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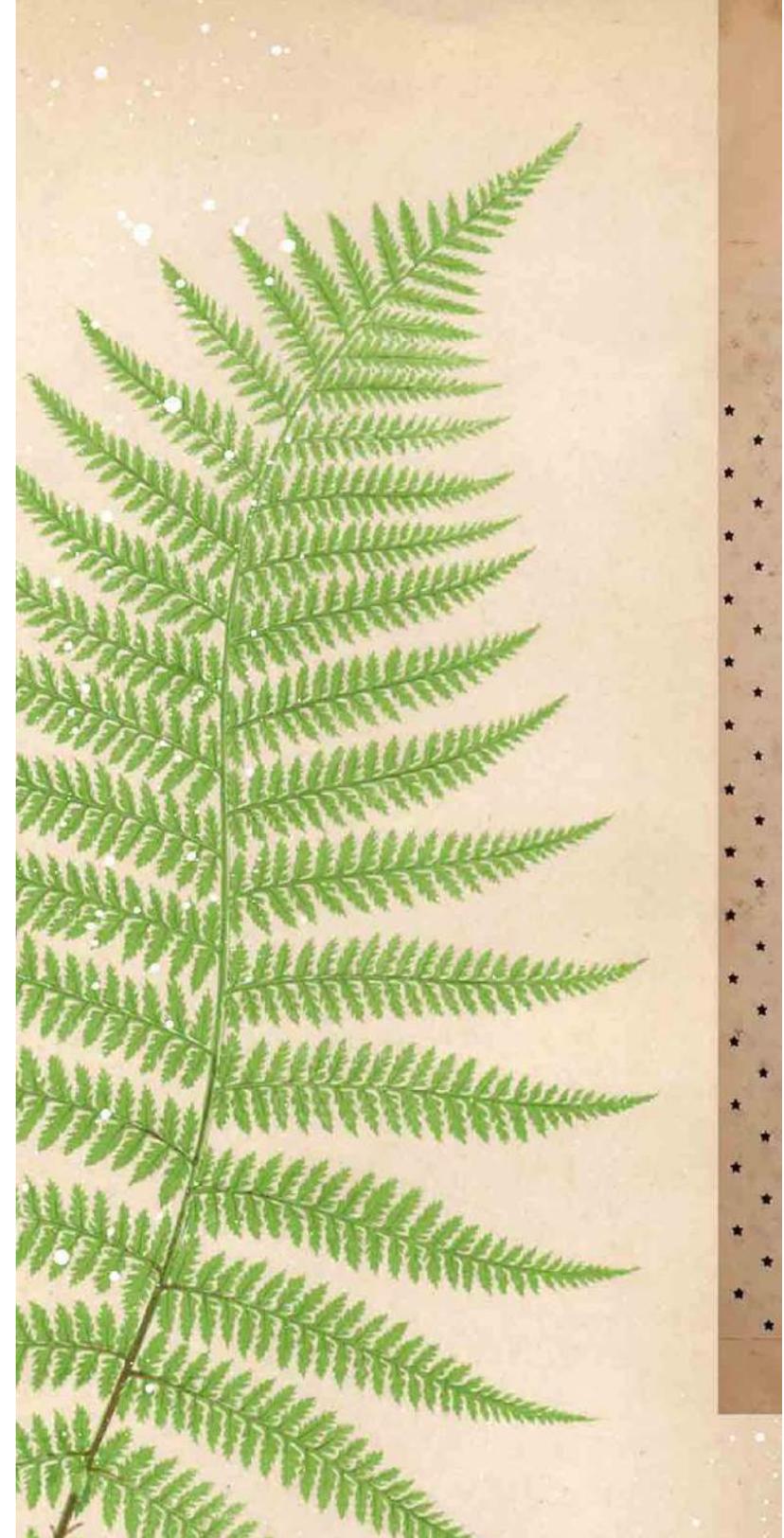
Contributing Artists

SHELLEY KOMMERS

CAROLE SILVERSTEIN

Thank You

TARA MOHR



REFLECTIONS

Introduction

TARA MOHR

I vaguely remember my life before becoming a mother.

Something about figuring out what to do with a day.
Something about a silence in the house in the early morning.
Something about wearing shoes with tall heels – no people on my hips or monstrous diaper bags to balance when I walked San Francisco’s hills.
Something about sleeping – *as in through the night*.

But at this writing – with a baby who is four months and a rambunctious three year old – motherhood is the tidal wave that has washed over me ... mind, heart and body, drenching everything completely.

Everything has been left covered in finger paints and milk spills and piles of toys. Everything messier. Everything humbler and more clear-eyed about our small but blessed place in the whole of things. Everything more full of wild, growing life.

It has been said by so many women: there is not enough said, written, painted, sung, studied, and heralded about motherhood. We need more words, more real ones.



black butterfly mandala
SHELLEY KOMMERS

And our conventional celebrations of Mother's Day, expressed in one register of colors – pastels – and one register of sentiment – appreciation – could not be farther from the dense, thick layering of our real experiences of motherhood, daughterhood, and sonhood.

Each reflection in this collection is a window into those layers. Each piece celebrates this aspect of the human experience - what mothering has carved into our bones, how daughterhood or sonhood has sculpted us, what the spiritual traditions have to say about Mother.

May these pieces open up minds and hearts this Mother's Day. Take them in, and share them with the mothers and fathers and daughters and sons whom you love.

- *Tara Mohr*



Tara Mohr is the author of *Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak Up, Create and Lead*. She is also the founder and teacher of the global Playing Big leadership program for women. She's the mother of two amazing little people and simply can't believe what her body can do to grow, birth, feed and comfort them each day.

Sacred Spin

WOKIE NWABUEZE

It is a cold winter morning as I stand in my foyer wearing feet pajamas, embroiled in an epic karaoke battle with my 7 and 5-year-old daughters. I am singing something by Michael Jackson, exaggerating my passion for the lyrics in every way possible. I watch my daughters laugh uncontrollably as they watch me. There is awe in their eyes as I am silly, unabashed.

Despite the joy of the morning, I feel serene knowing that these moments are never completely agenda-free.

I flash back to a quiet afternoon as I walked with my mother when I was almost 7. That day, I was too enchanted by my mom to skip the sidewalk cracks like I usually did. Her eyes smiled, and her mouth turned up only slightly on one side as it did when her thoughts were on mischief and play. Suddenly, she ran ahead and started spinning around in the middle of the sidewalk, dress flowing, while she sang “Look at me! I’m 33!” My heart burst with laughter before I could feel embarrassed by the people watching. We skipped along like nothing mattered more than being together. On that day and in those years I knew I had permission to be free, just like her.



hummingbird mandala
SHELLEY KOMMERS

Mothering is so easily consumed in a constant spin of responsibility. The caring and the washing, the fixing and the feeding make it so easy for me to forget my most sacred mission.

But, worry, the right hand of my fierce love, always taps me on the shoulder and reminds me that life is always dancing towards my children. It never lets me forget that on their journey, uncertainty and fear may dim their North Star.

Then I remember that I am life force. I keep the flame that lights my children's way back to themselves until, and even when they are old enough to light it for themselves.

So, despite how beaten down I feel, I am driven to pick up my hairbrush microphone and spin and sing until we all crack up with laughter; grounded in freedom. Just like my mother did for me.

I remember that they are looking to me to learn what life should feel like;

to learn how to see and be seen;

for reassurance, that joy and magic are already theirs.

When I remind them that it is, I remind myself, too.



Wokie Nwabueze helps women reclaim their voices and speak with power. She is the founder of The Seen & Heard Project and can be found at www.seenandheard.com.

River Music

MELISSA FU

A few summers ago, a friend asked if I would play my cello during her Qigong class by the river. Although I've played cello for many years, performing solo terrifies me. I looked at the date: not ideal. I looked at the time: I'd need childcare. It would have been so easy to say no.

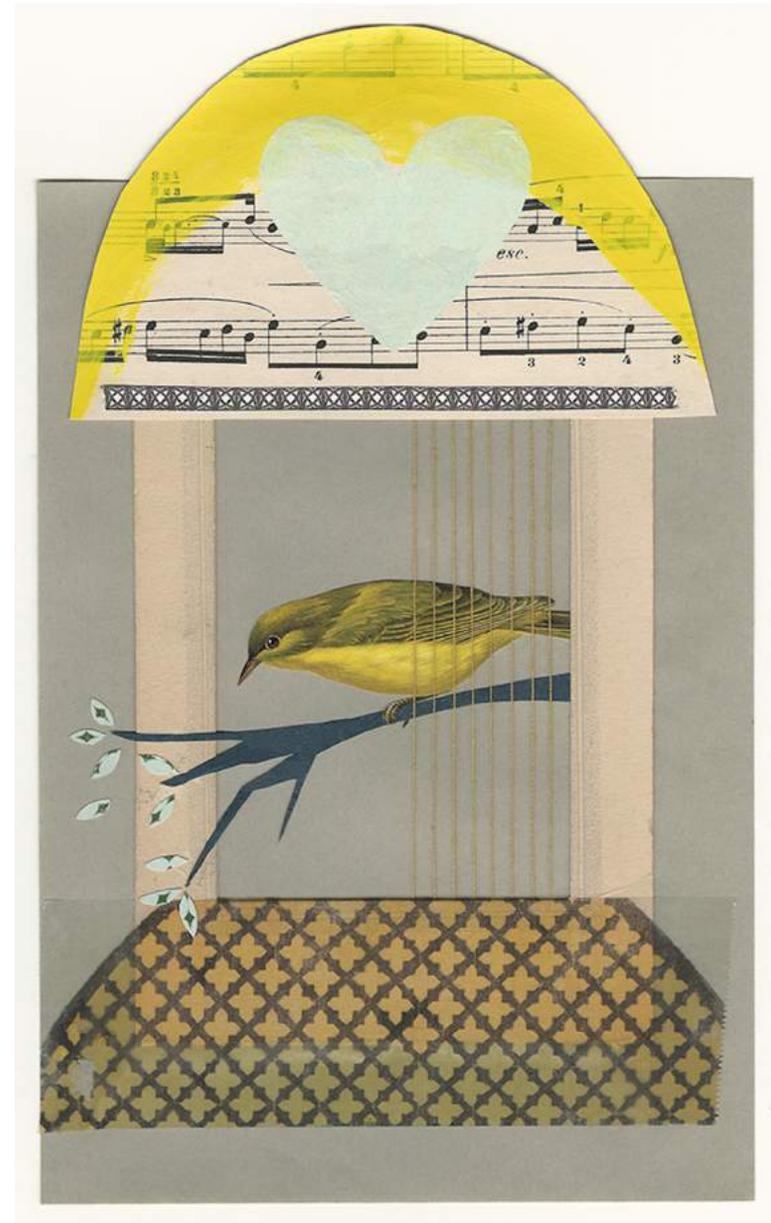
"Sure, I'd love to." Then I put it out of my mind. It's easy to make promises when they loom distant on the horizon.

When the day came, my childcare fell through at the last moment. I could have backed out. But I'd made a promise. And something I've learned is that every time I make and keep a promise, I trust myself to make and keep another. I decided to bring my daughter along.

That hot afternoon, I headed toward the river with my cello on my back, lugging a chair in one hand and holding my seven-year-old daughter's hand in the other.

"I'm scared," I told her as we walked along. "I'm scared because I'm going to play my cello in front of all these people and I don't know them. There will probably be someone who knows every note, who can play it better and will notice every mistake."

She squinted up at me through the sun's glare. "But I'm going to play anyway," I continued, "because I said I would. I'm glad you're with me. I'll play for you."



esc
SHELLEY KOMMERS

During the class, she settled on the grass by my side, sometimes sitting with her arms around her knees, sometimes lying down and looking up at the clouds. I could feel her eyes watching, her ears listening.

As I played J.S. Bach's Cello Suite no. 1, the breezes through the leaves provided accompaniment. The Qigong participants moved to imagery of trees, moons, the sun, the earth. I became absorbed in responding to their movement with my music. We were all present, imperfect and intentional.

Afterwards my daughter said, "I liked hearing you play." She asked if she could practice her violin outside. We played duets in the garden and shared the experience of playing *al fresco* to the neighbourhood cats and butterflies.

Now, when either of us is scared to do something, we remember the day by the river. We get to say to each other that we're scared, but we go ahead and keep our promises anyway.



Melissa Fu grew up in northern New Mexico and now lives in Cambridge, UK. Inspired by *Playing Big*, she started Spilling the Ink, a small business dedicated to cultivating writers' voices and stories.

Learn more at spillingtheink.com.

For Who She Is and Who She Isn't

REGINA PERATA

I was born on Mother's Day. I've been unpacking my relationship to "mother" ever since.

My mom's relationship with her mother was anything but easy, her teenage years harder. Somewhere along the way, she lost the ability to connect and relate. When she became a mother this translated into little or no ability to nurture, express empathy, or demonstrate love in the ways we typically know. Her way of mothering baffled, challenged and pained me for years.

Throughout my youth I raged: against her, against others and eventually against myself.

I was enamored with my mother, too, though. I adored her and loved her more than I could explain or understand. She had her first child at 19, her last at 30, and worked multiple jobs to keep us fed and well educated. Deep into my 20's I held her as a model feminist, soaking up and proudly sharing her stories of pushing through gender bias long before it was cool. She worked in finance for a construction company, rising up through the ranks as the only woman in a sea of men. She was a hero in my eyes. She still is.

Years of therapy—somatic, energetic, talk, you-name-it—make up my journey to differentiating and healing this paradox of anger and adoration.



entangled spirits
CAROLE SILVERSTEIN

But it was in our shared pivotal life moments—her threatening divorce from her husband, her diagnosis and recovery of her brain tumor, her gift of financial support for my IVF, and the subsequent birth of my twin girls—that forced me to keep doing my work.

Each event seduced me into peeling back layers of anger, sadness, and fear such that I am now, and maybe only now, at 45, able to love her wholly and completely. I love her for who she is and for who she isn't.

Occasionally, I still get caught in moments of shock and surprise by a thwarted expectation of what “mother” should look like, but even then, it's another opportunity to heal. Each time. The work is mine.

This Mother's Day I'll be celebrating the long line of strong women that are my lineage. Reflections of them live in me—for better and worse—as I confront my own humanity on the daily with twin five year olds.

I pray that as my little girls grow, they have the strength, compassion and courage to not only forgive me for the ways I will undoubtedly pain them but also to milk the learnings for every drop along the way.

I will keep sharing with them the reality of “mother” versus the myth.

And I will hold with them the beautiful mystery that life may, in fact, be one giant paradox, forcing us often to hold multiple truths at once, stretching our capacity to love and be loved. That work, however, will be theirs. And so it will go.



Regina was an executive coach and consultant to women leaders and their teams for over a decade before joining Nike where she works as an HR Business Partner. She lives in Boston (by way of Portland) with her wife and twin daughters. You can like her fb page Restoring Power and learn more about her consulting work [here](#).

Mother's Day

DANIELLE LAPORTE

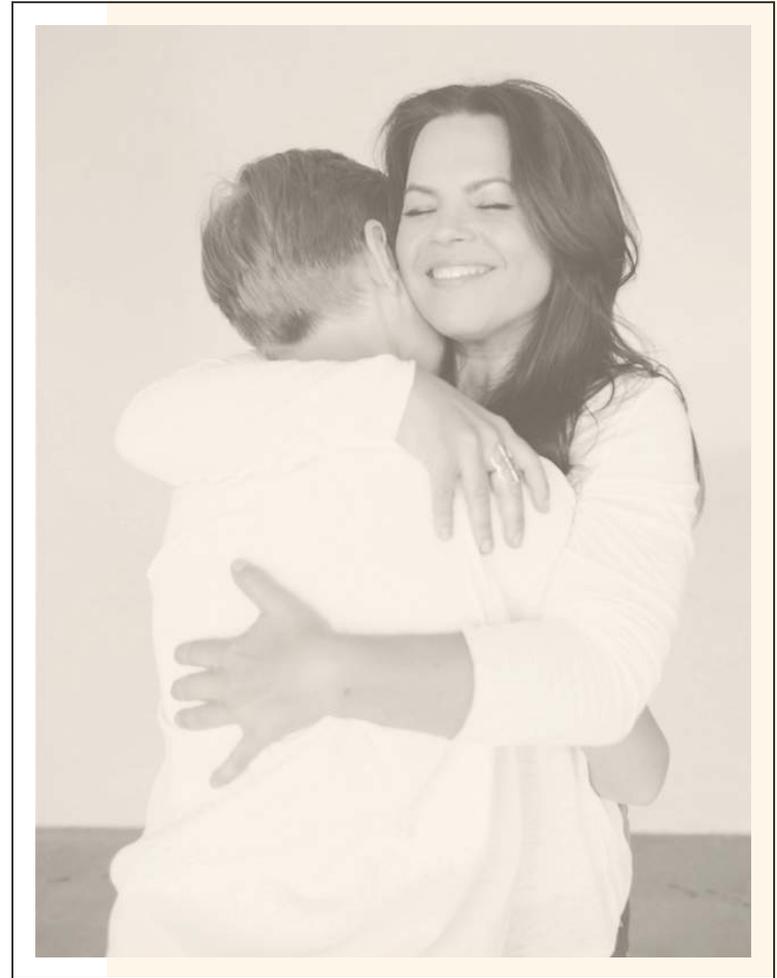
when you were born
my days
were suddenly full
of trees and apples
of hope
and the machinations of terror

I conceived of space

my world became
the size of a seed
pointed and round
no intruders
a harvest of possibility
only sorrow that I could imagine

my world became
a growing diamond
in your eyes

I conceived of love
I became home



Danielle LaPorte is the author of *White Hot Truth* and *The Desire Map*. She lives in Vancouver with her favourite philosopher, her 13-year old son. Together, they consume copious amounts of David Bowie, Queen, angsty teen movies, and Smart Puff cheesies.

Photo: **Catherine Just**

For Mothers Who Hold Space for Genius

JEFFREY DAVIS

On any given day the girls tug on her. Cling. Argue. Fall apart. Still, Hillary holds her own.

I quietly marvel at Hillary - a full-time business owner who sees patients with cancer and Lyme's Disease five days a week, a caring wife and life partner to me, and an attentive even doting mother of a sure-footed three year old and an expressive seven year old. With rare complaint.

The girls make different kinds of demands on her than on me. And so does the world. And so it is for many mothers.

Each week I talk with remarkable women - professionals, creatives, executives. Topics tied to motherhood inevitably arise, most especially how to manage demands of motherhood with demands of advancing their own work. In those conversations, we often discuss something inside each of us - what Greeks like Aristotle describe as a *daemon*, a guiding force, an inner genius. Its purpose is to remind each of us of our life's purpose and wisdom, however irrational that call might seem.



a space to dwell in
CAROLE SILVERSTEIN

There's a unique challenge to mothers these days: to listen to what extent that her genius's soul is called in to the home and to what extent her genius's spirit is called out to the world. How to make room for both?

Add to it the extent to which a woman's genius might also be called into the political arena of womanhood and motherhood and of the world-at-large where men in powerful positions with frustrated geniuses still act out.

That is a lot to hold while the three-year-old genius makes demands. While the thirteen-year-old genius makes demands.

To those mothers who face that challenge every day, I marvel.

For Hillary, my mother, my sister, my niece, my niece-in-law, and for all of the other mothers out there holding space for your own genius so that your children's genius, too, may flourish, may the world and this planet in turn hold you.

Deep bows.



Jeffrey Davis is a branding & creativity consultant and author of 4 books. His once-tow-headed genius still roams the Hudson Valley woods where he lives with his wife and two girls.

Where's Your Muse When The Baby Is Spitting Up At 3 Am?

HIRO BOGA

The crucible of parenthood plunges us right into the heart of the fire. And hammers us into a finer version of ourselves. Eventually. But while it's happening ... oh my!

We wrap our lives around our babies, creating a womb outside the womb for them so they can grow. Making safety and belonging and nourishment and home for them. We give them our imperfect selves and pray that that's enough.

In the process, we stretch and grow beyond anything we thought was possible. We fall short in mortifying ways. We feel passionate and guilty, terrified and torn — and never get enough sleep or time or support or gratitude for the largely unsung work we do.

It's the ultimate creative process. And it can feel like mind-numbing drudgery. Or like a primal war between our longing to surrender to the service of parenting, and our need to hold onto our innermost selves.

How do you find room for creative process in the midst of this?



magnolia mandala
SHELLEY KOMMERS

I don't have any ready answers. But I have faith that you can forge a path for yourself. One that honors your creative spirit and serves your children too.

In hindsight, here are some things that worked for me, most of the time. Maybe something in this list will spark ideas or insights that are helpful for you.

Keep things simple. Children don't need a lot — mostly just love, care, nourishment, sovereignty and shelter. Pajama days are good. So's fun and silliness and not taking things too seriously. Oh, and play.

As much as possible, flow with your kids' rhythm and timing. Experience the world the way they do. You'll discover the beauty of bread crumbs. And ants. And other tiny, fascinating things.

Get as much sleep as you can. Take naps when your kids are napping.

Ask for help. Say 'yes' to every offer of support. If you have money, use it to buy yourself time, space, room to breathe. If you don't have money, be creative — trade your skills for childcare, massages, food for your freezer.

Know that your children's lives belong to them. Treat them with respect. Just because their bodies are small and dependent, doesn't mean their souls are too.

Know that your life belongs to you. Treat yourself with respect. Reconnect with your own soul, and with your Source, each day. This doesn't have to be a sit-down-and-meditate kind of thing. You can connect in the middle of making dinner. Or any time, really. Just by turning to embrace your soul, entering the sanctuary of your heart, feeling your feelings, remembering your wholeness.

Make friends with your kids' souls. They are your best allies. Show your children how to stay connected to their wholeness too.

Give your kids space and time to be alone. They're here to discover themselves and their world. They can't do this if you hover.

Being a parent will bring out whatever lives within you — every family pattern, each piece of unfinished business, every unexamined emotion will come roaring forth, often during times of stress and pressure. Be prepared for this. Remind yourself, you're not a monster. You're not three years old, and you're not your mother or father or your Aunt Mildred either. Although your apprenticeship in parenting will probably include times when you're channeling all of the above.

Have a daily practice of energy hygiene. Yes, some days you won't have time to brush your teeth. But trust me, it really pays to take an energy shower a couple of times a day.

Your children will do what you do — not what you say or what you think they should do. Take time each day to be quiet and to reconnect with yourself. Make your inner world a priority. Fill yourself with whatever nourishes you. Make this an ordinary part of your day together. If you're relaxed and happy, your kids will be too.

You may not have time for the kind of creative work that requires sustained concentration, energy and attention. Make peace with that. In a few years, your children will no longer be children. Nurture the creative Presence within you, and open your heart to its expression in everyday moments. When you're cooking. Or reading to your kids. Or singing or wiping runny noses.

Creativity is soul-food because it nourishes Wholeness, and restores belonging. When you know you belong to yourself first, you'll create a lap of belonging for your kids, and your muse.



Hiro Boga is a writer, mentor to evolutionary leaders, Mom to two creative, loving young men, and Gramma to one almost-six-year-old sparkle-heart girl.

Scenes From a Miscarriage

BECCA PIASTRELLI

You came to me in a meditation
3 years ago

A sweet cherub faced little boy
bounding through the front door
holding your father's hand so tightly
It felt so deeply right to hold you in my arms.

I'd see you - at the library or coffee shop
My heart would burst with love
knowing you were near and excited to enter our lives

A week after your spirit entered my body
I dreamt of giving birth to you
alone in a bathtub
you were enormous
and I felt a love so powerful
I lost my breath for a moment

For 7 weeks, we communed
we were finally together



treasure
SHELLEY KOMMERS

5 days ago
I heard your heart beating
I could hardly believe it - 2 beating hearts in one body!

We shared the news with your grandparents, aunts and uncles
Tears flowed - you were coming

The moon rose full and bright that night
Something shifted in me
pain
concern
knowing....

You weren't staying
This wasn't your time
to join us earthside

All the joy, the initiation, the unity of our souls in divine love
had reached completion

You left
and the heart stopped beating

I knew
But we needed to hear it from the radiologist
spontaneous abortion

My body had begun passing what was left of you



#scenesfromamirriage, BECCA PIASTRELLI

All night I moaned
clutching the hot water bottle to me

as my womb contracted
and the pieces flowed out of me

Each time, humbling me
like little pearls

A glimpse of the miracle of a woman's womb

The grief - a fog lifting and lowering within the hour
mourning what could have been

and

I'm free

To create again
as a new woman
part maiden
part mother

Thank you, my darling

I release you with a tender
and hopeful heart



Becca Piastrelli is the woman behind [TheDabblist.com](https://www.thedabblist.com). She lives under the redwood trees of Mill Valley, CA, and is currently the mama to two very precocious kitty cats named Atticus Finch and Gorilla.

Getting Found

LIANNE RAYMOND

It was a beautiful day and I was sitting on the ground by a weathered statue of the Madonna in the small park of an old convent. I was daydreaming when a voice broke through, “I’ve been looking for you.” There was no one else around. Was the voice in my head?

Wherever the voice was from, it shimmered through me, and I waited to see if it would resurface. Like watching the glimmer left on the ocean after you glimpse, from the corner of your eye, an Orca fin disappearing in the distance.

As I sat in the shimmer, I had a bone deep knowing that it was my mother. My mother, who had died when I was just a year old, had been looking for me. I am here, I said, with tears. At 50 years old, I had finally allowed myself to be found.

In the months that followed things connected to her began spontaneously showing up. One of the most touching was three little dresses that my mother had sewn for me, sent by an aunt who had tucked them away. Another was the last photo she had taken before dying. Call it coincidence or what you like, the timing was right. My mother was dead, but my relationship with her had a new and unexpected aliveness. I could feel her with me.



a voluptuous scent
CAROLE SILVERSTEIN

I had spent years analyzing, reading, theorizing and gathering information about what it meant for me, psychologically speaking, that I had lost my mother as an infant. My view of our relationship had become limited by an analytic lens, constrained by a quest to know the unknowable. In that space, she could never find me. I was always looking behind me when, as Henry Corbin says, the past is not behind us but underneath our feet.

Now I wonder about our collective mother - the one who is literally underneath our feet. Though important and necessary, have the climate change conversations - impact, models, accords - become similarly constraining? Have we become hard for her to find? Has our vision become so narrow that we are missing a connection with the earthy aliveness that is right here, right now?

Is there a tree in your neighbourhood that has been trying to get your attention?

A weed breaking through the concrete somewhere that needs to be praised?

A blossom that wants to be blessed?

What treasures might show up if we give up our addiction to action for a moment and let ourselves be claimed by Our Mother's wild love?



Lianne Raymond is a personal coach specializing in women's developmental psychology.



El Dia de las Madres

FELIPE HINOJOSA

Mother's Day at my home church, *Iglesia Menonita del Cordero* in Brownsville, Texas, was special. The men of the church usually cooked breakfast for all the mothers, the Sunday School classes all organized something to honor the mothers, and the sermon was always a bit shorter on this day.

The big highlight was when the men of the congregation all gathered at the front of the church to serenade the mothers with the classic "*las mañanitas*," the quintessential celebratory song for Mexicans and Mexican Americans. We sing it to mothers on Mother's Day, to those celebrating birthdays, and to those celebrating anniversaries. The men, or as we call them in Latino evangelical churches "*los hermanos*" (the brothers), were mostly off tune and some barely remembered the lyrics passed the first verse, but all of them sang their hearts out.

Mothers are special, but in Latino evangelical churches, they are honored and praised. Unfortunately, that honor and praise rarely lasts. Mother's Day was the only day the men worked in the church kitchen and it was rare for "*las hermanas*" (the sisters) to be given a break and honored for their hard work. But no one paid much attention to that. Even now as I think about it, I can see the joy on mothers' faces as the people of the church—their sons, husbands, and friends—sang to them and showed them some love.



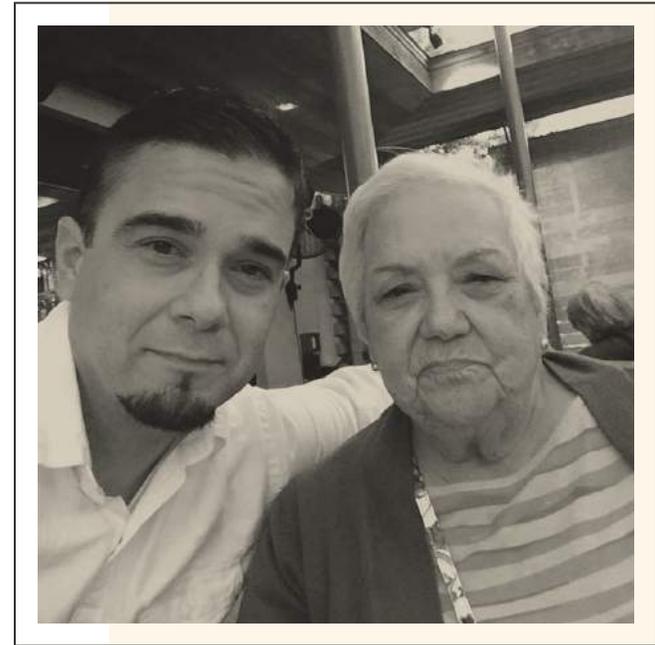
dahlia mandala
SHELLEY KOMMERS

But honestly, what I remember most was how those of us in the youth group, especially the teenage boys, addressed our mothers. When it was our Sunday School class's turn to present a small gift to our mothers, we all went up to the front of the church armed with a rose and our best "I promise I'll be better" speech. All of us guys pretty much said the same thing in a mix of Spanish and English: "*Ama, te prometo que* I'm gonna be better and behave and do good in school..." or something like that. Some of the guys even cried, which meant that their mother's started crying as well.

I did the same thing with my mom. Made the same promises, handed her a rose, and gave her a big hug. It really was sincere. None of us were out to trick our mothers. But our behaviors rarely changed. And year after year, we honored our mothers—even as they probably knew that nothing much would change—but they still loved us. My mother loved me and my crooked ways, David's mother loved him, and Hugo's mother loved him.

My relationship with my mother since those days at church has evolved; it has changed. I'm an adult now and she sees me parenting my own two children. She continues to be on my case, however, asking me if I went to church Sunday morning, reminding me to be thankful to God, and continuing to lecture me about right and wrong. I continue to fail and continue to promise—just like I did in church those many years ago—that I'll get better.

Through it all, my mother—and the mothers of those guys that I went to church with—continue to love us, they continue to believe in us, and they continue to protect us. It's why on every Mother's Day, no matter where I am, my spirit is back at the church where I grew up so that I can once again sing to my mother, present her a rose, and again promise her that I will be better, that I will be everything she wishes for me.



Felipe Hinojosa is the author of *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith, and Evangelical Culture* and Associate Professor of History at Texas A&M University. Growing up as the youngest with five sisters taught him a lot about family (and keeping a sense of humor!) which he draws on regularly as he parents his own two children now.

The History of Longing

MELISSA CISTARO

Dear Mom,

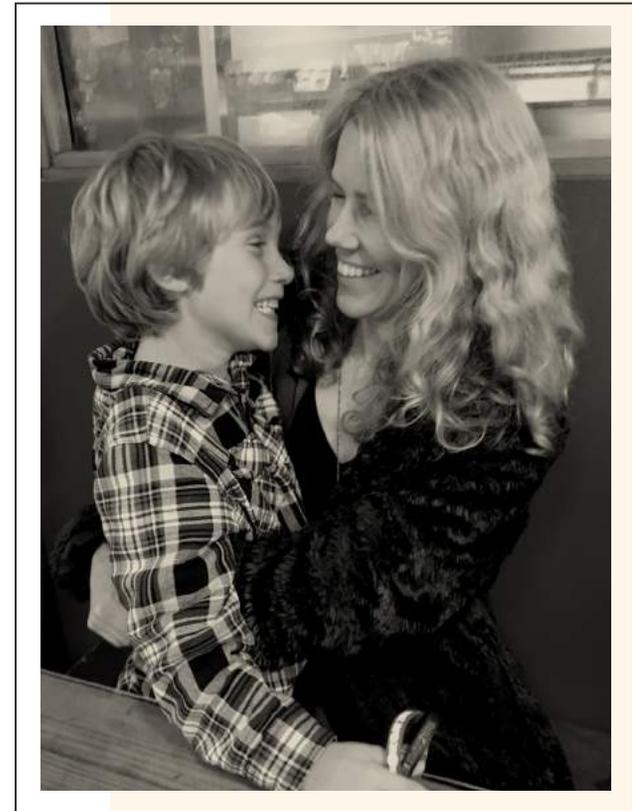
I wish we could have spent at least one Mother's Day together but we never did. Not once. Each year we held hope that you'd come back to live with us.

Dad made sure we always called. "Happy Mother's Day," I'd say twisting my fingers into the curly telephone cord (back when our telephones had curly cords and were mounted to kitchen walls).

In later years while I was raising my own children, we'd call to wish one another a Happy Mother's Day and then quickly find something else to talk about. Motherhood was a complicated landscape for us. Still, we reached out and tried our best, you and me as mothers - blemished, resilient, fragile, and strong. In the darkness, we learn to find the light.

We buried your ashes beneath a flowering tree in Olympia two weeks after Mother's Day. Sometimes I still climb the hillside behind our house and call out your name. When I'm on that mountaintop, I see you as the beautiful free-spirited woman you were and I hear the song of your voice.

But damn, what I wouldn't give to have a conversation with you. I will always be your girl - holding hope, like a lucky rabbit's foot in my pocket, that you might come back.



[Melissa Cistaro](#) is the author of the memoir *Pieces of My Mother* and proud mom of three children ranging from 8 to 22 (yep, that third child is called a mid-life surprise - born 9 months after we buried my mom).

It's In The Water

KATE NORTHRUP

Can we talk mom guilt for a minute?

The other day I got back from dance class, and I felt so filled up and alive. And I missed the whole evening with my little girl Penelope, other than 30 minutes.

When I first mentioned feeling guilty in my mothering to my mother she said, “Oh yeah. Mom Guilt. It’s just in the water, honey.”

I’m wondering: is this something you grapple with? Navigating your own desire to fill your cup with your desire to be there with your kids?

I haven’t found the magical cure for mom guilt, but I have figured out how to manage my energy so I feel it less often. Management that includes choosing to follow what feels good exclusively. Mostly play. Meaningful work. A new pace. New choices.

And when I do? The mom guilt subsides, and my ability to stay present and centered while loving up on my baby girl goes up 1 million percent.

Want to try it? Go for it! I’m cheering you on from the sidelines this Mother’s Day.



Kate Northrup is the author of *Money: A Love Story* and while becoming a mother is the best thing that’s ever happened to her, it also turns out it’s the hardest thing she’s ever done.

The Gift of Children with Special Needs

TRUDY BOURGEOIS

On November 17, 1982, I gave birth to our first child, Adam. After enduring a pregnancy plagued by morning sickness, we were overjoyed that he was healthy and strong! I went to sleep that night filled with joy.

At 6:30 the next morning, the doctors were making their rounds in the hospital. I remember hearing voices in the hall just as the door to my semi-private room opened.

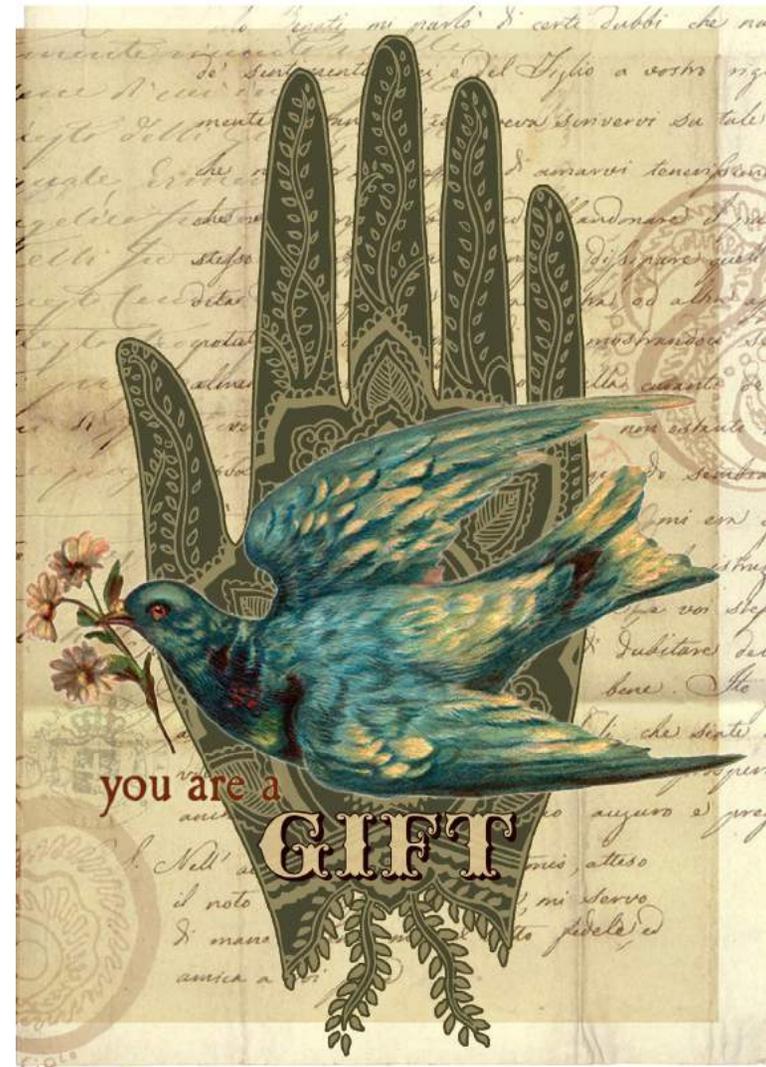
“Which one of you is Mrs. Bourgeois?” a white male asked.

“I am,” I responded.

“I’m Dr. Treadwell, one of the physicians here. I have some news about your son,” he paused, looking at his chart. “Adam is a mongoloid.” Disoriented, I asked for clarification. “He has Downs Syndrome.”

Waves of nausea hit my body. “What does that mean?”

“Your son will never walk or talk. You may want to consider institutionalizing him.”



you are a gift
SHELLEY KOMMERS

“I need my husband,” I sobbed, as the tears flowed and fear filled my heart.

A short time later, my husband, Mike, arrived. We didn’t understand how one of the best days of our lives could suddenly be tainted by such shocking news. Eventually, he asked me what I thought we should do.

“We have to fight for our baby!” I insisted. “We must trust God. We’ll take Adam home and give him the best life possible,” I sobbed, because that’s what a mother does, right? We fight for our babies. We believe. We love them from a place deep within our souls.

I’m proud to report that as a young man, Adam thrives despite his challenges, and has accomplished many things the doctors said he never would. He walks, he talks, and he works two-part time jobs. Adam is a constant source of joy, consistently teaching Mike and I how to love unconditionally and forgive instantly. He sees the good in everything and reminds us to do the same.

I work with many intellectually gifted people who struggle to deal with the realities of life. But when I tell them about Adam and how he has embraced life despite his limitations, they are encouraged. So, to all you mothers who’ve been blessed with a special needs child, know this—their lives have purpose and meaning, as does yours. This Mother’s Day, give yourself permission to celebrate that purpose we all share.



Trudy Bourgeois has been married to Mike for 37 years and is the proud mother of Adam Bourgeois and MaryEllen Brence. She is an author, speaker, change agent and avid champion for equality!

Carrying Mom to Mecca

MARK SILVER

As a Sufi teacher, I am touched deeply by how motherhood is honored within my spiritual path. The Prophet, peace be upon him, when asked who we should give the best of our manners and companionship to, said, “First your mother. Then your mother. Then your mother. Then your father.”

It is said that a holy man was asked, “If I carry my mother on my back all the way to Mecca, perform all the rituals of pilgrimage, and then return, all the while carrying her, have I paid her back for all that she gave me?”

The holy one answered, “No, not even for one contraction.”

Motherhood is a profound path that only some walk, and no man can walk at all. Whether or not you can walk this path, or choose not to, there is a great honoring and love and respect due to those who have carried us all, and brought us into life.

May blessings of love and nourishment and provision and honor and ease and healing be showered upon all mothers, of all species, and upon our planet, who carries each of us, every day.



Mark Silver, M.Div, is a designated Master Sufi Teacher in his Sufi lineage, and is also the founder and leader of the team at [Heart of Business, Inc.](#) They've helped thousands of business owners learn how to feel really good while getting more clients and more money, by making real the insight that every act of business can be an act of love.

#shitmymomsays

NATHALIE MOLINA NIÑO

As an adolescent, my mother taught me many things, including the importance of being on-brand (or as she'd call it, living with and on purpose). This year however, she taught me a different lesson, one about what it means to be off-brand. Off HER brand, that is.

ME: So ... I'm going to be on Fox News tomorrow.

MOM: Fox??

ME: Yeah, Fox.

MOM: Actually, Fox?

ME: Yes, ma.

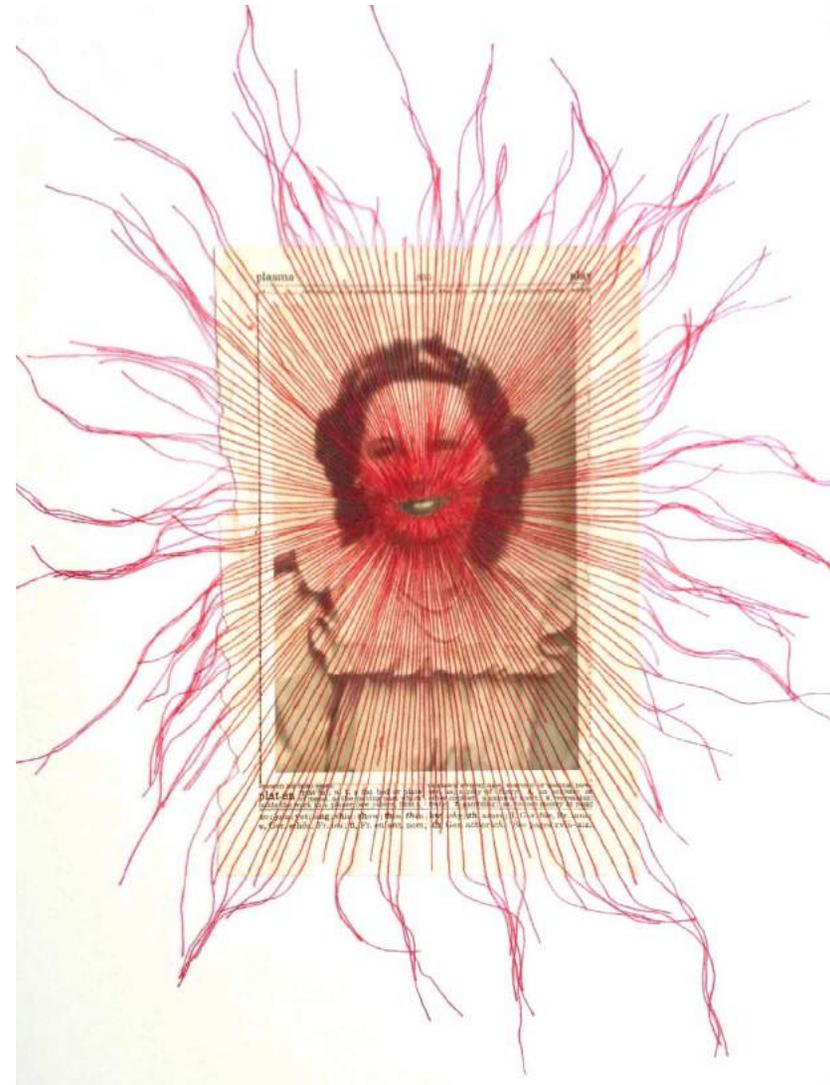
MOM: Oh, ok, well just don't mention me this time.

ME: Ma! I've mentioned you in every media appearance

thus far, you're part of the schtick.

MOM: Yeah, but not on Fox I'm not.

A few years ago, on a particularly memorable mother's day, we took a comedic break from her struggle with triple negative breast cancer to reaffirm her rather astounding inability to be scandalized. Catholic upbringing be damned, over breakfast, I thought it would be amusing to announce that I was having a tryst with a priest.



plasma
SHELLEY KOMMERS

MOM (*unphased and without looking up from her meal*):

What kind of priest?

ME (*waiting for it*): Baptist!

MOM (*still unphased*): Then it doesn't count.

ME: mm...kay, I give up.

Then, last Chinese New Year, at one of her favorite Asian restaurants, she taught me a lesson in reframing.

ME: happy Chinese New Years, ma.

MOM: you look good in this dim light.

ME: everything looks good in dim light.

MOM: (*laughs*)

There you have it folks, wisdom from my spitfire mother: don't mix with deplorables, sleep with whomever you like and for goodness sake, dim the damn lights and laugh -- above all, laugh every chance you get.



Nathalie Molina Niño, co-founder of [BRAVA Investments](#), grew up laughing and irreverently sticking her tongue out at her mom before she could talk. In that tradition, she's been keeping herself busy ever since, sticking it to bigotry, gender bias and injustice of every kind while making her mom proud.

Things I Learned From My Four Year Old About Finding Your Way in the Darkness

ELIZABETH HUNTER

We park the car on an angle on the grassy edge of a muddy driveway, turn off the lights, look out into total blackness.

As my eyes adjust, I can make out a faint flicker of light in the distance. Firmly grasping Moses' and Beatrice's hands (Tim has the other two kids), we head towards it like a mirage.

This is the Lantern Walk. As the days grow shorter, children at my kids' school, plus their families, gather together on a farm at nightfall to acknowledge this darkest time of the year.

The annual event is a rare chance to feel what true darkness is all about. I love the concept, but honestly, I have done this twice now and it wigs me out trying to be a mom when there is so much I cannot see.

The kids keep trying to pull away to explore. Each time I lose physical contact with one of them for even a few seconds, I feel I am losing them forever to the night.



Theo, my four year old, sulkily asks, “Where is MY lantern?” I have to tell Theo, “When you are in kindergarten, you will have your own lantern.”

“Theo,” Mrs M whispers, as she bends down close to him. “We have an extra lantern, and if you are very careful, you may hold it. Would you like to carry it?”

His already huge eyes grow even huger in the candlelight and I see my wildest child silently shaking his head up and down at her in wonder.

Before I have time to protest, a hush falls over the gathering. A single light starts moving onto the darkened path and we sense it is time to start. There are medium sized rocks and bumps along the way. The quiet is unfamiliar and intense, thick and velvety.

Before we got here, my biggest worry was that Theo would try to knock down the lanterns on the ground. Now, he is actually holding a lit lantern! I hold his hand but there is nothing else I can do. It is up to him.

He seems somehow to pick up on the reverent mood of the gathering, the importance of the task that has been given to him. This boy – who is almost always a noisy, non-compliant, happy blur of flailing arms and legs – walks the path in utter stillness. Still my stomach lurches as we walk. I make elaborate plans

for how I will catch the lantern if he drops it. But after a few minutes, I realize: he’s got this. He wants this. He is giving this everything he’s got.

He gets to the top of the hill without a fall or even a near miss. He does not set fire to a tree, he does not fall into the small pond, or slip in the mud. In some mysterious way, his footing is sure, focused on the simple, old fashioned miracle of a single light shining the way.

As we leave the circle and head down the hill, Theo whispers in my ear, “I LOVE Mrs M because she trusted me!”

Late that night after putting the kids to bed, I sit staring out at the darkness through the picture window in the living room. And I think about what my four year old said – “she trusted me,” – about what a huge difference it makes to a child when somebody trusts them.

And just then, in keeping with the spooky, miraculous vibe of the evening, a question pops out of nowhere, like a shooting star in the sky: “How much do you trust yourself?”

I start thinking about all the moms I know, wondering ... how much more amazing would our lives be if we trusted ourselves – not the parenting and adoption books – really trusted ourselves to navigate through the tricky transitions and rocky terrain of our own lives?

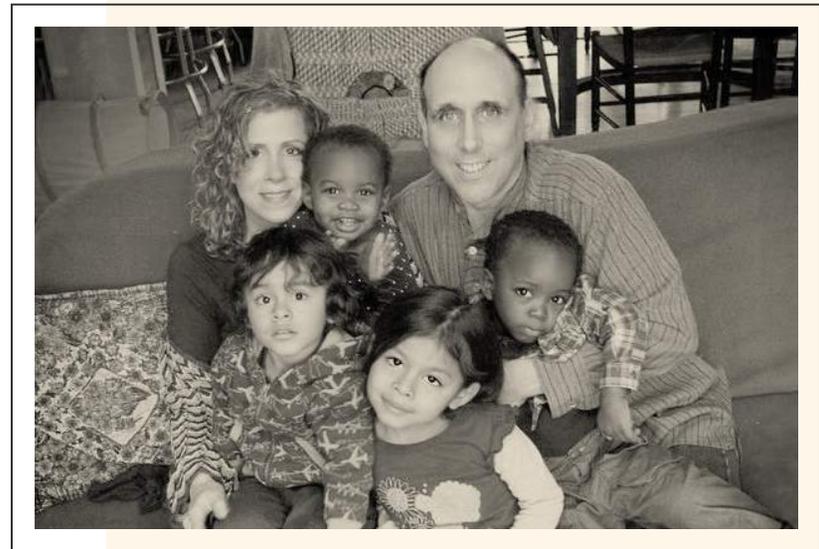
After four adoptions plus a new and accidental career as a writer and adoption mentor and advocate, I am deep in renewal mode. Following my instincts. Learning to let the darkness guide me. Learning to live without adoption paperwork deadlines and high drama. Making the transition from expectant mother to 'just' mother.

I'm learning to use my own lantern to figure out how to move forward – where to put my feet, how far to go, how fast, which way.

So I put this question out to all of us who are mothers, to those of us who dream of being mothers ... How would your life be different if you trusted yourself? Really trusted yourself?

I'm talking 'four-year-old-with-a-flaming-torch' kind of trust.

Some questions change your life.



Elizabeth Hunter is a mother of four, wife to Tim, writer, musician, singer and songwriter. She was also the creator of [The Adoptive Mother](#) blog and website. She passed away from leukemia in December, 2016.

A Life of Questions

SHARON COHEN ANISFELD

When I was growing up, my mother volunteered as a “Great Books” discussion group leader. This meant that she went into schools, religious schools, and even the local prison, to lead small group discussions about great works of literature. I have vivid memories of her sitting at the kitchen table, toiling over a one-act play or a short story, preparing for those discussions. What did it mean to prepare? It meant nothing more and nothing less than finding the right questions to ask.

What were the right questions? First, they had to be questions that required a close reading of the text. How I remember her relentless demand when we were discussing a piece of literature. “Show me the evidence in the text!” No point, no matter how interesting, was valid if it couldn’t be supported by the text.

The right questions, even more importantly, had to be questions that she didn’t already know the answer to. From her perspective, the worst thing a discussion group leader could do was to ask a question with a specific pre-packaged answer in mind.

And finally, the right questions had to be questions that mattered. She simply wouldn’t ask a question unless she really cared about the answer.



end of summer
SHELLEY KOMMERS

I became a rabbi partly because my mother taught me what it means for literature to matter – that there is writing so beautiful and so true that it can make your heart race. That there are characters so richly human that they can show you something about yourself that you didn't know. That there are passages so important that they must be read aloud to a friend.

I became a rabbi partly because my mother invited me into the centuries-old conversation in which great texts lie at the center, and voices – living and dead – engage with one another in the creative process of interpretation.

Needless to say, the implications of my mother's emphasis on questions and the search for the right questions extends far beyond the act of reading and discussing great literature. It is a stance toward life, a stance that requires humility, courage, and compassion in the face of uncertainty.

If I have learned anything in nearly three decades of being a rabbi, and over two decades of being a mother, it is that I do not have answers to any of the most honest and serious questions that I've been asked – whether by my students or my own children.

This lack of answers – what the writer Grace Paley calls “un-understanding” – has been humbling and unsettling at times, but I think it is actually the most solid ground I stand on. This is the ground my mother has bequeathed to me – the ground of our shared questions, the ground of our shared humanity as we encounter the endless mystery and complexity of life.



Sharon Cohen Anisfeld has been Dean of the [Hebrew College Rabbinical School](#) since 2006. She served as a Hillel rabbi at Tufts, Yale and Harvard universities and has been named as one of the most influential Rabbis in America by *Newsweek*. She is the mother of two – both of whom are now in college – and she and her husband live in Boston, where their flock of backyard chickens are helping them adjust to the “empty nest” stage of life.

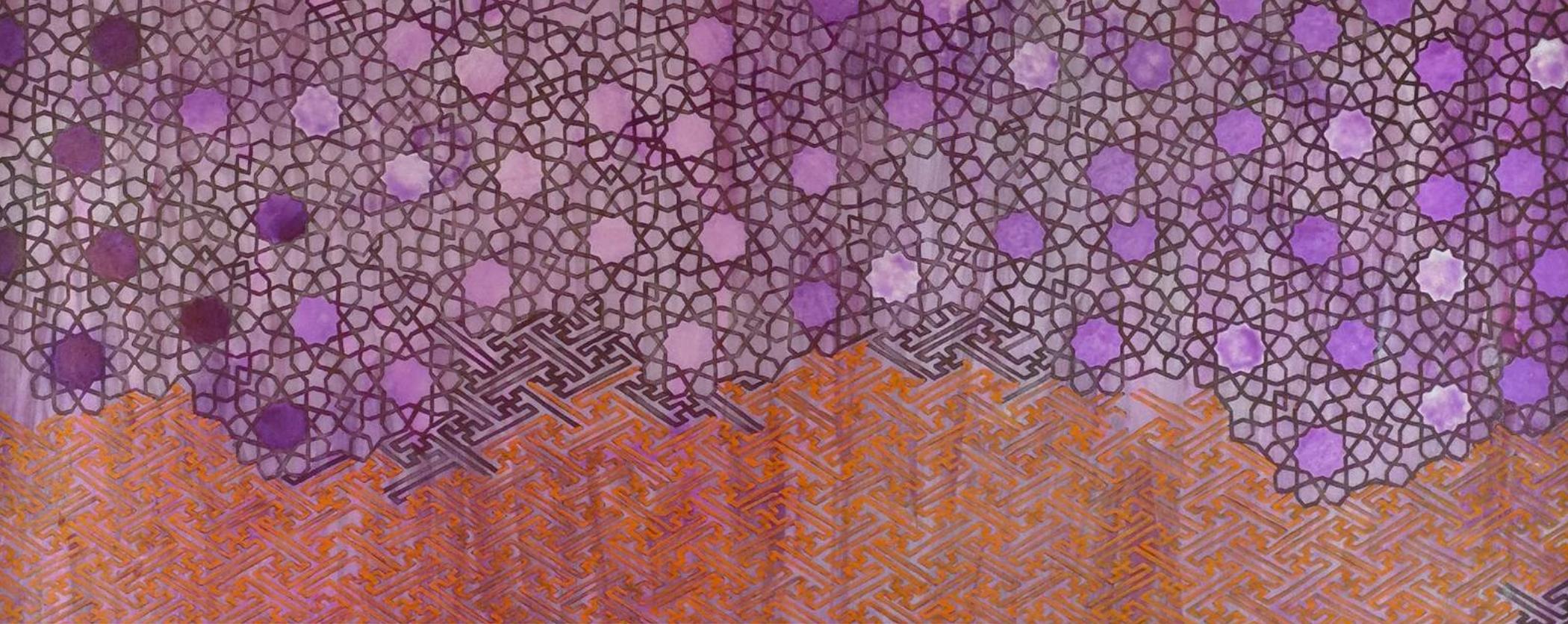
CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS



[Shelley Kommers](#) is a Los Angeles artist whose layered, collage-based artwork is shown in galleries throughout the U.S. Her aim in life is to create beauty, and she has twice exceeded her wildest expectations: first with her daughter Isabeau, and secondly with her son Callum.

Artwork: [dahlia mandala](#)





[Carole Silverstein](#) is a Los Angeles based visual artist making paintings, collages, and prints. She has shown her work nationally & internationally at the 2015 Venice Biennale in “We Must Risk Delight: 20 Artists from Los Angeles” and most recently in a solo show entitled “arabesque” at Nancy Toomey Fine Art, San Francisco. She lives with her husband and her 13 year old son who are both magical blessings in her life, and know how to make her laugh.

Artwork (scaled to show detail): [three realms](#)





I'm so glad you found your way to this
Mother's Day collection.

I believe we need more words – real ones –
about motherhood, daughterhood, sonhood.

So that we can parent skillfully.

So that we can heal what needs to be healed
from our mothering or being mothered.

So that we can give this very central part of the
human experience its due.

So that we are less alone in our experiences
around motherhood – whatever they are.

I hope this collection has done some part of
that for you.

For more writings and resources to support
your wellbeing, to nourish your inner life and
help you bring your unique contribution into
the world, visit www.taramohr.com.

With love,
Tara

WWW.TARAMOHR.COM

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DESIGNED BY **ADELE MILLER**