

Chapters
From the
Farmhouse Journal

Tales of Synchronicity and Grace



Laura Lander

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Farmhouse Journal**
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By Laura Lander

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*Chapters From the Farmhouse Journal: Tales of Synchronicity
and Grace*

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ISBN 978-1-62646-366-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida

Printed in the United States of America

First edition

Illustrations by Laura Lander

Edited by Ann Weber: <http://www.revealingwords.com>

Author photo by Carol Lander

Laura Lander: <http://www.LauraLanderAuthor.com>

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Chapter 1: Thirty Days Away

This narrative begins with a time in my life when I was certain of almost nothing at all save for two things. After an extended period of agonizing over the decision of whether or not to end my marriage, I made a thirty-day commitment to myself to live away from my home and my husband of eleven years. In concert with that was my commitment to practice centering meditation on each one of those days, for a significant length of time, without fail.

In the torturous journey of one of the most painful decisions a person should ever have to make, I suspect that clarity is often not easily forthcoming. I would imagine that it is more the norm is to be besieged with doubts and second-guesses, to wonder if what you are doing is the right thing or if it is the biggest mistake you could make.

This state of indecisiveness was, to say the least, an emotionally wearing ordeal both for me and for my husband. It had actually begun almost one year before making this thirty-day commitment, during a retreat in October 2008. I had a momentary mental glimmer of knowledge that the end was coming. It was as if someone had flipped open a curtain, however briefly, on a totally unexpected scene and let it drop again. The painfulness of acknowledging the eventuality of parting from my husband was so acute, I must have subconsciously built a

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thick wall of confusion around it to avoid feeling the pain of the suffering that it would effect in our lives.

I was walking our land in rural Kentucky one wintry afternoon with my friend Nina. She struck upon a genuine understanding of my dilemma: "So I see now. It's not just the marriage you would be leaving, but a whole way of life."

Nina managed to put into words something that I had not been able to express myself. In leaving the marriage, I *was* forfeiting a whole way of life: our log home, which we had built together with our own hands; my terraced herb garden, with stone walls constructed by my own back-breaking labor; the perennial beds; the woodland garden; the wildflower meadow; the vegetable garden; the asparagus bed; the labyrinth I had mowed in the meadow; the path I had blazed through the woods to the meditation bench that I had hauled down the steep hill in a wheelbarrow to the creek; the tree we had planted when my father died; the lilac bush and the columbine that had been Mother's Day gifts from one of my daughters.

So much of what made our home so special and unique had been created by my own dedicated labor of love, begun in the years even before we were married.

I had a dream of creating an increasingly lovely park-like setting for friends and massage-therapy clients to experience quiet country days of retreat. I saw such a hunger in our society – a need for quiet, for stopping, for taking time from the busyness of our lives. I had already begun hosting what I named "Coming Home: Sanctuary"

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days for my clients. These were special days of providing quiet and rest, massage sessions and a delectable lunch.

I had imagined myself semi-retiring on this land with my husband, doing massage part time from our home, providing more retreat days. I imagined welcoming my grandchildren for visits, watching them run and play, and letting them help me in the gardens.

All of this was what I had thought was to be my contribution to the world—and all of it would be left behind.

In leaving this marriage, I felt I was jumping off a cliff for the second time in my life. A woman I chanced to sit next to in a sidewalk café in California once told me: “You know what happens when you trust in God as you take this kind of leap, don’t you? Either you learn to fly as you are falling, or God catches you in His hand and puts you down gently somewhere.”

Pretty words for after the fact, but when you are standing on the brink, it takes raw guts. Courage. And yes, trust. Trust that no matter what happens, you have it within yourself to survive, to overcome, and to eventually thrive and blossom in a whole new setting—one that is as yet unseen.

And more, it takes some kind of certainty that what you are about to do is for the best, that it is the best thing to do. That it is not a giving up, or a giving out, or a giving in. It is *not* a failure. It is simply an ending, followed by a new beginning, for the highest good of everyone involved.

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For me, it was almost less a choice than it was the pressing necessity to embark on a desperate measure. To stay in a marriage inauthentically was just not doable for me.

In autumn of 2008, I had that glimmer that the end was coming. All winter, I flip-flopped. The following January, I participated in a Life Success Seminars¹ weekend. This seminar focuses on life skills that provide tools for conscious living through the medium of lectures, dialogues, interactive exercises, writing and meditations. I went with the intention of finding direction: How to move forward from the crossroads I had felt stuck in for so long? Whether to stay in the marriage or to leave?

My answer came clearly in the four days of that seminar, surprisingly sensible in its simplicity. My pathway lay in fully investing myself in the possibility of staying with the marriage and making it successful. That way, if it worked, everybody won. If it didn't work, then I would know to move on without second-guessing my choice.

I committed to doing just that.

Seven long months ensued of a roller-coaster ride with some highs and some lows and then, having passed through an all-too-brief honeymoon-like "tunnel of love" in which it seemed that everything was going to be all right after all, ended right back where it began—with me standing once again at the crossroads.

The emotional embroilment was unbearable. It was at this time that I gave the assignment to myself—

the commitment to live apart from my husband for thirty days and, during that thirty days, to practice centering meditation for a significant amount of time daily, without fail. Not just for two minutes, or five, or ten, but for a significant amount of time, at least twenty minutes, and more like thirty. Most days, my meditation lasted for half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening.

This time away was a bid for clarity. More than that, these steps, as simple and clear-cut as they sound now, came as a result of much soul-searching and were neither simple nor clear-cut. I had been floundering in an ocean of uncertainty and indecision, of torturous emotional distress and interrelational tension, and finally had barely managed to haul myself up out of the turbulent waters and aboard a small craft—a little boat that I gave myself permission to stay in for thirty days.

I suppose some central part of my deepest, innermost self knew that this was exactly what I needed to do, that this was *all* that I needed to do, to find my way. Mostly, I was counting on this time of meditation and being apart to lead me to my own answer.

One of my favorite personal meditation mantras had come to me three years earlier while on retreat on the island of Maui. I had gone to Maui to learn the traditional massage form known as Hawaiian Temple Lomi Lomi², a sacred ritual soul- and body-work in the lineage of Kahuna Abraham Kawai'i, taught by Tom Cochran and Donna Jason in the context of a retreat. While there, during a quiet space of time spent in nature, this message

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came to me: *"Cradling embrace... Abiding Presence... Everything you need is given to you."* In the three years since, I had only begun to believe this.

Taking time apart from my husband was an act of faith. Faith that, included in the promise *"Everything I need is given to me,"* are all of the answers to my own questions. I believed I had the answers within, and that it was not really necessary to go searching elsewhere. What *was* necessary was to create a space of quiet and calm, to make time for stillness, so that I could listen.

The space of quiet and calm was lovingly provided for me at just the right time by my younger sister, Carol³. Having herself known the throes of divorce-decision-making, she had only to take one look at me on an evening when I was at her home and was particularly beset with doubts and demons. I was feeling so off-balance, so uncentered, that to say I was beside myself is an apt description. Leaning her concerned face toward mine, Carol invited me to stay at her home for a while, for as long as I needed. She told me that whatever she could do to help me, I only had to ask.

It was during that conversation, and as a direct result of her gift of welcome and respite from the tensions that had moved in as permanent residents in my own home, that I resolved to make the thirty-day commitment to myself. To live separately from my husband for those thirty days, creating a space of quiet and calm. To make time for stillness, so that I could listen to the answer whispered deep within by my spirit.

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I was putting myself in a thirty-day timeout. My intention was to find the answer to my own giant question: Was my increasingly intensifying inner urge to leave my marriage the healthy intuition to finally let go of what was not in my best interest, and the tug to stay put “codependence” or some other unhealthy behavior pattern at work? Or was it the flip side of that question that was the truth: Was my desire to be free of this marriage a result of fear leftover from childhood patterns of relationship and unresolved emotions? Could it be the fear of allowing myself to really be loved, and my urge to escape just a classically textbook case of that good old psychotherapy catch-all phrase “avoidance of intimacy”?

I had flip-flopped over these questions for almost a year. But which flip-flop was which? Was the flip dysfunctional and the flop healthy or was it the other way around? My intention was to come out of the thirty days knowing which of the two conflicting voices was my higher self giving me direction, and which was my wounded ego self on the defense.

What I experienced during those thirty days was a gradual lightening of heart and soul. It was a day-by-day disentangling from the viny tendrils of the emotional tug-and-pull of living under the same roof with a man that I didn't know if I could stay with but couldn't bear to think of leaving. Each morning's centering meditation, on Carol's backyard bench just before dawn, brought an unfolding of inner peace. As the morning sun filtering through the trees gradually lightened the eastern sky, the

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muddled clouds of confusion and indecision were progressively dispersed from my mind.

My ultimate decision was not a choice made with my mind. It was not even made from my heart. It was a listening to my innermost spirit—the still, small voice that I believe is the Divine Presence within each one of us.

The day of what was to be my first night away from home was difficult. I felt sad all day. Driving to Carol's after work, I felt entirely displaced and not at all myself. I felt the impulse to turn the car around and head toward home after all, tell my husband it was all a false alarm, that I'm fine, that I love him and, of course, I didn't want to leave him. I was already missing him. I felt badly that I was putting him through this.

But I knew it was important that I stick this thing out for the entire thirty days, no matter what. I reminded myself that these two commitments to myself were a step toward ending the confusion, which was already causing both of us so much pain.

That evening, it didn't take me too long after I arrived at my sister's home to feel a little more at ease, and not quite like a homeless person. We talked well into the evening, and my ease expanded. I felt fortunate to have her as a sister and to be the recipient of her generosity in providing me with a safe place to stay while I tried to figure myself out.

Chapter 4: Finding the Farmhouse

I spent part of an afternoon driving to several different apartment complexes to see if I could envision myself living in them without being miserable. I picked up a realty catalogue to research houses for sale and for rent, to get an idea of what was available and at what price. After only one evening of looking through that and searching online, I became utterly demoralized.

My psyche felt threadbare. I was worn down from the years of stress and heartache caused by the decline of the marriage that I thought would last for life. I was exhausted from the long months of flip-flop indecision. I had had it. I could take no more.

It was then that I prayed a prayer unlike any other prayer I have ever prayed in my entire life. It was actually more like an expectant suggestion. Giving God directions. I shrink from using this word, but it was practically a *demand*. The saving grace of praying in this way was that it truly involved a total giving over to the genuine and humbling recognition that God is all-knowing and I am not.

I had a talk with God. Not beseeching, not asking, not requesting. I simply and firmly told him straight from my heart what it was that I needed.

My prayer went something like this: *“Okay, God. You know what I have been through, and how earnestly I have been trying to discern what to do. You can see how emotionally*

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wrought I have been. If it is truly for my higher good to leave my marriage and my home, my little piece of heaven in the country, my husband, my gardens, my labyrinth, everything that I have worked for all these years... If I really am supposed to go, then please, show me where. I'm going to need a place to live. I have no idea where the best place for me to go next will be. But you know. You already know right now where it is. And I don't have a clue. So instead of me searching all over Northern Kentucky, online and driving around, looking for a needle in a haystack, how about if you just show me? You already know where it is. Bring it to me. Lead me to it. I don't have the emotional energy to engage in an all-out search right now. How about let's make this part easy. If I am supposed to move on, please just show me where to go."

But, unexpectedly, I didn't stop there. Something within me urged this addendum:

"But it has to have these things about it: It needs to be a place that nurtures my spirit when I come home. It can't be a place that I hate to be, or that I feel afraid of the neighborhood, or feel claustrophobic and crowded in. When I get home from giving to others all day with massage, I need my own spirit to be restored. It needs to be a place that does that.

"I need to be surrounded by nature. I don't need to own the nature, but I need to have it around me. I just do.

"It needs to have a spare bedroom for my daughters to stay in when they come to visit me. A one-bedroom apartment absolutely will not suffice. So don't even go there.

"I need my hot tub for my own therapy. So it really should have a place for me to put my hot tub. I guess that pretty well rules out any apartment.

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"If I could bring my beehives, that would be perfect. I would really love that.

"And, oh yeah, I need a place where I can walk. Not one that I would have to drive to, but that I can walk to from right out my front door.

"Okay. Now show me where this place is."

I am not sure if I even remembered to say "Amen."

What possessed me to pray such an outrageous, seemingly arrogant prayer, I will never know. It could have been that the part of the Divine that resides within me, within all of us—what I call Inner Presence—inspired me with what to say, with the knowledge of how this prayer was to be answered in an almost miraculous way. My prayer must have had just the right mix of desperation, humility, certain faith and childlike trust, because this is what happened next.

Two days later, I was at work, massaging a client who I knew well and loved. For most of my clients, I suggest quiet, not chitter-chatter, during their massage sessions. I let them know that they will gain so much more if they remain still and receive, and not get distracted with conversation. But for some clients, conversation seems to be an important part of the session. I allow these clients to speak their stream-of-conscious thoughts aloud. On this particular day, this particular client was in that frame of mind.

So as she lay there talking about this and that, she began to express how thankful she was for her health. How at her age of 75, she had few complaints. She hoped that she would be like her elder sister, who was 87. Her

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sister lived alone, still drove, participated in senior aerobics three times a week. And her sister was, even now, busy helping her two sons with the cleaning and painting of *the farmhouse that she had for rent*. The former tenants had moved away, and they were getting the house ready to advertise for rent. The client was speaking of her and her sister's health. I zeroed in on the farmhouse that was for rent!

Casually, I asked her, "Where *is* this farmhouse that is for rent?" She told me later that she wondered why I had asked her about that. She had no idea that I was leaving my marriage and looking for a new place to live. But she told me enough information, without my having to pry, that I knew I could find the place mapped out on the Internet.

That evening, Carol and I took a drive to scout out the farmhouse. It was out in the country, down a long gravel lane, with speed limit signs that read 15 mph. We crawled along in the car, fields planted with soybeans on our left and three houses, spread out on huge lots, on the right. None of those houses fit the description that my client had given me. We drove through a little woods that made a tunnel of green over the lane. As we came out of the trees and headed up the hill, we saw it: a square, solid farmhouse at the end of the lane, on a little rise, overlooking the fields and the woods. I stopped the car, and we leaned to look at it out the window.

It was then that we noticed a pickup truck coming up the drive behind us. I began to feel a little nervous about trespassing as the truck pulled next to our car, but

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the friendly face of the man inside it smiled broadly at us as he asked, "May I help you?"

This was Will, one of the sons of the 87-year-old sister of my client, coming to do some more work on the house. I told him of my connection with his mother's sister, and of my interest in possibly renting the house. The rest unfolded naturally. Will was happy to let us look through the house and to answer any questions.

The house appealed at once. Its large, gracious rooms led from one to the other. Even though the house was empty except for the evidence of cleaning and painting in-progress, it had an unmistakably homey feel. It was light and bright, with many large windows, and with an expansive yard all around. When we stepped out onto the front porch, the peaceful and wide-open view looked out over the surrounding fields and woods, which secluded it from the road and any other houses. It was perfect.

Will told us that they still had two or three weeks of work to do before the house was ready. This was ideal, as I would not be ready to move for about a month.

After arriving back at Carol's house, I spent some time centering. I pictured myself in the house, all fixed up, living in it, sitting on the front porch in the mornings having my coffee, playing the piano, writing publishable articles and books, having my girls home to visit. It could happen.

The feel of the house immediately gave me a sense of coming home, of welcome, of nurturance. (Condition one: a place that nurtures my spirit.) It was, in fact,

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totally surrounded by lawn, fields of green and woods. It was like being on an island of green. (Condition two: surrounded by nature.) It had a spare bedroom. (Condition three: room to accommodate my daughters when they visited.) The back patio was just the right size for my hot tub. (Condition four.) And it was a farm: Of course, beehives would be welcome! (Condition five.) The house was located at the end of a half-mile gravel lane that led to a little traveled, winding country road—ideal for walks. (Condition six: Check!)

My prayer was answered in every respect. And along with this place came the blessing of a family living right down the lane who owned, loved and took good care of it. New friends for my new beginning! Most of all, finding such a perfectly suitable place gave me affirmation of God's continued care and providence in the new path that I had chosen. It underlined my newly hatching recognition that the third line of my Maui meditation was true: Everything you need is given to you.



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