



JAN DESAI'S

# COMPASS ROSE

A Weekly Roadmap to an Authentic Life

Get Your Bearings and Stay on Course to the Life of Your Dreams

## IN THIS ISSUE

- School's out!
- Trying to be a gentle, guiding mother
- Memories of a unique boy named Tom
- The spectrum in each of us

## Diagnosis: Human

In this week's Compass Rose, we discuss the spectrum of "normal", and come to realize that normal is anything but. We are all divinely unique, and that uniqueness leads each of us on a different journey towards a truly authentic life.

It's mid afternoon and I'm sitting at my desk looking out the window at the dappled sunlight that falls across the serene face of the white marble buddha in my meditation garden.



As I sip my strong green tea, all is *peacefully quiet* in our home. I relish this absence of noise even more today because in 90 minutes we will mark the end of another school year.

My fabulous lot of peanuts will **chaotically burst through the front door** loaded down with bags and bundles of completed work, art projects, broken pencils and crayons, chewed up erasers, and pockets full of treasures that had taken up residence in the classroom over the past months. I sigh as I think about

sorting through it all and the detente it will take to get these *proud Picasso's* to give up any of it. *It's a bittersweet time*. I marvel at how all four munchkins have flourished over the past nine months, growing in independence and self-confidence, and developing an inquisitive and authentic love of learning.



I'm already something of a pro when it comes to kids and schooling, having already nurtured a 39-year-old daughter and a 26-year-old son through the trials and tribulations of getting an education. As I look back, I still believe that *all children should come with handbooks* to diminish the mistakes and damage we parents can inflict ***even with their best interests at heart***. Every interaction provided a valuable insight and an appreciation that while they may have been the students tromping off to school every morning with backpacks in tow and

lunchboxes in hand, I was the **greater student of life**. And like all students, I've made more mistakes than I prefer to acknowledge.

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Yet, I'm **lucky**. When I decided to have children again at 55, I got the opportunity to do it all anew. So this time, I'm operating from a space of *greater wisdom and insight and deeper patience*, with the knowledge that everything will turn out as it is meant to. (Which is, more often than not, in great *opposition* to how *I* think it should go down!)

This time around, I'm embracing what it means to be a *cheerleader and an advocate* for these little ones *without being a helicopter mommy, constantly hovering around, behind, and over them* trying to ensure that **they live up to my lofty intentions and desires**. I fully embrace the truth that this is **their** journey, **their** unique path. True it's early – the older twins are only in kindergarten and the younger twins are in preschool - but I'm as proud of them and their development as I am of myself. In just a few days, their progress

reports will be in my hands and *I will see them through the eyes of their team of teachers* and learn more about the journey they are beginning in the world **beyond** our walls.

Their journey makes me think back on *my own* school days. When I do, I am sharply ricocheted back to the midwest United States in 1966, and St. Mary's Grade School. It is the afternoon of the last day of fourth grade. The warm outside temperatures were seeping into the classroom through the wall of tall, opened windows. My fellow classmates and I were *far more interested in the arboreal playground created by the mature elm trees just outside our classroom windows* and the antics of the bushy tailed gray squirrels jumping and seemingly playing tag from limb to limb. I swear you could **hear** the alluring call of summer.

As I close my eyes, the picture comes to life. I smell the chalk dust that swirled in the fluorescent light. The large blackboards that covered two full walls of the classrooms. In front, standing sentinel, was our teacher's large steel desk piled high with books, papers, and her grade book. The copper loudspeaker cantilevered at 45 degrees in the high corner as if watching our antics as we tried to sit still in our long rows of desks.

We had been *meticulously* trained to line the left edge of our desks to the bisecting corner

of the linoleum floor squares beneath our feet. *Conformity was everything.* However, a single desk was segregated from the rest, its back to the radiator. In it, sat Tom.



I still see Tom's skinny boyish face. *Tom was "that" kid.* He was always uncomfortable in his desk, never able to sit still for long. His crew cut enhanced his awkwardness. His non-normative behavior meant that he was constantly calling attention to himself. *Very little of that attention was good or helpful or positive.*

That afternoon, the teacher was handing out the end-of-year report cards - the traditional ranking of our aptitude over the last quarter in the subjects that filled our days from 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM. On the left side of the card were our traditional subjects: reading, math, geography, etc., along with a grade for each.

On the right side were our work habits and social aptitudes...things like completes assignments, listens in class, works and plays well with others.

As we sat with our cards in our hands, Tom acted up once again. The teacher lost her temper and summoned him to her desk. Once there, *she demanded his report card.* When he handed it over, she announced to us all that his disruptive behavior deserved a checkmark so that his parents could see how *naughty* he was. Then, as Tom stood in front of all of us, feet shuffling as he stared at his shoes, *the teacher announced that because of his slow progress in every subject, he was being retained in the fourth grade.*

While that experience scared me then, as I look back on it now, *my heart breaks.* I can .



only imagine the humiliation this child felt and the scarring he endured as a result of this experience.

There's another reason why Tom's memory resonates so strongly with me. You see, *I too struggled in school*. My academic aptitude was less than average. Throughout my grade school years, I was constantly compared to my 18-month-younger sister who was, in a word, **brilliant**. She was a **beautiful, bright, talented, and compliant child** who was **meticulous** in her schoolwork. She was also quiet and never caused an ounce of trouble.

In my eyes, she was the perfect student. *I was the opposite, closer to Tom than my sister.*

Like so many of you, I was born into an era that didn't recognize or understand children that were differently-abled. Tom's alienation reminds me of my own. **There's no blame here for how any of it played out. This was my path.** While I was late to understand the unique journey I was on, the gift and the grace that it gives is the realization that the journey is indeed glorious. **All of it.**

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*My friends, life is never black and white.* The end points on a spectrum do not define us. Our attempts to **categorize, label and sort ourselves and others** are at best, crude, and at worst, false and misleading. The seeming success of receiving an A in one of life's many subjects is always counterbalanced with the seeming failure of receiving an F in another area. ***Complete success is as unachievable as complete failure.*** No one is infallible and perfection is a lie that is often used to trap us and keep us from becoming who we really are.



Instead, *we all dwell on a spectrum between these two arbitrary and artificial points.* It is in these subtle shades of inbetweenness that we are able to share, that we are able to meet, and that we are able to see that *we are defined by our failures and foibles as much as we are by our successes and strengths.* *This commonality is our birthright and our legacy.*

Embracing the inbetweenness allows us to become **deliciously human and gloriously real!** It allows us to become conscious, aware, and awake. It births compassion and equanimity. We know that we are forever expanding. We realize that we are always evolving. We understand that **we are all Tom and we are all my sister** and that they are a part of each other as much as we are a part of both of them. It is **this interconnectedness, this empathy, that defines us**, not a label or a diagnosis or any other arbitrary attempt at categorization.

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Not one of us is perfect. Yet, that imperfection does not mean that we are flawed. The truth is that we are all beautifully imperfect. *We are each a facet in the enormous jewel of existence, reflecting and refracting the light of life. We are divinely human!* So, celebrate the diversity and difference that surrounds us. The moment we embrace this truth, life becomes a glorious journey - a journey where *everything becomes clearer the farther we travel down the road* toward our most **courageous and authentic lives.**

Until next week,



# ANNOUNCEMENTS & INSPIRATION

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MEET JAN LIVE!



"You are not broken.  
You are evolving. You  
are beautifully  
imperfect."

Jandesai

SHARE THE COMPASS ROSE WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

