

*This issue is dedicated
in memory of
Sarah Ruth Rochitti.*

Stick Em Up by Joan

One of my favorite memories of my Aunt Sarah, who passed away recently, was that every time she saw you she would say, "Stick em up!" and point her two fingers at you like they were coming from an imaginary holster tied around her waist. Then she would ask you if you wanted a piece of candy.

Sarah had a deep love for life and appreciated hers every day. Many people might not have felt that way if they were to have lived in her shoes and the circumstances that she dealt with ongoingly, but that was not how my aunt perceived it. She felt she had the best life that anyone could have been given.

Born the 12th girl child in a family of 13, she was dropped on her head at birth, and from that moment on experienced severe epileptic fits and uncontrollable seizures. At that time, with less knowledge of the condition than we have today, she was considered a *misfit*. Not allowed to go to school because of the frequency of her seizures, as well as not having many of the other privileges that most of us take for granted-- like driving, going shopping on her own, having a job, dating, giving birth—her life was sheltered. Yet she somehow still felt she had it all.

I can't remember a day I saw her that she did not speak words of gratitude about her life and tell everyone around her how blessed she was and how her God always took care of her. Even after a very painful seizure she would recover and say, "I'm feeling okay. I'm all right. God is taking care of me."

Many of us took her a bit for granted. We do that with people who are always around. It's like they become an invisible part of our lives and we don't know how much their presence is a part of it and our growth until they are not longer there.

She was the quiet one-- always sitting in the corner and observing everyone. She was always present but not always noticed. She let the rest of us have center stage. We would go on about our lives, our work, our victories, our failures, and through it all she would just listen and be there. I am sure she was sharper than she led on.

I can't remember a time in my life that Aunt Sarah was not home when you went over to her house. She was always there; always happy to see you. Always present *with* and *for* you-- cracking jokes and trying in her own way to get you to lighten up.

From Spring to Late Fall you knew just where you would find her as you drove up to visit-- sitting on her front porch like a queen on her throne, watching over her *queendom*. Looking out for the children, stray pets, and anything unusual that might be taking place in her little corner of the world.

"Whatcha doin', Aunt Sarah?," we would call out as we entered her sanctuary. "Oh, nothing. Just sitting here."

As we grew older we knew she was not just sitting there alone. She was sitting there with her God as she experienced it. Not alone at all. I use to worry about her being alone when I was younger, but as I began my own spiritual journey-- and learned the power of being quiet, calm, and in the present moment-- I came to realize more of what her daily life had been about.

The power to be silent and to be still is what a master is gifted with. For in the silence and quiet we are invited to convene with the holy ones. To hear the voice of our soul. And that is what she was doing, sitting there watching over her world, being with her God.

I came to know that we were walking in on Sarah in a roomful of her angels and guardians-- the ones she kept company with when family was away.

She was, "Always present," as my nephew Phil eloquently said at her funeral, "but not always noticed."

I never knew how much pain she was in but I know it was great, and not once did I ever hear her complain. "God takes care of me," she would chuckle, and then ask you if you wanted a piece of candy. I think of it now and realize that my aunt Sarah had been given a personal burden—her own stigmata if you will. And she willingly accepted this condition. Out of that willingness-- she was given divine compensation, compassion and the gift of divine wisdom that she was loved and cared for by God.

This is what I learned from her as I sat at her funeral and watched the people pour in: *My aunt Sarah knew how to let God love her*. She knew every day of her life that she was always taken care of and would be provided for. She knew that God worked through other people and His grace would be sent to her when she needed it.

I can't tell you how many times some challenge would arise in her life-- where she may have needed to pay her taxes or some house repair bill above what her monthly would cover-- and she would again give it up to Spirit to handle. My mom would get so worried about it, and then the next day my aunt would call and say, "I went to Bingo last night and I won the jackpot!" It always happened that way for her. Not always from Bingo, but from divine intervention and she knew it. She took nothing for granted.

There was nothing in Sarah's consciousness that kept miracles from happening. For her the equation was clear.

She accepted God's will for her life and in this acceptance was given grace on so many levels. Her acknowledgement of her blessings kept them coming. She was happy with the life she was "blessed" with and in her happiness she blessed so many of us with it.

The kids in the neighborhood loved her, and not just because of the ever-present candy she'd dispense to them. She was a constant force for them as well.

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Many of them came home from school to houses where their parents were not yet home from work. They, like us, knew she was always there.

Each evening she would walk up and down her block, and all the kids would come out and say hello. It was like she was tucking the neighborhood in and making sure – every one was okay, safe and protected. She was the guardian angel, caretaker, head Priestess of the neighborhood, and even the most jaded parents and children acknowledged it in their way.

When she got sick and had to leave her home and go into a nursing home a few months before her death, the kids missed her. My brother Phil, in referencing this at her funeral, touched my heart and made me feel a new peace inside.

“Look around at all these people. Aunt Sarah never experienced the pain or joy of giving birth, yet she held everyone in this room in her arms at some point, and loved them as if she was there mother; even the newborn baby she got to hold the night before she passed away.”

She did not die in pain. The night before she died, she was playing a game with visiting family members. We know it was a good death for her because as she passed over to meet her God, Who had blessed her so dearly in this life. She exited with a smile on her face—conveying to us a last lesson: that she was happy and for us to not to be afraid of death or to worry about where she had gone.

A silent witness for her God. An everyday mystic who accepted and allowed in the life that God chose for her. That was my aunt Sarah.

When you would leave her house she would always say, “Don’t say goodbye, say farewell. Goodbye is forever, and farewell is just for now. So, farewell Aunt Sarah. See you soon. And stick em up!

What's Working - Potpourri by David

** Once in awhile I get a glimpse of the spirit I have carried within me in this world... reflected back to me in equal measure.*

This month it came in the form of a forwarded YouTube movie, pulled onto a stand-alone site to help relieve traffic and facilitate the millions of hits it was getting to get a look at it. The movie is about a 3 minute summation of the inspiration of Juan Mann, of Australia and can be found at www.FreeHugs.com.

This twenty-something came up with the idea of carrying a sign that reads "Free Hugs" and walking around in public places... up to the task of fulfilling anyone's interest in having him honor the promise.

I won't say more here. But I do feel you will have your joy quotient lifted and heart opened should you decide to take a gander (and please put the gander back where you found it when you are done).

** A book that has been doing wonders for us and people around us lately, is "Loving What Is" by Byron Katie. This is work from a woman (yes Byron, is another unisex name like Pat and Chris) who used 4 simple questions that came to her... to lift her, and now thousands of others, up and out from under the weight of the tricks of the mind, where it comes to not being ok with... what is.*

As yet another great tool to complement any other intended to help keep us in "the now", this work-- called The Work-- is simple and profound. Much is detailed on the website (www.thework.com) but we recommend reading the book as it includes transcripts of this process of examining our unexamined thoughts (most of which are assumptions, and wrong ones at that) as done on/with participants at her workshops. Most of these are along themes relatable to all of us, and we thus begin to quickly be able to render impotent the fear-based chatter of the mind.

** I have adapted and extended this concept into an exercise I do called "Being Present To What Is". It is amazing how you can just pick a spot outside and relax into life around you... quiet yourself... and remember you are ok in the moment, and that seemingly big worries up to that point are diffused by breathing in all that surrounds us all of the time. Just another way of slowing down the wheels and a rewarding one at that. Let us know how this trifecta works for you; and share what's working in your world!*

The Passed Encourage Us to Honor Those Present by David

Day of the Dead. Dia (or Dios) de Los Muertos down on Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles, and in the hearts and minds of the latin/hispanic/mexica community the world over.

A time for remembering and celebrating those who have passed—at this time of year when the veil is said to be thin. Not too far off from Thanksgiving philosophically, as both tend to tie-in to the time of the harvest. The *reaping* of the harvest. And perhaps extending to the reaper, and the scythe (insert Vincent Price evil laugh track here).

What I love about the Day of the Dead celebrations is—exactly that- that they are *celebrations*. I have always resonated most with those cultures practicing ways of rejoicing the spirits of those who have given and affected us so much. And here is a wake, of sorts, to which we are all invited.

Dios de los Muertos altars-- some very elaborate-- are created to honor those who have passed. To the outsider these can look slightly irreverent—what with the possibility of being festooned with earthly delights—perhaps cigars, bottles of alcohol, sweets—anything that the departed might have truly loved.

This is an honoring, and a reminder that spirits are alive and remain with us; and that we, in turn, must do our part to keep their spirits alive by way of our memories and actions. It is also a celebration and embracing of the Great Mystery. Viva! Salut! L'Chaim!

*“Save your regrets for the dead,
but for the living—
give them love and give them bread.”*

-- from the song "Bread" by Todd Rundgren

While I love this aspect of it, I also personally use such reminders to help me recommit to celebrating *the living* as well. This holiday is the first of the *appreciation season* in my book! We get to remain in gratitude for all and everything we experience, from now, through Thanksgiving and on to all the spiritual occasions that lead us up to the New Year of many traditions.

Of-late I find myself and some of my friends experiencing sadness and sympathy for the trials and health issues of sick and/or elderly friends and relatives who have moved on to other legs of their journey or who will be here with us for many more adventures.

The Day of the Dead altars I took in on Olvera Street, and the stories of certain of these individuals really has me urging us all to embrace all the more... anything or anyone we believe we would miss at that time they should they no longer be here with/for us.

Yes this begins to sound like a “stop and smell the roses” speech, but no, I do not ever find such cliché.

A cliché is only a cliché when you think you know what a concept means, have understood it to the level possible and have filed it away in your brain so as not to have to continue looking at it. It says to me that we have reached the limit of our ability to *receive* that thing. That we begin to grow uncomfortable going down a path of appreciation and understanding finer and finer nuances that ultimately lead to too many question marks, too much light from the sending end, and/or feelings of inadequacy or not deserving on the receiving end.

Naming is not knowing. I put to you that there are infinite levels of knowing and appreciating a thing or a person, a concept, a thought, and that these reminders of this season are aimed at encouraging us all to dig a little deeper into that and those we claim we will miss... at such time that they are no longer before us.

Here we enter the world of wonder and contemplation, real prospects of witnessing the sublime... with the only sting perhaps being... thoughts that there is only so much time to appreciate so much. Put those thoughts out. There is exactly the time needed. And it begins now.

This is the wisdom behind the wind that stirs the crisp and crackling leaves of autumn: the stirrings and urgings of those who have gone on, whispering and reminding us to savor all we have now in corporeal form. This is the texture, to be bitten off and chewed—the memory of the taste of which to take on to other realms. And it comes in the faces of those who we believe we know... yet of whom we might actually know very little, or at least... not enough.

Spirit calls us to quit atoning for *living*, for being alive. Be conscious yes, but shift from using *the thing* to block and numb you from Spirit, to renewing curiosity for the spirit behind and within *that and all things*.

Spend time on those worthy of the gift. Your return on this exchange is... more joyous memories of, and with, them.

Leave not one question unasked, so that you may relay forward the legacy of what each person left in the hearts of those they loved.

Toward this end, this article is dedicated to the spirit and spark living within Lavonne Jeanette Cropley, Edna and Gladys Jorgensen and Nils Hanson. May you know how you are seen by those in your sphere. May your challenges be small ones.

*“If you look deeply into the palm of
your hand, you will see your parents
and all generations of your ancestors.
All of them are alive in this moment.
Each is present in your body.
You are the continuation
of each of these people.”*

-- Thich Nhat Hahn



For Those Who Have Come Before

*That favorite food,
those comfy shoes,
pictures of your youth,
are for your memories.*

*Just as this altar
is for us to remember you
for who you were,
who you are,*

*for as long as we keep
your spirit and memory alive within us.*

Thinking Ahead

Thank you for your commitment to continuing to focus on the positive.

This is a world in transition, where all the skills you can muster will be called on by those in need. We can help each other through anything, as long as we handle ourselves first, then act in accordance with that which guides us, and toward the highest interest of the one in need.

Take time to remember those who have gone before us, those who are with us and those who will come. We are each one link in a very long, unbroken chain, and thus, all equally essential. We are also all able to send love up or down the chain as we choose or are asked.

November will continue exploring these themes of the *appreciation season*.

See you next month!

About the Authors

David Bartholomew and Joan Clark are married and currently living in Lawrence, Kansas. This publication stems from their commitment that each of us lives from our true calling, and trust that this is possible.

Joan is an artist/painter/natural perfumer/writer/teacher/holistic practitioner bringing forth intuitively and Spirit-driven work. She truly lives from a place that everything is connected and all aspects of her life reflect this.

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*What Would You Do...
If You Knew You Could Not Fail?*