

# Awakening to Me

A black and white illustration of a hummingbird perched on a vine, drinking from a small flower. The vine has several leaves. The title 'Awakening to Me' is written in a large, elegant, cursive script, with the words 'to' and 'Me' being smaller and positioned below 'Awakening'.

One Woman's Journey to Self Love



Kerri Hummingbird Lawnsby

## Praise for *Awakening to Me* by Kerri Hummingbird Lawnsby

Kerri's raw courage and vulnerable transparency blaze a trail for any woman on a healing journey. *Awakening to Me* is a magnificent book that takes us behind the scenes of transformation, and shows how even the most difficult situations can be the fodder for finding oneself. Let Kerri's book guide you to find your independence and self-love.

— HeatherAsh Amara, author of *The Toltec Path of Transformation* and *Warrior Goddess Training*

In *Awakening To Me*, Kerri shares her intimate and difficult personal and spiritual journey to identify and express her authentic being into the world. Her story is engaging, sometimes disturbing, yet with a clear underlying thread of compassion for herself and others also engaged in their own struggle with borderline personality disorder. In her words, she seeks to give voice to those who have no voice.

Her life voyage takes her through light and darkness, to amazing heights and agonizing lows. In her world travels she meets with some of the teachers who have helped shape the views of spiritual development for a generation. Each has something to share with her that may shed light upon your own path, as well.

It has been my pleasure and honor to walk with Kerri through some of her journey. I heartily recommend this book to you as a tool for your own amazing self-exploration. Among these pages you will find a courageous and dedicated explorer of life and spirit.

— Gerry Starnes, M.Ed, author of *Spirit Paths: The Quest for Authenticity*



*I dedicate this book to you, to your beautiful soul waiting to awaken from the darkness. Open your heart and your mind dear one... then open your eyes and see your reflection. You are divine.*



*"You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere.*

*You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe deserve your love and affection."*

*— Buddha*

*"There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting."*

*— Buddha*

## *Acknowledgements*

*From the bottom of my heart, I thank Spirit for guiding me each and every day on the journey of my life. I thank my sons, Garrett and Tanner, for endless support and thousands of I love you's. I thank my parents for supporting my growth into a woman and mother, even if they do not completely understand all the things I seek and do. I thank my soul daughter, Shana, for being the daughter I dreamed I would have. I thank my friends for understanding my struggle yet holding me accountable for my healing. I thank my mentors—Gerry Starnes, Cecilia Zuniga, Chrispy Bhagat Singh, HeatherAsh Amara, and the amazing faculty at the Four Winds Society—for opening doors to healing that have transformed my life entirely. I thank the many people who entered my life during this transformational period, most of whom read and consented to the publishing of this story. Gratitude to my best friends Marques Harper and Dorothy Sloan for providing invaluable editorial feedback, as well as Gerry Starnes, Chrispy Bhagat Singh, and HeatherAsh Amara for mentoring me through my healing journey and going the extra mile to review my manuscript.*

*Thank you to Alberto Villoldo for following his heart and intuition to learn from the indigenous shamans in South America, and to persevere to develop an amazing body of shamanic healing practices that have forever changed the course of my life. Endless gratitude and overflowing munay. Because of your courage and conviction, I am no longer lost in the dark: I am a lighthouse of hope that people can find the way home to their essential selves.*

*Most of all, I thank myself for slogging through swampy murky waters fearlessly and believing there would be joy and love at the other side.*



# Why

This journey begins with a single step: a decision to share openly my personal experience in the hopes that you might benefit from hearing it. That you might realize: *You are not alone.*

Along my journey, Spirit guided me to the realization that I have a gift: *courage.*

*"The root of the word courage is cor—the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage had a very different definition than it does today. Courage originally meant 'To speak one's mind by telling all one's heart.'" — Brené Brown<sup>1</sup>*

By sharing my story, I give you permission to share yours. I open the door in a darkened room, and let the summer sunshine dispel the shadows so that you may see that there is no shame in your experience—there is only the opportunity to learn and grow into the person you were meant to be.

Each one of us on this planet is meant to be here; otherwise, we would not have been given this precious gift of *Life.*

There have been times in my existence that I did not feel the preciousness of Life; rather, I felt its burdens and heaviness and pain.

I am here to tell you, there is hope. There is a path to a joyful existence. And it can happen for you even if you currently exist in darkness.

I have felt absolute terror about sharing my story with you. I have felt fear about what you will think of me. I have felt fear about what you will say about me to my children, to my parents, to my face, or worse, behind my back. This is my fear. My fear wants to keep me in the darkness living in shame. I am writing this story because ***I refuse to let fear win.*** This book is my authentic story. It is me. And to love myself, I have to let my story live in the light, I have to accept myself for the path I have had to walk.

This story is important to be heard. As I have shared my story privately throughout the years, I have heard from so many other souls that have struggled with sexual abuse as a child or adult, at the hands of family members and trusted loved ones: brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, cousins, step-parents, and the list goes on. This is *love abuse*. It needs to stop.

I do not hold a master's degree or doctorate. I am not trained in psychotherapy (although, I think with the 30 some-odd years I have spent on a couch, I should have earned an honorary degree by now).

I am not healed, I am not cured: I simply have awareness of my patterns of thinking and behavior, and I have the capacity to make different choices.

I am merely a student of life, a master and student of my own experience. And because I have struggled, I have compassion for your struggle. But you might say, "You don't even know me. How can you care?"

I care because you are part of my Universe. We are made of the same material—you and I. We are from the same Source. If I can touch your heart, and help you heal even a little of your pain, one battle in the war against fear and shame has been won, and we have given love the advantage for a moment in time. All love needs is a crack—that's how the light gets in. <sup>2</sup>

I know you can find your own joy. I know you can learn to love yourself.



*As I sit on my front porch I see him. His long slender scaly body stretched cool against the warm concrete of the step, his viridian neck extended high, his head alert but relaxed in the sunlight.*

*An unexpected visitor: the Snake.*

## *A Soul In Crisis*

❧ *the journey begins in shadows* ❧

I am misery. I am surrounded by darkness. I am abandoned in my treachery. I am inconsolable. I cry hot tears from the bottom of my soul, and they scorch my eyes. My thoughts are whips and knives that slash my self-worth until there is nothing left but a bloody aching mass. I want to die. I cannot see light. Nor hope. Nor peace of any kind. I am trapped inside a hell of my own making. And I cannot escape.

My cousin's voice is like the seductive drip of heroin into my veins. His strong and gentle hands cradle my head as his tongue caresses mine, then his fingers trace the contour of my neck down to my shoulders where he brushes aside the bows that hold up my halter top and it slides down as his tongue follows, wrapping around my nipple as desire swells from the deepest part of me. I am suspended in thick sweet honey.

The memory of our intimacy has become an endless loop of sensations for my starving heart, a loop that is always completed by the grand finale: a darkening and crushing wisdom that our love cannot be. That our love is wrong.

Still I yearn for him. This unexpected romance somehow blossomed in the back alley of my marriage, and after nearly two decades of making it work I see that the foundation of the life my husband and I built together has irreparable damage. My cousin, who I have known since we were children but only reconnected with in the past year, points it out to me, defending my honor: "I don't like the way he treats you. You deserve so much more Kerri." Somehow this kindness from a trusted soul opens the door, and we cross the line into a forbidden world.

❧



*The day is finally here...  
the day planned for over a month in secret conversations over text  
messages and phone calls...  
The day long awaited and anticipated...  
The day we would make love for the first time.  
I knock on the door and as he opens it our eyes lock together in steamy  
desire.  
I melt into his arms. His lips are soft as they meet mine, his tongue  
explores my mouth with passionate yearning and deft expression.  
He knows what he is doing to me.  
I have known him all my life and trust him completely.  
I dissolve into bliss.*



Now he has ended it after a mere 2 months, my thirst for love and romance unquenched. I become desperate for my cousin's attention. I promise things I have no business promising.

"We can go back to the way we were."

I send him kind thoughts over text message in hopes of a response. "Missing you today. Wishing you the best." When I do not hear from him, I obsess. I keep watching my cellphone to see if the light blinks, to see if he has messaged me. A day goes by and I am crazed. Why doesn't he respond? Does he care for me at all?

*I am abandoned.*

Eventually he calls. He says he cares for me but he cannot help me to get over him. He says this affair, and continued contact with him, is not good for me, and what we have done is morally wrong. It is unnatural for cousins to have an affair as we have, he says. He has put his feelings for me in a box and left it for God.

*He has thrown me out. Like trash.*

I am devastated. I am filled with shame. I am savage at the loss of his love. In my mind's eye, I streak blood across my face and storm screaming with axe in hand to exact revenge. In reality, I sit crying

at my desk while futilely trying to work on consulting projects for clients. I am hopeless.

I hear a Nine Inch Nails' song, and repeat it over and over and over in my mind. The song is so profound and exactly how I feel. I text him the lyrics.

*Well the tiniest little dot caught my eye  
and it turned out to be a scab*

*And I had this funny feeling like I just knew  
it's something bad*

*I just couldn't leave it alone,  
I kept picking at the scab*

*It was a doorway trying to seal itself shut  
But I climbed through*

*Now I am somewhere I am not supposed to be,  
and I can see things I know I really shouldn't see*

*And now I know why, now, now, now I know why Things aren't as pretty  
On the inside<sup>3</sup>*

I want to die. I am afraid I might actually try to kill myself. In a moment of weakness, in fear for my life, I tell my husband what has happened. He calls me right after I have talked with my cousin and my heart is breaking and my husband can hear it in my voice. I confess. My husband listens, absorbs the wound, and turns the other cheek. He tells me he is not worried about this affair, because it has been with my cousin. It is a forbidden love that will never come to light.

That night, my husband acts like it's no big deal what has happened with me and my cousin. In fact, if it makes me happy, I can keep doing it. It's not like I'll leave my husband for my cousin.



My shadow is long, deep, and wide. I can't stop thinking of my cousin which makes me angry at myself, and desperate. But I can't stop thinking about the love between us. Why is our love wrong? It

feels right. It feels more right than anything I've ever felt in my life.  
I text him, trying to convince him...

*Meet me in outer space  
We could spend the night  
Watch the earth come up  
  
I've grown tired of that place  
Won't you come with me?  
We could start again<sup>4</sup>*

He is tempted and almost bites, texting me how much he misses being with me. But then he rejects me all over again. He tells me our love is evil; he fills me with agonizing *shame*. I cry all day at home while my children are at school. I hear songs that make my heart break. I feel connection as Kanye West croons Heartless...

*In the night I hear 'em talk, the coldest story ever told  
Somewhere far along this road he lost his soul  
To a woman so heartless  
How could you be so heartless?<sup>5</sup>*



I love him, and I hate him. Over the months that pass, I try to return to being family, but I can't stop wanting his love and intimacy. I feel addicted to him.

Around this time, I have dinner with some artist friends, and one of them tells a story about an acquaintance in the army who keeps re-enlisting for service. We keep wondering what would make a person continue to sign up to go into hostile situations where it was necessary to kill and kill again, and again?

I have an epiphany. If this soldier stops killing, if he returns to a civilized life, he will have to face his demons, he will have to face himself in the mirror and settle up with God.

If this affair ends, I will have to face the truth of my treachery: *I betrayed myself. I betrayed my family.*

## *Suggestions*

*If you are in crisis right now, consider trying these home remedies to regain sanity and composure. Just know: this too shall pass. ♥*

***Get Outside!*** *Fresh air is incredibly useful for shifting mood. I know you want to stay in a dark room and sulk, but get outside in the sunshine. Now! Breathe the sunshine in deeply. Stop holding onto your pain. Let it go.*

***Move the Energy!*** *Walk, run, bike, or do yoga. Do some sort of exercise daily. Even if you do not feel like it, force yourself to do it. Depression feeds off stagnation. When you move the energy, you will elevate your mood and make space for peace. At the lowest point in my journey, I would run for at least 6 miles, my mind churning over my pain, until finally I felt peace and could see the sunshine.*

***Listen to Soothing Music!*** *One choice I made that prolonged my grief was listening to music that resonated with my own sorrow and desperation. Turn off the radio or carefully choose music to soothe your aching soul. I recommend instrumental music without lyrics.*

***Breathe!*** *Breathe in deeply while thinking “Peace” entering your body, breathe out in a forceful burst while visualizing “Pain” being tossed out of your body like phlegm. Breathing practices, such as those done with yoga, activate communication pathways between the mind and the body that have positive impact on your brain by calming your stress. If this is a new concept for you, suspend disbelief and try it!*

*Cry! No matter the cause of your angst, let yourself grieve. Allow yourself to feel the pain. Go deep into the bowels of your home, into a dark closet where no one will hear you, and SCREAM and CRY. This part is very frightening because the emotion can be so absolutely consuming and overwhelming. Allowing this expression moves the anger, sadness, and other toxic emotions out of your body. If you suppress these toxic emotions, they can end up manifesting physically in your body.*

*After I eventually left my husband, my doctor discovered a Texas grapefruit-sized cyst on my ovary. I nicknamed it my marriage cyst and had it removed. Do not stuff your emotions! Risk people thinking you're crazy for screaming in your house. You'll only hurt yourself if you don't get it out.*

### *Quotes*

*"Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light." — Brenè Brown<sup>6</sup>*

*"...incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering." — Eckhart Tolle<sup>7</sup>*

*"You have the strength. You just don't know it yet."  
— Kimberly Wharton*

*"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."  
— Laozi, Tao Te Ching<sup>8</sup>*



*“Avoid continually replaying the event, the insult, the pain over and over again, wondering how it could possibly happen to you. The disaster happened, you survived, and now it's time to get on with rebuilding.” – Gerry Starnes, M.Ed<sup>9</sup>*

*“When physical or emotional pain arises, our reflex is to resist it not only by stiffening our body and contracting our muscles, but also by contracting our mind. We lose ourselves in thoughts about what is wrong, how long it will last, what we should do about it and how the pain reflects our unworthiness...Feeling fear or anger or jealousy means something is wrong with us, that we are weak or bad.” – Tara Brach, Ph.D.<sup>10</sup>*

*“When you calm your disaster mind, mental chaos dissolves into a clarifying spring breeze that blows away the dust and cobwebs so that you can clearly see what your next step is.” – HeatherAsh Amara<sup>11</sup>*

*“Studies are revealing that by changing the patterns of breathing it is possible to restore balance to stress response systems, calm an agitated mind, relieve symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder(PTSD)...”  
– Richard Brown and Patricia Gerbarg<sup>12</sup>*

*“Behind this so called love is all that fear of I'm not good enough, I'm not worthy. If I do get this commodity of love from the outside, I've got to hold onto it at any cost. And I'll sacrifice my truth, myself, my soul to hold onto it. Behind that is always the fear that we're gonna lose it. It's no wonder they call it hell.” – Allan Hardman<sup>13</sup>*

*“Two choices - we're making one or the other in every moment... Expand into love, into the challenge, into the opportunity, into the grace ...or contract into fear, into isolation, into limitedness.” – Chrispy Bhagat Singh<sup>14</sup>*



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