



INTRODUCTION

*"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your
one wild and precious life?" – Mary Oliver*

- Are stress, anxiety and overwhelm everyday companions for you?
- Does your life feel like it's just one struggle after another?
- Do you blame life and others (or yourself) for why it's so difficult?
- Are you missing out on what you always dreamed life could be?

If so, there's a reason for it all ... and it's not the reason you may think. ***A Field Guide to Life*** may be the choice you didn't think you had. Its pages offer a path beyond the stress, struggle, blame ... and lost dreams.

This work has its roots in *my* 30 years of struggle and in *my* broken dreams. It explores "why this stuff keeps happening" to many/most of us ... *and* what you can do about it – *now*. My intention is to open a path for you, a path to the life you may have only dreamt about ... until now.

I spent 30 years of adult life following a "plan" laid out by my parents, which was strongly upheld by teachers, friends, managers, society, the media. I knew a lot, worked hard, got it all right, avoided mistakes, was nice to others, stayed busy, didn't rock the boat (OK, maybe a bit on the professional side), and made good money. Clueless I was living someone else's life and not my own, I felt "successful." Although eating well, I was starving. Yet it was the only 'way' I knew; why would I question it? But after the loss – in a single year – of [another] marriage, a job, home, retirement account, and all I'd been taught mattered, I recall feeling lost in wilderness, wondering, "if all I *thought* was 'me' is gone, *who am I?*"

And so life's true journey began. I recalled a time years earlier when an associate had taken me to spend a morning with monks (the abbot was a friend of his), to help me *get it*, to trade my "human doing" badge for "human being." The visit scared me; I had my own plans. Yet I knew

(intuitively, not consciously, as I now see) that the visit was a *seed*, an “orchard invisible” as a Welsh proverb claims, a clue to a world of possibility awaiting me. Back then, however, I was terrified that if the seed took root, “my” world would crumble. So I ignored it (but never forgot).

Fast forward, and here I sit, writing about my journey today, on a path I’ve created *consciously* for the past 20 years. Rocks still litter the road, but now I polish them, where before I’d kick them (often until my feet hurt). It’s the same me, yet everything about “who I *am*” is different.

As I look closely, with a level of clarity and perspective I only *thought* I had back then, I see that there was only one ingredient distinguishing *that* me from *this* me – **conscious awareness**. I know now what I could not believe, imagine, accept or even consider then ... that I’d lived those 30 years on unconscious autopilot, thinking it was all reality, just determined to follow the rules of what I’d been taught *should be*.

Do you know how exhausting it is to spend your energy trying to turn “what isn’t” into “what should be,” when you don’t even know there’s no such thing as “should be” to begin with? Maybe you do.

Do you know what it feels like to realize that you’d been blaming life, others, world, luck, smarts, effort, even yourself, for the stress – when all along it came from unknowingly trying to live *someone else’s* thinking instead of your own? Maybe you do.

Do you know the sinking feeling of realizing how much of life has flowed under the bridge without your awareness? Maybe you do.

But ... can you imagine the joy of seeing life anew, as a place of huge potential, a stage on which your dreams and deepest longing unfold, an unfolding that responds to the power of your conscious thought and deepest truth? Maybe you can (or maybe not).

This is the world I inhabit today. It’s who I am. I realize now it’s who I always was, but I denied the glimpses into this “me” that continually showed up in my life, determined as I was to follow the program instead. I find it curious now just how strongly attached I was to my *lack* of consciousness, yet swearing I “had it handled,” that I was “right.”

I have a suspicion that my story may have much in common with your story. It’s only a guess on my part, but *you* know what’s true for you. Whose life are you living? Are you sure? Do you dare find out – for sure? Let’s set out for the territory, and see what it has to teach us.

A Field Guide to Life is a collection of essays exploring the ***significant challenges facing our lives and times*** ... challenges that hold us back from authentic, wholehearted living. Each essay/chapter/idea:

- depicts one aspect of “*the way we think it is*” and shows how it *isn't*
- exposes our stress, anxiety and struggle as a result of thinking we *believe* is conscious and purposeful, so we can't possibly imagine it's *unconscious*, and that therefore, *we* are the cause of our stress
- explores the insidious connection among consciousness, cultural wiring and evolutionary adaptation, and how they conspire to leave us doubting, or altogether denying, new ideas (including all you read here) ... thereby perpetuating life's struggle
- explores the possibility – joy, peace, freedom and meaning – that comes from “waking up to who you've been all along”
- offers everyday practices to light your path from here to there.

Each idea is rooted in the same simple yet powerful premise: *while you may blame life, others, life's challenges or yourself for the struggle, the true culprit is how you've learned to see and think ... about life, others, challenges, yourself.* But because you have no reason to believe that, you have no reason to go there looking for answers. How you see and think is not only invisible, it's also adopted; it's the thinking of others, in the form of old lessons, so your certainty may lack a firm foundation.

If you're to live with self-trust, peace and meaning, you need to change the *thinking* that keeps you from it. If you're to change your thinking, you need to make that thinking visible. By learning to *consciously* reflect on the “*life story of your thinking*” – as opposed to the life story of your *life* – you *see* old lessons, and *see* how unconscious attachment to them has limited you.

I invite you to join me, as a companion on *my* journey, yet with the intention of creating *your* journey. Our paths are uniquely our own. Yet the consciousness needed to walk them is shared; it's the power that makes us human, the power that confers the ability to choose the course our lives will take. (And it's the same power that allows us to deny this choice, favoring outdated stories instead.)

Two different paths; two very different outcomes. Which path will you choose?