



JAN DESAI'S

# COMPASS ROSE

A Roadmap to an Authentic Life

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



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## A Fish Out of Water

Life shows up to do what it is meant to do. It shifts. It changes. It evolves. And it always surprises us when we least expect it! In this week's Compass Rose, unexpected pain results in the chance for unexpected - and unlimited - gratitude.

## Chance and change are life's motive forces.

The latter is the *engine of the world*, constantly and powerfully moving everything and everyone forward. The former is the **quicksilver companion** of that engine, illuminating the moment when two disparate things, driven by their forward momentum, collide, creating synchronous results.

Things can get broken in the collisions caused by change - hearts, bones, and promises. Yet chance ensures that the consequences of these collisions produce beauty, as well as pain. The beauty is always there, beyond the obvious wreckage. The question is, *do we have the eyes to see these miracles for what they are?*

I had the opportunity to face that question head-on this past weekend.



Spring in Florida is *magical*. Delightfully cool breezes drift off the Gulf of Mexico and the sun's warmth feels like a soft cashmere blanket caressing your skin. The siren song of cloudless blue skies and the humidity-free air lures you out-of-doors to bask in the delights of nature.

Last Saturday was one of these beautiful Florida spring days. We were entertaining guests, and through the generosity of family and friends, I found myself childless with the **afternoon to myself**.

Several hours to myself is an event in and of itself. That it occurred on a **picture-perfect Saturday** was nothing short of miraculous! I literally felt like a kid in a candy store, something I remember with great joy from my youth.

The small community where I grew up had a tiny, family-run grocery store called Ellenbecker's that stood two blocks from our home. Many mornings, my sister and I would scarf down our breakfasts as quickly as possible in order to get out the door early on our way to St. Mary's school. This extra time allowed us to sneak into Ellenbecker's for a few minutes so that we could gaze at the oversized mahogany and glass display case filled with jars of penny candy.

Multiple glass shelves held colorful jawbreakers, miniature boxed candy cigarettes, deep red wax lips, white-hot atomic fireballs, pink bubble gum, string licorice, and more. *The choices were*

*seemingly endless*, each filled with the promise of sweet ecstasy. Tall (at least to 6- and 7-year-olds), thin, gray-haired, and serious, Mr. Ellenbecker stood sentinel with the patience of a saint, waiting for each of us to make the **serious decision** regarding which treats were worth the investment of *three pennies*.



*That same feeling of anticipation and excitement rose up through my body on Saturday.* Should I crawl into bed and watch a movie? Snuggle into a chair and read a book? Perhaps I should run to get a pedicure. I could always knock off a few items on my to-do list, but this unexpected and precious gift of solo time deserved something special... certainly something more than falling back on traditional items that needed to be checked off a list.

I wanted a **splurge** and decided that immersing myself in the delicious Gulf breezes with the sun on my back and the

sand and the salt water between my toes was the ultimate binge. So I threw on my bathing suit and walked down to the beach. There would be no kids racing behind me yelling "pick me up, mommy!" No mini munchkins needing to be raced back across the street for an emergency potty break. It would just be *me, the beach, the sun, my thoughts, and the deepest gratitude.*

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Right now, the Gulf of Mexico is being inundated with red tide, a challenging ecological occurrence that is happening with more and more frequency. Red tide is an algae bloom that travels down the entire coast in the warm waters. Fish and shellfish ingest the poisonous algae, die, and are washed up on the shore. Based on the size and type of fish, you can determine how far out the algae bloom is growing and traveling. It can also be dangerous to humans, causing respiratory issues in individuals who are susceptible. To the rest of us, it causes itchy, watery eyes, a runny nose, and a deeply irritating dry cough. Because of unseasonably warm waters, red tide has been more invasive this year.

As I approached the beach, I began to feel the *tell-tale tickle* in the back of my throat. I surveyed the Gulf. It was churning and spitting up yards of grayish foam onto the sand. Amidst the froth and spray was a necropolis of dead fish. Tiny mullet, flounder, blowfish, and for the first time in my experience, large jackfish, almost three feet long, were all decomposing on the beach. Yet, amidst this die-off, people were still sitting at the beach, sun tanning, reading their books, walking up and down the sand, and enjoying themselves.

The weather was so intoxicating and there were so many people at the beach, I decided to *ignore the red tide and continue with my splurge*. I figured I could step around the fish and still get in a good walk.



With an inspirational meditation on my iPhone, I raised my face to the sun and took off at a good pace. In no time at all, I was totally

immersed in the experience. The water had lost its chill and the waves felt so refreshing against my legs. Before I knew it, I found myself more than a mile down the beach thinking **how great it was to be alive**. Gratitude was rolling off my body in waves that matched the Gulf's action.

There are areas of our powdery-white sand beach that are still littered with decades-old pilings from long since destroyed piers and docks. As I came upon some that were being lashed by the waves, without thinking I gingerly stepped to the side and was immediately struck by the **most excruciating pain I've ever experienced**.

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The agonizing throbbing came from my left foot. I felt a white-hot, surging pain like **volts of electricity** running up and down my leg from my toes to my knee. As I looked down in horror, I couldn't see anything. My feet were covered in almost six inches of froth and foam. The pain was so severe that I screamed and collapsed sideways onto the beach.

And then I heard a voice saying, “*Jan, Jan, are you ok?*” I looked up and there among the group of strangers was one of my staff members who had been coincidentally sunning on that public spot of the beach with two boat captain friends. She was exactly ten feet away from where the accident happened. I felt delirious as if I was seeing a mirage. “*Kim,*” I whispered... “*is that you?*”

The captains searched around my feet and found the offending culprit...a saltwater Gafftopsail catfish that I have come to learn has a dorsal fin with a very sharp stinger that is filled with venomous neurotoxin. The barb had pierced the skin between my toes and *the neurotoxin was immediately delivered into my bloodstream.*



These two stout and weather-worn captains picked me up and carried me to the street. I couldn't walk, my left leg had gone numb. Another sainted stranger had run to his car

and gotten out his emergency kit, spilled it over a bench, and cleaned the wound and packed it with gauze.

As I was gently placed into the front seat of Kim's car one of the captains said, “*take her to the emergency room - the toxins are really dangerous.*”

On the short mile and a half drive home, I called my husband, who was at lunch with our friends, and told him that I had an accident at the beach and needed to be taken to the emergency room. I scared the poor man to death, but he kept a cool enough head to remind me that one of our house guests was an *emergency room doctor with more than 40 years of experience.*

My sweet husband and our doctor friend raced through every stop light on the way home. (*As we used to say up north, he drove it like he stole it.*) As he pulled into the driveway, his concern was real. When he looked at my foot, the toes were swollen to three times their normal size. Although the feeling of numbness continued to move up my leg, the **shooting pain** continued unabated. Our doctor guest knew what needed to be done to treat me. As he worked, he kept talking to me, asking me what happened and how I felt.

My adrenaline was pumping. I could feel my heart coming out of my chest, but as we spoke, **the flood of emotion arrived.** Both tears and anger suffused my body. My mind was off to the races, retreating to the past,

retrieving old stories of victimhood.

*"I never get free time," I spit out. "I can't believe that with this generous gift on a Saturday, I would be taken out by a stupid catfish."* Then a sharp punitive breath, *"I'm never going to do anything for myself again."* Then more self-flagellation, *"I should have stayed home and taken care of my to-do list."*

The pain and the stress of what happened were enough to kick me back into old negative behaviors that escalated like a high-speed elevator in one of those breathtakingly beautiful skyscrapers in Dubai.

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Of course, the pain was real, but *wrapping an outdated belief system* around this chance happening allowed me to **personalize the trauma and make it all mine**. It delivered what seemed to be absolute proof that the universe was out to get me. The powers that be had decided that *ruining my gift of a free Saturday afternoon was the highest cosmic hilarity*.

Change had caused two disparate events to collide. An unexpectedly free woman and an unexpectedly dead catfish came together,

but chance colluded to provide some results that rose above the pain caused by this meeting of neurotoxin and foot.

When I **realized** this, my old story fell away and I found myself back in my body, grounded in the present moment. *I was suffused with remembrance and gratitude.*



Life will do what life does. It shifts. It changes. It evolves. No one – not you, and certainly not me – is being *strategically targeted* for bad stuff to be delivered at our feet (*or in my case, between my delicate toes.*)

So rather than focus on the incident, I will remember to rest in the gratitude of the miracles:

- Our executive assistant – who coincidentally almost never goes to the beach – was sitting **ten feet away** from where I was struck down.

- She was sitting with **two long-time boat captains** who had the wherewithal to find the fish and let me know what it was. They were strong enough to lift me up and carry me to the car.
- The **kindness of a stranger** who had an emergency kit and was willing to minister to a stranger's dirty, sandy, and bloody feet.
- We had a **senior emergency room doctor staying with us** to treat me in my own home – saving me hours of pain, as well as hours at an emergency room facility. Plus, he carefully monitored me the rest of the weekend.
- Although my husband and I can make each other crazy, the absolute **love, devotion, care, and concern** on his face that afternoon was palpable. It felt good to be reminded that I was loved like that.

It has taken several days for my foot to get back to normal. On Sunday night, Panache was able to remove a quarter-inch long stinger from the web of my toes and today, I'm feeling rational and very much at peace with it all.

*I am blessed.* I choose to live in gratitude and recognize the miracles that change and chance are constantly delivering to me and my life. *I dwell in the house of possibility* and I invite you to sit next to me and look at your life through eyes that can see the *beauty that always lies beyond the crisis of the collision.*

Sometimes, all it takes is a sharp reminder of how **truly magical** our lives can be.

Until next time,



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