I’m tired of polite, weary of safe. I want to live dangerously—with a willingness to dig deep into the caverns of my life, mining the grief and greatness dwelling within my story and lived experience. I want to give my story a voice, allowing it to shape my present and future. I know that how I approach my story, or yours, is of utmost importance.

I find myself asking questions like these; maybe you do too.

- How can I really live with authenticity?
- Do my own limited versions of reality imprison possibility?
- What will help me taste and listen to my life, offering me the capacity to stand still without judgment, with compassionate attention?

While attending a retreat, one afternoon offered me the leisure to simply be present. I nestled into a deck chair in seventy degree sunshine. Flower pots overflowing with vivid blooms attracted golden orange honey bees. A bee landed on my chest just above my heart, and the fuzzy tangerine and lemon body, inky black face, and spindly legs captured my attention. Not moving, I slowly took one deep breath, then another. I knew that if this bee were to sting me, I would become very sick for a few days, and potentially need a visit to the hospital emergency room. Still, I chose to pause, continue my breath pattern, determined to inspect the bee just inches from my face. I would not travel the familiar path of fear and protective action. Perhaps a minute passed, maybe two. I marveled as the bee lifted front legs, then back, and with a sudden wiggle and buzz, departed.

A few hours later, our writing exercise was a quick series of responses to this question: “What are you most afraid to write about, to put onto paper?” I dug deep, and the nuggets I uncovered surprised me. With a willingness to go beyond polite, and risk truth-telling to myself, I listened to my body and spirit speak new revelations within me. Fear, insecurity, desire, lack of love, stubbornness, and an incredible inner strength to ask for what I need were revealed. The challenge: turn off my inner critic, listen compassionately, receive my truth, and learn.

I am convinced that when you or I choose to lovingly listen to our own story in all its beauty and squalor, we also grow in the capacity to be a compassionate listening presence for others. We create spaciousness for truth, healing, and authenticity to breathe. One way I find the courage to be a little less polite—thus more truthful—is when I am willing to entrust my story to paper, speak it aloud to my spiritual director, or with a group of soul friends. A power exists when we are careful, not careless, choosing to listen to ourselves and each other with compassion that refuses to lock a person, thought, or action in time and space. Similar to my decision to continue breathing when bee landed on my chest, the eyes with which we gaze upon our life and what appears before us holds power, potential, and mystery.

Will you join me in being just a little less polite, and choose to traverse the dangerous territory of honest authenticity, tempered with forgiveness and loving compassion?

—Pegge Bernecker

SEEDS OF INTEREST:
- Field Notes: Walking a Labyrinth: My First Time
- Field Guide: A Story Feather
- Poetry: I Learned What I Could Not Say
- Global Resources
- Ask Owl
I Learned What I Could Not Say

Where ink bleeds onto parchment
I learned the things
that only the motion of my hand
could express,
the things I could not speak
and perhaps should not say
until the struggle of not knowing why
revealed itself in the deep within.
When a word rolls off the tongue,
and is put into motion,
it takes on a life of its own
with the power to create
and the power to destroy.
Once a word is spoken,
it can never be unspoken again.
Its waves vibrate forever,
possessing the power
to become melodious music
or the screeching sound of nails pressing,
dragging on a blackboard.
A word goes forth
and its syllables
either support life or
extinguish its flame.
Learn to ask the questions first.
What will my words do to me?
What will my words do to another?
Ultimately what we say to ourselves
travels an invisible path
and becomes an echo
to the hearing of another.

—Wendy Romero, Carencro, Louisiana, USA
It took several tries before I was even able to spell the word *labyrinth*. But understanding what walking it means will take the rest of my life.

I wasn’t sure about labyrinths at first. What were they? I knew their origins were unknown, dating back 3500 years BCE. And they were found in cultures around the world. But why I wondered? Why walk in a circular pattern all the way in and all the way out? What could possibly be transforming in this?

I was first given the chance to walk a labyrinth at Holden Village, a remote retreat center in Western Washington, USA. I stood at the entrance and took a deep breath. There is no prescribed way to walk the labyrinth; you can run, hop, skip or walk or dance. How would I walk it? I took a cautious first step. But soon, the continual walking and turning wound me down to a quiet place in myself. I was aware of the other people who passed on the adjacent winding path, but though we could brush elbows, they seemed far away and inaccessible.

If I were to say what happened as I walked further and further into the labyrinth, I would say *nothing*. But when I reached the center, I was still. It seemed I could have stayed at the center for a long time or without an understanding of time. I discovered I didn’t want to leave; it was as if I were leaving a friend in the midst of a long conversation. When I turned to walk out, I was surprised that I was now very aware of other people. As I turned and turned again, I realized my turning matched the turning of others; we all seemed in a great dance together, yet apart. This feeling grew until I noticed I was dragging my feet, not wanting it to end. What had just happened was both quite ordinary and quite extraordinary.

I seek out labyrinths now. I still wonder at the mystery of it, what energy comes whirling and whispering in the spiral journey. I’m not sure if the sacred quality comes from the design of the labyrinth itself, or if it is only opened when the body moves upon it. But like all pilgrimages, the labyrinth offers mystery, wisdom, challenge, and peace—and for a few moments we are back at one with the place of our beginning.

—Marcia Wakeland is a Lutheran pastor and spiritual director living in Eagle River, Alaska, USA. She has now built three labyrinths. She can be reached at mwakeland@gmail.com.
There is a time to tear down and a time to build—even in our spiritual lives.

**Soul Repair**  
*Rebuilding Your Spiritual Life*  
By Jeff VanVonderen, Dale Ryan & Juanita Ryan

Jeff VanVonderen, a featured interventionist on the A&E® documentary series *INTERVENTION®,* joins Dale Ryan and Juanita Ryan to describe how forms of abuse, addiction, codependency and anorexia can arise in people’s spiritual lives, laying a damaged foundation that must be rebuilt before healing can take place. Uncovering the distorted images of God that accompany these damaged spiritualities, the authors provide tools for reconstructing a solid spiritual framework.

Jeff VanVonderen is a speaker and consultant in the areas of addiction, family systems and recovery. He is the author of *Good News for the Chemically Dependent* and *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse.*

Dale Ryan is CEO of Christian Recovery International in southern California and director of the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is coauthor of *The Twelve Steps.*

Juanita Ryan is a clinical nurse specialist with an M.S. in psychiatric mental health nursing. She is currently a therapist in private practice at Brea Family Counseling Center in Brea, California.
Words of wisdom are gifts from the wise. Enlightenment requires an astute listener.

Here we have the perfect exchange, a partnership, a fundamental necessity if we as neighbors, brothers and sisters, community and world leaders plan on communicating successfully. We simply need to listen, evaluate, and perhaps offer a solution or opinion for consideration.

I am a Dena’ina Athabascan and a member of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, in Kenai, Alaska, USA. As Culture Bearer, during a presentation, I will often use a tool designed specifically for the art of communication. It is simply called a Story Feather. Beautiful to look upon, powerful to hold, a Story Feather requires at least two people: one to speak and one to listen. Whoever holds the feather has the voice. Upon passing the feather, one then becomes the listener, without interruption of the speaker.

The Story Feather is created with colorful beads, suede and leather on the handle, and sometimes adorned with the fur of fox or beaver. You may choose your feathers, often from a goose or raven. Or perhaps your feather will choose you and fall at your feet! Gather it up, take it home, and consider the possibility of building a Story Feather for your family circle.

—Bunny Swan Gease is one of Alaska’s premier cultural performers. An artist, storyteller, singer and songwriter, she captivates audiences with her lively music and stories of Dena’ina heritage. She can be reached at Bunny@BunnySwan.com.
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St Joseph’s Centre for Reflective Living

St Joseph’s is a Conference and Retreat Centre situated in the Hills district north west of Sydney. The Centre is set on acres of rolling countryside and offers many facilities including a chapel, conference rooms, ensuited bedrooms, an art space, swimming pool and reflective spaces such as the labyrinth and contemplative areas.

The Centre also offers Sabbatical courses throughout the year. “Thresholds” is a sabbatical for professional people and will be held 14th April – 15th May 2009. “New Voices” is a sabbatical program for the 60+ and will be held 24th October – 6th December 2008. The Ignatian spiritual exercises and private retreats are also available on request at any time throughout the year.

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Fax +61 2 9899 4249
Email: reception@stjosephscentre.org.au
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30 Day Retreat

For information and applications, contact Karen Doyle, SSJ, at 516-621-8300 x 25, or kdoyle@inisfada.net
Question: I'm interested in telephone spiritual direction and would appreciate any tips you can offer me.

Hoot Hoot: Spiritual direction via telephone can be surprisingly precious. Some reasons to explore this option include your geographical location; availability of local spiritual directors; frequent travel; a residence in more than one location; you or your current spiritual director relocate; limited mobility; desire to conserve energy and resources; and so forth. Telephone spiritual direction may offer you a freedom that you do not experience face-to-face.

Helpful tips include these elements: place, preparation, prayer and pauses, and a photograph. Choose the PLACE where you will receive spiritual direction with care. Be thoughtful, and do your best to make it free from distractions. You may want to light a candle, play background music, sit outdoors, or in a park. It is helpful to use a hands-free headset, turn the computer off, and close the door if you are indoors. You might need to ask children, family members, or colleagues to avoid interrupting you—and tell them when you will be finished. When you telephone your spiritual director, a beautiful practice can be for each of you to describe your physical location. Doing so can help you be embodied and fully present to one another.

PREPARATION for your time is important. Your body language isn't visible offering clues to your spiritual director, and you do not receive visible physical responses when you speak. Thus, it is increasingly important to use your time wisely and be clear about what you are bringing to spiritual direction—with a willingness to let go as your conversation unfolds. Make sure your telephone battery is fully charged, that you know the correct time zones, and be prompt when you telephone your spiritual director. You and your spiritual guide will determine how a payment or donation will be managed, and you will have set appropriate boundaries for telephoning when you do not have time scheduled.

PRAYER and PAUSES can be rich moments of connection during spiritual guidance. Perhaps you begin or end your time with prayer, or you don't. Maybe you pause during transitions in your conversation. Offering prayer together and simply sitting in silence connected through the telephone and vibration of human energy is powerful and transformative. Try it!

Finally, sharing a PHOTOGRAPH might be helpful. You could share the place where you offer or receive spiritual direction, or if you have never met your spiritual director face-to-face, sometimes an image is helpful. With the ease of digital photography and e-mail, sending a photograph is simple and aids in being present.

You will discover additional tips through your own experience. Be willing to be surprised and embraced by telephone spiritual direction. It can be as powerful as a one-on-one, face-to-face relationship.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@ sdlworld.org.
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“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ... 
Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones ...”

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio