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# Every Warrior Must Have an Ordeal

(Thank you to [Gabriel Halpern](#) for the wonderful teachings that inspired me to write this story.)

It's all over the yogic texts. The ancients devoted thousands upon thousands of words and hours of study to letting us know about it. There's no escaping it: Every warrior must have An Ordeal.

OK, not to brag (aren't people always about to brag when they say that?!), but I'm kind of awesome at pain. I'm not taking credit. I hand the credit over to the long line of tough women I come from. Case in point: my mother had me **via cesarean**, in a tiny island hospital, WITHOUT any screens on the windows and WITHOUT any anesthetics. Yep. You read that right. The only anesthesiologist in the islands was drunk at the bar. And then she still decided to have three more children.

Following in their footsteps, I have built an impressive pain-tolerance resume. I first realized it when they were running short on wheelchairs after my emergency abdominal surgery, so I decided to walk the half mile to the car. It didn't seem like a big deal until I saw the horrified look on the doctor's face. That was child's play compared to the time when I lived with debilitating chronic pain every day for years. That's 1095 days. Or around 26,000 hours. (But who's counting?) I bit my lip and went ahead with "treatments" for said pain, which were by far worse than the pain itself, three times a week for six months. The final treatment had made two previous patients pass out. I maintained a conversation with the doctor about anatomy of the pelvic floor. So. Yeah. I look small and sometimes come off sugary, but I found my warrior in those days and I know she's there.

And then, sort of like ice melting, my daily companion, the pain I could count on, left. And in its absence was this vast space of quiet and time. I did all the things you are supposed to do to fill a life up. Got back to work. Called friends. Exercised. Did a handstand or two. Rearranged my furniture. Got a few house plants. Traveled. My husband and I, always servants of this pain, were now free to make plans, to build, to hope for what might be next. I kept wondering when I'd feel the familiar symptoms, letting me know my body and life were not mine for a mysterious, ever-unpredictable amount of time. They never came.

Wahoo? Well, yes. Sort of. I found I sometimes missed the organizing certainty of pain. And I mourn for the lost years of my twenties. The travel I was going to do. The power couple we were going to be. The nights we'd spend in jazz clubs. Those projections that were never mine because we were in this fortress together. Holding on. Fighting, sometimes each other, mostly this unknowable, seemingly unbeatable, inexplicable pain. I learned that love really is the strongest thing in the entire world.



I also learned that sometimes just as difficult as enduring pain is letting pain go. Letting the joy in and the guard down. Letting others know, as you are ready. Laughing about it, even. Being completely satisfied with life, just as it is, if only for an afternoon. Reading a book that doesn't relate to self-improvement because you don't need constant fixing. Relaxing that jaw and those shoulders that are ever-ready for the fight, for the bad news. Planning for your wildest dreams. Believing that every disappointment has the potential to transform to beauty and blessings beyond what you thought possible. Believing that all that crap they put on inspirational cards can actually be real. Acknowledging that every moment that you thought you couldn't tolerate it, you did. And it was not just suffering; it was preparation.

Ultimately, I will never resent my path. It was my warrior's path, it was My Ordeal, my karma that led me to the path of my dharma. I'm now blessed enough to teach yoga. It is the number two love of my life. (Number one is always, always my Andy.) I have been marinating a class series on the warrior's path for some time now. To me, learning to be a warrior means: Learning to sit in the quiet, powerfully and still vulnerably. Learning to battle when it's time to battle, hang on when it's time to hang on, be patient when it's time to be patient, and dance when it's time to dance.

The more I meet others through practicing yoga, the more I realize that my story is, in a way, not unique. Rather, it connects me to the fundamental struggle we all face in our lives. We are all fighting hard battles. How do we deal with The Ordeal? How does it define us? What do we make of it? Kurt Vonnegut wrote, "You were sick, but now you're well again, and there's work to do." What work do we do in all the long, long days after? Stay tuned. I'm just getting started. So are you.

With love,

Serena