“Breathe in, breathe out,
Move on and break down,
If everyone goes away, I will stay.”
—Mat Kearney

My daughters and I traveled 500 hundred miles last week to visit my parents in Florida. The timing felt divine. My heavy heart knew I needed to retreat … to be quiet … to shut out the noise. I knew I was searching … but for what, I did not know.
After dinner on the night of our arrival, I opened one of my mom’s many magazines sitting in a pile on the coffee table.

The initial line of an article caught my attention. “If meditation came in the form of a pill, it would be the best-selling drug on the market. It gives you the opportunity to delete stress on demand and puts everything in perspective,” Suze Yalof Schwartz was quoted as saying. (Family Circle, March 2018.)

I continued reading and was encouraged by three surprising points:

1) A mere sixty seconds of meditation was enough to decrease depression and anxiety and increase focus, memory, and productivity

2) A still mind was not required. “Meditation is not meant to eliminate thoughts. It simply teaches you to direct the mind’s mental traffic” -Leonard Perlmutter

3) Meditation can happen anywhere. “When you close your eyes, slow down your breath and get present, you’re meditating,” said Yalof Schwartz, which she stated could be done on the subway or while standing in line.

I’d always wondered about meditation, but it always seemed so elusive … until that moment. I marked the page by turning it down, but I knew I would not forget. The information felt like a map of some sort, a positive direction when I wasn’t sure where to go.

The next day, while drifting on a boogie board in the water next to my daughters, this new information came in handy. My younger daughter Avery had just been talking about an upcoming babysitting job and what to do if she didn’t feel safe. It was just one of many new worries that appeared with the recent mass shooting in Florida. My older daughter Natalie had just been talking about a missing grade that was not in the online gradebook last time she checked.

I looked at my children’s beautiful faces and could practically read the worries, flashing like breaking news headlines, in their brains.

“Hey,” I said. “Want to try something with me? It’s a 60-second breather that can bring an instant sense of calm.”

After describing the first two steps (close your eyes and let your focus go), I emphasized the third and most memorable step: “Drift in the gap of nothingness, even if it’s just for a millisecond,” I recited from the article.

“Gap of nothingness,” Avery said giggling.

“I don’t think I can be quiet for a millisecond,” Natalie said jokingly.
“C’mon, let’s try it,” I said. “Just close your eyes and focus on a single point—your breathing, a calming phrase, a sound, or an object for one minute,” I instructed.

Both girls closed their eyes and were surprisingly silent. I couldn’t be sure, but after the exercise, they seemed more agreeable and less agitated. I decided to suggest a “60-second breather” throughout our visit.

Over the course of five days, my daughters and I used the meditation practice multiple times: after watching the news and worries were high … when minds began to race at bedtime … when traffic got stopped and we thought we’d miss our flight … and during a walk to the park when there was a beautiful sight to behold.
What I noticed most was a visible difference in anxiety levels upon the return trip – less angst about airport security, school assignments, appearance, and upcoming events, like the babysitting job. I wasn’t sure there was a connection, but the difference felt like a stabilizer in an unsteady time.

When my daughters and I arrived home, there was a package waiting. A dear reader of my blog sent each of us a necklace that had a tiny map of the entire world. “Go be love,” two of the beautiful medallions read. The other said, “Love knows no borders.”

Natalie walked through the kitchen and immediately picked up one of the necklaces and asked where it came from. I told her about the giver and the note of explanation that was inside the box. In an effort to bring healing to a broken and isolating time in her life, this woman recently began a “love mission,” and our family was on her gratitude list.

“Wow. This is pretty amazing considering I just applied for a learning trip to East Africa.”

I’d had the exact same thought when I saw the map of the world and the message inscribed.
But what Natalie said next truly astounded me. “Remember how you said an object can be a focus point in the 60-second breather? Well, I will be able to hold this charm throughout the day and remember my purpose when school pressures start getting to me.”

I must have walked by the other two necklaces fifty times before I sat down and really studied them. And when I did, I automatically closed my eyes and prayerfully listened to my breathing. Avery’s elderly friend “Annie,” who recently passed away, vividly came into my mind.

Go be love.

The words echoed in my brain and felt like a direction I was supposed to take. I walked into Avery’s room and said, “I think we need to go to the nursing home.”
Although she didn’t have quite the same enthusiasm as when Annie was alive, Avery packed up her guitar and said, “I’ll play three songs for Mama J.”

As we were about to walk out of the house, Avery stopped at the necklaces lovingly displayed on the counter and asked me to put one on her.

*Go be love.*

As we entered the building I noticed Avery closed her eyes momentarily. The temperature, the smell, the sights are a lot for a Noticer. I watched as she stopped to take her one-minute breather, as if prayerfully gathering herself to go forward in courage and love.

Mama J was surprised to see us. Although this was our fifth visit in the past few months, she did not remember us. But as always, she tapped her hand on the blanket in time with the music … she told Avery she was a “rainbow in her cloud,” … and that she was too tired to sing, but then she sang anyway.
Avery ended up playing more than three songs, and Mama showed her appreciation with candy from her big box of Valentine chocolates. Avery chose the only heart shaped piece in the box just as Mama J said, “Take as much as you want, Baby. That is from my heart.”

As Avery packed up her guitar, I noticed I did not have the same feeling of peace I normally do after a visit. I attributed it to Annie’s absence, but that wasn’t it. It was the sadness radiating from Mama’s roommate. I’d been watching her beyond the privacy curtain throughout our visit.

As we were leaving the room, I stopped at the foot of the woman’s bed. Despite the vibe that screamed, “leave me be,” I spoke to her.

“Hello,” I said. “How are you today?”
She grumbled something incoherent.

As I turned to go, she unexpectedly said, “Did you bring a cat in here one time?”

“Yes. We brought in our cat Paisley,” I said smiling at the unsmiling woman.

“Well, I remember you were wearing that hat you have on today,” she said irritability.

Suddenly I remembered her now too. “Oh … you have a cat at home, don’t you? And you were hoping to get better so you could get back to your cat,” I recalled.

The woman looked down sadly. That conversation happened over year ago and not much had changed.
“Are you getting better?” I asked hopefully.

“No,” the woman said, her bottom lip beginning to tremble.

“I am so sorry,” I said gently. “It must be so hard to be here when you want to be home.”

She nodded as tears welled in her eyes.

“Would you like us to bring Paisley to visit you?” I asked.

And just when I thought sorrow was permanently etched on this woman’s face, her eyebrows raised ever so slightly. “You would do that?” she asked in disbelief, her mouth curving upward into a partial smile.

“Of course, we would,” I said.

Before I turned to go, I asked if there was anything else I could do for her today. That’s when she pointed to the television remote that was lying on the floor.

“I haven’t been able to reach it all day …. and it’s my lifeline to the world,” she explained.

When I gave it to her I purposely touched her hand so that I might be her real, tangible, loving lifeline to the world – even for a millisecond.

And that’s when I knew what I’d been searching for during a time of fear, hopelessness, and chaos for my children and our world:

**Go be love … but first, get quiet.**

Get centered.

Get balanced.

**When the world is off kilter, we must restore balance within ourselves.**

*Balance excessive information with thoughtful introspection*

*Balance mindless talking with attentive listening*

*Balance frenzied doing with prayerful being*

*Balance biased opinions with heart-held beliefs*

*Balance the superficial and fleeting with the deep and enduring*
Vital to our personal and global healing is holding our hearts. But how? That sounds so elusive. It is as simple as closing our eyes and focusing on the sound of our own miraculous breath.

What images come to mind?

What truths come to surface?

What hope comes to fruition?

What prompts come to life?

When we are willing to sit and be still in the gap of nothingness, the elusive unknowns aren’t so elusive anymore. That is when our heart becomes a map of the world, giving definitive direction to hard questions like:

What should I do?
Which way do I go?

How can I help?

What should I say?

What is my purpose here?

Using our heart as our guide is how we find our way out of the dark, going to places where pain resides, saying things we didn’t know we knew, and doing things we didn’t think we had the courage to do.

That is when we get the opportunity to pick someone’s heart up off the floor … and ours right along with it.

And for a millisecond, the view of the world looks a whole lot brighter.

Go be love.

But first, get quiet.
Dear friends of the **The Hands Free Revolution**, it gives me great joy and peace to see your faces in person at my speaking events. This Sunday, March 3rd I will be keynoting the **7th Annual Mom, Me, & Tea Fundraising Event** for the MCR Foundation for the Prevention of Eating Disorders in Chattanooga, TN. On Thursday, May 3, I will be speaking at the University of Central Missouri. This is the inaugural event for the Whiteman Spouses’ Club Speaker Series. The WSC provides resources and support to military families at Whiteman Air Force Base and to their surrounding communities. If you’d like to be notified when tickets go on sale online, or arrange for a group of tickets, please email wscspeakerseries@gmail.com. There are more speaking events in the works and I will be adding them to my speaking page soon.
If you have not visited the Hands Free Shop in a while, there are four gorgeous new prints: GET OFF THE SCALE, FACING FEAR MANIFESTO, and Only Love Today in edgy lettering and in whimsical lettering. Thank you for being part of the Hands Free Revolution! Your support and love give me hope.

*The next session of SOUL SHIFT, my new online course, begins April 23. Feedback from current course members indicate life-changing shifts are occurring using the painful truths and healing tools I poured into this 8-week journey. Click here to be notified when registration opens in April.

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