

POLISH
THE
Diamond
IN YOUR
HEART

*How to reveal your unique fire and
brilliance and use it to start a business in
midlife and beyond*

MEMOIR + WORKBOOK + GUIDE



DEE COXON

Polish The Diamond In Your Heart By: Dee Coxon

I have chosen this chapter as my “give away” because it says so much about the personal and emotional journey that got me to this point and on that basis I’d like to think you can see yourself in these pages or at least relate in some way. As a standalone chapter this is a transformational read. Read in context with the rest of the book, the depth and value is even greater and allows you to see fully that *no matter where you are on your business journey, something is happening within the context of your life, the two are inextricably linked.....*

Chapter 6: Grief

You’re born twice. Once at your birth and again when your Mother dies - Rufus Wainwright.

You may well ask, what grief has to do with starting a business or why it has a place in this book? Well in my case, after losing my mother, it was a huge factor in both delaying and driving my business decisions all of which will become clear.

In the natural order of things, we can expect to lose someone we love, especially a parent and while everyone grieves differently, none of us can know what that will actually look like until it happens. I used to hear people say grief makes you crazy, but I couldn’t have predicted where crazy would take me and I’ll share that with you now.

For a long time and because of my grief I went through a phase of being completely disjointed. My head knew what I had to do but my heart wasn’t playing ball. I simply couldn’t make a connection between the two and believe me if your heart and your head are out of sync, that’s a bad situation to be in.

The effects of my loss were not just emotional. The physical impact was so debilitating, every single thing on my to do list, seemed to weigh a hundred pounds as I dragged myself through what felt like wet cement every day, trying to complete even the smallest task.

Throughout all of this, I was plagued with what I called mental vacating, which could happen anywhere and at any time. I might be sat at my desk; in the

middle of a supermarket or at an event chatting when, without rhyme or reason my mind would literally empty.

And believe me when you've been talking to someone for twenty minutes, getting to know them and enjoying their company, then suddenly your head decides to empty and you don't know what you've been talking about for the last twenty minutes, let alone remember the name of the person you were talking to, you're in trouble.

Worse still, once my head began to fill back up with thoughts and information, these would be completely unrelated to whatever I'd been doing beforehand, so I was forever being taken off topic.

Brain dumping on this scale meant it was really difficult to make any meaningful progress in my business and when this level of inconsistency and struggle is taking place internally, it's not long before it shows itself externally and other people start to notice something's not right here?

I was sure that while no one ever said as much to me, although I could see it in their faces, people must have been thinking this woman's losing the plot, where's she gone? I was just talking to her a minute ago and she's swanned off? How rude, what's the matter with her? But I couldn't explain what was happening to me.

I didn't have a name for it so I couldn't say to people, do excuse me I need a moment because I'm suffering from *whatever*, when I truly didn't know what it was, nor could I predict when and where it would happen. So it became a real hindrance and on such a scale that I had to withdraw. Not in a pity pot kind of way but definitely in the name of self-preservation, I mean who wants to be known as the crazy lady?

Eventually and while having coffee with Lydia, my mentor and close friend of ten years, who I meet with every six weeks or thereabouts; I was retelling her about these episodes and explaining; while the mental vacating hadn't increased in frequency or intensity, it hadn't decreased either.

Coincidentally this particular meeting just before Christmas, would be the first one in five years where I didn't cry at some point. Yes, for five years I'd cried every time I met her. Not big monumental sobs or dramatic whaling but there'd always be something in relation to my mother that triggered the tears, which for as long as I could manage would remain precariously balanced on my eyelashes. But we both knew the moment I blinked, they would roll. Whenever this happened we just sat together quietly until I composed myself.

I never attempted to speak while I was crying. That's so hard for someone else to watch and besides I find it escalates the crying, when, in frustration you try to get words out that become so distorted with emotion, you have to keep repeating them.

Worse than that, I'm an ugly crier and I'm am not doing that in front of someone else. Now if I could do a Cheryl Cole and cry a cascade of diamonds, pouring from glistening smoky rimmed eyes, bouncing onto perfect skin with not a snot, blemish or red eye in sight, then I would but that's not how I cry. I mean really, how does she do that?

So, the outcome of this Christmastime meeting with Lydia, led to her saying to me among other things, *you have to find a way to process this grief because it's been going on for too long now. You have to lean in to this, feel it, work through it, suck it up and let it come.*

I do feel it I said, *I am feeling it, my heart is broken, and I don't know how to get past this.*

Loosely based on the Kubler Ross model - The five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, It's fair to say I'd worked through the first three, although not necessarily in that order and as a fully paid up lover of life I've never suffered from depression, so number four wasn't even on my radar.

Lydia suggested that acceptance, or my lack thereof, could be the reason for my stilted progress, so I promised to look at ways to get myself out of this stuck position, not least so that I could find some forward momentum and get back on track.

At the end of our lengthy chat and very unexpectedly, Lydia gently added a little aside that went something like this; *you know* she said, *in some cases and especially after such a significant loss, there are those who like being the victim, so it might be purposeful for you to give that some thought.*

Oh my God, her saying that to me was like being hit by a train. In my mind I couldn't imagine anyone wanting or embracing such sustained levels of sorrow and as far I was concerned, I was in no way an elective victim, but it pissed me off that she might think that about me. More importantly it shook me into action.

The following week was the 5th anniversary of my mother's death. Yes she died at Christmastime and as I'd done each year since I went off to Durham Cathedral, to light candles in her memory and reflect on her passing. This time

though I deliberately stayed longer than usual, for two reasons. The first was to set an intention and tell my mother I'd soon be letting her go because I had to find a way to move forward, having tried everything else to no avail.

I'd wrote down the intention at home and brought it with me on the day. After looking at it for a few more moments, I folded the note and placed it in the prayer basket next to the lighted candles in the hope it would somehow make its way to her, the universe or both.

The second reason for my visit was to attend the carol service. Christmas is huge for me. I love everything about it and my mother knew how to do Christmas so I'm guessing it's in my DNA.

At the carol service there was method in my madness. I find Christmas celebrations incredibly emotional at the best of times, whether it's a school nativity play, the Salvation Army band or a Christmas sing along in the middle of my home town, you can bet there will be tears and they will be mine.

On this occasion though and as bizarre as it sounds, I'd actually pre planned the mother of all cries because I knew once the chorister's began singing, accompanied by the majestic pipes of the cathedrals three hundred year old organ, not a soul would hear me as I wept for what had been and what was no more.

Now, they say there are no coincidences, yet right on cue at the end of the service, when all had fallen silent, a white-haired member of the clergy with a full beard, clothed in red and white vestments came down the aisle. And just as he glided past, a small voice behind me exclaimed Grandma Santa's here!

I knew that voice to be my Grandsons and as a gentle laughter rippled through the near seated congregation, I turned around to see him, arms outstretched running towards me. At the same time my granddaughter did a somewhat exaggerated tip toe in the opposite direction as she tried to escape in pursuit of Santa, only to be corralled by my husband Martin who was already hot on her heels.

The three of them had been to the Christmas market while I was in the cathedral and had mercifully come to find me at precisely the right moment. As we were leaving I protectively pulled the children in close, mindful of the precious cargo they've come to be. Once outside I took in a breath of the wintery air, exhaled slowly and looked skyward as I whispered thank you.

Days later and as New Year approached, I'd decided that whatever it was I was going to do, in terms of letting go, was going to take place on New Year's Eve.

Of course, it was symbolic and felt right to be closing this chapter at the end of the year, so that my new chapter would begin on day one of the New Year. I still had no idea what I was going to do but I'd set the intention and that was enough for now. I made it known to friends and family, I wouldn't be going out on New Year's Eve and I wouldn't be having guests. I wasn't maudlin or sad, in fact I was feeling expectant and I just wanted to do this my way.

On the morning of New Year's Eve, I began writing a letter to my mother. It went into just over six pages and most of what was in there is between me and her. Although I will say I did tell her, my letter was an attempt to let go of my constant longing for her. Once I'd finished the letter, I put it away for the time being. Then I went out to choose a new frame that would take my favourite photo of her and as long as I was out I'd pick up a bottle of champagne to bring in the New Year. I'm not really a lover of champagne but again this was symbolic.

Being a musician and singer, Martin was at work on New Year's Eve and I'd already decided not to go to the gig, which meant I had the house to myself. At 11:45pm I filled the coffee table with an array of lighted candles and lovingly placed my mother's photo among them. Then I turned on the TV without the sound, because I wanted to see, but not hear, Big Ben strike midnight. At the same time I hit the play button on the CD remote so that I could hear Shirley Bassey singing as I love you, while I read my letter to my mother out loud.

If you've heard the song, you may know it as a love song and you'd be right however, in our case, this was a love song from a mother to her children and one she'd dedicated to us just days before she died.

My letter was an excruciating read and with no one else present, there was definitely ugly crying although I did make it to the end, snots and all and was utterly exhausted by the time I'd finished.

As the TV showed clips of celebration fireworks from around the world I set the CD to repeat, then I placed my letter and her photo along with more treasured items inside a memory box and told her, I'm putting this away now and I don't know when I'll open it again. I didn't open the champagne. Instead and once I'd finished my ceremony, I made a cup of tea followed by several more.

Now that it was over I began to feel different. Not better, not great, just different. The room was silent by now and I lay down on the sofa feeling wiped out, but every now then I'd be surprised by an involuntary sob, you know the ones that come from nowhere, long after you've stopped crying. After about an

hour I began to feel tired. I didn't sleep though. As soon as I closed my eyes a story unfolded before me, in a way that I likened to a clip from the movie Armageddon.

You know the one, where Bruce Willis hits the button on a hand-held device so as to blow up a meteor that's hurtling towards earth and as he hits the button, the atmosphere lights up as elements of his life flash before him? Well it was like that, without Bruce Willis and definitely no flashes before my eyes.

What did show itself, was a gentle albeit vivid journey through my life and every single scene included my mother. These events were ordinary and unremarkable or so I thought, like watching her decorate the Christmas tree and opening up tins of Quality Street and Roses chocolates on Christmas Eve.

I could see her wrapping me in a bath towel when I was small and pressing the soles of my feet against her face and kissing the palms of my hands while she was getting me ready for bed. As the journey progressed I got older and could feel her putting the money in my hand to buy the Twinkle magazine for little girls and escorting me up to the counter in the news agents to pay for it. And letting me choose the pick and mix on Saturday afternoons as she shopped for weekend treats for all the family.

I could even see myself perched on a chair in the kitchen as I watched, then eventually learned to bake with her on Sundays.

I remembered as a young teen, her taking me out to buy hot pants against my dad's expressed wishes. Then her standing guard for me as I sneaked out of the house wearing my Bay City Rollers denim everything, with tartan trim.

And how on the night of my eighteenth birthday, she kept my dad talking so I could escape out the front door wearing a mini skirt no bigger than a belt, along with six-inch stilettos, hair as big as a house, masterfully held up with yards of lac and tat and my face plastered in makeup, which of course looked utterly bloody fabulous.

Later, I could hear my mother laughing as she tried to convince my dad that my Sacha shoes were a fashion choice and not as he thought, provided by the local hospital. And that he shouldn't worry because my feet really were fine.

As my journey into the past continued, I could see and hear her singing as she made tea while the rest of the family sat round the dinner table creased with laughter, because she made up her own words to a variety of songs, which she sang in her snow white, early Disney voice.

My recall went on for a long time that night and I remembered her saying to me on so many occasions ooh you're just like your dad! I'd always believed I was just like my dad whom I adore, and who, while I was growing up, was strict old school. A formidable character, tenacious and strong willed, I did in fact agree with my mother whenever she said, I was just like him.

Until that was, it began to register with me, yes I did have a lot of his traits and was grateful for some of them however, the woman I'd become, the way in which I was able to show love, my strength and my coping skills, my warm heart and caring nature along with my ability to dig deep in the face of adversity and to never have a single doubt about how much I was loved, was down to my mother. But what surprised me more was, the sheer number of gifts she'd managed to give to me without fanfare or announcement and for the most part, without me even noticing.

Until that moment I hadn't recognised any of these things as being extraordinary. Why? Because this was all I'd ever known. Her gifts were my norm and my every day just as they'd been her norm and her every day. My mother was able to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary using only love and here I was, seeing this for the first time.

I got that she'd spent her life lovingly weaving her gifts into the fabric of my life, as she had with all of her children, but since her death this had suddenly stopped, and I wasn't prepared for the impact or the fallout. Neither had I been prepared for something that was completely new to me..... A life without my mother.

The fog was lifting, and I was able to see for the first time, that since her death, I'd been held hostage by the chaos of my emotions, all of which had been brought about by an unquantifiable loss. To this end, I'd subconsciously been resisting acceptance every which way I could, but somehow, the New Year's Eve ceremony had counteracted the turbulence and helped me to start feeling my way forward. This journey into my past was speaking to my current situation and at last I was ready to submit and listen. Open to acceptance for the first time and all in the same night, I remembered something else that had happened years earlier.

I was in my thirties, when a rather loud discussion took place in my parents' home with some of my sibling's present. As usual I was the only one being particularly vocal and after making a point from my high horse, something I did regularly, my mother said to me in exasperation, mainly because she didn't

agree with me, *one of these days lady you'll come down off that high horse of yours and when you do, you won't know what cuddies kicked you!*

Where I live in the North East of England a cuddy from the local dialect means horse. So metaphorically speaking she was telling me that, I would in time receive a jolt so powerful it would cause me some pain and make me rethink my values, which up to that point were black and white with absolutely no room for grey.

These were strong words indeed from my mother and her warning left me feeling somewhat perplexed, so I asked her, *what do you mean by that?* To which she replied *oh you'll know about it alright when it happens lady!* Was this period of complicated grief, the cuddy kicking of which she'd warned me, I wasn't sure yet? And then something else hit.

While it hadn't happened for some time, there had been about a two-year period after my mothers' death where I'd experienced floods of tears whenever my granddaughter was with me. Whether she was climbing all over me or snuggled up in my arms I would at times become so distressed that, I'd have to put her down or Martin would have to take her while I pulled myself together and I never understood why.....

My grandson was born before my mother died, so they'd met and made a wonderful connection from day one. My granddaughter on the other hand was born three months after she died, so they never met and knowing they would never meet, caused my mother great sadness. When my granddaughter was eventually born and to my absolute surprise and delight, she was so much like me I couldn't believe it. In fact, it was like looking in the mirror and everyone said so, even strangers. It's true her expression, her mannerisms, eyes, hair and smile were all me right down to her strong character, which was evident very early on and the general consensus was my mother had sent her.

At last, here was something else I could understand for the first time and it wasn't that my mother had sent her. Those tears and that pain overtaking me every time I'd held my granddaughter, were from a place of happier times. A place of knowing that all of this love and joy within one little girl, must have been what my mother saw and felt when she looked at and held me and this was how she'd found it so easy, to give to me in spades.

I should say I don't have a daughter, nor did I crave one. Probably because I was close to my mother and sister so there was no sense of lack in that area of my life. Nonetheless, I can only assume that not having a daughter, is the reason

it had taken a whole generational skip for me to make this life affirming connection between my mother, my granddaughter and me.

Roll forward some months after my New Years' Eve ceremony and not only had the mental vacating stopped, I was beginning to understand that those vacant episodes which had plagued my mind for so long, were I think, the universe trying to make space for the messages it wanted me to hear.

To get me to look at what was really going on and to understand, these messages were in fact life lessons that so far I'd resisted and which, up to now, have turned out to be threefold.

#1 was to recognise and celebrate exactly who I was, along with how and why I'd got here.

#2 a life time of being deeply loved and valued, had given me the heart centred tools with which to work and the capacity to share this with others.

#3 is based on something my mother said to me just before she died that would further shape my forward path.....

She told me she'd always been in awe of how I'd had the courage to go after what I wanted and to never be put off, especially by those who told me I shouldn't or couldn't do it. In fact, she had so much faith in my ability, that even as she stared death in the face she said to me, *you should show other families how to do this.*

Do what I said, show them how to prepare for dying, was her reply. *Oh right, I said so you want me to rock up to the hospital and say to other families, here are some instructions on how to take your mother home to die?*

No she said, *but you could write about it or find a way to tell people about it.*

So I asked her, *who exactly should I tell? Well I don't know exactly,* she replied, *all I do know is, it's hard for people to talk about dying because they're afraid and their families are afraid, but they wouldn't be afraid if they knew what to do..... and you know what to do.*

It's true, she thought I knew what to do and that I was brave, because that's what I let her believe. She had no idea the only brave person in the room was her, or that every time I turned away to do something for her, I wasn't doing anything other than choking down the fear, as the inevitable countdown to zero hour loomed terrifyingly closer.

After she died, I did write about her end of life journey and I named the book *Three Weeks and Two Days*, that's how long we had together after her

condition went from remission to terminal however, another person in my life felt the book was too intimate to be read by others, and I had to respect their wishes, so it was never published and in time I went on to write this book instead. I'd like to think that by writing diamond, although it's not what she'd asked me to do, she would be glad to know I made the effort to share what I know despite this not being a manual on how to die well.

Going back to the months that followed my New Year's Eve ceremony, the bigger picture of my mothers' influence and how this had impacted my life, was becoming even clearer. The Steve Jobs dots were beginning to connect. My long term niggle to follow a different calling, together with the zigs and zags of my start up journey were meshing once more, and these latest aha moments reinforced my belief that I should not limit myself. Instead my forward path could and should combine all of my gifts including those my mother had so lovingly bestowed upon me.

Was this the beginning of a spiritual awakening?

A spiritual awakening is, generally speaking, a newfound awareness of a spiritual reality. It can be gradual or rapid and can mean different things to different people.

Writer Karen Black of karenmblack.com shared her findings on heart explorations where she explains, your spiritual awakening process will not unfold in a structured order. In fact, part of the spiritual awakening experience is to let go of linear thinking and structure of many kinds.

She goes on to say, there are different kinds of awakenings including but not limited to, mind, body, universal and heart. The one that piqued my interest, as you've probably guessed, was the heart awakening which involves claiming real power. Often catalysed by heartbreaks or losses, these catalysts have a purpose to open your heart and prompt you to seek. There's a reason for this. Your mind is most powerful when your heart is involved. Your heart is most powerful, when balanced with your mind.

Talk about a light bulb moment. You'll remember I said at the beginning of this chapter, my heart and mind had been way out of sync since the death of my mother and only became reunited after my New Year's Eve ceremony, which by the way I am now defining as my very own heart awakening and which I didn't even know until very recently, was a thing.

While Oprah Winfrey defines spirituality as *the measure of how willing we are to allow Grace, some power greater than ourselves, to enter our lives and guide us along our way*, the reverend. Ed Bacon, rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California, defines spirituality as a meaningful connection and says; *it's about our being connected with one another and connected with the cosmos. It is the process of being healed, forgiven, empowered to go into the world and to be fully alive. Full, unconditional love is the essence of spirituality. It's that experience of love that connects you with everyone, connects you with your past, and connects you with your future, gives you hope and excitement about going into the next day, going into the next moment.*

For Dr Brene Brown, spirituality is *recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion.*

When asked do you believe that for all people there is some connection between personal suffering and the intensity that is needed for a spiritual breakthrough? Renowned spiritual teacher and author Eckhart Tolle replied *yes, that seems to be true in most cases. When you are trapped in a nightmare, your motivation to awaken will be so much greater than that of someone caught up in a relatively pleasant dream.*

Although my heart awakening was unplanned, not least because these things can't be planned, mine occurred the same night I symbolically let go of the constant longing for my mother and I've already shared how that unfolded however, I now understand that my awareness of being on a spiritual journey also presented itself that same night.

So much so, that I'm on that journey still and believe I will be until I die, which is why the words of the Rev Ed Bacon resonate with me more than any others and I absolutely get it when he says; *Spirituality is the process of being healed, forgiven and empowered to go into the world and to be fully alive. Full, unconditional love is the essence of spirituality. It is that experience of love that connects you with everyone, connects you with your past and connects you with your future. Gives you hope and excitement about going into the next day and into the next moment.*

Add to that the nightmare scenario described by Eckhart Tolle, and it was indeed a long-term nightmare that motivated me to awaken to all that was possible, although I couldn't have known the awakening would present itself in

the way that it did, or that it would lead me with such clarity onto my forward path.

As I said earlier, for me there were no white lights or thunderclaps. No ethereal music or voices. No out of body experience, or visions of rippling pools filled with celestial water. Just a gentle albeit vivid journey into my past and once it was over, I felt different and I felt lighter. I became fully present and ready to move on. My heart and my head were in sync once more and because of this, I couldn't help but feel I was on the road to reclamation.

Now that I've discussed grief in relation to how it affected me, bearing in mind I'm not qualified to discuss grief in any context other than my own experience of it; I do hope this has given you an insight into what can happen and that it may send you spiralling in different directions. It might even drive you crazy for a time and it will impact your business one way or another. That said, I would also add that the journey, along with the recovery is different for everybody. What I won't say is you'll get over it because I don't believe we do get over it altogether. If nothing else, we are changed for ever by loss and as such life is never quite the same again.

I want to end this chapter with a quote about coping with loss that is for me, more accurate than any cliché, sentiment or therapy burger that's ever been flipped my way.

When comforting a friend who'd lost her husband, our late Queen Mother was asked, if it got any better with the passage of time. Having lost her husband many years earlier, she replied it doesn't get any better but you get better at it!

Before you go feel free to click the link below. It will take you directly to my New Year's Eve song. You Tube – Shirley Bassey- As I love you and it starts at 37 seconds. <https://youtu.be/KLr0KVQFzr4>

Thank you for taking the time today – from my heart to yours

Dee X

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