

Preface

I began writing this book exactly one year after my wife suddenly passed away, returning home from dinner. The guilt of Survivor's Remorse and the trauma of witnessing her soul transition left an indelible mark on my spirit—one that I know I may never fully remove. Yet, I have learned to harness that pain as a motivational tool. Writing was always my wife's passion, and now, this bittersweet endeavor—my first book—has emerged from the depths of my grief. I

dedicate this book to my wife, Jennifer. In the months following her passing, I struggled with

Survivor's Remorse and PTSD, haunted by the feeling that I had failed to revive her long enough for the First Responders to arrive. While her death was profoundly heartbreaking, it served as a poignant reminder that "Life is for Living" and that tomorrow is never guaranteed. I realized that drowning in my grief and guilt was counterproductive. About a week before our wedding anniversary, I made the conscious decision to share my story with the world after a breakthrough therapy session. This book has unexpectedly become a true healing process and an additional layer of therapy. As I share my experiences, I confront past traumas, shortcomings, and reminders of my poor life choices. Yet, it has also become a beacon of courage, guiding me as I explore the parables of my life and navigate through the storms that have shaped me. In this journey, I've embraced the principles of S.E.R.E.:

S—Survive your trauma and overcome it.

E—Evade the horrible circumstances and situations that seek to drag you down.

R—Resist the temptation to let those experiences affect your mood and keep negative people at bay.

E—Escape from societal norms and become a true "free thinker." At this stage, you can tap into the mystical powers of the Universe.

By embodying these principles, I am not just surviving; I am learning to thrive, and I hope my story inspires others to do the same.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgment.....	iii
About the Author.....	v
Preface	vi
Chapter 1: Grand Rising	1
Chapter 2: Victory Lap	11
Chapter 3: The Line Between Love and Hate.....	25
Chapter 4: Ascension (Don't Ever Wonder).....	38
Chapter 5: Brown Sugar	48
Chapter 6: One Day You're Here and the Next.....	58
Chapter 7: The Power of 23 and Spiritually Woke.....	68
Chapter 8: Life After Death.....	82
Chapter 9: Patience: "Tap In, Tune in and Turn On"	92
Chapter 10: Life Goes On.....	103

A WIDOWER'S PARABLES

Chapter 1: Grand Rising

The greeting "Grand Rising" emerged from spiritual and wellness circles as a more uplifting alternative to "good morning." It conveys a sense of optimism and positive energy, intended to create a hopeful outlook for the day ahead. It is more than just a unique way to say "Good morning." It is a phrase that carries deep significance, aiming to inspire a sense of spiritual and emotional awakening as you embark on a new day. Unlike traditional greetings that acknowledge the time of day, "Grand Rising" conveys a more profound message. It signifies the opportunity for personal growth, new beginnings, and the cultivation of a positive mindset.

By greeting the day with "Grand Rising," you set a tone for a productive and fulfilling day ahead. It's a reminder to approach each day with intention, to stay present, and to

make the most of the opportunities that come your way. This phrase encourages individuals to approach their day with mindfulness, recognizing that each morning is a chance to start afresh and to align their actions with their deeper values and aspirations. By using this expression, individuals are reminded to appreciate the gift of a new day and to approach it with a

hopeful and open heart. It serves as a gentle nudge to focus on life's positive aspects and see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles.

It aligns with the principles of self-awareness and self empowerment, encouraging you to rise to your fullest potential. So, this phrase is more than a greeting; it's a call to action, motivating you to take charge of your day and to make choices that reflect your highest self. The use of "Grand Rising" also connects individuals to a broader community of like-minded people who value

personal growth and positivity. It creates a shared understanding and intention, reinforcing a collective commitment to living each day with purpose and awareness. This sense of connection and purpose starkly contrasts the environment I experienced in 1996 when I was 16 years old.

Attending school in rural Mississippi during that period felt like being trapped in a narrowly defined, tightly controlled environment. The small-town school system was characterized by its rigid structure and strong emphasis on conformity, which often felt suffocating. The curriculum and daily routine were predictable and unchanging, creating a sense of monotony that I found particularly stifling. The limited scope of experiences offered by the school system was a stark contrast to what I yearned for. The school's small size meant fewer opportunities for diverse activities, extracurriculars, and intellectual exploration. The social dynamics were similarly restrictive, with a close-knit community reinforcing a singular way of thinking and behaving. This lack of variety and the pressure to adhere to a specific set of norms left me feeling unfulfilled and restless.

I longed for an environment that was more dynamic and expansive—one that offered a broader range of experiences and allowed for personal growth and exploration. I yearned for educational and social opportunities that could challenge me and broaden my horizons, providing a richer, more stimulating experience. The desire for something beyond the limitations of the rural school system was driven by a need for intellectual

curiosity, personal development, and a sense of possibility that extended beyond the confines of the small-town setting. While I was expected to engage with the academic

material and show a genuine interest in my studies, I often felt like I was merely going through the motions. My real passions lay elsewhere, particularly in sports and social interactions.

At that stage, my primary focus was on sports and chasing after girls. I was deeply invested in the social dynamics of teenage life—trying to be a ladies' man to impress my friends

and, more importantly, to connect with my father, who I admired greatly. My father's approval was a significant motivator for me, and I often felt that my attempts to impress him and my friends were at odds with my school activities. This conflict created a sense of hypocrisy within me. I felt like I was living a dual existence: outwardly performing the role of a committed student while internally, I was more absorbed in my life's social and athletic aspects. This internal struggle made me feel increasingly disconnected from the school environment, amplifying the sense that I was not being true to myself. I found myself manipulating girls' emotions and feelings, reflecting on the behavior I had seen from my father more times than I cared to recall. Aside from getting into trouble, it seemed like the only way to capture his attention. Whether or not it was entirely accurate, it felt like this was the only path to engage with him. The dissonance between my public persona and my private struggles was further exacerbated by the disturbing truths I witnessed within my own home. These revelations cast a long shadow over my understanding of morality and family. From a young age, I saw my father engage in various acts of infidelity. These episodes typically occurred during times when my mother would insist on him taking me along on his outings or when I would plead persistently enough to accompany him. These moments were unsettling and confusing, as they contradicted the moral and religious principles deeply ingrained in our family life. The disparity between the values preached, and the behavior witnessed left me grappling with a sense of disillusionment and questioning the authenticity of the beliefs that shaped our lives.

Despite being fully aware that I was exposing myself to situations I would rather have avoided, I was driven by a deep desire to spend time with my father. Our interactions were usually limited to fleeting moments or instances when my actions led to his disciplinary response, often involving his favored belt—a belt with a large, prominent buckle and a thick, formidable strap.

This belt became a symbol of the rare, direct engagements I had with him. Whenever I found myself in trouble, this very belt appeared, delivering the type of old-school punishment that was common in our household. The discomfort and even fear associated with these moments starkly contrasted with my yearning for meaningful, positive time with him. The belt, a constant reminder of discipline and control, was far removed from the nurturing and supportive father figure I longed for. My efforts to be around him, even at the risk of witnessing things I would rather ignore, were fueled by a deeper need for connection and understanding with a father who was otherwise mostly distant and preoccupied. Even now, years later, my father still doesn't truly understand who I am as his son. The disconnect between us persists, and despite my efforts to gain his attention through various means, I'm left with the lingering sense that he remains unaware of my true self. Looking back, I recognize that I made a deliberate

decision to distance myself from my father to safeguard my peace of mind. At the core of this decision was a deep-seated desire for a father figure who could offer me genuine guidance, support, and inspiration, someone I could turn to for advice and encouragement as I chased my dreams. I longed for a paternal presence that would provide wisdom and motivate and uplift me through life's challenges. In hindsight, my choice to address him by his first name rather than "Dad" might be more than just a casual preference. It could be a manifestation of this underlying emotional distance I have created. By opting for a more formal address, I may have subconsciously erected a barrier between us, an emotional shield to keep myself from fully investing in a father-child relationship. This choice might reflect a deeper reluctance to open up and engage with him more personally and intimately. It's possible that by maintaining this distance, I have been trying to protect myself from potential disappointment or hurt while also shielding myself from the vulnerability of a closer relationship I had always craved but struggled to establish. This pattern of emotional detachment, likely a defense mechanism, was deeply ingrained in my psyche. It was a survival tactic honed over years of navigating a complex and often contradictory family dynamic. The roots of this behavior, I believe, can be traced back to the broader cultural and generational context in which I was raised. Both of my parents came from small, rural towns where the population was under 2,000 people. After finishing high school, they immediately entered the workforce and remained with their respective companies for over three decades. My father, in particular, dedicated an impressive 41 years to his employer. The ethos of the era was one of quiet perseverance and spiritual devotion. Material possessions were seen as distractions from the ultimate goal of salvation. A rigid adherence to religious doctrine and a strong work ethic were the cornerstones of a virtuous life. This worldview was deeply ingrained in the community, shaping everything from daily routines to aspirations. The promise of a heavenly reward, far surpassing any earthly riches, served as a powerful motivator. This belief system created a society where contentment was cultivated over covetousness. People were encouraged to find fulfillment in their faith and their role within the community rather than seeking personal gain. However, as I grew older, I began to question the underlying motivations driving these values. Was this simply a genuine expression of faith, or was it a more complex control system? The stark emphasis on obedience, humility, and deferred gratification raised questions about the extent to which these beliefs were imposed rather than freely chosen. The rigid structure of my parents' lives, defined by a relentless work ethic, unwavering religious observance, and a subdued public persona, created a sense of confinement. Their world seemed to revolve around a narrow set of expectations, leaving little room for individual expression or personal ambition. This stark contrast between the professed values of faith and community and the lived experience of constraint and

limitation created a dissonance within me. It forced me to examine how societal pressures and historical legacies might have shaped the beliefs and behaviors of those around me.

However, it wasn't until my twenties that the confines of my rural upbringing became painfully apparent. As I matured, it became clear that my ambitions and dreams extended far beyond the confines of rural Mississippi. The quiet, predictable life of a small town felt increasingly limiting and stifling. I began to recognize that I was meant for something much larger and more dynamic

than what my rural upbringing could offer. In retrospect, I realized that my sense of boredom and disengagement had been a symptom of a deeper dissatisfaction. The routine of small-town life, with its narrow scope of opportunities and slower pace, left me feeling unfulfilled. I craved a sense of purpose and excitement that seemed unattainable within the confines of my surroundings. The realization that I was meant for a life with broader horizons pushed me to seek out new experiences and challenges that would allow me to grow and pursue my

aspirations more fully. This understanding marked a significant shift in my perspective, driving me to explore new possibilities and embrace a future that promised greater opportunities and personal growth. For instance, I would often lose myself in daydreams of vibrant metropolises or the enchanting allure of Italy. The thought of immersing myself in the pulsating energy of a

bustling city or exploring the rich tapestry of European history was intoxicating. I would visualize strolling down cobblestone streets, savoring authentic cuisine, and engaging with vastly different cultures. While my reality was confined to a small town, my imagination painted vivid

pictures of a world beyond my reach. My closest encounters with Europe were through the

filtered lens of television and film, which offered romanticized glimpses into a life seemingly worlds away. These idealized portrayals fueled my longing for adventure

and a taste of the unknown. The surreal experience of actually living in Italy years

later was a profound realization of the power of the human mind. It was as if a part of me had always known this was possible, subconsciously guiding my life's trajectory. This journey from childhood dreamer to European resident is evidence of the intricate interplay between imagination and reality. It's a reminder that our dreams, no matter how distant they may seem, hold the potential to become our reality. This extraordinary experience has instilled in me a deep appreciation for the human capacity to envision a different life and to take steps, no matter how small, to make those visions tangible. It's a journey that inspires and shapes my

perspective on life's endless possibilities. Each morning, my wife and I greeted each other with

"Grand Rising." It was more than a simple greeting—it was a celebration of our journey together. It symbolized our rise from a past full of limitations to a present brimming with

possibilities. This daily exchange was a cherished reminder of how we transformed our lives, embracing each new day with hope and intention. A WIDOWER'S PARABLES

Chapter 2: Victory Lap

I fathered my children with two different women within a year, but unfortunately, I never built a strong relationship with either of them. Over time, I saw my children become pawns in a painful struggle. Rather than working toward a constructive co-parenting arrangement, the focus shifted to using my children as leverage—tools to extract more money from me or to settle personal grievances. The real casualty in all of this was the time lost with my kids during their formative years. Their early childhood, a period that should have been filled with warmth and connection, was overshadowed by the conflict and manipulation that defined my interactions with their mothers. Every attempt I made to be present and involved was met with resistance, leaving me feeling more like an outsider than a parent. The constant conflict and manipulation took a heavy toll on me, fueling deep anger and resentment toward both women. My journey toward finding peace began when I left Mississippi to attend college in Oklahoma.

It was a fresh start, an opportunity to distance myself from the turmoil of my past. To support my education and gain some financial stability, I joined the Army Reserves. This move helped cover my schooling expenses and gave me a sense of purpose and a way to regain control over my life. The structure and discipline of military service offered a new perspective and a chance to build a better future amidst the chaos I had left behind. However, this new chapter came with its own set of formidable challenges. My time in the military, while providing valuable career opportunities and personal growth, felt like a double-edged sword—a “gift and a curse.” It meant leaving my children behind in Mississippi, a decision that carved out a deep and persistent emotional wound. The separation from them was not just a physical distance but an agonizing void that weighed heavily on my heart. Every day apart felt like an eternity, amplifying the loneliness and heartache that haunted me. The distance was a constant source of pain, making the emotional burden of missing out on their early years even more acute. Adding to this heartache, I was reassigned overseas for two years as part of my service. This relocation took me further from the life I longed to be part of, intensifying my struggles. The miles between us seemed to stretch endlessly, deepening the chasm of separation and leaving me grappling with a profound sense of loss and isolation. The distance separated us geographically and magnified the emotional gap, making every moment apart feel like a painful reminder of what I was missing. In the early 2000s, the technological limitations of the time made staying connected with my children and loved ones a difficult and frustrating experience. The absence of instant communication only heightened my sense of isolation. Being in a foreign

country, grappling with a language barrier and cultural differences, compounded my feelings of alienation. During this period, I wrestled with depression, struggling to cope with the emotional distance from my family and the overwhelming sense of disconnection. Yet, amidst the

challenges, I started to learn how to manage my emotions more effectively. Through this process of self-discovery and emotional regulation, I began to find some peace. The discipline and structure of military life, combined with the necessity of navigating a new environment, eventually helped me build resilience and renewed hope for the future. During my second year of college in Oklahoma, the weight of being a young father began to press down on me

more heavily. Balancing the responsibilities of parenthood with the demands of school and military service was challenging. I was struggling to navigate my path in life, trying to reconcile my ambitions with my responsibilities as a father. The pressures were intense, and finding a balance between my roles as a student, a soldier, and a dad was proving to be a difficult journey. I deeply yearned to be a true provider for both of my children and, more importantly,

to be active in their lives. My goal was to offer them financial support and the emotional connection and involvement I felt I had missed growing up. However, the strained relationships with their mothers only complicated this effort further, creating an even greater

challenge in fostering a meaningful connection with my kids. Reflecting on my upbringing, I realized how much I had missed out on. My father was more of an authoritarian figure, whose interactions were often characterized by a "do as I say" approach rather than the nurturing, mentoring, and guidance I longed for. This lack of bonding and connection in my childhood made me all the more determined to break that cycle and be different for my children.

In pursuit of this goal, I decided to leave college and give up my part-time job at UPS. It was a sacrifice, but I hoped it would pave the way for me to focus more on my role as a father and find a way to be there for my children more substantially and meaningfully. I decided to commit to a full-time career in the military, envisioning it as a stable path that would provide for my

family and give me the structure I needed. Over twenty years, I undertook three deployments and navigated through numerous relationships, many of which failed. Looking back, I realize I often played a part in these failures through my self-sabotaging behaviors. It wasn't until I sought long-overdue therapy that I began to understand the root of my relationship patterns. In many ways, I had been replicating the same behaviors I witnessed growing up—patterns I had seen in my father's approach to his marriage and his extramarital affairs. I had become adept

at operating in relationships in a way that mirrored his shortcomings, repeating the cycle of emotional detachment and dysfunction. Through therapy, I came to the painful realization that my tendency to treat relationships as disposable, casual encounters stemmed from a deeper sense of incompleteness within myself. I was searching for something external to fill

an internal void, never truly feeling whole or content with anyone. This insight was both eye-opening and challenging, exposing how my unresolved issues shaped my approach to love and connection. In retrospect, I realized I had never truly understood what it meant to be fully devoted to a partner or to allow myself to be vulnerable in a relationship. My own experiences with intimacy were profoundly influenced by the toxic relationships that surrounded me growing up. I had no real model for healthy, committed relationships; instead, I was exposed to dysfunctional patterns that distorted my view of what a loving partnership should be. The environment I grew up in was marked by the all-too familiar scenario of a man having an affair outside his marriage while his wife either turned a blind eye or accepted the infidelity as part of their relationship dynamic. This toxic normalization of betrayal and emotional detachment shaped my understanding of relationships and intimacy. I witnessed firsthand how such arrangements became the norm rather than the exception, creating a skewed perception of commitment and loyalty. Because of this, I struggled to grasp the concept of genuine devotion and vulnerability. I didn't have a clear picture of what a healthy, supportive partnership looked like. Instead, my experiences were colored by a backdrop of acceptance of infidelity and emotional estrangement. This lack of positive examples made it difficult for me to cultivate and sustain meaningful connections, as I was operating from a place of confusion and misguided expectations. A real relationship thrives on loyalty, where trust is steadfast and unwavering. It's rooted in truthfulness, ensuring that honesty guides every interaction. Communication is key, allowing for open dialogue and mutual understanding. Transparency keeps everything out in the open, preventing deceit and misunderstandings. It's not about glossing over flaws, ignoring betrayals, or pretending everything is fine when it's not. A genuine connection demands confronting issues head-on, facing imperfections with courage, and holding each other accountable with respect and integrity. Navigating through multiple life challenges, especially those as intense as returning from deployment with severe PTSD, combat injuries, and the pressures of fatherhood, demands a delicate balance of self-care, support, and resilience. During such times, maintaining a level head involves acknowledging and validating your feelings while seeking professional help. And so, after returning to Texas and seeking to reestablish a sense of stability, I chose to reconnect with my Christian roots by renewing my faith and committing to regular church attendance. Settling into Dallas, I found a church that felt like home—one where I could engage deeply with my beliefs and connect with a supportive community. Once I found that place, I joined the church choir, which provided me with a creative outlet and a sense of belonging and purpose. Within this nurturing environment, I met a woman who, over time, became a significant part of my life. Our relationship blossomed, and I found myself envisioning a future together. When I proposed, it felt like a culmination

of years of personal growth and self-discovery. I was truly convinced that I had reached a pivotal point of contentment and self-acceptance. The journey through these experiences helped me feel comfortable and at peace with who I was, and I genuinely believed that I was in a wonderful place in my life, ready to embrace new beginnings and the promise of a shared future. After re-establishing my Christian faith, settling into one city, and finding what I believed to be the love of my life, I felt a profound sense of accomplishment and contentment. I had worked through my past commitment issues and womanizing tendencies, and for the first time, I truly felt like

I was on a stable, positive path. My life seemed to fall into place in a way I had long hoped for—professionally, personally, and spiritually. Despite this newfound sense of balance and happiness, the relationship faced an unexpected challenge. My partner's desire to have children eventually became a point of contention between us. While I had been hopeful and committed to our future together, our differing visions for the future proved to be insurmountable. Just short of two years, our relationship ended, and it was a painful reminder that even when things

seem perfect, not all outcomes align with our hopes. To my surprise, she soon moved on, marrying later that same year and quickly embarking on the journey of parenthood.

In retrospect, I realize that I may have dodged a bullet. While our relationship had its issues, the fact that I didn't want any more children provided a way out, and it turned out

to be a crucial factor in our separation. This experience taught me that sometimes what feels like a setback can be a blessing in disguise, as it opens the door to new opportunities

and self-discovery. However, looking back, I recognize that I could have approached the situation more maturely. In the aftermath of our breakup, while I wished her well and made an effort to check in occasionally, it became clear that my attempts at maintaining a positive connection were not always well received. Despite the end of our relationship, a part of my spirit continued to hold a place in my heart for her, reflecting the A WIDOWER'S PARABLES

emotional complexity of moving on from someone you once deeply cared about. The transition was challenging on multiple fronts. I left behind the comfort of suburban life—a symbol of stability and success—and moved to a weekly-rate hotel in the inner city. This shift represented more than just a physical relocation; it marked a profound search for peace of mind and a fresh start. Many men in similar situations experience this same upheaval, finding themselves in less stable and more modest accommodations. This change often signifies a deeper quest for meaning and self-discovery. This move was emblematic of a broader journey toward

personal growth. It was a period marked by the need to reevaluate my life and priorities, seeking solace and clarity in new and often unexpected places. Despite the upheaval, it

was a necessary step toward healing and understanding, revealing the resilience and adaptability required to navigate life's unpredictable challenges. During this time, I began to explore and understand myself fundamentally. My modest living situation and the environment around me played a significant role in this self-discovery. Being in a weekly-rate hotel and witnessing the struggles of those living under similar circumstances exposed me to a stark reality I hadn't faced before. Ironically, despite the challenges, this experience offered me a unique perspective on resilience and adaptability. For the first time in my life, I found myself technically homeless, moving from one weekly hotel to another over two months. Each place represented a temporary refuge, a place to rest and regroup while I navigated this tumultuous chapter. Eventually, I secured an extended-stay hotel, which offered a more stable environment to call home temporarily. It was a modest and somewhat makeshift solution. Still, it provided the stability I needed while I sorted out the logistics of retrieving my personal belongings from the house I had just left. This period of transience and uncertainty forced me to confront aspects of my identity and priorities in ways I hadn't anticipated. It became a profound journey of introspection, resilience, and growth, revealing the inner strength required to rebuild

and move forward from life's unexpected challenges. I was determined to move forward with my life and retrieve my personal belongings without escalating into a domestic dispute. The goal was to handle the situation as amicably as possible, avoiding any unnecessary conflict.

As the months passed, spanning about six to seven months, I gradually began to experience a newfound level of inner peace. This period of tranquility was a stark contrast to the turbulence of the previous two years spent in our relationship. During this period, the sense of peace I cultivated was profound. It felt like a restoration of balance and clarity that had been missing for a long time. I engaged in retrieving my belongings with a focus on resolution rather than contention. Eventually, this led to a formal resolution through small claims court, where we both agreed to settle the matter legally. Although the court route was not ideal, it provided a

clear path to finalize our separation and facilitated the recovery of my personal effects and some furniture. The legal process, while impersonal, ultimately served as a practical solution to close that chapter and move forward with a renewed sense of peace and direction. A few years later, I discovered a deep spiritual connection through Islamic teachings and devoted myself to practicing the Faith. This new path gave me a sense of spiritual fulfillment I had not experienced before. I realized that I had previously followed a faith presented to me as a child without any choice in the matter, as children have no say in the religion, names, or spiritual beliefs they inherit from their parents. As I delved into my family's ancestry, tracing our roots back to West Africa, I uncovered that our lineage was part of the Yoruba tribe. This profound revelation sparked a renewed sense of connection to my heritage. Inspired by this discovery, I began planning a pilgrimage

to West Africa, eager to explore the land of my ancestors and immerse myself in the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Yoruba people. This journey was not just about spiritual exploration but also about reconnecting with a significant part of my heritage and understanding the deeper roots of my identity. The Yoruba religion is one of the world's major spiritual traditions, with its roots deeply embedded in the cultural and historical fabric of West Africa, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria. It is a rich tapestry woven from a blend of indigenous tribal beliefs, myths, legends, proverbs, and songs. Much like how Christians might reference the Psalms for spiritual reflection and guidance, the Yoruba religion draws on a vast array of oral traditions and spiritual practices to convey its teachings and values. Yoruba spirituality is characterized by its diversity and adaptability, reflecting the complex interplay of various religious influences. It encompasses a broad spectrum of practices, including reverence for a pantheon of deities known as Orishas, each representing different aspects of life and nature. The Yoruba religion also integrates philosophical concepts, rituals, and ceremonies that are deeply connected to the rhythms of daily life and the natural world. In contemporary practice, the Yoruba religion coexists with other faiths, such as Christianity and Islam, which many people in the Yoruba community follow alongside traditional beliefs. This pluralistic approach illustrates the religion's capacity to integrate and harmonize with other spiritual practices while preserving its own unique identity. For individuals like myself, embracing Islam while honoring Yoruba traditions allows for a multifaceted spiritual journey that respects and celebrates both ancestral heritage and personal faith. The Yoruba religion's adaptability and inclusiveness reflect a broader cultural resilience and a deep-seated respect for diverse expressions of spirituality. Many might question how blending different religious traditions is possible, but the process is quite straightforward once you understand the approach. The first step is to undergo a process of deprogramming from the beliefs and teachings instilled during your formative years. This means critically examining and reassessing the religious and spiritual doctrines you were taught as a child, allowing yourself the freedom to explore and understand them from a fresh perspective. Approaching this exploration with an open mind is crucial. It involves setting aside preconceived notions and biases to engage with new ideas and practices genuinely. This open-mindedness creates space for integrating various spiritual traditions in a meaningful way. When discussing this blending of faiths, I often advise people to undertake their own research. It's essential to dive into the sources, teachings, and practices of the traditions you are interested in rather than relying solely on inherited beliefs or the opinions of others. Personal exploration and study enable you to develop your own understanding and come to original conclusions about what resonates with you. Recognizing that these conclusions may not always align with the dominant views within your social or religious circles is important.

Embracing a personal spiritual journey often means making unconventional or less popular choices among your peers. However, this individuality in spiritual exploration can lead to a more authentic and fulfilling practice rooted in a deeper understanding of your heritage and personal beliefs. By balancing respect for traditional practices with a willingness to explore and adapt, you can create a harmonious and integrated spiritual path reflecting your ancestral roots and your current faith journey. My first international trip with Jennifer was to Tulum. The Nipsey Hussle song, "Victory Lap," was filmed in the very place where we rented a yacht and celebrated—an experience that marked a personal victory amidst many challenges. That moment in Tulum symbolized more than just a getaway; it was a tangible reflection of overcoming struggles and savoring the victories along the way. Looking back, I realize that this journey has been filled with countless "victory laps," each one a testament to resilience, growth, and the ongoing quest for a better life.