

Soul-Medicine: Start Here

by Amanda Fall



This is Why

“I am ragged and whole. Aching tired and burning bright. I am too much and not enough. Held breath anxiety and deep sigh oceans of peace. I hold it all. There is room enough for every too much/just-right piece of me.”

I scrawl tender truths in my waiting art journal. Heart pounds in throat, thick with yearning. I smear luscious color in oil pastel, jagged strokes speaking emotions with no name. I tear collage elements that shiver me, tape them down without worrying about straight lines or perfection.

All I need is this: to express, to spill what fills me, to find my breath again.

Color is now spread, ragged bits of my heart taped into place, words whispered into the safe space of my journal. My hands still. Heartbeat

slows. Breath comes softer, gentler.

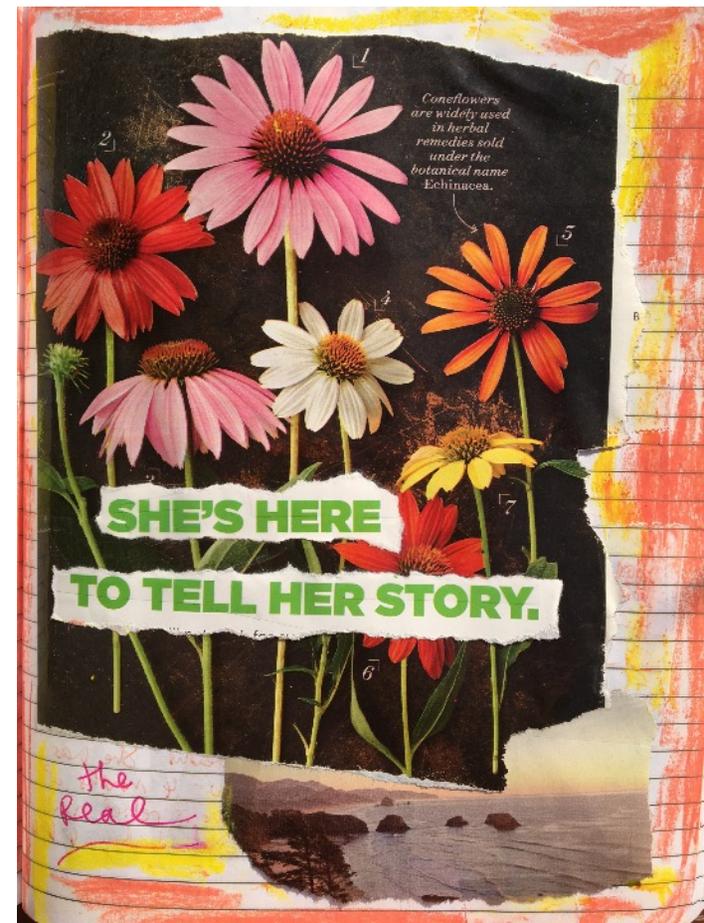
I am home again in my skin, in that calm space at my core. Shaken out. Emptied. Yet somehow fuller, more satisfied than I was before.

This is why I art journal. To find my way back to me. To breathe with more ease. To relieve anxiety, stress, doubt. To celebrate joys and lessen ache. To tell the story of my soul. To honor every ragged, whole part of me.

My Art Journal Journey

I’ve kept many kinds of art journals since about 2010 (after learning about this practice via Connie Solera of Dirty Footprints Studio).

I’ve loved making some more elaborate, detailed, carefully-curated art journals. I’ve used everything from altered books, beautifully bound bought books that scared me a bit with perfect creamy paper, handmade “junk journals,” etc.





My favorite way to art journal? It's with "the messier, the better" philosophy, created with many layers of collage elements (mostly magazine) and yummy Scotch tape (my not-so-secret guilty pleasure) and bold strokes of oil pastel. In the past several years, I've treasured these books, filling them with visions of life that I aspire to, along with heartpounding exploration into life-right-here.

I used to spend hours creating in my beloved books. Then . . .

My son, Maverick, was born in March of 2017. He's—I'm *pausing to find words hefty enough*—he's a walking miracle. Well, a running, hopping, squiggling, dancing, bouncing, squirming miracle. I adore him. I do. I do.

But. Recovery and reentry and re-discovering myself after his birth and as I've become a first-time and stay-at-home mama in my thirties? Whew. Lemme tell you. It's not been easy. A lifetime of intensity could squeeze into those four words: *it's not been easy*. Postpartum panic attacks. Borderline postpartum depression. The continued

lifelong battle with generalized anxiety and depression. And a sweet boy who's struggled with sleep since the day he was born, meaning most days I'm running on shreds of sleep myself.

It's a lot, loves. I've needed art journaling more than ever, but have less time, less mental space, less physical and emotional energy than I've ever had before.

For a while, I couldn't bring myself to journal at all, because the brief moments I *could* spend felt like nothing compared to the delicious hours I used to while away with paints and markers and complicated layouts and uninterrupted inspiration.

I went from a very quiet, introverted life to a lovely boisterous loud life with a toddler! My system's in a bit of a shock, and I'm still finding my way.

Thank goodness, thank the universe, thank Love, thank Source—my dry spell didn't last long, and



I'm solidly into a new approach that works with my current life. Whew. *Yes.*

Start Where You Are

**(even when it's not
where you want to be)**

In March of 2018, I finally dug deeper into my friend Teresa Robinson's offerings. I'd known generically of her Right Brain Planner work, admiring it from afar, but didn't think I "needed" her system because I'd already been art journaling for years. Well, thankfully I listened to universe-nudges, and finally looked closer. Teresa's system of "art-journal planning" sparked something within my exhausted, worn-out soul. A new way. A fresh possibility. I tried out some of her methods, adapting them to my own tastes and what I had time for (this often means five-ten minutes while kiddo plays by my feet). I immediately fell in love with my new art journal—a wilder, messier, less precious version of ones I'd kept in the past.

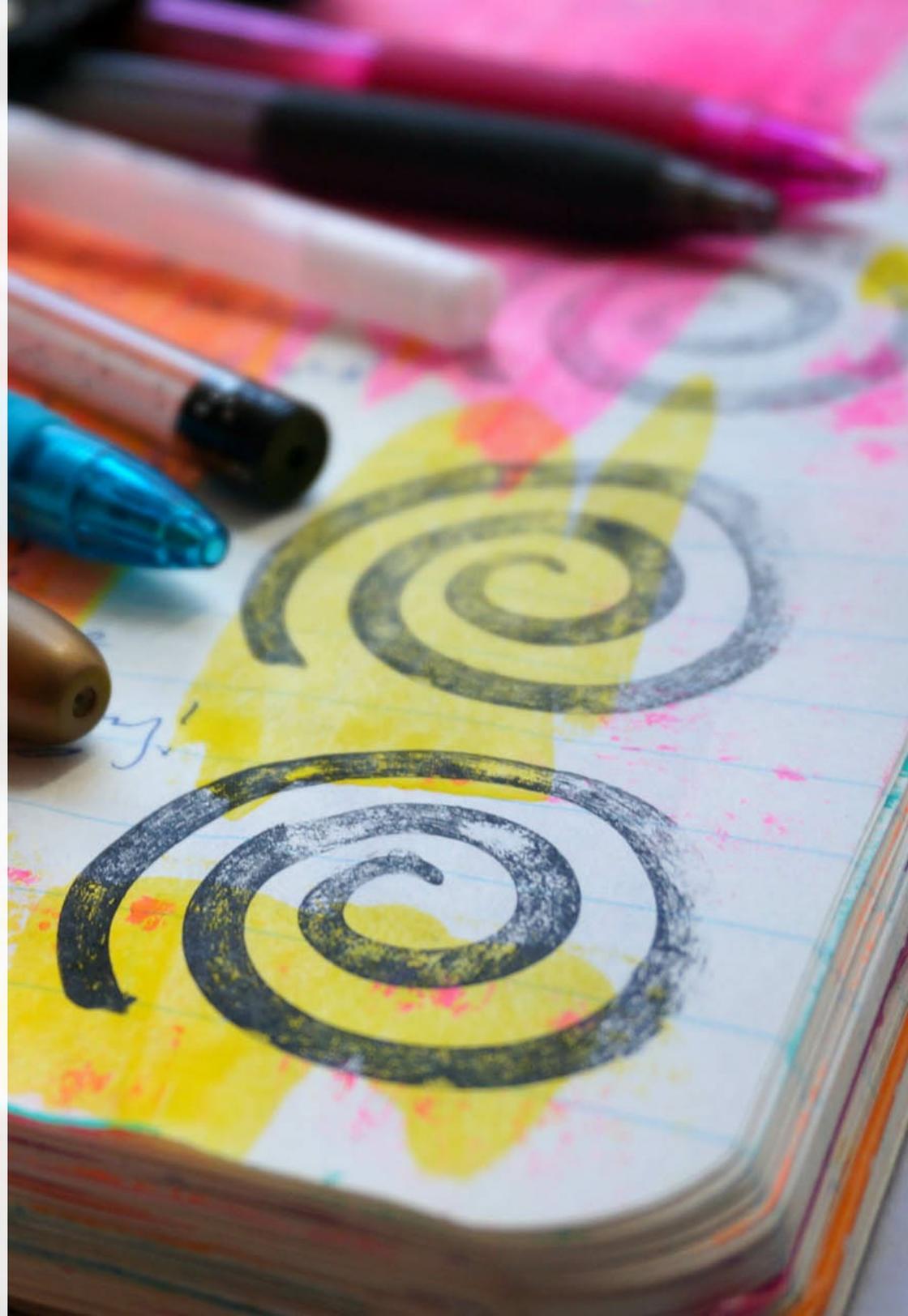
My altered composition book soon became my treasured companion (pilfered from deep in one of my mom's closets, its already worn-in quality filling me with delight only an artist would understand: a big chunk of pages torn out, cover already battered and worn, with no possibility of me being intimidated by pristine pages). I brought the book with

me everywhere, shoving it into my diaper bag with no concern (it was already beautifully tattered, so what harm could I do?).

This art journal, kept in a style similar to what Effy calls “sweet trash journaling,” was exactly what I needed—a safe space when my life felt completely unknown and unpredictable. Somewhere I could spill my fears, my tears, my worries, my joys, my sleepless doubts and my triumphant celebrations.

After years of keeping my written and visual journals separate (and, actually, mostly abandoning written journaling after embracing it wholly in my childhood all the way up to college, having gotten weary of hearing myself say the same tired thought over and over), I now joyfully throw everything together into one messy/beautiful book.

I’m learning to fling caution to the wind, creating whenever and wherever I can, as opportunity finds me (or as I run after it, clutching, begging, *I-need-art-right-now-PLEASE*). My first “sweet trash” style journal I filled, fast and furious, from March-July. That’s the quickest I’ve ever completed a full-size art journal!



Sometimes,

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I am ragged and whole. Aching tired and
burning bright. I am too much and

not enough.

Held breath
anxiety and
deep sigh
oceans of
peace.

I hold
it all.

there is room
enough for
every too
much/just
right piece
of me.

What do you hold?

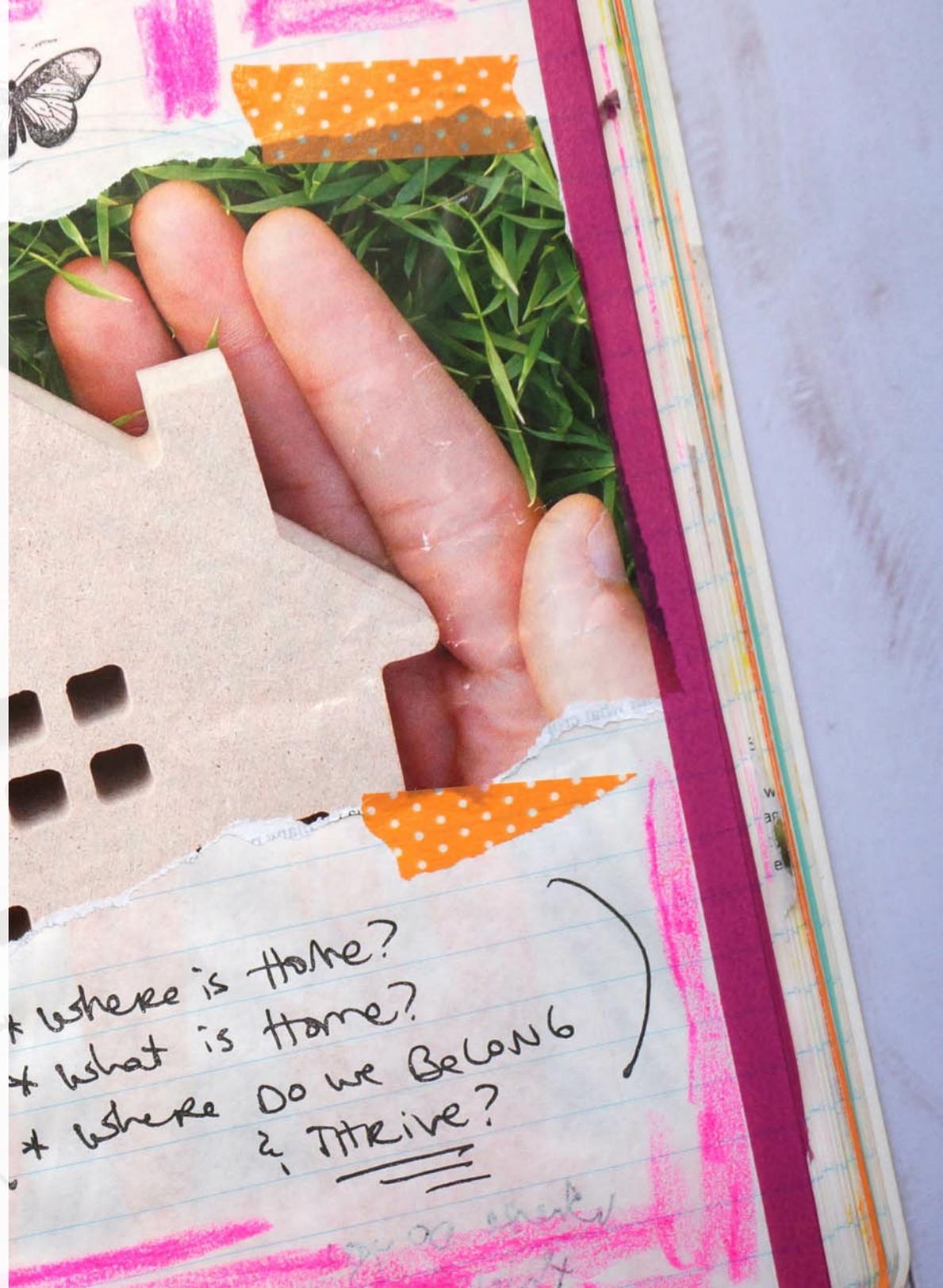
I used to luxuriate over my art journals, sometimes taking years to finish one book. And I love those more carefully-kept books—I do.

These new, messy, wild, tattered, of-the-moment art journals, though? They feel more alive and more precious to me than any I've ever kept . . . simply because they are the ones I've needed the most.

What Do You Need?

I'm so grateful to be rediscovering and redefining my "why" for art journaling. Over the years, I've had many reasons for keeping art journals . . . and really, they are still valid. But I'm learning that my creative practice is as malleable and adaptable as I need it to be. If I'm willing to sit deep in the wondrous mess and muck of my real life, listening to the voice within and beneath it all—I'll hear exactly what my soul needs. That need may be different than it was ten years ago, or even ten days or ten minutes ago.

I wasted valuable time wishing my creative practice looked more like anyone else's, or even looked like my own used to! It's so easy to get caught up in com-



parisons and self-doubt. But for me, that means I've lost sight of what matters most about my creative practice: it's *mine*. Nobody else's.

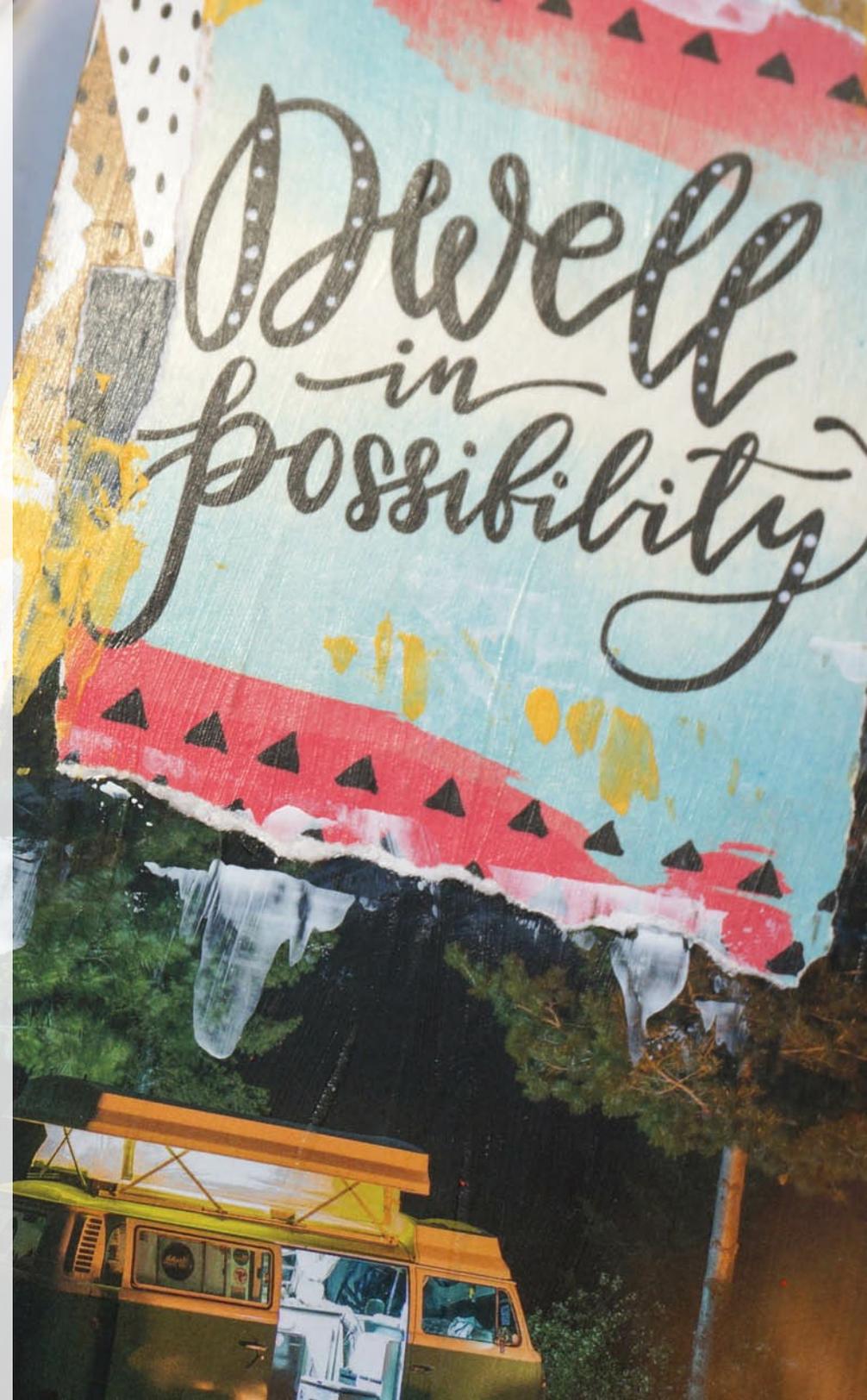
And your practice? It's yours!

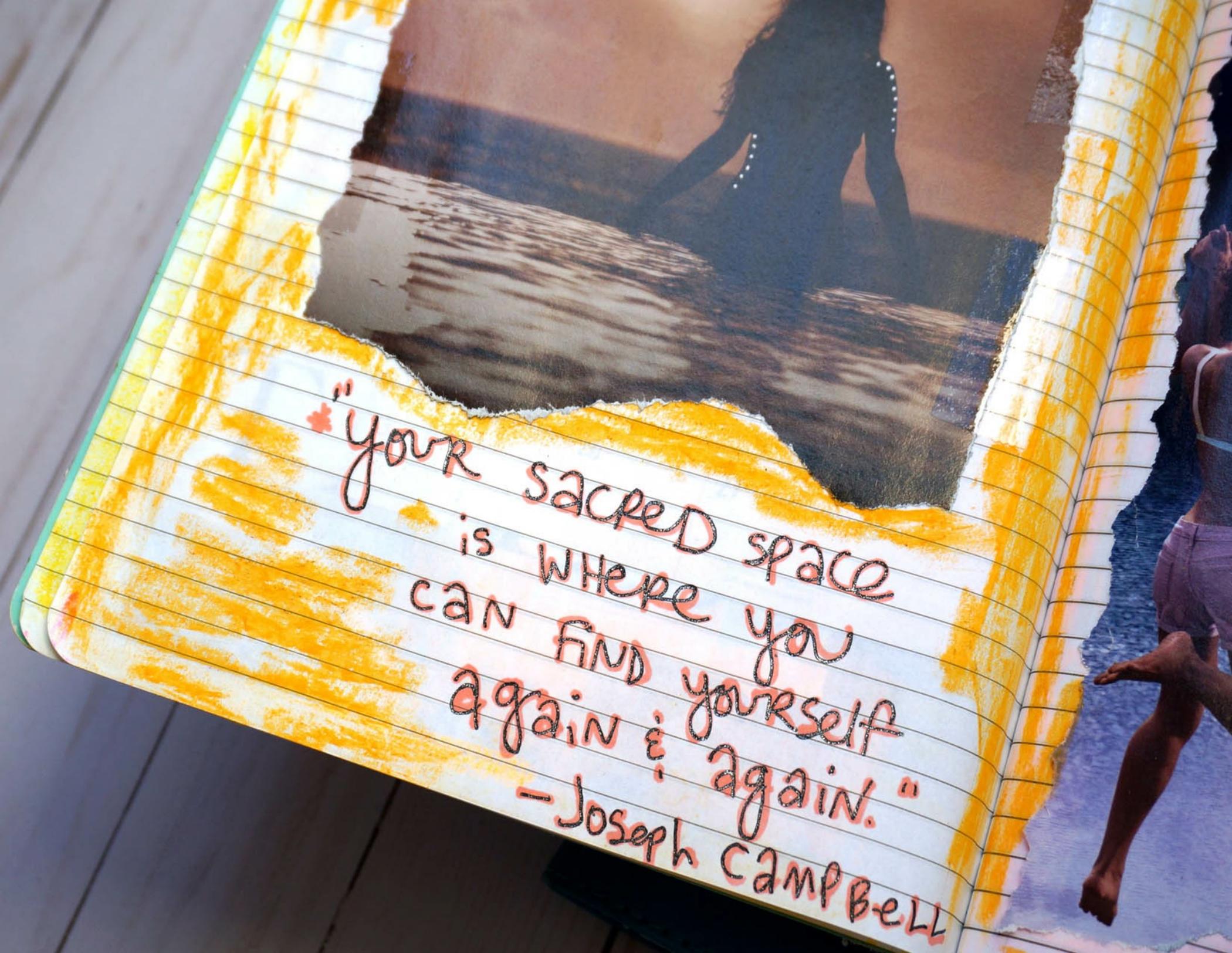
It sounds so obvious now. But somehow it's easy to forget. Creative expression is about letting our souls breathe, about making meaning in the mess of our lives, about whispering our secrets and singing our joys, about getting down deep to the true of us. Just as we are, right where we are. Here. Now.

I'm learning (and relearning, as often as needed) to look to others' journaling practices and lessons only so long as they inspire and motivate me, and to keep jealousy/comparison/yearning-for-something-other-than-my-own-trueness checked at the door. I don't have time for that! Only time for more ART! Right?!

My current practice fits my sleep-deprived, anxious, busy, diaper-in-one-hand and paintbrush-in-another life. That's more than good enough, if it does what it's intended: to create a space all my own, a reminder of who I've always been, a witness to who I am, a guide to who I'm becoming.

What do *you* need from your practice?





"Your sacred space
is where you
can find yourself
again & again."
- Joseph Campbell

My Go-To Supplies

- cheap composition book (takes away the fear/resistance of imperfection & lets me embrace the yummy mess)
- old magazines (can usually find free at library or donated from friends); I especially like *Afar*, *Travel & Leisure*, *O*, *Real Simple*, *National Geographic*
- junk mail (you'd be surprised what gems hide in ads when you look closer)
- oil pastels (cheap ones work great in composition books)
- cheap craft or student-grade acrylic paint, scraped across paper with old club cards or rolled with brayer
- Scotch tape, washi
- glue sticks
- gel pens, Stabilo All multi-surface pencils, white Sakura Gelly Roll, Papermate flair, Staedtler fineliner
- stencils and rubber stamps, especially alphabet and my personally meaningful symbols (butterflies, spirals, etc.)

For this style of messy/spur-of-the-moment art journaling, I wholly embrace inexpensive supplies that are readily accessible. This is a great chance to play with whatever materials are sitting around your house. Have fun! This is about expression, not perfection. Let loose. Get messy.



RELEASE

YOUR

ROAR

Banishing fear with Love



hack
Must-
The sea:
obligatio
beat the
Must-Do
Hack: M.

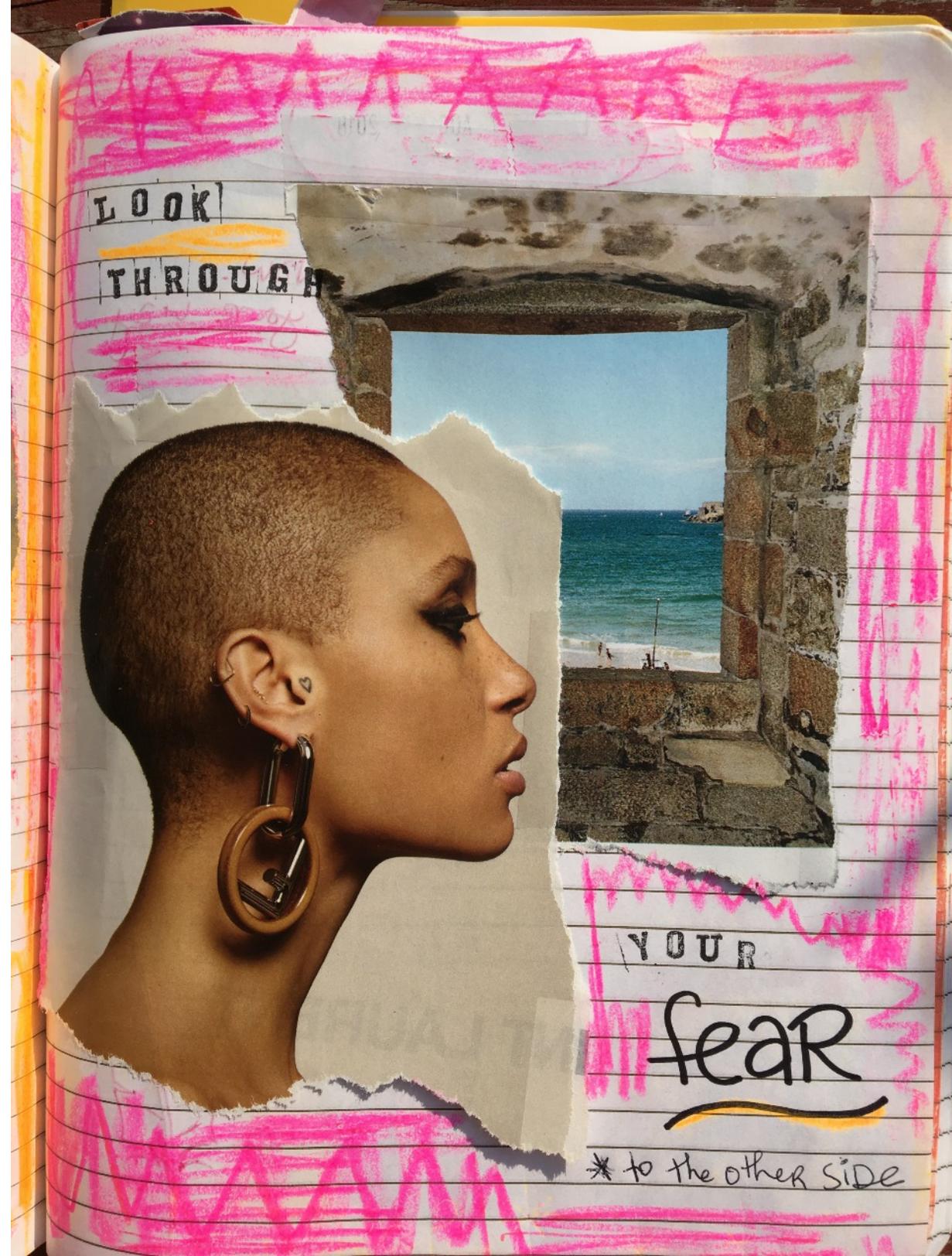
A

5-Minute Creation

I'm queen of the five-minute art journal lately. Sometimes that's all the time I've got before kiddo needs me. What can you do in five to ten minutes? You'd be surprised!

- prep backgrounds: scrape acrylic paints, scribble oil pastel
- flip through magazines and gather a heap of inspiration: what sparks you? What makes you curious? What words resonate?
- rubber-stamp or stencil throughout your book; add some to upcoming pages, or boost detail to spreads in progress
- journal how you're feeling right now; add color with a "box" of washi around your words
- write song lyrics
- play with your pile of magazine collage inspiration; move a few bits around your page until they feel "right." Tape or glue into place
- flip through your previous pages. Sigh and nod with their truth. Be proud!
- write a mantra/reminder for your day
- scribble your to-do list; add messy color
- sketch your favorite symbol

What else can you create in five? Go!



I see flocks lifting,
testing, circling,
practicing
their movement
and my tired heart
lifts too





Soul-Prompts

I'm a big believer in the power of questions and thoughtful prompts. It's not even about finding the answers, necessarily, but the practice of sitting with the wonder itself that expands my being. I also allow myself to answer differently each time I explore the same prompt, because we are learning and evolving every day—isn't that the point of this beautiful/awful/aching/ healing life?

Here are a few of my go-to soul-prompts:

- what sparks my soul?
- what smothers my soul-fire?
- what do I need in this moment?
- I am/am not . . .
- what if . . .
- I believe/don't believe . . .
- what does ____ look like, sound like, taste like, smell like, feel like? (Can be abstract, like: fear, love, pain, dreaming)
- I want to remember/forget . . .
- right here, right now
- if I could tell my past self/future self anything, it would be . . .

What would you add?

Remember: your practice is YOURS.



you ARE NOT ALONE

Fear no more.*

*Umm... well, maybe fear less. (OK.)

(Lion-Heart)

BRING IT. ALL OF IT.

UNTAMED.

LION HEART. ❤️

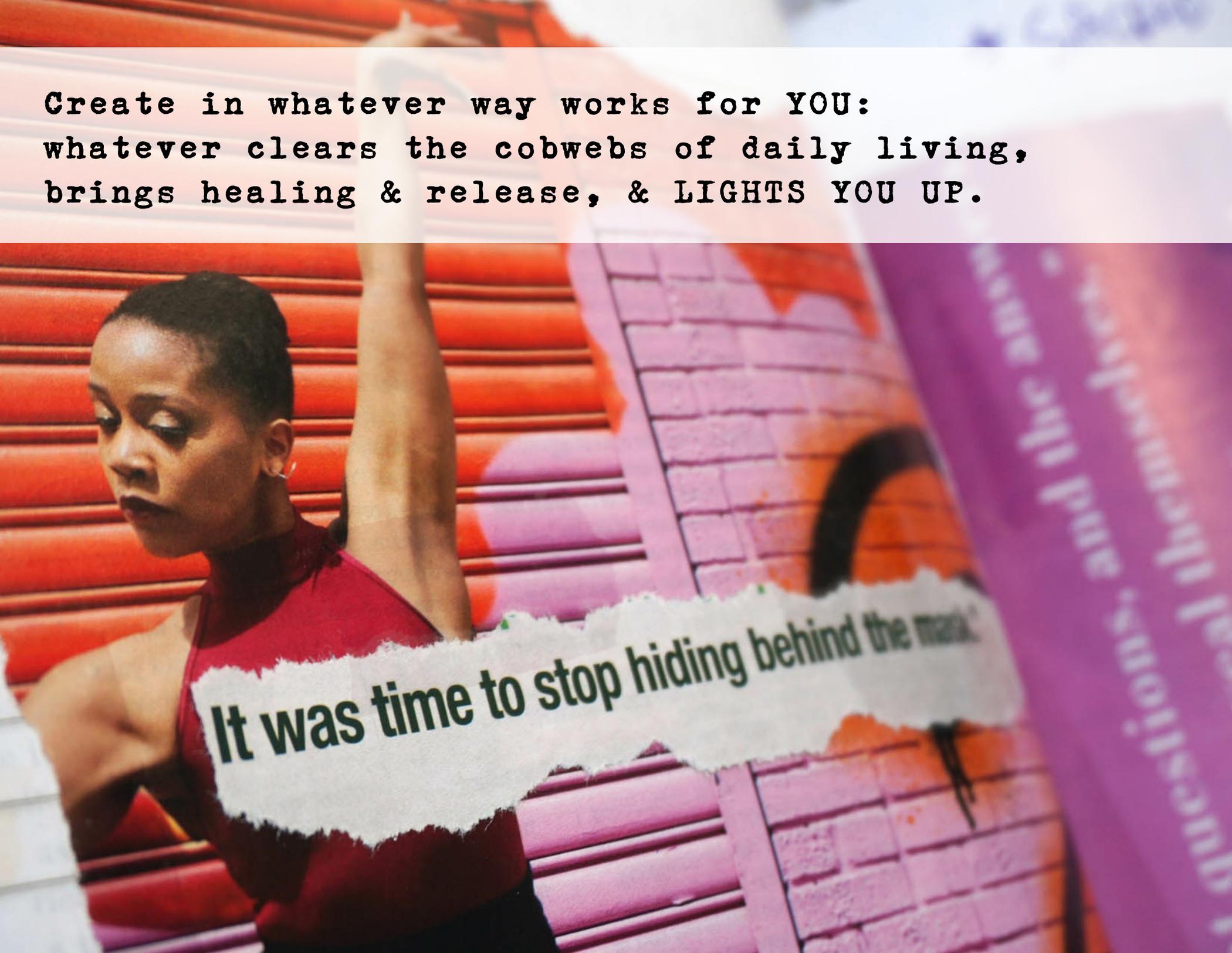
Who knew something so powerful could be so gentle?

(ROAR)

Your art journal need not look like anyone else's.
Does it bring you joy? Does it make you feel alive?
That's (more than) good enough!



**Create in whatever way works for YOU:
whatever clears the cobwebs of daily living,
brings healing & release, & LIGHTS YOU UP.**

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a red tank top, is shown from the chest up. She is tearing a piece of white paper with jagged edges from a pink brick wall. The paper has the text "It was time to stop hiding behind the mask." written on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background consists of a pink brick wall and a purple banner with some illegible text. The lighting is bright and even.

It was time to stop hiding behind the mask.



RISE

And always: start where you are (whatever that looks like). Remember who you are. Who you were. Who you want to become.

THIS is your soul-medicine.

your burdens -
all that keeps
you small &
afraid.

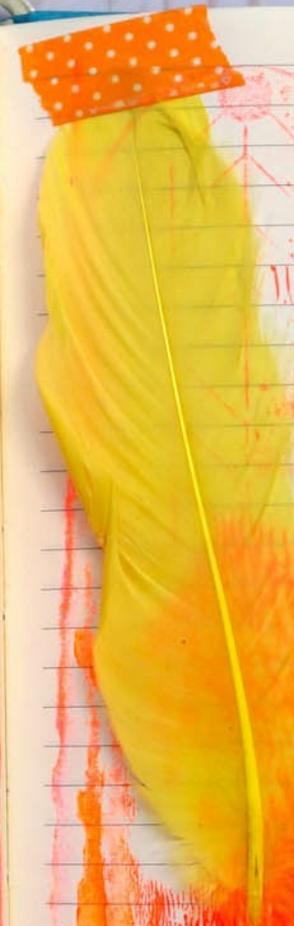
TURN

your t B U t h



you were
made for
JOY.

become



Rise



your

S O U L

L E T

* SHED
OLD YOUR
when she SKIN
LONGER no
fits.



Amanda Fall is a truth-speaker, love-believer, and heart-on-her-sleeve. She's the proud creator and curator of [The Phoenix Soul](#), a vibrant online community (including free collaborative blog, indie digital magazine, private Facebook gathering, and more). You can also connect with Amanda on [Patreon](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).