

Star Ancestors

Back in April 2022 I had a heart attack. It happened on the evening of my new and only grandson's naming ceremony, which I had begrudgingly attended over zoom rather than in person, resenting that my son had moved to Aotearoa, so far away from home but grateful he had not given up on practicing aspects of his culture.

Anyway, I'm not going to lie. That "cardiac event" was scary. Less for the threat of death than the prospect of living the rest of my life in pain or with severe limitations on my lifestyle. Surprisingly, I felt somewhat prepared for death. It seemed significant that my last official act in this life would be to organize and attend my *mokopuna's* naming ceremony. If it came to that, I would exit this reality with some measure of closure.

However, upon being treated in hospital, it became evident that if my death was imminent, it would not be free of painful, uncomfortable and considerable medical interventions. In this era of advanced medical care where we can keep the hearts of the dead pumping, I was further afraid that, should I survive, the rest of my life would be lived under the influence of constant medical monitoring, various interventions and a host of mind-altering pharmaceuticals.

At some point, I decided that dying was fine, pain and limitation were not. I thought a lot about transitioning, a word many of my friends prefer. I used my manifestation skills to generate a peaceful, pain-free outcome, gently slipping away in my sleep. Material world considerations crept into my imagineering sessions: Was I ready for death? Had I prepared my children for my inevitable demise? Had anything been left unsaid to loved ones? Did I have any apologies to make? Reconciliations to attempt? Affairs to put in order? And what would happen to my poor elderly cat?

Realizing I didn't want to put my kids (or my cat) through what I had already been through with the death of my eldest son five years earlier and my mother's a year later, I had asked such questions before but with less urgency. Consequently, I had attended to most of my affairs at that time so felt reasonably certain that, although I'd like to continue living, I was ready to die.

The spiritual work I had done in my life, much of it in Arrivals Personal Legacy, left me feeling confident that death was merely a transformation from the material to the spiritual, easier than birth (according to my deceased son), and that the afterlife was full of love and loved ones. While life in the physical realm included plenty of stress, challenges and anxiety, death would be freeing. I would conjure an easy, peaceful demise with my spiritual powers.

Over the 12 days I spent in hospital, I became somewhat detached from the idea of my survival, numb and resigned to whatever outcome was awaiting me. It was true that I wanted to meet my new and only grandson in Aotearoa, had already booked my ticket to do so, but I'd be able to meet him after my death and without the stress of 24 straight hours of travel in the tender care of Air Canada.

Despite feeling ready to go, I survived my ordeal and was discharged from hospital with prescriptions for 12 medications and a host of specialist appointments for follow up. My second son from Toronto had come out to care for me until I was recovered enough to resume living independently. I felt a little blindsided in those first few weeks after being discharged. I hated being dependent on my kid. The drugs had side effects that randomly made me dizzy, nauseous, drowsy and lethargic - often at the same time. I was frustrated that none of the medical professionals I encountered had expertise, interest or respect for plant medicines, naturopathic approaches or Indigenous healing practices as alternatives or companions to standard allopathic treatments. So, I had to do my own research and put together my own recovery plan. Despite the lockdown easing up, rehab was still relegated to zoom sessions and the approach was medicalized and isolating. Emotionally, I was still numb and detached in that first week after my discharge. That was about to change.

Though I could barely make it from the bedroom to the bathroom without laboured breathing, chest pain and palpitations I took the standard medical advice to go out and walk a few steps every day. One afternoon, I had shuffled around my building in crisp spring weather, consoling myself that fresh air was better than the indoor variety, even if it didn't seem to be accelerating my recovery. Breathing hurt and I was at my whiniest.

Upon returning, I opened my apartment door to a sight that startled me out of my drug-induced haze. There stood a woman so tall she had to lower her head to fit under my ceiling. She was striking in appearance, with blue skin, the facial features of a Black woman (wide nose, luscious full lips), and a radiantly bald head. Dressed in a white gown and gold headband, she smiled generously. I realized my jaw was on the floor where it remained for the entirety of our split-second encounter.

"Time to go," she said cheerfully.

Of course, I imagined she meant *time to die*. I assumed her to be a Helper Spirit come to guide me to the afterlife.

"No!" I reflexively replied. "Not until I meet my grandson!" I wasn't afraid but I was adamant and clearer than ever since the heart attack: I wanted to live. It was a revelation for me. I DID care, after all. And by admitting that to myself I had turned a corner. I had committed to my wellness and the changed lifestyle it required. In doing so I realized Life was its own entity. Why would it stick around, filling my lungs with air, pumping blood through my veins, for indifference? Why would it stay if it wasn't cherished and appreciated?

My extradimensional visitor smiled wisely and disappeared. She had despite her amusement, accepted my response.

My son called from the kitchen.

Stunned, I didn't answer so he came to see if I was okay. "How was the walk?" My appreciation for his presence and willingness to care for me, grew a hundred-fold in that moment. While I'd been detached and numb, my second-born had taken time off from his work to invest his time and energy into keeping me comfortable. Who was I not to value and honor that?

"Good," I replied. And with that my indifference was displaced by a renewed passion for living.

Since that day, I've discussed my experience with very few people. I guess this seed changes all that. While in Aotearoa I gifted my youngest son, a newly minted father, a set of Native Oracle Cards designed by Elder Denise Linn (Tsalagi). I had a not-so-hidden agenda in hoping that the cards would be a tool he could use to tap into the intuitive healing abilities he had demonstrated since childhood but never developed. Not that his life hasn't been fulfilling and purposeful, but it's my prerogative, perhaps my responsibility, as a mom to nurture the nascent gifts with which my children present. Hence, my attempt at finalizing unfinished business.

My son seemed interested in the potential of the cards to awaken and sharpen his abilities. He did several readings for me, his partner, and his baby son. In one of those readings, I asked what had been on my mind since my helper's visitation: Who is she and how are we connected?

The answer: she is an ancestor, a version and reflection of me, from the stars.

With that, a whole new set of questions now haunt me. What is my relationship to the stars? Is it spiritual, genetic, metaphorical? All the above? What is humanity's relationship to Our Star Relatives? What can Star Ancestors teach us? Why is it that the Star Beings who come and go in the wondrous oral histories of so many global Indigenous nations are disbelieved, discredited and ridiculed by settler colonial culture?

I am humbled. I am curious. I have a renewed excitement in being alive.