Have you ever heard the expression "You can have it all," but doubted it applied to you? The good news is you CAN have it all. But to do so, you need to be true to yourself. The question is: Who are you?

It's Time to Get to Know You

By Glynis Ferguson

As a life coach, I find that most clients who seek coaching say they are either looking for a soul mate, better relationships, or more meaning in life. Underneath, however, what they are looking for is more passion and a sense of purpose. Uncovering your purpose and passion is part of the process of finding you.

Today I live a life full of passion—I love my life. I'm also eager for more! I enjoy witnessing the power of coaching as clients transform their lives. In that process I grow as an individual, and I'm inspired to coach more. I have a beautiful home with views of mountains and water, two wonderful children, some great friends. I do what I love to do—I travel, get out into nature, I draw… These are the things that I feel passionate about!

Living with passion

But it hasn't always been that way. Five years ago, living as a British expat in Hong Kong, my life seemed to fall apart. My husband announced, on our wedding anniversary of all days, that he wasn't sure he wanted to stay in our marriage. In that moment I was gripped with—no, *paralysed* by—fear. How could this be happening to me? I had the perfect life, didn't I? I had a hard-working husband who provided handsomely for our family, I had two beautiful children, and I had all the perks of an expat life.

In the weeks ahead I was supported by a counselor, and, for the first time in my life, I journalled. A way to get clear on my thoughts and feelings, I was told. A safe place. When I read that journal today, I still feel shocked at what I wrote: the *truth*.

Before marrying, I had a typical Bridget Jones-style single girl life in London. Within a few months of marrying, I became pregnant and miscarried. We moved to Hong Kong. I miscarried again, then again. Without being conscious of it, my focus turned to having a baby. I became obsessed. The baby didn't arrive, so we adopted. At the same time, life seemed to revolve around my husband. He became a star. I became a shadow artist—my purpose was to support him. I did a great job. To outsiders we had it all—an illusion I had created. Underneath I was dying. I lost myself to another; I forgot who I was. I had no purpose in life other than a routine existence. Looking back, I felt small. Dull. Lifeless. Can you relate in any way?

A year later I joined a counseling skills course. My first assignment was to create a collage and present it to my group, a collage that expressed, "Who am I?" I remember wanting to curl up and die when I heard that announcement. Every cell in my body resisted the idea of the suggested cutting and pasting. I complained that I was not creative. My resistance did not let up. Yet, I was brought up to be a "good girl" and to do as I was told, so I felt obliged to do something. I thought of using words. Few came.

The next session came around much too quickly. As others in my group presented their pictures, I wished the floor would swallow me up. When my turn came and I delivered my presentation of me—of my life—there was a gasp, then silence. My collage consisted of a huge question mark in the middle. To the left (my past) a photo of my children; a primitive drawing of a small woman on her hands and knees bowing to the ground and chained to a large powerful man, hands on his hips: a slave to a powerful husband; the words "domestic goddess," "weak," "perfectionist," "peace-keeper," "no self worth," "unattractive," "incapable of surviving on my own." To the right (my future), the words "strong," "courageous," "independent," "intuitive," "curious," "attractive," "whole," "a beautiful woman," "peace of mind." The tears rolled down my cheeks.

A few months later I had a date—the first with someone other than my husband in 20 years. When it came to writing my journal, I couldn't find the words to express my experience. Instead I found myself searching for a pencil and drawing paper. Three hours later, I gasped when I stood back and saw what I had created. I had drawn a picture of a young girl skipping, the wind in her hair, her eyes sparkling, a huge grin on her face, full of energy, alive. Another of two hands intertwined. I had expressed the feelings of being playful and connected. Amazing! I had gotten in touch with my heart and found I could draw.

It was with joy that I shared my weekly news with the group. When I offered my drawings, it was their turn for tears. And, when I owned "I am creative," there were more tears from me. A few days later, I signed up for fine art drawing lessons and owned a part of me that I had put away when I was 17—when my parents advised me against studying it because, "you'll never earn money from art."

Following the counseling skills course, I had my first experience of life coaching. With the support of my coach, I found the courage to take the first step to taking responsibility for creating a new life. I left the family home. During the process of uncovering my emotional fears, I learned that my fear of looking selfish and my fear of feeling unlovable had caused me to become a people-pleaser. And, in the process, I had sacrificed my "self" to another. I felt huge sadness; there was forgiveness work to be done…forgiveness towards myself.

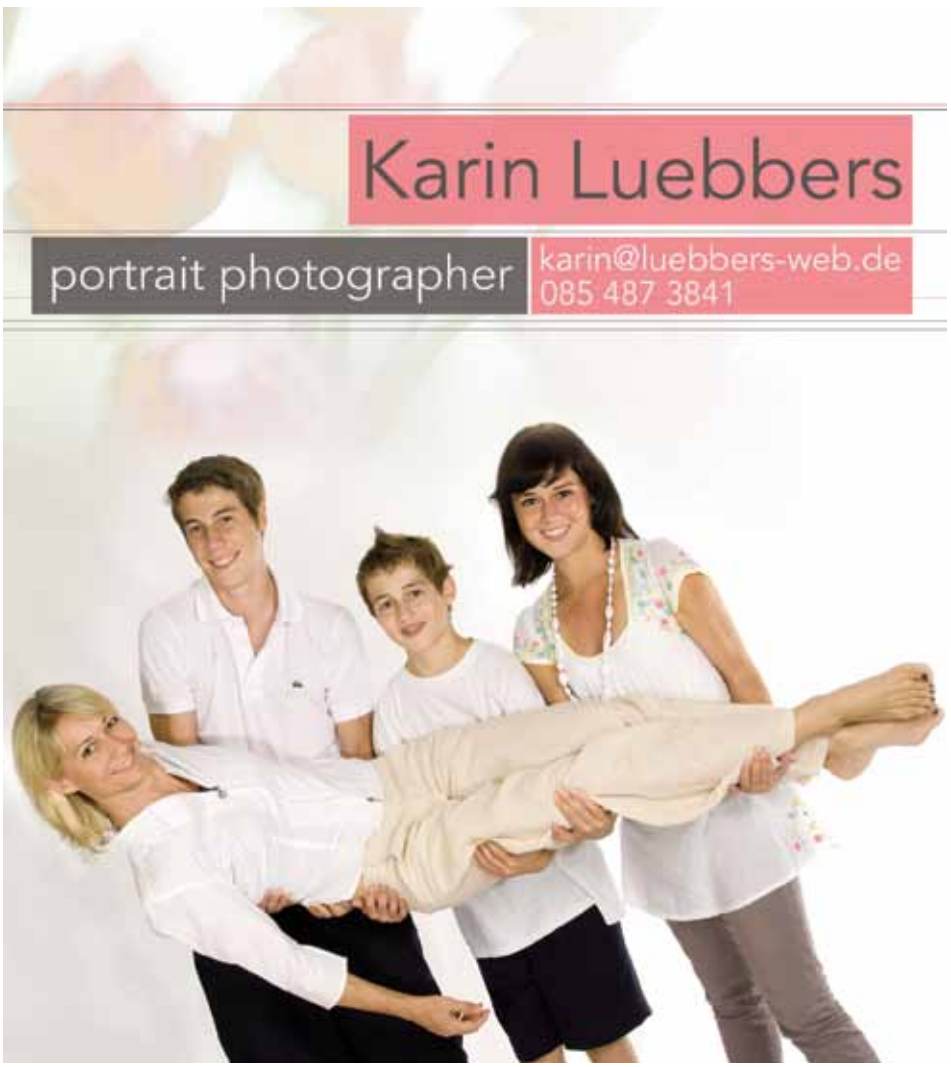
I took the opportunity to get to know me, and that meant being truthful. Truth is crucial to healing. It sets us free if we allow it to, for it gives us the freedom to be who we are, with all our strengths and weaknesses.

Through a series of exercises, I reflected on my values, what mattered to me. I examined my beliefs and chose which ones I wanted to keep and which no longer served me. I asked myself, "What are my commitments? What are my priorities?" I asked, "What do I love? What do I feel passionate about" And, from there, I explored what my purpose in life is. I got in touch with my heart, felt the feelings I was afraid to feel. I listened to my negative self-talk and learned to *love* myself instead of *diminishing* myself. I looked at my excuses. No longer was I willing to think I was "just a housewife." Fear keeps us small; fear keeps us safe. When we are willing to have a relationship with our fear and step out of our comfort zone, we grow as individuals. And we learn how brilliant we are, just as we are.

If you want to get to know you, here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- What are your top five values? What are the qualities of being that you want to exhibit, perhaps kindness, personal integrity, passion, authenticity, courage, persistence, light heartedness? Which is most challenging for you to exhibit?
- What gives you pleasure in life? What activities make you feel most alive?
- How much does the work that you are doing right now express what you really want to do?
- What would you love to do with your life if you didn't need to think about money, time, family responsibilities, or "how" to do it?
- Where are you resisting taking responsibility for your life?
- What are your top five priorities in life? Family, friends, career, fun, spirituality, health, romance, creativity,…?
- What things do you tell yourself to rationalize why you can't have what you want in life?
- What thoughts and feelings are you afraid to think and feel?
- Fill in the blanks: I should be_____. I should do_____. I should stop_____. I should plan_____.
- What do you say to yourself when you beat yourself up? What names do you call yourself? How do you feel when you do that? What happens to you and your dreams when you beat yourself up? What percentage of your negative self-talk do you believe to be true?
- How willing are you to put yourself first?

Who are *you* underneath all the roles you play? How much do you own your feminine energy? How much do you love being a woman? We expat women are often so busy taking care of everyone else's needs we forget our own. What would your life look like if you were gentler with your self?

It took a crisis for me to do the work of getting to know me, but you can start now. If you don't know who you are, you get to decide!

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