

# Death is a teacher: We are always coming home

05/19/2017 05:26 am ET | Updated 17 hours ago



If we are all traveling home on the path of each life's trajectory, then each passage, each moment is a journey in itself that further equips us to honor the signs that define both the way and the immovable heart of apparent paradox at any point. Every moment counts and all things, whether apparently right or wrong, have a key place when we piece the puzzle. Welcome to Ladies' Stories: Celebrating & connecting women one life lesson at a time. This is a story about a remarkable woman, my teacher Uma Inder, teaching us that we are all equipped by nature to serve the bigger picture.

I met her during my first trip to Bali. This is six years ago now. I walked into the famous Yoga Barn in Ubud to take a hatha yoga class. Or so I thought. What I walked into was something I have never tried before. I have done loads of teacher trainings and have quite a steady asana practice. But never have I encountered this!

Into the class walks a tiny pint-sized woman. Uma. Dressed in white. Long black hair. Black penetrating eyes. Everyone in class stop talking. Everyone's looking. At her. She closes her eyes and opens her mouth. Now, I'd expect a high-pitched voice judging from this small, feminine woman's look, but out of her roll sound waves that wash over us - and beyond I'm sure. A deep, dark, self-confident and somehow universal familiar voice makes sound of ancient mantras that I have never heard before.

What must have been her steady practitioners start singing a long. They start shaking. Howling. Me, I just sit there, jaw dropped. And then we start moving. Stomping. Sweating. This is not a regular 90 minutes asana-thing. It is not wellness. It is not positive psychology-lingo. It is not westernized yoga. It is two and half hours of going back to what feels like the ancient source of yoga. Deep down into the dark. Whirling with the chakras. Diving in. Lifting up. I'm fascinated. I'm sceptic. After class I feel electric. Like all my cells are vibrating with an almost erotic lust for life.

For my remaining weeks in Bali I sit in with Uma and student's from yoga class. No small talk. Only big talk. I have kept coming back many times since. Everyone is welcome. All Uma asks is that you dare speak your truth. Always.

Uma's truth, to be honest, I'm still trying to grasp it here years after meeting her for the first time. My conditioned mind cannot. She cannot be boxed. I'm still learning, forever a student to this wild woman: African-born, of Indian descent, was initiated by a renegade tantric master with whom she lived for a period of seven years in the Balinese jungle and seven more in the world at large in conditions and states which transcended the bonds of consensus reality. Uma is often initially unpalatable to the Western practitioner accustomed to spiritual padding. Time around Uma tends to upset, destabilize, and otherwise rearrange one's manufactured order. In my notebook I write down something she says randomly to one of students:

*I don't require you to like me. I am full in myself. And of myself. I am all I can be and unafraid to become. Some will live their lives by how they are perceived by others. Some will feel afraid of being judged. Everyone longs to be seen in their true Nature, and some dare not be it, because they are afraid they are not likeable. So they wear masks and make themselves small. And sweet. Suppress their ugly sides. Feel shame. A lot of shame. I am open and yet not subject to how you perceive me. Im free to include all darkness and ecstasy.*

Here is Uma.

### **What is your story?**

"Defining the backstory of my life and my conscious relationship to it are dreams - recurring childhood dreams centring around the age of four. In one of them I dreamed of myself in the back of our family sports car - with my brother in the front passenger seat and my mother, a car racer, in the drivers seat - zooming across the savannah in Kenya, the country of our birth. When our car ground to a halt with a puncture, I was the one who was kneeling at the wheel to mend the hole and refill the tyre so our vehicle could be on its way again. I can see me as a small girl with a red skirt (my key garment in dreams and their future fulfilment in waking life). The moment the job is clearly done, the car races off again, and I am left standing, holding the tools. Around me is the rugged sprawl and stretches of certain treachery. To the right of me is a foot path snaking its way, long and smooth, through the dusty brush and stubble of thorny bushes. Prowlers, predators of all ilk with horns, fangs, talons, trunks, thunderous foot stamps and blown-out nostrils all have a place, preying, waiting for me to fall. At every bend a snarly wild beast and in the air a visible scratchy noise. But, at every land bridge the sound as I pass of an all pervasive cosmic hum. Gravitating to the ground underfoot, with only the path to define where I had come from, where I was and where I was going, I walked on alone. And then time within time of each dream, I see what is always waiting, a grass hut with an open door and a man worn by time itself with arms outstretched, for me. A black man. The Father Ancestor of all."

### **Okay, wow, so what were these dreams all about?**

"They laid the path and called me on. Dreams of my father plunging off the edge of a cliff to transform into an eagle and soar away up into the open sky. Dreams of my teacher with Native American blood and astonishing green eyes. Dreams of the electric green giant who tied me without fail night after night to the stone altar outside my hut. Dreams of a young boy at my side, diving into the pool to reemerge with a golden key. Dreams of the same boy with me and our rotating crystalline spire whose spin and speed was ours to regulate. Fantastical and universal as dreams are wont to be, their forms and function crossed nonetheless into my personal, daytime reality."

---

**How and what did that teach you?**

"I was taught that, whether the road be gnarly or easy, I am coming home. I honor death's motives and impact in my life. My beloved mother did die when I was 14. And my big brother who was my greatest friend died in a suicide attempt four years later to be with her again, he wrote. And soon after my father disowned my sister and I to choose his second chance at life. And I walked alone to orient myself towards my instinctual sense of source. I continue on through adversity with the blessings of a job consciously done to serve my ancestors and descendants as I know how. The car in the dream represents to me our lineage or genetic transport. The blood red of my skirt represents powers of resilience, renewal and willingness to freely quest through limitations. The boy who is neither dark nor light diving for the golden key, communicating as one mind without words, is my child who was conceived against the odds. And the green of my master's eyes in ceremony is the same green of the giant's electric body who I met on this plane as the Nature Man, or Pan. My mother's death was seen in the lines of my grandmother's palm and read to her in India by a 'nadi' reader decades beforehand. My mother died of an undiagnosed brain hemorrhage, when she was 36. Every day she had filled my world and overnight she was just gone. Even before word of her death, the ring of the telephone alone propelled me running into an action both familiar and unpremeditated. The action of a head arching back and a mouth open as wide as it can go. The action of a scream. The scream of one word raised over and over again into the yawning black night sky: "Why? Why? Why?". This changed everything. Death rushed in. Death filled my life and life questioned its purpose for being. The questions, just like the dreams, laid the path. Death in multiple forms became the Teacher, ever present until I surrendered to the constancy of its relevance, and in the surrender I felt the fear of fear release its grasp. And the experience of death as a hard master in time relaxed to become the experience of an intimate relating moment to moment with an unswervingly truthful, respected friend."

**How has this affected your life?**

"I realize each time I behold this and other vision-dreams that I am, as we all are, equipped by nature to serve the bigger picture, no matter if I am a little piece of the picture, whether alone or bereft. I am tried and tried by tests and mortal dangers. I am embraced by the path full circle - behind me, under me and ahead. This recognition doesn't so much change me now as it reminds me of what is unchanging about me."

---

**Uma Inder in a box**

**Profession:** Ayurveda & Yoga Sadhana

**Female role model:** Mothers

**What does being woman mean to you:** Embodied powers of resilience, regeneration and conductivity in any sense - gross and subtle. In a woman's body, I draw viscerally from a multi directional emotive range of receptivity, assimilation, renewal and transmission. My greatest honour in this current human form is to have been born a woman as a receptacle of a seed of life, unfolding and nurturing a seeming miracle, in real time.

**Best advice a woman ever gave you:** My midwife said: "Relax. Now push!"

Read on and get more inspiration at [umainder.com](http://umainder.com)

***Ladies, let's connect globally! Nominate a wise woman for me to interview or contribute to Ladies' Stories by sharing your own story and life lesson. Submissions or questions email: [info@karenpallisgaard.com](mailto:info@karenpallisgaard.com)***