay if I'd like (*Yes, I would like that*), and I could come over that morning. He also said he'd give me a refund for two nights because of the trouble I'd been through.

Front Desk Guy didn't seem happy about that, and he nearly cut off Mr. Manager to protest, but it seemed like Mr. Manager could say and do what he wanted. Although the issue only happened during one night, I thought it was more than fair to get two nights refunded (and it actually helped me feel better about the whole thing, because at least I was saving some money in my most expensive city stay).

So I packed up my stuff and moved into my new room, which was right beside the always-staffed front desk. I felt safe and the rest of my stay was pleasantly uneventful. Mr. Manager would smile and say "*Ciao bella*" every time we crossed paths, sometimes giving me *bacini*—Italian kisses to the cheek which usually accompany greetings. While I'd rather take kind over rude any day, every interaction with him felt a tad insincere, like he was overcompensating for that hostel night of hell with affection.

I kept on checking my credit card to see if there was a refund from the hostel. The night before I was to check out, there was still no refund. And this whole time, I had been concerned that I wouldn't get the two-night refund promised to me by Mr. Manager because he had been over-the-top with kindness while Front Desk Guy had seemed so against it.

I was relieved it was a woman working the front desk that night, because she wasn't Front Desk Guy. *Maybe I could sort the whole thing out with her, and then I'll never have to confront Front Desk Guy*, I thought hopefully. I asked the woman about my refund, but she had no idea what I was talking about; there were no notes in their system about my situation. She said Front Desk Guy will be working in the morning (*yipee*), so I could just ask him when I checked out. Ok, fine.

In the morning I gathered up my courage, rather dreading the menial task that laid ahead, because I'd built it up in my mind over the past few days. Near the end of the check-out process there had still been no mention of said refund, so I knew it was all up to me.

"Have you done the refund for the two nights?," I asked, sure to say "two," but not drawing attention to that figure.

"Oh right, let's see, what day was that, that was Thursday, right?"

"Yeah, it happened on Thursday," I said. *But I'm expecting a refund for Thursday and Friday because Mr. Manager said so!* I said to no one but myself.

"Okay, so that's 15 euros," he said, rounding up to the nearest euro and handing me a ten and a five from the register.

And it's in that moment, cash in hand, that I couldn't muster any more courage to *Act, Grow*, and ask for what was promised to me. I didn't want to push it. It felt like they were already doing me a service by at least giving me one night's refund. I also feared that asking for two nights back might somehow put me back at zero, that Front Desk Guy would think I was trying to take advantage of the situation (or something) and refuse to refund me anything. This was my mindset. I let *Fear* win over any *Curiosity* of discovering what might have happened if I had asked about being reimbursed for a second night.

And so I walked to the train station with 15 euros in my wallet and traces of regret and defeat in my heart.

## Stress Spot Repeat

After a week each in Florence and Bologna, I took a train to the countryside for a two-week [HelpX \(Help Exchange\)](#) stay on a small family farm. During this time I would be working around five hours a day, five days a week, in exchange for food and accommodation.

The mother of the family, Victoria, was British; the father, Italian; and the two daughters, polite and cute. Victoria was incredibly welcoming and patient, making me feel right at home. She taught private English classes in town during the day, so I was usually receiving "work" instructions from her husband, Davide (DAH-vee-day).



Davide would almost always speak in Italian—even to me—and even though he was also fluent in English. As someone who likes learning languages, I quite enjoyed this, but it also gave me the impression that perhaps he didn't want to talk to me (because all I could say in Italian was "thank you" and "how are you?"). Davide was friendly, animated, and easygoing, though clearly a hard worker. There was always something to be done around their farm, but during the day Davide would do jobs on *other* nearby farms—that was his "day job."

One day I was supposed to remove these tiny weeds from their gravel driveway. It was a simple task, but time consuming, so it turned into my "down time" chore which I'd return to again and again during those two weeks. Because of my fused spine (I had a [spinal fusion for scoliosis](#), summer of '05), I would sit cross-legged on the ground when working over an area. This didn't fully prevent me from ending up in a position that wasn't the best for my back, so from time to time I'd sit up straight to stretch and breathe.

While I would easily get lost in the weed pulling as a meditative task when working by myself, one afternoon I noticed the stress spot in my left shoulder kept on flaring up. It was the same spot that used to bother me the previous summer while I was working online. I took note. What was different about this afternoon? Davide was home, out working somewhere on the farm. I must have been subconsciously worried Davide would see me during a moment of repose—aka not working—and... I'm not sure what exactly, then tell me to work harder?

I broke it down in my logical mind later: *You are on a Help Exchange. You're not even getting paid to do this work. So what's the worst that Davide would do, within his character realm (he's so friendly and kind!)? What are you so afraid of happening? Let's say Davide thinks you're a shit worker, which you have no evidence for, by the way, because you help with the dishes after every meal and even did laundry and cleaned for an Airbnb guest on your off days when Victoria was in a pinch. But let's just say he thinks you're not a hard worker. So what? That would be his opinion, which he can have. You're out of here in less than two weeks.*

This stress-spot flare up signaled to me that I still had work to do in overcoming this fear of... fear of what? Of being thought of as a bad worker? Of accepting the possibility of failing to meet someone's expectations? It wasn't clear, but my body's sensations were. Okay, noted.





## Painting, Interrupted

After my farm stay I took the train to Venice for my final week in Italy. One day I sat against a wall facing a canal to paint a two-page sketch of the scene. Straight ahead of me was a black *gondola* sitting in the water, and on the other side of the canal was a restaurant called *Trattoria al Ponte*, which had some outdoor seating that stretched along the street. To my right was a small pedestrian bridge over the canal, typical of the city.



As I sketched and later painted, I absorbed the show in front of my eyes. I saw the *gondola* load up with passengers and take off under the bridge. I noticed one of the waiters at *Trattoria al Ponte* spoke Spanish, as I'd heard him talking with some patrons outside. I watched the people walk past, all oblivious that someone was sitting below their line of eyesight. Meanwhile I painted and painted, enjoying this state of calm concentration after having been out and about all morning.

Then I had to pee. I wanted to finish my painting right here on location rather than from a photo, but I was at least 10 if not 15 minutes from my hostel. To finish the painting I'd need to stay at least another hour, but I couldn't hold it.

Suddenly I got an idea: Maybe I could go up to the waiter who speaks Spanish, show him I'd been painting his restaurant all morning, and explain that I wanted to finish it, but could I use their restroom please? My instinct told me restrooms are for patrons only, and my ego feared rejection.

Even in a place where I didn't know anyone and no one knew me, a place I would be leaving in a few day's time, a place whose cultural norms were unknown to me—so it would be easier to break them if this were an off-request for such a place—even then, odds stacked in my favor, I continued to *Think* about it and play the request in my mind.

When my bladder could wait no longer for me to mull it over, I snapped some pictures, packed everything up, and darted off to my hostel.

Regardless of the outcome that day, I wanted to become someone who would have had the courage to potentially get denied a request. To get rejected. To be told no, you cannot use our restroom if you're not a paying customer, get lost. I wanted to become someone for whom that small interaction wouldn't take energy, second thought, or courage.

But that afternoon at the canal I couldn't do it. And that's okay. Once again, I simply noted the event and the opportunity for growth.





## The Cigarettes

My travels continued with many small compass moments to celebrate, carrying me to my final destination of Montpellier, where I stayed with Damien and his family for a week and a half.



*Visiting friends in Montpellier*

After my French homecoming it was time to return to Madrid for a flight back to Chicago, so I took the 13-hour night bus from Montpellier.

Now, I rather enjoy traveling by bus, but on that overnight jaunt I did not sleep my usual full eight hours. So when we pulled into a gas station at 6 a.m. and the driver got on the mic to tell us we all needed to get off the bus because they were refueling, I was somewhat out of it.

I got off the bus, used the restroom inside the gas station, and then stood outside in the chill morning air to wait until we could get back on the bus. There were several other passengers also waiting in the same general vicinity. One was a larger woman of Eastern European descent, just a few feet to my right. I don't know what language she was speaking, but she was in my line of sight as she opened the carton of cigarettes she'd just bought from the gas station.

In full view, I saw her rip open the plastic wrapping from the carton and drop it straight to the ground. My eyes bulged. There was a trash can three yards away, within clear sight of the both of us! (And even if there hadn't been, she could have put the wrapper in her pocket or held onto it to throw away on the bus!)

I had a quick internal struggle, as I wanted to say or do something, but then I was afraid of making a fool of myself. (Remember how I tend to avoid confrontation and conflict? Oh yeah, that.) But then I asked myself, *Do you want to live in a world where it's okay to throw your trash on the ground?* No. Okay, then Act! This was one situation where my grogginess actually helped me, because in a split second I decided *fuck it, these are the moments where I have to take action!*

I still didn't want to confront anyone, though, so what ended up happening is I took a step towards the woman, bent down right under her, and picked up the plastic wrapper.

My heart was pumping. *Holy shit, you're doing it, you're doing something.*

Then, I stood up and quickly turned and began moving towards the trash can—avoiding eye contact with the woman—but then I muttered aloud in French "It's just right there!" to express my annoyance (and because I was pretty sure this woman did *not* speak French. No harm done, right?).

Some point between when I picked up the wrapper and started to walk away, the woman said something ("sorry"?), but I couldn't make it out and didn't attempt to start a conversation. And then I proceeded to avoid contact for the rest of our waiting period. (Baby steps.)

So yeah, looking back it was a super awkward encounter, but I was still proud of myself for taking any action at all. And honestly, I'm not sure what the outcome would have been had I been a fully rested human in that moment... I might not have done anything at all!

There would be plenty more opportunities to practice confronting others later. But for now, it was no litter—for the win!

## One Overnight

Since I was back in the states for the summer, I volunteered to be a camp counselor at [Camp Quest](#), a secular children's camp which features science, natural wonder, and humanistic values. The camp's mission is for children to explore, think for themselves, connect with their communities, and act to make the most of life for themselves and others. Basically it's the kind of camp I wish I'd had when I was younger, and which I'm thrilled to support now.

I'd had my phone interview with Nicole via Skype back when I was at the farm outside of Bologna. The wifi hadn't been great, so some parts of the call were choppy and quite difficult to understand, but even from that brief, glitched encounter, it seemed I would have a lot to talk about with Nicole and her wife, Monica.

Since I didn't have a car, I was planning to take a bus to Minneapolis and then catch a ride with another counselor to the campsite. Earlier on in our email exchanges, I had asked Nicole if they help organize any sort of carpool, or if she could put me in touch with the other counselors who were driving from Minneapolis. In her response, she wrote, "You are welcome to crash at my place and drive with us to camp." Phew—an option!

While home over the summer I went to our town's festival with Gil, an old high school friend who just so happens to also live in Minneapolis. We tend to run into each other once every year or two when we're both visiting our parents. The camp came up in conversation, and when I mentioned that I was still trying to figure out transportation logistics, Gil offered to let me crash at his apartment. Phew—another option!

Meanwhile I had also contacted my aunt and uncle who live not far from Minneapolis, to see if I could visit their family for a few days either before or after camp, since I'd be so closeby. Their schedule was open after that week, and they could pick me up from camp on the last day. The pieces were coming together!

There was only one bus to Minneapolis the day before camp, so I bought a ticket. I weighed my options and ultimately decided to take Nicole up on her offer, even though I'd never met her and felt a little uneasy about the one-way generosity (as I saw it in my eyes). Gil would have had to come pick me up from the bus stop, and I didn't know if he could drive me to camp the following day—what if he had to work? But Nicole and her family were making the drive for sure, so I could just carpool along. Nicole said she would pick me up from the bus station that day, so we were all set.

Then, I started thinking (*Thinking!*) about all of the details and unknowns. *My bus will get in around 5 p.m., so should I bring a dinner along? Or would Nicole be able to drive me somewhere to pick up a dinner? Was I inviting myself over for dinner? I don't want to invite myself to dinner!*

While asking any of these questions to Nicole would have removed the worry, I didn't want to hound her with such questions. Her previous responses had all been so concise and to-the-point that I thought my questions about dinner might be excessive and make me come across as a super Type-A, unable-to-go-with-the-flow kind of person. *But I can go with the flow!*

Deep down I knew that everything would be completely fine. This is how I travel without plans, after all, as I had done during those three months in spring—making it up as I went along, trusting the world would provide. So I didn't ask; I kept them internalized.

If given the space, my *Fear* would have had a field day with *Think*: *What if it's awkward? What if they have to rearrange the whole day just to pick me up? What if they eat really early and they've already eaten when I show up, and assume I ate on the bus? Say I bring food along but they cook dinner, should I insist on eating my food, or when would I eat it? What can I bring along that can stay unrefrigerated for the 5-hour bus ride? Dang, should I have taken up Gil on his offer, just so I'd be with someone I at least knew?*

So my coping method was (and often is) to push it from my mind, to keep those worries at bay, just under the surface. If I don't give myself space or time to worry, there's no space or time for worries. I wasn't yet at a place where I could leap into *Curiosity* (i.e. *I wonder what their house will look like, I'm so excited!*), so instead what it looked like for me to follow my compass was to keep on moving and staying focused on the present task. *Only think about what you can control in this moment*, I would tell myself. *Don't think about Friday until Friday is here. Okay now it's Friday and you're on the bus, and now the bus has arrived, now Nicole has picked you up with her nephew, you're driving together in her car, you have not asked to stop somewhere for dinner, and now you're at their house!*

There was a tiny library on their front lawn, accessible from the sidewalk, and old shoes lined the windows of the front porch—the soles nailed straight into the sills. What a fun, playful vibe!



Now I *was* genuinely excited to step foot inside. Greeting me on the stairs of the front entrance was Nicole's young niece, who adorably took me up to her bedroom to play with her brother. Hooray for children, who make me feel so at ease!

There was no wifi in the house, so these kids played inside and out, using their creativity and imaginations on the daily. Nicole and Monica *had* made dinner for me that night, so together we ate a delicious vegetarian taco meal. I'd brought along some green beans from my garden, which we cooked and ate as well.

As I helped clean up a bit afterwards, my eyes were happily absorbing their kitchen. Glass jars full of dry ingredients lined the shelves—there was no packaging to be seen. There was also no dishwasher, so Monica washed the dishes as we chatted. I asked a bit about their lifestyle, and they both recommended the book ["Radical Homemakers"](#) to me. I jotted it down in my notebook.

Then I had a great discussion with Monica about our back health, because whereas I'd had a spinal fusion when I was a teenager, Monica had worn a back brace for scoliosis. She went down into the basement and dug out her old brace so I could look at it. I told Monica how I had gone to a physical therapist for the first time just days prior and received stretches and exercises I should be doing to improve the muscles that need more strength (because of my fusion). It turned out Monica had also just gone to a center for back care, which gave her a slew of exercises as well!

The next morning we had smoothies for breakfast and a chocolate-baked something or other. In each of our smoothie glasses was a reusable metal straw, the first time I'd ever seen one. Genius! Just wash and reuse. You could theoretically have one straw for your entire life.

After breakfast the kids finished packing their bags and we picked up the U-Haul we'd be taking to camp with all of the supplies. On our drive, I asked Nicole about her zero-waste kitchen, and she told me more about her decision to become a "radical homemaker" when she became caretaker for her niece and nephew. And just like that, seeds were planted. My world was cracked open inches wider that day.

Camp was amazing, but perhaps more incredible was the significant, lasting impact that those 24 hours in Nicole and Monica's home had on me.

I did read "Radical Homemakers" later that fall, and it has greatly changed my understanding of "economy" as we know it, as well as our consumer culture and related topics. In 2018 I began a journey to learn about the zero-waste movement and sustainability. This was sparked by many



influences, but staying in that Minnesotan zero-waste home the night before camp definitely made an impression on me.

And to think, I almost missed out on the whole experience because I was nervous about a few unknown details and not wanting to impose/be a burden. When worries like this pop into my head, now I can think back to this situation and ask instead: *What if it's amazing? What if this experience completely changes the course of my life?*

Remembering this lesson and carrying it with me steers me ever closer towards *Curiosity, Growth, Act, and Experiences*.

## Four Good Things

Camp Quest was an intense and rewarding experience. Being "on" all the time, in charge of all these little people, was emotionally exhausting—even more so when you're used to ample time alone each day to recharge, which is what my summer had looked like up until that point. So there wasn't much time to process or decompress each day; it was go, go, go from sunup to sundown. Each day had its challenges—which always arise—but I also got to witness many warm interactions between the campers, which made my heart fill with joy.



*The kids having fun painting a fellow counselor*

Like the morning when, while waiting in line for breakfast, I saw our youngest girls (ages 8-10) teaching the oldest boys (ages 14-16) how to play their hand clapping game. The guys were genuinely trying to learn; it was so cute and uplifting! I was also lucky enough to witness an older girl invite one of the younger campers to make a nametag next to her on the first day. This younger girl didn't know anyone, and had been visibly sad and anxious to be without her parents—until the older camper took her under her wing.

I'd been making a mental list of these "good things" I was seeing, and eventually wrote down a brief list on paper. I had the thought of sharing these "good news" items with all of the campers, thus encouraging/drawing attention to good behavior rather than scolding and giving attention to misbehavior. Each day there were always a few times that the entire camp—all three age groups—would be together for an announcement of some sort before we broke into smaller groups, so that would be an ideal time to share my observations.

Now although I was seen as an authority figure to the campers, as a counselor it was only my first time volunteering at the camp, so I felt like a newbie—even with my prior teaching experience and even with my role of Lead Head Cabin Counselor. I was watching keenly to see how the Director and Assistant Director handled situations as they arose, learning from their

classroom management and leading tactics as I gained a little more confidence every day. It was these two staff members and some veteran, outgoing counselors who addressed the group when the whole camp was gathered together. Which is to say, this idea of mine very much felt like a stretch.

After letting the idea brew in my mind for a few days, one afternoon between activities I noticed that at that very moment, everyone was in the same room, sitting on the floor, listening to one of the counselors give them direction for what was coming next. I decided I was going to do it.

"Can I make an announcement when you're done?" I asked the Assistant Director, who was about to give an announcement of her own.

"Sure!" she said.

So when she was finished communicating her bit of news, she passed the stage on to me. "And now Rebecca has something she wants to share with you."

I had run through what I was going to say many times in my head, and I even had the list on paper in my hand in case my mind went blank. But when actually saying it out loud in front of all of the campers and most of the counselors, my heart pulsed faster. My fingers shook ever so slightly as they held my paper, and I could hear some wavering in my voice. I don't know if I looked nervous to anyone else, but I was surprised at just how much my body was reacting to this leap of action I was taking.

The older boys and younger girls grinned when I talked about seeing them playing the hand-clapping game together, and I felt proud all over again when I recalled a camper who had gently touched his chatty neighbor's shoulder to remind him it was time to listen. Two minutes later I was done, and off we went into a whirl of afternoon activities.

Later that day, a counselor told me she really liked what I'd said to everyone earlier. It felt good to hear this because it's not every day you receive such direct indication that your words and actions have influenced someone—even though I strongly believe our presence is always rippling out into the world in some form or another. It was also wonderful to have concrete evidence that my "leap" had made an impact on a fellow *counselor*, because originally I'd only been thinking about how my words could boost the campers.

It was such a small moment in the scheme of things—a quick message delivered during a few minutes of transition between awesomely fun camp activities one day. But that instant was worth celebrating, as it moved me an inch closer toward my compass directions.

## No Smoking

A month after my short camp gig, I began a six-month AmeriCorps term serving with ACE in Arizona. On the conservation corps we would go on 8-day hitches with an 8-person crew (including a crew lead) and do work like trail maintenance, removing invasive species, or building barbed wire fencing, for example. The final three compass-directed moments of this book all took place during my ACE term.



On my very first hitch there was a young 19-year-old girl on my crew, Leah, who immediately stood out as a one-of-a-kind individual. By the end of the week she had won us all over with her raw energy, her disregard for social norms, and her bright smile. But my initial impression was that of trouble: She received numerous reminders each day to put on her PPE (Personal Protective Equipment: hard hat, gloves, eye protection), Leah didn't have my optimism or work ethic, and she smoked on the work site. ACE rules state that you can't smoke during the work day, from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.—not to mention that in many places you also shouldn't smoke for risk of starting a wildfire, but that's another story. So shortly after meeting, my mind had categorized Leah as a "rule-breaker."

One of the safety rules we go over each morning is "Direction and Duration"—that whenever you leave the group (usually it's to "visit the bushes"), you must tell someone which direction you're going and how long you'll be gone.

On our first or second day out working, the crew was split up along a mile stretch, each working on different parts of the barbed-wire fence we were building. I'll also add for context that this had been my first time sleeping in a tent (with elk making sounds I'd never heard before at night, no less!), so I hadn't slept the greatest those first few days. And we already know what happens when I don't get my 8-9 hours... the smallest clash can easily set off my tears, emotions are magnified out of proportion, and my mind and body are not their usual selves.

Okay, so I was sitting with a few people during first break when Leah appeared from around the corner, walking towards us. Several yards away she shouted, "If Tom asks where I am, I'm over this way. I'm taking a smoke where he can't see me," and off she disappeared into the forest. Tom was our crew leader.

Immediately my body got tense. I asked the people around me, "Isn't she not supposed to smoke?" but one girl immediately countered, "*Leah* can do what she wants to do" and laughed it off, letting it be.

I continued eating my salty snacks, but inside I was torn apart. By sitting and letting Leah go smoke, I was a knowing participant, an enabler. I didn't want to later get in trouble for letting this happen. But whereas in my past teaching jobs I was always the authority figure, now I was Leah's peer, her fellow crew member. *What am I supposed to do in this situation?* I was also ten years her senior.

My tendency in this sort of situation was to stay in my head and think about my moral conundrum. But something in me that day clicked—perhaps aided by a newfound identity of "elder/adult," since all my other crew members and crew lead were 19-25—and I decided to be an adult and just go talk to Tom. To ask him what he expects crew members to do in this sort of situation. To gain information by taking action, rather than sitting in the discomfort of not knowing.

I grabbed my snacks and walked down the trail a bit until I found Tom, lying under a tree.

"Hey Tom, can I ask you something?" I began.

Then I provided some background, explaining that I was trying to get past childhood-learned rules-following habits and adjust to being a peer in this new organization, rather than an authority figure.

As these conflicting feelings were finally being expressed verbally, I could feel the exhaustion and emotion bubbling over and suddenly felt as though I could cry. *Why would this make you cry?! Don't let it start!* I thought. The lack of sleep was without doubt the main culprit in amplifying this micro-conflict. In addition to the internal struggle to do what felt "right," the disinterest from my crew mates about Leah's rule-breaking had made me feel alone and uncool. *Why does my body feel so uncomfortable and unsafe in this situation, when it's no big deal to most everyone else?* I wondered.

"What do you expect fellow members to do if you know someone's off smoking in the woods, for example?" I asked, keeping my cool.

"Leah?" he said immediately. "Ugh, I've already told her twice today not to smoke!" he said, visibly annoyed at how much supervision she required.

"I'm asking for me—do you expect members to police one another or how should we handle things like this?"

"Tell her not to do it, call her out!" he said casually, his tone sounding more peer-like than I'd been expecting, glazed with evident irritation for the situation.

"I'll talk to her again later," he said.

*Shit, that's not what I was after!* My intention was not to tattletale, it was to gain information/clarity for myself. To potentially feel calmer. To feel safer. But I knew he wouldn't bring me into it, so I let our conversation end there.

Now, with six months of ACE hitches under my belt—all led by a variety of crew leaders (and leadership styles)—part of me is embarrassed at how worked up I had been about this small infraction on my very first hitch.

But that said, I'm also proud of how I handled it: I noticed sensations in my body, pushed my comforts by taking action, and grew. It took courage for me to leave my head, approach the crew leader, and openly admit how distraught I had been about my fellow crew member breaking rules. And that's exactly what needed to happen for me to live by my own standards in that moment.



## On Break

During my second month in ACE I had a hitch out on a wildlife refuge between California and Arizona. On the very last day, our project partner from the refuge, Mateo, left our crew with instructions to pull weeds throughout the fenced-in area surrounding their office. "Pull everything," he told us, "There shouldn't be any vegetation here."



*Some of the "weeds" we had to remove*

And so that morning our crew began "weeding" the property. We were filling black garbage bags really quickly with the unlucky plants. Sometime around 8:30 our crew leader called for morning break. On a full work day we would normally break at 10 or 10:30, but since this was the last day, we would be driving back to our homebase in Flagstaff by that point. It still seemed really early to me—we had only been working for an hour. But when your crew lead calls break, you take break.



I grabbed my water and salty snacks and took a seat next to some friends on a bench. We sat facing the gate entrance of the chain-link fence which surrounded the plot, just to the side of the office building.

A few minutes later, we saw a white U.S. Fish and Wildlife pickup truck approaching: Mateo. Without even thinking about it, I darted up and rushed behind the office building, where I wouldn't be seen as Mateo drove in. If he saw us all sitting around, he would probably think we were slacking—especially since these were the final hours of our last day and soon we would be driving home. But I had been working damn hard pulling those weeds!

I hadn't even had time for those thoughts to run through my mind, though—my movement had been a 100% automatic physical reaction. After he drove past I went back out to my friends and started analyzing: *Wow, I'm supposed to be on break. We're all supposed to be on break. Why couldn't I let him see me taking a break?*

This is one benefit my personal compass has provided: increased awareness. And sometimes, awareness is all you need. In this case, which we've seen pop up again and again, I clearly have some sort of deep-rooted fear of authority / being seen not working hard, likely learned by my body in childhood.

That fact wasn't news to me, but this scene revealed: *Hey, you're not over this. There's still something deep in you that doesn't want to be seen as a bad worker, because you believe yourself to be a good worker. You don't give a shit what others think of you in so many other contexts, yet you're still holding on here. You know logically that it doesn't matter what Mateo thinks—you've done no wrong, and even if he didn't like the fact that we were taking a break, that would be on the crew lead—but even though your mind knows this to be true, your body has some unlearning to do. There is still work to do underneath to free yourself from this snag.*

And that's the observation I took away from my hiding-on-break incident.

## Save the Mice!

That fall I met and was on hitch often with 20-year-old Adriene. We quickly became friends, as I was drawn to her openness, directness, positive attitude, warm laugh, and huge smile. Adriene is a vegan because of her love of animals, so we would often cook our meals together, since I ate vegan meals on hitch too.



When we were working together in the backcountry of the Grand Canyon, our four-person crew camped with two National Park Service (NPS) workers at their campsite about halfway down into the canyon. There was a "kitchen" set up, which remained there week after week, containing a three-burner propane stove, a nice (by camping standards) set of dishes and utensils, a card table to house the radios as they charged, and two trail folding chairs which were always set up.

One morning after breakfast we had a few minutes to spare, so most of us were sitting around the kitchen space before we had to leave for our 7 a.m. Safety Circle. The night before I'd actually skipped dinner due to cold/flu nausea, but that morning I was feeling considerably better in comparison, albeit still plagued with a lousy cold.

Suddenly we heard some mice scurrying nearby, probably interested in whatever scraps had fallen while we'd made our lunches and prepared snacks for the work day.

"Damn mice," said Kyle, an NPS worker. Then he picked up a rock.

Adriene gasped. "Please don't," she said.

I marveled at how much braver she was than me when it came to confrontation and being oneself.

But unfortunately Adriene's a bit soft spoken, so Kyle didn't even hear her plea to spare the animal, and seconds later he hurled the rock at the mouse.

"Ughhh, I can't watch this," Adriene said to me as she got up and left the kitchen.

Kyle continued throwing rocks at the mice—which I didn't want him to kill, either—but he had such a headstrong, backwoodsman, I-do-what-I-want, cold presence that I felt he was intimidating, unwelcoming, and unapproachable. So I said nothing. A few minutes later my crew gathered for Safety Circle and my thoughts turned to the day's trail work at hand.

Later on the hike in to work, Adriene said she was really upset at what she'd seen in the kitchen that morning. I completely agreed with Adriene: Vegan or not, we were in these animals' living space and had no right to be killing them. I also didn't like hearing that my friend felt so distraught at our campsite because of Kyle's mouse-stoning habit, so I thought about saying something to him later.

That evening when my crew returned to camp from work, I saw my opportunity: Kyle was sitting on his chair in the kitchen and my crew mates were all headed to their tents. I had thought carefully about the tone, angle, and word choice I would use to communicate most effectively with Kyle, and ultimately decided to just share Adriene's position with him so he could make future decisions based on a truer reality.

I took a deep breath, gathered up some courage, and walked down the rock stairs into the kitchen area.

"Hey Kyle? I just wanted to let you know that Adriene is vegan because of animal rights, so it really upsets her to see mice killed at camp. You can do what you want, obviously, but I just wanted you to know."

"There are always people like her camping with us," he said, annoyed. "It seems every crew has someone who is all concerned about animal rights. But the damn mice get in the food! I'm not gonna stop—I don't want them in my kitchen—but I'll try not to do it in front of her."

Pleasantly surprised that he had already bent slightly, I emphasized once more that I'd just wanted to let him know. Then I scraped together some words to wrap it up and got the hell out of that uncomfortable confrontation.

As I walked up the large rocks to leave the kitchen area, my legs felt shaky. Without warning I became woozy, almost as if I were going to faint. *Did blood pump to my head? What was going on?*

While I was still fighting off whatever virus or bug I'd been dealing with that week, this immediate physical reaction must have been related to the uneasy action I'd just taken.

Once again, it was my body confirming what my mind and soul knew: I had just done something uncomfortable—something which aligned with my compass.

## *Closing Reflections*

When I penned my first personal compass nearly two years ago, I had no idea just how influential it would become. In addition to the stories shared here, my compass has directed and continues to direct numerous moments in my life. In fact, after so much time under its guidance, I've come to internalize the path and how to navigate daily moments accordingly. (Which isn't to say my actions are always moving me towards my compass directions, but rather my awareness is high.)

Here are some more takeaways I've gathered from following my compass and from writing this book, which allowed me to relive these moments in slow motion:

**My inner workings are complex.** I've always been drawn to self-reflection, but by turning my attention to such moments I've been able to do lots more observation as a third party and get curious. I'll ask myself why I reacted as I did, while digging around for what's beneath the surface. And I've seen that in some instances, there isn't a logical "why"—that my body sometimes reacts in an automatic way, even when my mind knows everything's okay.

**Mini-successes are worth celebrating.** No matter how it may have seemed to an onlooker, whenever I moved towards one of my directions, I felt proud of myself. I would praise myself in my mind, usually while smiling, and a few times I even threw my hands up in a celebratory gesture. This was a natural reaction for me, but I think it really propelled me forward and brought purpose and joy into seemingly insignificant cracks of time. And all of those tiny wins? Over time they pile up.

**Small actions amass over time.** Tapping into one's courage for a mini-moment might seem trivial when looking at the big picture, but these moments add up. With each celebration for a compass-directed moment, I'm strengthening these new connections in my brain, essentially "rewiring" it over time. Slowly, I'm developing into a new being with new base comforts and inclinations. Looking back, I feel like a completely different person today than who I was in the fall of 2016, without a doubt.

**Action creates courage.** I used to think some people were simply more courageous than others, but I've seen my courage grow with action. Once I stretch myself, I gain experience *doing* something that had felt somewhat out of reach. And it's this "act of having done" which then builds my courage, confidence, and motivation up a level. That said, an appropriate stretch will look different for everyone, so it's necessary to turn down outside noise in order to listen to your body, mind, and spirit.

**My body is a signal.** In many compass-directed moments my body gave me physical signs of stretching, and this time I noticed them. I've also been gaining bodily awareness through meditation (hello, lungs!) and yoga over the last two years. I think all of it plays together and is helping me to get more in tune with everything working together, rather than solely living from my mind, for example.

**We're ever-changing.** One of my favorite quotes comes from Natalie Goldberg's book "Writing Down the Bones." She writes, "They were my thoughts and my hand and the space and the emotions at that time of writing. Watch yourself. Every minute we change." I fully believe that we're changing every minute—we're fluid humans—and as such, my compass has morphed since its creation too. (*Experiences* is now *Sustainability*, for example, as I explore the zero-waste lifestyle and learn about sustainability this year.)

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One of my greatest shifts from 2016 to the present was perhaps that I no longer obsessively think about which cause to "dedicate" my life to. As illustrated in my first *Act > Think* example at the start of the book, this question used to keep me up at night, stealing precious space and time from my mind on the regular.

I hadn't realized this significant change had happened, though, until writing this very reflection. It's easy to lose sight of what no longer surrounds you, like the physical possessions left behind on my year-long journeys. Out of sight, out of mind.

My standard Saturdays and typical Tuesdays are now freckled with purpose and delight. I could credit this to growing up—a shift that perhaps happens to most as they close out their 20s and begin decade number three—but I think this transformation was largely made possible by my personal compass, among other influences that drew my attention to everyday moments (shoutout to [Alexandra Franzen's work](#) and the [Moment Sketchers community](#)!).

So while my compass did successfully fill the role of that personal growth measurement tool I had been seeking back in 2016 to guide my uncharted times ahead, bit by bit it also led to a powerful change in my mindset and life philosophy. And for that, I'm incredibly grateful.

As I move forward into more unexplored territories, I'll continue to bring my compass along into daily moments—allowing the directions to change and morph as I do. And as my compass slowly guides me, it will lead me to opportunities for growth, illuminating the path to become my truest self. Onwards!

# *How to Make Your Own Personal Compass*

If you're interested in making your own personal compass, here are five steps you can follow.

## **Step 1: Identify Core Values**

A simple way to begin is to google a list of values and select around five that resonate with you. [Here's a list you could use.](#) [Here's another.](#)

When choosing what rings true to you, it's really important to get quiet and listen to your inner voice, not what your family, spouse, friends, church, or coworkers would want you to say. What's truly important to you?

Write down your top values on a piece of paper.

## **Step 2: Highlight Attributes You Admire**

Then, flip that sheet of paper over and think of 4-6 people you admire. These might be friends and family or well-known public figures. Dead or alive, you can choose anyone. Write their names around the paper, into a sort of mind map.

Next, go through each name one at a time and write down why you look up to that person. Jot a bullet list under each name to record the attributes you admire in these people.

## **Step 3: Select Compass Directions**

Using the values and attributes you uncovered in steps 1 and 2, think about your current tendencies and which directions you'd like to move towards. Write down any unfiltered thoughts on your piece of paper.

You may want to take a break at this point and let things simmer for a few days. Then, return to your words and select 4-6 that are speaking to you the strongest.

I can't stress enough that your directions will be unique to you. Whereas I needed to push myself to act instead of think, others might want to think before acting. And whereas inequalities were helpful to me, you might be drawn to different words or even images.



## Step 4: Make Your Compass

Once you've identified your compass directions, grab an index card (or a Post-it, or a piece of scrap paper—whatever you have on hand) and write them down.

I wrote mine in a circle to look like an actual compass, but again—create however you want to!

Also, I'd like to note that even though I had identified inequalities for my compass directions, I only wrote the "positive" direction on my compass. It's better for the mind to focus on affirmatives when seeking change. For example, we would tell ourselves to "smile" instead of "don't frown." Otherwise, our minds would actually fixate on the word "frown"—even though it has the negator "not" in front.

Make your compass as simple or as fancy as you want. Have fun! Make it you.

## Step 5: Use Your Compass

Now that you have your compass, the most critical step is putting it into practice on a regular basis. You'll have to reprogram your brain a bit to break from habit and start using your compass.

For me the biggest factor was awareness. For my personal compass to work, I had to be aware of how my actions were aligned in the moment. But this is difficult to do when you've been on a different autopilot for so long.

So how do you change your awareness? Visual reminders can be so helpful! Draw out your compass on a few notecards and post them around your home, work, car—wherever you'll see them. If you're a smartphone user, snap a picture and set it as your phone background. These visual hints will help you become more aware that your compass is available to be used at any moment.

Then, take three minutes at the end of each day to reflect and see in what moments your compass served you that day. You can set a recurring alarm on your phone to remind you to do this. Use whatever method works for you—jot them down in a notebook if you're a pen and paper person like me, or keep a running list in your Notes app throughout the day if you prefer digital. The more frequently you turn to your compass to help you, the more it will become second nature.

One more idea is to set a recurring calendar appointment named your compass directions. In my case, for example, that would mean receiving a notification at a certain time each day for "Act!

Create! Curiosity! Done! Experiences! Growth!" I didn't use this technique myself, but I think it could hold potential for some.

Adjust your process to fit your needs as you progress with time. Likewise, remember you can adjust your compass directions at any point so that they grow right along with you. If you think you'll forget to reevaluate down the line, set a calendar appointment right now for six or twelve months from now, to see if your directions still feel true and resonant.

That's all there is to it!

And for those of you who love all things paper, [here's a free, handwritten zine you can print out](#) (and [fold into a mini-book](#)) to guide you through this compass-making process. Enjoy!

## *Pay What Feels Right*

As I mentioned in the introduction, I'm using a PWYW model for this ebook. Lately I'm seeing more and more that where you spend your money is a vote for what kind of world you want to live in.

If you received value and enjoyment from reading, and if you believe in what I'm creating, then consider this your invitation to vote for a world with more creativity, values-based living, kindness, gratitude, and reflection.

[You can make your payment here via PayPal](#) or to @RebeccaThering on Venmo. Do what feels right! (Suggested amount: \$15)

Your support will enable me to bring more projects like this to life. Whatever you're in the position to pay for the ebook, I'm so grateful for your contribution. Thank you.

With gratitude,

*Rebecca*

# *Influences and Inspiration*

These books, people, podcasts, and more have all played a role at some point in this chapter of my life—paving the way for my creativity to take precedence and encouraging a life more closely aligned with my values.

## **Books**

["Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear"](#) by Elizabeth Gilbert

["Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone"](#) by Brené Brown

["The Crossroads of Should and Must"](#) by Elle Luna

["Finding Your Way in a Wild New World"](#) by Martha Beck

["How to Be an Explorer of the World"](#) by Keri Smith

["Just Kids"](#) by Patti Smith

["Life on Fire: A Step-By-Step Guide to Living Your Dreams"](#) by Kim Dinan

["Love Warrior"](#) by Glennon Doyle Melton

["Mindset: The New Psychology of Success"](#) by Carol Dweck

["My Life in France"](#) by Julia Child

["Playing Big: A Practical Guide for Women Who Want to Speak Up, Create, and Lead"](#) by Tara Mohr

["Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture"](#) by Shannon Hayes

["Refuse to Choose!: Use All of Your Interests, Passions, and Hobbies to Create the Life and Career of Your Dreams"](#) by Barbara Sher

["Show Your Work!"](#) by Austin Kleon

["Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within"](#) by Natalie Goldberg

["You're Going to Survive"](#) by Alexandra Franzen

## People, Podcasts, and More

[Alexandra Franzen](#)

Art nights with Emily, Liz, and Hannah

[Ballads for Buddha](#) by [Luke Thering](#), my younger brother

[Brad Montague](#)

[The Couragemakers Podcast](#), its creator [Meg Kissack](#), and her site [That Hummingbird Life](#)

[Flow Magazine](#)

[Hilal Isler](#)

Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson of ["Broad City"](#)

[Kim Dinan](#)

Lindsey Bugbee of [The Postman's Knock](#)

[Mary Oliver](#)

[Magic Lessons with Elizabeth Gilbert](#)

[Moment Sketchers community](#) and its creator [Candace Rose Rardon](#)

[Natalie Goldberg](#)

[Real Talk Radio with Nicole Antoinette](#)

[Regina Spektor](#)

[Snail Mail](#) and its co-creator [Kyra Maya Phillips](#)

[Violeta Nedkova](#)

## About the Author

**Hey there! It's me, Rebecca.**

I value gratitude, Mother Earth, creativity, kindness, play, and truth.

An enjoyable day might include any of the following: drinking tea, art journaling, snail mailing, writing, wander walking, hiking, reading, or playing ukulele.

I feel most alive when I'm learning something new. Some past learning endeavors include walking the *Camino de Santiago* across Spain, teaching English at an elementary school in South Korea, learning French to fluency, [improving my health by adapting a whole foods plant-based diet](#), doing conservation work in Arizona, and I'm excited to see what's next!



More information can be found at my website, [www.rebeccarosethering.com](http://www.rebeccarosethering.com), where I also keep a personal blog.

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If you've read this far, I would absolutely love to hear from you! Did any of my stories resonate with you? Have you ever made some sort of personal compass or identified your values? Do you have any recommendations for me? A question you want to ask?

Whatever the reason, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

- **Email:** [rebeccarosethering@gmail.com](mailto:rebeccarosethering@gmail.com)

## *Further Reading*

If you liked this ebook, you might be interested in the following pieces I've written over the years:

[A Look Inside My Day-Marker Art Journal](#)

[I Puked, I Sketched, and Then One Man in Munich Changed My Day](#)

[The Joy of Being an Adult Beginner](#)

[Just Move the Pen](#)

[My Guide to Writing Online as My Truest Self](#)

[Never Again](#)

[Personal Projects: Ideas to Kickstart Your Next Creation](#)

[A Reflection on 100 Days of Mind Mapping](#)

[The Unexpected Email from My Spanish TA on Easter](#)

[What I Learned Walking 500 Miles on the Camino de Santiago](#)

A current collection of things a past-me wrote can be found on the [Archives page](#) of my website.

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Thank you for reading.