



EVERYTHING BELONGS

The Hero and Heroine's Journey
with Kirsten Oates and Patrick Boland

Paul Swanson: In 1989, *The Power of Myth* aired on PBS, quickly becoming the most popular program in its broadcast history. In this series, Joseph Campbell, who died shortly after filming, described his theory of the hero's journey. Originally outlined in his landmark book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell suggests that a single narrative might lie beneath many stories across cultures, lands, and centuries.

By studying the world's great myths, epics, and tales, we can piece together a rough road map, guiding us towards the meaning behind a fully lived life. This special and the theory of the hero's journey deeply influenced Richard, so much so that he titled his book's second chapter, *The Hero and Heroine's Journey*. In this episode, we discuss the hero's journey and its insights into the journey of *Falling Upward*.

Mike Petrow: From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petrow.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Mike Petrow: And this is *Everything Belongs*. Richard, it's so great to keep talking with you about *Falling Upward*. It's been amazing to revisit my original copy and see all the notes and highlights and questions that I wrote in the margin to converse with you about. And now that we actually get to do this, it's extraordinary. And so, I love that we get to start out today by talking about chapter 2, which is *The Hero and the Heroine's Journey*.

Richard Rohr: Okay.

Mike Petrow: You know I love Joseph Campbell. Campbell said, "In order to found something new, one has to leave the old and go on a quest." And then he described that in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. He said, "Because there's a certain typical hero sequence of actions that can be detected in stories from all over the world and from many periods in history. Essentially, it might even be said there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people."

Richard Rohr: Wow. What a quote.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Thank you.

Mike Petrow: So I'm curious, did Joseph Campbell influence your work and your understanding of the hero's journey?

Richard Rohr: Yes. I remember watching that. When was that? Early '90s maybe?

Mike Petrow: '89, it came out.

Richard Rohr: '89. Oh, okay.

Mike Petrow: *The Power of Myth*.

Richard Rohr: And it was just confirmation again and again. The guy was a genius, and that was shown on PBS. It was, at that point, the most watched show ever on PBS, because it touched

something archetypal, perennial tradition, and Americans aren't used to hearing that.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Ours is all anecdotal stories. But for someone to find the archetypal symbols that keep returning, that's new for Americans. We don't tend to read the big picture, the little picture. We think our revolution was the first or the only, or the only one that mattered, as it were. And when you don't have mythology like that, big, archetypal stories, you get lost. Did we say this last time? You get lost in pathologizing, finding out, "What makes me sick?"

I mean, I watch the news at night, as you know, and it's nothing but advertisements for medicines. It's just on and on and on. A medicine for diseases you never heard of, but that's all we have left. We don't understand spiritual medicine, so we make Big Pharma even bigger by creating necessary medicines. Anyway, and now I'm preaching. Sorry.

Mike Petrow: No, that's great. I love that quote when you say that, and it reminds me of Joseph Campbell again and James Hillman, and a lot of the great Jungians.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Mike Petrow: If we don't mythologize, we pathologize. Could you say more about what used to-

Richard Rohr: Repathologize?

Mike Petrow: If we don't mythologize, we pathologize.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yeah. That's true.

Mike Petrow: Could you say more about what that means? That's you. I'm quoting you to you.

Richard Rohr: Well, I said this in the reading of the Gospel today, where Jesus condemns Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum. I said, "You don't realize, this is the whole prophetic pattern to critique the culture. Like you Americans, you're all materialistic." That's 98% of the prophetic message, and we have entirely heard that wrong.

We attack individuals, "You, Joe Blow, gay man. You, Marianne, a prostitute." I mean, all we think of sin is sex, and they just don't. It's cultures of power and money. We're getting close to this now with our understanding of intergenerational trauma, that this guy is a product of his family, of his grandparents. I watch William Henry... No, not Henry...

Mike Petrow: Henry Louis Gates. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yes, that's it. And as he traces the roots of so many people, their eyes just open up, "My God, that's in me, and it was my grandfather's whole quest." So our notion of intergenerational woundedness and intergenerational salvation is becoming more knowable, more recognizable, that it's not a gift to the individual. We're products of our ancestors, and we're creators of our descendants.

It's a much richer idea, because now the idea is solidarity, not cult of innocence, how to prove I'm not a sinner. Now it's having sympathy for the brokenness of my ancestors. We

carry it collectively. Sin is collective. Grace is collective. You'll go to families. I'm sure you've met of them. Maybe they're not your own, but where the graciousness in a whole family is due to one grandma, one grandma who had faith. We're contagious. Maybe that's another way to say it.

Mike Petrow: I hear in what you're saying that we find ourselves at home in those old, big mythological stories, because they connect us to that intergenerational path of-

Richard Rohr: Because they are perennial. They're not anecdotal. And that should be what makes the Bible special, is if we could read the Bible as anecdotal stories, not all of them are, but many of them, most of the big ones are, they're always true. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: So I'm thinking about these big stories and the culture that they create. And you've talked about it in family systems, but then as we also talk in mythic systems, there is this communal, broad sense of finding oneself in that story. And as we've talked about Joseph Campbell, and the myth that you use in *Falling Upward* of this hero or heroine's journey, and we often think of that as the individual. What is your sense of how the individual plays a role in that journey? And I guess maybe my tag on that too would be, much is made in this chapter about leaving home, leaving what's comfortable.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: How does that relate to the communal and the person within that community of that myth?

Richard Rohr: You've got to have both. I think the Bible emphasizes the collective. But unless there's individual identification with, "Oh, that's true of me. That's just like Grandma," or whatever it might be, it doesn't bring it home. It's got to be a part of my individuation or some individual I know, or the universal pattern doesn't strike home. You need both.

It's just that we're coming from so much over-individuation and over-individualism. Individuation is good, coming to a sense of yourself. Individualism is not good, where you think the individual is all that there is. And that's pretty much what we got. We got your soul going to heaven, my soul going to hell. It doesn't help. It just becomes what I keep calling a cult of innocence, how to prove I'm on the side of heaven without really growing up.

Paul Swanson: And part of that growing up, I hear you saying it, is pushing up against what has been known or what has been comfortable, to test it out for yourself?

Richard Rohr: Let's not say pushing up against, because it too easily becomes oppositional, but just realizing an alternative that demands more love of me, more bigheartedness of me. This would be suicide that called me last night, or I called him. That's what was happening to him, that he could see that he was every story, and he wasn't just one bad man. You're carrying the... And then he had the insight to see that.

Fortunately, he had made the Men's Rites of Passage. So he had the archetypal

universe planted within him, so he wasn't hard to talk out of suicide. But people who've never had it, the only thing you could do is pathologize, is explain, "Oh, you had a bad father," which is a piece, but you can't change it. It is what it is, what it is. And what archetypal storytelling does is it has... Well, it even uses the word "the fates." It has a, "This is the way it is. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You're a part of the universal march toward wisdom."

But when you just pathologize, you get into all this self-pity and victimhood. This is half of America today. Victimhood gets you nowhere. Nowhere. We've seen the civil rights movement do this. We've seen feminism do this, and I see men coming to the initiation rites tempted to do this. But I hope we're keeping them from it by saying, "That's a dead end." Don't go there and play the game of, "I am a victim," or "I am a saved righteous one," either making myself totally dark or totally wonderful. They're both lies. What you got to do is hold the two together. I hope that's what the rites of passage are teaching.

Mike Petrow: It's interesting, Richard, and I hear in what you're saying... So many of us probably listening, and I know myself, sort of deconstructed an evangelical background, and we were handed this narrative of original sin, that we came into the world broken. So we deconstructed that, but then I and a lot of my friends moved into a psychological story-

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Mike Petrow: ... where my attachment style and my inherited intergenerational trauma and the epigenetics of all of it keep me still in patterns of brokenness. And I don't want to discredit that, because that's been very-

Richard Rohr: No, it's a piece.

Mike Petrow: ... healing in my life, and we know it's real.

Richard Rohr: That's right. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: But what I hear you describing, something that happens in the rituals of the Men's Rites of Passage, what you talk about in the hero journey is letting these mythic stories and rhythms show us how we inherit these wounds, but also give us possibilities for healing, and to imagine a different way. And I think this is my question. Just as I'm handed the unfinished work of my family and generations behind me-

Richard Rohr: Which it always is.

Mike Petrow: ... and I'm handed healing work to do as well, right?

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Mike Petrow: It's shaped by that.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: And myth helps me get there?

Richard Rohr: It allows you to see yourself in the whole, yourself as a whole person on a universal journey, instead of just seeing yourself as wounded. I attended the rites Saturday night up here at Jemez Canyon, and they've developed since I let go of it, in many ways for the good. And they all stated before the whole group, in one or two words at most, "What is not just my wound but my wound behind my wound? Why does this hurt me so much?"

Oh my God, these men were shouting it out. You just wanted to weep for some of them. But then immediately, they walked into saying thank you for it, if you remember that. Well, you haven't done it yet, the ritual. It was so good to be reminded of what I myself thought I was teaching 20 years ago, and how it's been refined already and clarified and ritualized. Yeah. Did I respond to your question at all?

Mike Petrow: Yeah. I think something else I hear in what you're saying, especially with the men's work and how I hear they've been developing elder work as well, is that there's not only mythologies that offer us the possibilities of imagining a different way, in a way of healing, but there are people, there are true elders in our lives who embody that for us. And I think our closing question for you might be, what would you say to us about eldering, or who was an elder for you that gave you the possibility to imagine growing into holiness, wisdom, health, wholeness, whatever word we want to use?

Richard Rohr: Did I talk last time about what ails you?

Mike Petrow: You did, but I'm sure people wouldn't mind hearing about it again.

Richard Rohr: Oh, I don't need to repeat it. But that was one of the core questions the young man asked of the old man. He's begging from him honesty and vulnerability, "Don't tell me about all the awards you got in World War II. I understand, but tell me about why you still have PTSD from World War II. Let's talk about that, and now you could really be my spiritual father."

That's just genius. How did they get that already in the 11th century, to know that this is the question we must ask? Without vulnerability, there's no change. You just hold on to what you already have. But once you can express your woundedness, there's desire and need for healing, for change, in other words, positive change. Healing means positive change.

Mike Petrow: Wow. That changes my understanding of what a hero is, to anchor that in-

Richard Rohr: Tell me why. I'm glad.

Mike Petrow: Well, you said, yeah, "Without vulnerability, there's no change."

Richard Rohr: No.

Mike Petrow: And to think of a hero not as someone who is a conqueror, who gets it right, but as someone who can own their vulnerability.

Richard Rohr: The superhero in a cape that we have today, and I know your little boys are probably wearing

capas. I would, too. But yeah, that isn't it. Yeah. But he can't know that yet. I mean, he's a little boy. He's got to wear a cape to show his bigness, because he's little yet. But a big man could show his littleness, because he's already experienced his bigness. He's secure as a son of God. That's what I saw at the rites Saturday night, these guys just shouting out their sacred wound.

Paul Swanson: Yup. What I'm really struck by what you just said, both of you, is that this shift from the hero is like these award ceremonies to this process of their whole life, which takes on a mythic quality of being on the journey and being open and vulnerable to that journey in its entirety, and not just showing up for the award ceremony, wherein someone pins the medal to your chest, and how we need that when we're younger, to feel that power almost sustain us throughout the unknowns we're going to face. But it's actually seeing the totality of the journey that is most inspiring for younger folks, to see themselves as a part of a larger story.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm. Good. And now we have whole stores that just sell trophies. I don't know. Shelf and shelf of trophies. I mean, I'd be giving them too to little boys. But when men, middle-aged, still need trophies and trophy wife and trophy child, that's distorting the human family.

Paul Swanson: Watch out. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, where your children are your signs of how wonderful you are. Oh, come on. I'm preaching. Stop me. Ask something else.

Mike Petrow: I guess I'm not going to get my trophy for best-

Richard Rohr: No.

Paul Swanson: We'll go buy one.

Mike Petrow: Fair enough.

Paul Swanson: Well, this has been great, Rich. We're going to close out this, and just appreciate your time focusing on chapter 2 here. Everything Belongs will continue in a moment. Today, Mike is joined by two guests, Patrick Boland, who is an executive coach, leadership consultant, and psychotherapist. He's the author of *The Contemplative Leader*, and the coauthor of *Everything Belongs* with Richard Rohr. He lives with his family near Dublin, Ireland.

Kirsten Oates is the cohost of our sister podcast, *Turning to the Mystics* with James Finley. She's a spiritual director and an executive coach, who brings wisdom and insight into the intersection of spirituality and leadership. Kirsten and Patrick worked closely with Richard Rohr to craft the CAC's online course, *Falling Upward: Life as a Spiritual Journey*.

This course deeply explores the transformative journey outlined in Richard's teachings, providing participants with insights and tools to navigate their own lives. Additionally, you could find a chapter from Patrick's book, *The Contemplative Leader*, in the show notes. It offers his perspective on the hero's journey.

Mike Petrow: Friends, this week's chapter is *The Hero and the Heroine's Journey* from *Falling Upward*,

this beautiful idea that there's one story told in many times and many cultures, a shero with a thousand faces that offers us guidance for living our lives in the ordinary world with all the challenges come of being human. Richard said this in the conversation with Paul and I earlier, "Archetypal storytelling lets us stop feeling alone and stop feeling sorry for ourselves, and recognize you're part of the universal march towards wisdom."

What an awesome conversation to step into. Kirsten and Patrick, thank you so much for joining us today on the Everything Belongs podcast. Let's get right into it. How did each of you first encounter *Falling Upward* in general, the hero's journey in specific? How's it been a meaningful part of your life? Patrick, again, welcome. Would you mind kicking us off today?

Patrick Boland: Sure, Mike. Yeah. I'd be delighted to. So yeah, a few questions in there. I could probably talk for 30 minutes just to get into all the details of it. So I'll try and keep it pretty short. The book itself, *Falling Upward*, I encountered it about 14 years ago. I was doing my master's in counseling. And so, I'd been studying Jung and Jung's work, and was really interested in that.

Previously to that, I had been reading about Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey, and this whole idea of narrative. What does it mean to have a story? And I'd be considering existentialism and the nature of life, and all those kind of questions. And as well as that, there was my own experiences of spirituality and understandings for the first time of the Paschal Mystery. And I had all these pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, but I didn't have the picture.

So I think when I read the book and I saw the framing that Richard had, and he was talking about Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and I was like, "Oh, I studied that in my undergrad." I didn't see how this was connected to the *Odyssey*. I didn't see how this was connected to the first and second half of life. So just seeing the jigsaw puzzle picture altogether, that was beautiful. That was a wonderful moment, a wonderful experience for me.

So that was kind of encountering the book for the first time. But prior to that, there've been so many experiences in life, from studying literature and narrative and stories, and having my own experiences of faith, of conversion, of wondering about spirituality, thinking I'm on the right path, and the next thing, the rug gets pulled from underneath you, and you're like, "Oh, okay. That clearly wasn't the right path."

And then you do it again. You do it again, and realizing, "There's a cyclical nature to this. I think I'm going somewhere." And then everything is lost, and I don't know where I'm going. And then something happens, and I find a way. How does that happen? People come into my life. Mentors come into my life. So then when I stumbled upon Joseph Campbell's work, I was like, "Aha, there is a bigger archetypal narrative." And then joining that with Carl Jung's work and archetypes, it was all kind of there. So reading Father Richard's book was just fantastic to bring it together.

Mike Petrow: That's so good, Patrick. And just a quick follow-up question before we pivot to you, Kirsten. Why do you think it is that Richard includes the hero's journey so early in the book? What's the gift of having this template right away before he takes us through the journey of *Falling Upward*?

Patrick Boland: I think Richard's probably the best place to answer it, but I suppose my own interpretation of it is, it's a really nice framing to understand a metamodel, and it takes us out of the

anecdotal and the specific into the general for a moment to kind of invite us into the universal and go, “Okay. So you’re part of something bigger. This is a pattern, and there are many details to it.”

If we go back to Joseph Campbell, there’s 16 steps. So there’s this many steps to it, but just have a little bit of a structure and a framing, and then, hopefully, we can delve in deeper with confidence. And that certainly was the impact for me. I was like, “Okay. I know the territory. I have a map of the territory. Let’s go and explore the territory.”

Mike Petrow: That’s great. I love that. And one of the things I love... I’m going to resist the urge to geek out too hard on this, because you both know I love Carl Jung. I love Joseph Campbell. I love mythology and storytelling. But one of the things that these sort of maps and archetypes remind me is... And I think about this a lot, because I can overintellectualize and I can get lost in the abstract, and the ideas and the steps.

But when I remember that this is an invitation for me to know that I’m not doing this alone, but I’m taking this journey that so many people have taken, that it connects me with so many other people who share this experience and have these guides as a result, that’s just absolutely amazing. And so, I’m so excited that you’re both here.

And I think probably for some of our listeners, you’re both going to step into the role of a guide and an ally along the way. So thank you, thank you, thank you. Kirsten, same question. How did Falling Upward in general, the hero’s journey in specific, come into your life? How has it been a meaningful part of your journey?

Kirsten Oates: Thanks, Mike. And wonderful to be here with you and Patrick. I was introduced to Falling Upward and the hero’s journey at the same time. I found the hero’s journey through Richard’s book, Falling Upward. And the book had a real personal impact on me, and I’ll just share a story. So I’d read the book, and it’s interesting, when you read something, how key concepts can get tucked away and just arise in you in a certain when they’re needed.

So I’m grateful to have had read the book when, about 10 years ago, my sister-in-law died unexpectedly and quite tragically. And she had one son. His name is Will. And so, when she died, he lost his only parent, his home, and his sense of self. And my husband and I, at the time, invited him to come and live with us, and he’s become like an adopted son for us.

And one of the many struggles he faced at that time was feeling really isolated from his community, from his friends, who were very carefree and still really enjoying life. And he just wasn’t able to enter into those experiences in the same way when he was struggling with this pain and loss. And so, one of the things I turned to to support him was this idea of the hero’s journey.

And I told him about the framework, and I suggested that maybe he was being called into the journey of the hero. And I also told him that if he were to do his work, this work of grief, and moving through the pain of this experience, he would be crossing a bridge from the site where we start our grief and where a lot of people get stuck. But if he were to cross this bridge, going through his grief in a healthy way, he’d be standing on the healthy side of the bridge, of the grief bridge, and that every single one of these friends he felt isolated from right now would arrive at that bridge at some point in their lives.

I mean, I could promise him that each one of us is going to face some kind of loss that brings us to that grief bridge. And if he did his work well, he could reach out his hand and help his friends cross that bridge. And while telling him all of this, it didn't remove the tragedy and the pain of the loss of his mother, but it did give him some kind of hope and some kind of directionality. And so, he did the really, really hard work of going through the grief and going through the pain, and crossing that bridge. And it was a gift to be part of that journey with him and be a support for him.

And then it was a few years later, I remember getting a call from him, and he said to me, "Do you remember years ago when I first came to live with you and you told me about the hero's journey and that bridge of grief?" And I said, "Yes. Yes, I do." He said, "Well..." This makes me cry. He said, "Well, my first friend has arrived at the bridge, and I'm so excited to be able to help him." And so, I'm very grateful to have learned about the hero's journey to be able to help Will along his way.

Mike Petrow: Ooh, that's really... Thank you. Just give me a sec. It's very beautiful. Oh, Kirsten, I really appreciate you sharing that. We're friends. I don't know if we've talked about the synchronicity before or not, but it's an interesting thing. I studied a lot of Joseph Campbell in grad school. I had left seminary to study mythology and Jungian depth psychology in grad school instead, and I was learning about the hero journey.

I'd just taken this big class on Joseph Campbell, and then I followed that up with a class on Arthurian mythology. We were studying the quest for the Grail. And so, I was learning about the call to adventure and these quests, and it was in the middle of that that I lost my brother and then, shortly after that, my mom. And I knew that the hero's journey was going to help me navigate that.

But I really appreciate you framing it that way, that the invitation to grieve our griefs is a part of that journey, and the recognition that we don't just take the journey for ourselves. Right? When we do our work and we grieve our griefs, we have something to offer someone else. So thank you for that. I'm crying a little bit. Thank you for that very beautiful image of crossing the bridge, and then being able to invite others across. Wow. Oh my gosh.

And that is the beautiful thing about the hero's journey, is when we take the journey, we are often gifted elders and guides that come along, just as you were able to be an elder and a guide for your nephew/son. And then he, in turn, got to be an elder and a guide. And I can't help but think about, Patrick, your work. I know you have a book that has... If it is either about to come out or has just come out, depending on when this episode airs, and I believe it is about... So yeah, what can you tell us about this book, and then how the kind of wisdom of Falling Upward and the hero's journey plays into it? Because I think it is about being a guide, isn't it, in its own way?

Patrick Boland: Yeah. That's certainly one part of it. Yeah. It's called The Contemplative Leader. So it's looking essentially at what is it like for people to lead as they move from the first into the second half of life. So what is it like to lead through nonattachment? What happens internally? What has to happen within us in order to make the space that we can be generative leaders?

So in some ways, it's kind of applying what Richard has written about, what Carl Jung has written about, what Joseph Campbell has written about, and quite a few others as well, applying some of these things directly into leadership, looking at our presence, and how, if we want people to follow us, or if we want change in organizations or in cultures, and ultimately contribute to our community, to society, and to the world, the change has to start within us.

And so, just even in one of the chapters in the book, chapter on narrative and the stories we tell ourselves, or the schemas, you might say, from a psychotherapeutic perspective, the scripts, and the meaning that we have. So I just use the three pillars, the three general pillars of the hero's journey as just signposts to think about, "What is that call to adventure?"

And we can't keep on doing things the way things have always been done, because then we're going to stay in the first half of life, and it might just remain transactional, individualistic, selfish, all about outcomes, or whatever version of narrative that we've inherited. And then, what's it like to let go of control, plus, at the same time, holding onto responsibility? So holding that tension in a contemplative way. And then, how do we go into the descent and the return, and then do it again and again and again?

I think the genius of what Richard has really done in *Falling Upward* is looking at, this happens on a meta level between the first and second half of life, but it's happening all the time. It's consistently happening. And in that way, I think it's beautifully mirroring the Paschal Mystery. There's always something to let go of. There's always something to learn, and there's always something to let go of, and there's always something to learn as well.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh, that is so profound. There's always something to let go of, and there's always something to learn. I thank you for saying that, Patrick. As I was driving to the studio to record this podcast this morning, I was having a conversation with a friend, and we were joking. I said, "You keep thinking. You take the call to adventure and you do the journey, and you keep thinking, 'Well, after this, everything's going to be easy,' because this was so hard, and then life gives always something new."

If you don't mind, I'd love to ask that first beat, the call to adventure, and that invitation to then let go and learn something new. How do you think for our listeners... How do we recognize those moments in our life that are that door swinging open or that call or that invitation, or maybe even an interruption?

Patrick Boland: I'm going to go back to what Richard says all the time here. It's usually great love and, more often, great suffering. And Mike, let's go with the great love, a relationship, a child is born. If something wonderful happens, we get an opportunity and say in our career, and some way of serving in our community, and it's like, "I'm passionate in my care." Sometimes that happens, and that's beautiful, and that is, most certainly, a call to adventure.

But I think for most of us, given how tight our narratives are and how much we want to stay in control, it usually requires great suffering that's done unto us, and where we cannot control it to go the way that we've always wanted it to go. And I know myself, and my first experience of this as a teenager was a deep experience of depression at the age of 15 for about a year.

And it was just totally deconstructing of all the narratives, the ideas that I had about myself and about life, and there was nowhere else to go except to go where it took me. And that was certainly my first experience of the call to adventure, and it wasn't an adventure I wanted to go on. But looking back, it was wonderful. In the moment, it definitely was not, until I ended up getting a few mentors and guides, and that was a real gift.

Mike Petrow: Oh. Wow. Thank you for sharing that. It's so interesting to think of how we can meme and romanticize the call to adventure, and it is... What an amazing gift to have a calling and to be invited to make it real in the world, but I'm reminded. Thank you for saying that. So many of these calls to adventure we have not looked for. I'm thinking about when I was 19, one of my very best friends in the world was unexpectedly killed in a rock-climbing accident, and I've never considered that a call to adventure till exactly this moment in this conversation. But it's an invitation to suddenly have to reconcile something that turns our world upside down, huh?

Patrick Boland: Exactly. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh. Thank you. I have a feeling that as we go through our conversation, we'll talk more about those next two big beats of letting go of control. Tell me again, before I pivot to Kirsten, Patrick, what are the three beats succinctly?

Patrick Boland: So the overarching, the three pieces are the departure, so letting go of the ordinary world, letting go of life as you have known it heretofore. And then there's the whole journey of initiation, is the language that Joseph Campbell uses. And on the course with Father Richard, Kirsten, I call that beat the descent, more to mimic the language of the Paschal Mystery. So the initiation or the descent is where... It's a deconstruction of our world, of our identities, of our sense of self, creating the space for something new to emerge. It's painful. It's difficult.

We get mentors. Usually, there might be a boon, something to help us along, but there's some kind of a death, a psychological death or physiological death. And then the third beat is the return, where something happens. And again, using the language of the Paschal Mystery, it's the resurrection. It's the return. Something changes within us, and we come back to the ordinary world, but we're changed, and we've got something different to offer and a different contribution to make.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that's so profound. And I imagine some of our listeners might be thinking of a model they may have encountered, described as order, disorder, and reorder-

Patrick Boland: Exactly.

Mike Petrow: ... which I know Richard loves to talk about. That's so beautiful, the way that all lines up. Kirsten, I'd love to ask you about how *Falling Upward* and the hero's journey has turned up in your work. Our listeners probably know that you're involved in a little side project called *Turning to the Mystics*, where you get to hang out with the one and only James Finley, and explore so many of these beautiful mystics and beautiful mystic texts, and I imagine this pattern shows up in that journey.

So open question, really, in anything you want to talk about, but I would also love to hear about, specifically for Turning to the Mystics, how has this pattern of the hero's journey and the path of descent and return enlivened that material for you in any way? And also, you're welcome to tell us how is working with Jim also, or like having an ally in the process.

Kirsten Oates: Well, it's a true gift to work with Jim. And there's a wonderful community surrounding that podcast that are devoted to Jim's, Jim as a teacher and to that community. So it's just been a real gift to be a part of it. What's interesting to me in relation to Turning to the Mystics is, when I first read about the hero's journey in Richard's book, *Falling Upward*, I didn't really identify with it. I couldn't bring to mind, I think, female role models that I could really see as people who have taken that journey.

I think a lot of the popular culture and historical stories of the hero's journeys have had male heroes. And so, it didn't really resonate with me until I offered it to Will as a gift, and then I was so grateful to have it as a tool. But then with Turning to the Mystics, Jim's introduced us all to these amazing female mystics, so like Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Spanish mystic; Julian of Norwich, a 14th-century English mystic; and from last season, Mechthild of Magdeburg, a 13th-century German mystic.

And these women were so courageous, and not only courageous in their spiritual work and their spiritual journeys, and the way they were open to being overtaken by God's presence and bringing God's presence into the world in unique ways, but also in the way they showed up to their communities. They were leaders. They were reformers. They were spiritual directors for people. They were teachers.

And so, these have become my archetypes for the hero's journey, and their journey is really towards this experience of union with God. And I feel like that's the kind of, Richard refers to a homesickness we have as part of this journey, and that unitive experience is what we deeply long for. And so, yeah, that's been a real gift to find these just amazing, courageous, wonderful women, who I feel are now my guides and my friends on this journey.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh, that's so profound. I so appreciate that. It's interesting. A very, very legitimate criticism of Joseph Campbell's writing about the hero journey is that it is the hero journey, and he uses predominantly male figures. There have been some amazing books that have explored this specifically from a woman's perspective, the *Women Who Run with Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *The Heroine's Journey* by Maureen Murdock, and so many more.

I love that invitation that the women mystics have taken you there. And I wonder, do you think there's a way that it is different? Have these women shown you an insight that there is an expanded capacity or an invitation to understand the journey in a bigger way? And I'm also going to ask you a question about home in a minute, because I love that you brought up homecoming and nostos.

Kirsten Oates: What comes to mind for me when I think about these female mystics, there's something about their level of embodiment. There's something about the way they seem to offer me more of an invitation to be connected into my body. They had these amazing embodied experiences of this unitive experience with great imagery or significant pain in their body, or fainting in their body.

And so, the invitation into the body, for me, feels different. And I'm really grateful for it, because I think, for me, this journey is embodied, and that having permission to feel God's presence through my body and to bring God's presence into the world through my body, that's a beautiful and helpful invitation. I do have one piece I'd love to read to you from Mechthild-

Mike Petrow: Oh, please.

Kirsten Oates: ... whether now or a bit later.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Yeah. No. I just want to say, I so appreciate you bringing in that aspect of embodiment, and you're causing me to think about the women mystics that I've studied. And like you said, that can be rapture. That can be pleasure. That can be disease. It's so many things that invite us into that. I would love to hear what you want to read for us, please.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yes. So this is Mechthild of Magdeburg, and God gifted her with a book to write. And so, in obedience to this flow of creativity that was coming through her from God, she wrote *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, very boldly for her time. She was 13th century. And to write God's words flowing through her, it's very bold and courageous.

She was a Beguine. She was part of a female community committed to this unitive path towards God and being helpful in the community. And at the end of her life, her body wasn't working properly, and she could no longer feed herself, and she couldn't dress herself. And so, she was being supported by the community in those ways, but she still felt called to write the book and finish the book. So she was dictating it at the end. So she's in this state. She can't dress herself, feed herself. She's having to have someone else write the book, and she finishes her book with these words.

And this is her soul speaking, and she says, "Ah, dearest prison in which I have been bound." And here, she's talking about her body, because at this point, it's like a prison. She's bound in it. It can't do anything for her. "I thank you especially for being obedient to me. Though I was often unhappy because of you..." And I love that line, because there are times our bodies make us unhappy, either reacting in ways when we don't want to, or feeling pain. Yeah. So I love that line.

"Though I was often unhappy because of you, you nevertheless came to my aid. On the last day, all your troubles will be taken from you. Then we shall no longer complain. Then everything that God has done with us will suit us just fine, if you will now only stand fast and keep hold of sweet hope." And for me, that's really the offering of this framework of the hero's journey, which it can give us this ability to hold hope that we're headed towards this place where then everything that God has done with us will suit us just fine. I think that's just such a beautiful thing to know.

Mike Petrow: That's so beautiful. And what a gift, an invitation to recognize that we're on a path that's going somewhere, and potentially somewhere good. That quote specifically makes me think of so many of the conversations we've had with Richard about this book, getting ready for this season, and then talking with him as we're recording, have revolved around this idea that's already been mentioned. And we talked about it with Brené Brown, who mentioned it in the foreword she wrote for the book, this idea of the nostos, of the journey towards home

and how home and the longing for home plays such a particular part.

And I would love to hear from both Kirsten and you, Patrick, because you've talked about this as well. Home seems like such a complicated concept in the hero's journey, because we are leaving home. Right? That's the first part of the journey. We leave home, and yet, we're questing for something. And I think a lot of folks feel a longing for home that pulls them towards the quest. And I don't know if it's the home that they've left or the home not... I would love to just ask both of you. I know this is kind of a random question, but what do you think that home is that we're longing for, and how do you think it plays out in taking the journey? Whoever wants to go first.

Patrick Boland: I can jump in on that one. I think the home we're looking for is our true self. I think the first half of life, as Richard says, it's about building the ego, building the full self, building all the identities that are essential, that we need to do, that are required for getting by in daily life. And we move from first naivete into the loss of innocence. And then as a result of this, over time, there is the chance that if we allow it to happen, we can move towards the second naivete.

So we can move away and realize that all of these identities that we've built, all this full self, it's been necessary, and it's not real. And what we're really seeking to do is to come back home within ourselves, and to realize that we can travel the globe, go to other planets. We can read all these books, have all these experiences. But ultimately, it's about being comfortable in our own skin and being the person that God has made us to be deep down or, as in some of the Zen Buddhists' teaching, the face you had before you were born.

So my sense of coming home is, there might be a sense of place to it. And I know that when we talk about nostos, lots of writers talk about a real sense of place. But I think the sense of place is really a metaphor to transcend. It's about coming home to who we are within ourselves and who we are ultimately in God.

Mike Petrow: I have a follow-up question for you, Patrick. So my great mystic teacher is Origen of Alexandria. I love him a bunch. Kirsten knows. I talk about him all the time. And he has this statement. He says, "In order for the soul to know herself as beautiful, it is necessary for her to be threatened." And I think it's a bit of a clunky translation in the English, but I think he's saying that in order for us to know the true beauty of our true selves, we do sort of have to walk the road of trials.

And so, my question for you is, why do you think it is that we have to face adversity to find our true self? And I don't want to romanticize adversity for people who have been victims of injustice or trauma. I'm not saying, "And it's all great," and putting a bow on it. And yet, I am asking the question, why do you think it is that we have to take this journey to find the true self?

Patrick Boland: For me, I'd say, in one line, it's the pattern of the universe. It's the pattern of evolution. It's the pattern of change. It's just, evolution happens when there's multiple miniature experiments and most of them don't work. And then if you do work, and then they go on and then they flourish and grow. And then to survive, they need to adapt, and then they continue to adapt, and that process continues. I think that's kind of the essence of life.

So that's kind of a headline answer for you. I have a quote I'd love to read to you that I think might get into it. A friend of mine sent it recently, and it's a quote directly about the hero's journey, and I think it fits in this context. There's a few parts to it. It's from Paul Weinfield. "People constantly throw around the term hero's journey without having any idea of what it really means. Everyone from CEOs to wellness influencers thinks the hero's journey means facing your fears, slaying a dragon, and gaining 25,000 followers on Instagram. But that's not the real hero's journey." I know. It's great.

"In the real hero's journey, the dragon slays you. Much to your surprise, you couldn't make that marriage work. Much to your surprise, you turned 40 with no kids, no house, and no prospects. Much to your surprise, the world didn't want the gifts you proudly offered it. If you are foolish, this is where you will abort the journey and start another, and another, abusing your heart over and over for the brief illusion of winning. But if you're wise, you will let yourself be shattered, and return to the village, humbled, but with a newfound sense that you don't have to identify with the part of you that needs to win, needs to be recognized, needs to know. This is where your transcendent life begins."

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh.

Patrick Boland: I think that's just a beautiful way of moving away from a pop culture understanding of the hero's journey to kind of say it's about coming home to being within ourselves. And I don't have an A to Z, clearly logically thought-out reason as to why it is exactly the way it is, but it is a pattern. For me, I see it as the pattern of evolution. And it is something that, certainly in my experience, it keeps on working, it keeps on shattering me, and then it keeps on healing me. And that's the process. And it feels alive, and it feels painful, but it feels important.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm. That's a great quote, Patrick. Thank you for sharing that. I love that. I think, for me, part of it too is, there's adversity at one level, and it really is that part that needs to win or that needs to feel safe or that needs to... That part is the part that faces adversity. But what the hero's journey is inviting us to is to find something deeper and trustworthy beneath all the circumstances.

And I think that's what I would call the homecoming for me, is finding... Because if the tragic things happen and I can just kind of psychologically heal from them, I live in a world where then I'm just waiting for the next tragic thing to happen, and it's not a safe world. But if I can find, through the tragic thing, something safer and trust something safe and trustworthy that I know is there no matter what the circumstances, then I can ground myself in that, and that's what I would call the home.

And for me, I had a near-death experience years ago. I was on a flight, a long overseas flight, and one of the engines went out. And yeah, it was a terrible, terrible experience. But what I found through that experience was literally falling in the sky. But this sense of falling out of even my conscious self, my body, what was I falling into, and at the bottom of it, the only thing I could fall into was God. And I found, even if I was going to die in that experience, that I found a place that I could trust and that felt trustworthy. And the gift of that experience was, I'm able to bring a little bit of that back into my day-to-day life.

Mike Petrow: Wow. That's so good. Oh my gosh, Kirsten, that's so good. Patrick, that's so good. I'm thinking, we have an episode coming up. We're going to interview Paula D'Arcy, and I'm super excited about it, because one of the things I've learned from her teaching, she says, "We encounter suffering that just sort of blows our doors off and upends our ability to cope. It's too big. It's bigger than we are. But then when we eventually drop into love, love is even bigger than our suffering."

And I'm realizing through what you just shared, Kirsten, at exactly this moment that that love is the home. And from what you shared, Patrick, tell me if this sounds right, that love is also our true self, because our true self is born... At least I believe that our true self is born of that love.

Patrick Boland: Absolutely.

Mike Petrow: Goodness. What a journey, though.

Kirsten Oates: I think one way I think about it is, if I can find myself, as the generosity of God, that I am the generosity of God, like I'm a loving act of God, then yeah, that's my home base, if I can believe and experience that.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. And I love the both end of finding ourselves in love and generosity, and also being willing to face the things that shatter us. I love that quote that you shared, Patrick. It reminds me... The mentor of mine who taught me Joseph Campbell, who's a true Joseph Campbell scholar, used to say, "Everyone thinks the quintessential Joseph Campbell quote is, 'Follow your bliss.' And no one gets that Joseph Campbell is telling you to follow your life into the underworld, bravely and courageously. It's a very different thing."

Patrick Boland: That's it. Yeah, because he has that great quote, "It's by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life. Where you stumble, there is your treasure."

Kirsten Oates: And it's interesting, because the pre-stumble part of us, the gifts that we find down there, wouldn't see them as gifts, so things like humility and compassion and empathy. Yeah. So they're gifts that you eventually find as gifts as well. You have to... Yeah.

Mike Petrow: That's so good.

Patrick Boland: It's funny listening to us all talk about this. On one level, it's encouraging, and I'm kind of smiling on the outside and on the inside. But at the time, in the moment, it's horrific. It's just the worst. There's no perspective. There's no understanding, particularly the first time that we are called to adventure, or if the adventure is a suffering experience, because it just feels like, "This should not be happening." And it's that idea, "This should not be happening. This is not what is meant to happen to me."

And that is so, so difficult, because we are having to let go, or power, control is being removed from us. It's so essential. But at the time, talking about these models and approaches and frameworks doesn't really help, because it's just so visceral. It's in our nervous system, and it's frightening.

Mike Petrow: I so appreciate that, Patrick, because it's the paradox of the hero's journey gives you a map

for the moment in life, where there really isn't a map. Right? For me, the big moments of shattering, thinking about what you're saying are the moments where I'm like, "I'm off script. I have literally no idea what to do. I've lost the plot completely."

Patrick Boland: Or even for me, I mean, I'm going through something at the moment where I can recognize cognitively, "Oh, this is the descent. This is the loss." And it's a little bit of an encouragement to know that, but it doesn't affect waking up in the middle of the night worrying about things. So I think we're back to the true self and the connection in with God, because all of this is ultimately pointing to ultimate essence and to presence, and to who we are in God.

Kirsten Oates: Patrick, I appreciate you bringing up the point about the nervous system, because I think, too, what can happen is we have the shattering thing. And maybe at the time, we can't face it at all, and we just kind of have to dissociate or get on with life, and we can't address it or even fully experience it. And so, there's this way on the spiritual path that we can eventually come back around and heal those places that were shattered in our past, and the nervous system is where they show up, in our reactivity or in our ongoing pain or ongoing ways we try and cope.

But I feel the gift of the spiritual journey and trying to find that way home into God gives us the ability to go back in time to those places and do the spiritual healing, without bypassing the psychological or the physical or the other healing that's required, but yeah, to bring us into that hero's journey when we are ready for it.

Mike Petrow: Kirsten, you just answered a question I was about to ask before I asked it, and I would love to ask it again quickly, which is, based on what you said, Patrick, I was going to say, it's so funny when I have found myself looking down the drop on a roller coaster when I know I'm at the precipice of another path of descent. I'm about to learn another lesson. I'm experiencing a shattering, and it's been a few at this point.

So I'm now at the place where my cognitive mind, my higher brain, my mammal brain, even can say, "Okay. I know what's happening. This is going to be hard. I'm going to get through it. I'm going to learn something." But my nervous system... Kirsten, thank you. My nervous system is going into alarm mode. We are in absolute panic. We're like, "Danger, danger, danger."

What would either of you share as a help, even a contemplative practice, or anything that you do to be able to sit in that tension of trusting the pattern, but also recognizing your body is inviting you back, like you said, Kirsten, to those old wounds? And goodness gracious, it's hard to sleep, and it's hard to be at peace.

Patrick Boland: And Mike, I'm smiling here, because there's an entire chapter in my book exactly dedicated to this. It's called Leading from Our Body, and it looks at applying polyvagal theories, so looking at three nervous system states, and practically speaking, "What do we do?" So a real high-level overview. But when we're in this state, we do fight or flight, and some say we go into a fawn response as well. So it's our sympathetic nervous system state. It's cortisol. It's adrenaline. It's just survival.

And after a while, we get out or we survive, we get through, and then we drop down into our dorsal vagal state, where it's just, recuperate. We're exhausted. But then what often happens

is, so many of us just go between those two states and, very physiologically and practically, to get into the other state, our ventral vagal state, which is part of our parasympathetic nervous system.

And four simple practices that I do and that I use with clients is sigh, stretch, touch, and smile. So deep sigh and stretching. These are all just state change things, smiling. Big, cheeky smiles for at least 30 seconds, ideally 60 seconds, and then some kind of gentle touch with a message. There's just four ways. There are many other ways, a lot of it from the teaching and work of Stephen Porges and Deb Dana.

And then we start to map out and understand our nervous system, and go, "Who are the people I need to be around so that I can feel safe and connected, even in the midst of all this pain and challenge at the moment? What are the places I can go? What are the activities I can do?" So that's kind of a start in the moment. And then just a final one for me would be, in my psychotherapy practice, when people are ready and the time is right, I use EMDR with people. So it's a neuroscientific practice for healing deep trauma that's stored in the body.

And as you were saying a few moments ago, Kirsten, in those moments of pain and suffering and loss, there's something amazing about our bodies and our whole nervous systems that we can survive, that we can click into it, maybe a dissociation for a time, but our bodies do also have the resources to come back and to heal the dysfunctionally stored memories. So there are great practices around it. And I think having the deep-seated spiritual foundation of knowing that we are loved, that we are held, and knowing that we're coming home, that we're home, I think that's the fundamental narrative that really allows other practical healing steps to take place.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. I resonate with that, Patrick. Thank you for sharing details on polyvagal. But yes, I really feel like it's a combination of the somatic work with the body, understanding states of the body, and being able to bring your body into a safe state. And there's a lot of great work being done on that right now. And then being clear on my thought patterns and my psychological self, and things like the Enneagram, and we can learn about ourselves through lenses like that.

But for me, without the spiritual grounding, like I said earlier, that work, I might be able to heal a psychological wound or a physical wound or a somatic, kind of get my nervous system in the right state. But if I don't have this deeper spiritual connection that I get through my contemplative practice or reading the mystics or listening to contemplative teachers, I'm just waiting for the next... The world is a dismal place, for me, without that sense of the beauty, the generosity, the love that's underlying it. But I do think we need to engage in all those aspects to be able to live more fully into that true self.

Mike Petrow: I love that, because it gives us the ability to find the practices and find the support that let us stay in the moment while anchoring ourselves with a hope that's pulling us forward. I appreciate that. And it sounds like it's what you were saying, Patrick, about the... It's just the letting go of control, isn't it?

Patrick Boland: Essentially. I think it's the scariest thing to do all the time, and we never get really used to it.

But I think it's essential.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. It's really accepting reality on reality's terms. And I think that's really a major part of that hero's journey, is learning to be present to reality as it is on reality's terms. Yeah.

Patrick Boland: Yeah, because there's the narrative that we wanted to have, and then there's the reality, as you say, Kirsten, and it's, do we allow our first narrative to be deconstructed and then embrace another narrative and go, "Well, this is reality on reality's terms. Let me participate rather than play the victim"? Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Right. Isn't that a great Joseph Campbell quote? We have to let go of the life we felt we were going to have to have the life that's waiting for us, which, again, is a lot more scary than it sounds.

Kirsten Oates: And there's also the cultural narratives around it too. For instance, when Will's mother passed, there's a lot of people, "Just get busy. Get back to work. That's the best thing," or "Let's focus on all the positive things that happened in your mother's life," or all these kind of ways to keep him from the depth of the pain and the grief, that that was actually the path of transformation. So I don't think society really encourages us into these pathways of descent or losing control. It really encourages us in the opposite direction.

Patrick Boland: That's so interesting, because... So I'm over here in Ireland. And from my experience, we have a slightly different approach, because we have a culture of having a wake where you stay up all night with the body, and where you cry and you tell stories, and you eat and you drink, and you talk and you express your emotions, and you talk about what you're feeling, and you go through it.

And that's an interesting cultural comparison. I don't think we're quite like we were, say, 20, 30 years ago in that respect. You certainly wouldn't get it in urban settings. I think what you're describing there, Kirsten, I can relate to that in urban settings here. But certainly, traditionally, it's a very different approach to that particular form of suffering. It's so interesting.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And it just shows how culture can really shape our ability to go on this kind of a journey. Yeah. So losing those traditions that really kept us more grounded in reality, in the planet, in the Earth, and in our sense of life and death.

Mike Petrow: I appreciate that, Kirsten, because I think that this idea that the hero's journey is a myth, and I mean that not in the sense of something that's not true, but an ancient, meaningful story that is about what's experientially true and not historically true. Right? And so, this myth has traveled across cultures and time and space, and gives us guidance in how to live our lives. And in so many cultures for most of the human race's existence, there have been rituals that initiate us into it and help us to sort of live the realities but, for a lot of us, have lost those and, depending on where we are, have lost some of those rituals and those guideposts.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And the mentors and the elders that would be around to bring through the next generation, yeah, I don't think we have many of those either.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. That's powerful, and goodness gracious. Well, we're getting to the bottom third of our

conversation here, so I have a few lightning-round questions for you. But before we get into that, when we're talking about mentors and elders and guides, one such guide is reading Richard's book, reading your book, Patrick, and the two of you have collaborated together on building this course around *Falling Upward*.

How did putting the course together... I know the course starts with the book and then expands and adds and brings in extra material and gives different lenses, and looks at it through the lens of a journey. If you could just say just a little bit each on what you are excited that the course gets to go deeper into, and maybe what you learned personally about this material and this journey by working on the course.

Kirsten Oates: Well, when Patrick and I were designing the course together, one, it was just so wonderful working with Patrick and with Richard on this course, but we really wanted to give people a sense of being on a journey. And so, we've used the map of the hero's journey to walk people through the course. So each unit is an element of the hero's journey.

And what I love about that is, it gives you a sense of the rhythm of that journey. So, one, you might be able to see it more clearly in your own life, but then also, like what happened to me, you might be able to be a mentor for someone else, see it taking place in someone else's life, and be the guide or the mentor for them. And that's one of the emphasis of the course, is how to create mentors and elders for people who want to go on a deeper spiritual path.

Yeah. So that's what was really fun and exciting to weave the course around this journey. And then also, Richard wrote that book 14 years ago or so. And so, we were able to bring in some of his newer frameworks and expand on the tools and the teaching, and then we were also able to bring in some of the frameworks that are tried and true and very aligned with the book, like actually have people learn about the five major archetypes and reflect on the light and shadow of their own personality using the lens of the archetypes, which was wonderful.

And I really enjoyed that. I will say it's something I learned going deeper into the archetypes. I'd been big into the Enneagram as a lens to look at personality, and I really just have loved getting into the archetypes, because it offers more of an energetic look into yourself, like the energies that flow through me. And so, I love that sense of the archetypes, and I learned more about my own, helped me delve deeper into my own shadow work, which, I'll not take you there.

Patrick Boland: You do on the course, so it's okay.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: That's fantastic. Patrick, anything to add to that?

Patrick Boland: Yeah. I'm smiling here listening to you talking about it, Kirsten, because it was so fun. There was so much to it. We had such a lot of freedom and such great times recording it. And there's two courses. The first course is out now, and the second course will come out at some other point. And so, the first course is the first half of life and what's the soul work, essentially preparing for the liminality of the crossover towards the second half of life, which we can't force, but which is done unto us.

And so, I really loved getting to do the archetypal work as well, because it's something... And Mike, I'm sure you're the same. I'm just so passionate about it, and love the Jungian understandings. I would love how it dates back a long, long time into history. And I've just seen the power of it when we transcend the cognitive and move into the preconscious and the subconscious, and allow that to come out and just to see what's happening.

And then as, Kirsten, you mentioned, moving from the light to the shadow and understanding what the shadow is and what it's not, and giving some specific definitions around it. And then going from the shadow to the dark, and understanding what that is with specific examples. I think Richard's teaching was so great on that. And then for me personally, the second course, just the idea of moving into the second half of life, because it just was speaking to me at the time. So getting a sense of it, but not quite being there, but longing to be. A kind of being, but not quite being, and doing that dance and hearing Richard teach.

Mike Petrow: Gosh, I so appreciate that, and I'm so excited for everyone who's gotten to take the course and who will get to take the course. And I've so appreciated this conversation. If I can share a personal story, I share that story about losing my brother when I was studying the hero's journey. One of the things that happened just a few weeks, literally just a few weeks, before I lost my brother, I was talking to a classmate, and he had just lost his son-in-law to suicide, and he said to me, "You know, we all have to take our underworld journey, but it's really easy to get lost in there."

And for most of the human race's existence, we've had shamans and we've had elders who take the journey and find their way back, and then they can show us how to go in, how to take the path of descent, how to go through the underworld, how to take the hero journey, and find our way back home. And I just remember he said to me, "We need shamans. We need elders. We need guides for the journey again." And then just weeks after that, I would lose my brother the same way, and I've been thinking about that for 15 years.

So I appreciate both of you functioning as guides and elders for us in this conversation. I've been thinking lately... When I've been referring to the hero's journey, I've been thinking about it more now as the hero's... Or, excuse me, as the healer's journey, and what it means to undertake the journey of our own healing so we can come back and offer medicine for the world around us.

So my parting question for both of you: So many of our listeners are poised in between the two halves of life. They feel young and they feel old at the same time, or they're like the story you shared, Kirsten, where it might be young people who were initiated into second-half-of-life realities sooner than they wanted to be, or, Patrick, like you talked about, those of us who... We've been through a few cycles, and we have more to go.

What advice would you give anyone listening who's taking the journey for the first time, taking the journey yet again, trying to hold the tension of both of those types of wisdom? Yeah. It's a super vague question, but really kind of take it wherever you want to go. And how do we be the healers with a thousand faces, really?

Patrick Boland: Just going to end with those easy questions?

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Just go anywhere you want to go.

Patrick Boland: So for your first question, the way I've thought about it over the years is, I remember having a conversation with a spiritual director when I first read *Falling Upward*, and the spiritual director said, "You know what? That's one framing. It's one developmental framing of how life unfolds. It's not the only one. And again, it's a model. Don't let it become the truth for you. Hold it loosely." And that was very helpful for me.

And as I look at my own life, I see multiple cycles, some small and some rather large, some that last weeks, some that last years, of departure, descent, return, departure, descent, return. So a lot of the time, I was going, "Oh, is this the transition into the second half of life? Oh, is this the one? Is this kind of the big fall?" And now I'm kind of going, "No, you don't have to spot it, and maybe it doesn't even look like that."

In fact, maybe the overarching model is the Paschal Mystery, where some people call it the process of sanctification. So we're letting go. We're experiencing more of who we are and more of God's love, and we're allowing that to change us. And then we're living, and then we suffer, and then it's difficult, and we try, and relationships break down, or whatever is happening, and then we are changing as we go.

And so, rather than trying to map it onto, "Are we there yet? Am I there yet?" I'd say to go with it. And I'm saying this to myself as much as to any listeners, because I need to be reminded of this. Go with it, because it's hard to know where it's going. You're never fully there. You're never fully home in the way that you'd like to be. There's moments and there's seasons of nostos, of being home. But just go with the cycle, and trust the process, and trust that you're being held. Trust that you're being loved by God, no matter how shattered it can feel. So that would be my overall answer to your first part. I hope that makes sense.

Mike Petrow: That's brilliant. Kirsten.

Kirsten Oates: Thanks, Mike. This will be a little bit of a summary of what I've said already, and that is, as I reflect on my life's journey, one of the most important things for me to remember is what's most true about me, and that is that I live and move and have my being in God, that the universe is trustworthy, and that I am the generosity of God, that God's loving me into my being. And in those ways, I'm already home.

And so, I try and live my life in alignment with that truth. I try and be a generous, loving person, and I find myself failing at that again and again because of my own unhealed wounds and my own life story. And so, that's my work to do. And I use all the tools at my disposal to try and work on those things and be as loving as I can, and I put effort into that.

But I do that knowing deep down in my soul that even if I remain broken, even as I remain broken, even as I continue to make mistakes, that God loves me through and through and through just as I am. And as I've gone my way, coming back again and again to that sense of love and compassion, that's ultimately where I found my healing, and I think that's the place that I draw from when I try and heal and help others.

Mike Petrow: That's fantastic. Thank you so much. You both have been guides, elders, and healers with a thousand faces for all of us by sharing this wisdom today in this episode. This has been such

a good conversation. I've enjoyed this so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you both so much for your time and being a part of Everything Belongs with us.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you, Mike, for the wonderful way you held this together and for sharing some of the depths of your own story. Thank you for being willing to do that. Yeah. And Patrick, always wonderful to be with you. Thank you.

Patrick Boland: As with you, Kirsten. And thank you, Mike. It was fun. I really enjoyed it. Great conversation. I could keep on talking, I tell you.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Me, too.

Mike Petrow: Same. If Corey wasn't here with a hook, we could talk about this for another hour.

Paul Swanson: Mike, it was so fun to listen to this episode and to listen to this conversation between you and Patrick and Kirsten, really touching the notes of the hero's journey. And as you know, I was a bit on my own journey during that time, battling COVID and seeking recovery from that. Back in full spirit and health. I just love the way that y'all distilled the hero's journey into naming the beats of leaving the familiar, facing adversity, and returning home transformed.

Mike Petrow: It's such a beautiful pattern that I think so many of us can relate to. And I have to be honest, my favorite moment in the episode was Kirsten talking about how, in encountering the hero's journey, she didn't find heroes and voices that she could relate to until she pivoted to the Christian mystics, and then found all these profound women mystics, whose stories spoke to her.

I hope in the listening to this, our listeners themselves have reflected back on where they've found guides, heroes, and folks whose lives give them a pattern that they can relate to. Yeah. This notion, leaving the familiar, facing adversity, and returning transformed. And I think for me, I was really moved by the idea of thinking it in terms of a healer's journey, and that might involve the pattern of leaving the familiar, facing adversity, doing our personal healing work, which is ongoing, and returning transformed with healing for the world. And I wonder if our listeners can relate to that.

Paul Swanson: I love that story about Kirsten, because I think there's such a treasure trove of heroes that we can look to and heroines that we can look to, whether it's in literature or film or spiritual traditions, that we can learn to emulate from and find these patterns in our own stories.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. It's just really beautiful, and a great thing to leave our listeners with, reflecting on that, and then thinking about the hero's journey or the healer's journey. As you've taken this journey with us today, between now and our next episode, we encourage you to reflect on these questions. Where are you in your own journey? What adversity are you facing right now? What familiar and safe situations is it asking you to leave behind? What healing work are you being asked to do right now? And in doing that healing work, how will you be asked to return with medicine to offer the world around you?

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Corey Wayne: And me, Corey Wayne. The music you hear is composed and provided by our friends, Hammock. And we'd also like to thank Sound On Studios for all of their work in post-production. From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.