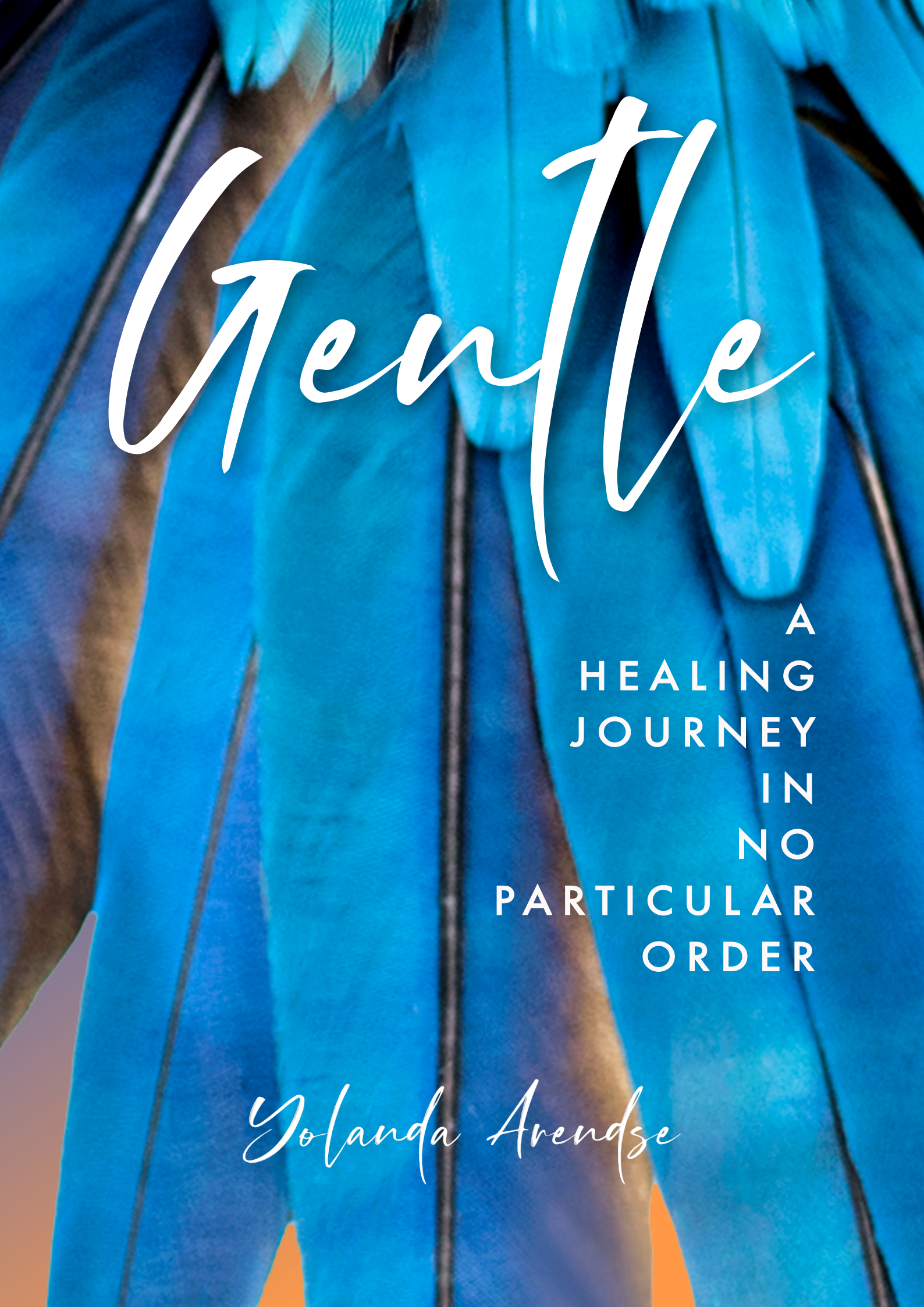




# Gentle

A  
HEALING  
JOURNEY  
IN  
NO  
PARTICULAR  
ORDER

*Golanda Arendse*

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In the book, the intention of the author is purely to share what she has  
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There are words between yesterday's hurt and tomorrow's  
healing that need to be spoken.

These are those words.

## YOUNG GIRL

“Here lays a gift of such beauty and wholeness. The Holy You.”

- “*Young Girl*”, Yolanda Arendse, Unpublished -

**Y**oung Girl is a poem I wrote to myself and my niece, in response to a letter received from her which I found tucked in one of my desk drawers while sorting out some paperwork a few weeks after she had visited with me. She had left a little thank you note for our time spent together, sharing how she admired how I lived my life freely.

This is for my niece and all the other young girls... And boys... To any person, young or old, female, male, or identifying as any other pronoun, as an invitation to stand tall in your clarity.

Being that I wrote it from a female perspective to myself, it carries feminine pronouns. Feel free to use it interchangeably with pronouns with which you identify.

### *YOUNG GIRL*

Young girl  
When you say you want to live like me  
Be like me  
Do like me  
Let me tell you...  
It takes COURAGE...  
Not balls of steel. Those were designed for machines  
I'm talking about Feminine Courage

It will require you to stand planted, when they try to bump you off with  
THEIR expectations of who they wish you to be  
It takes you standing strong in your gentle, rugged, instinctual feminine  
power  
In the KNOWLEDGE and TRUTH of who you are  
Who you FEEL to be inside  
This that you see  
It didn't come easy young girl...  
This Me that you see  
This took hard work  
And guess what? It still does  
It took mountains of courage, rivers of tears, raging fiery fights, irretractable  
words,  
It took slamming doors that made the roof shudder  
It took skies full of forgiveness, endless cushions of gentleness, continuous  
self-affirmation and self-love  
It took many conversations in the dark of my room, in the forest, by the tree,  
by the river  
It took waking up way before the sparrows left their nests

And long after the night owls hooted their goodnights  
It took whole nights under the moon  
It took standing firm, against both my most outright and subtle oppressors,

Choosing something different to the tradition, the religion, the culture and  
mindset I was raised in, mostly with respect, but sometimes even with  
seemingly disrespect

Because who I am needed to break through

Are you clear?

Are you truly prepared?

Because when they come with their preconceived ideas and perceptions of  
who you should be,

And they not only try, but outrightly force it on you as if it is the only Truth

Let me remind you, they won't like you for standing firm in who you are

They'll call you names,

Like Stubborn, Headstrong, and Difficult

They won't like that they can no longer manipulate you

When you unintentionally frustrate them with your non-conformity

And I'm not talking about how you dress, and how you look

I'm talking about how you think, and how you express yourself

I'm talking about how you set up your boundaries that keep out the dictators,  
the distractors, and the drainers of your energy

Those who ignore your Nos and insist on only your Yes'

Those who manipulate and abuse your gentle good-naturedness

So be clear young girl

When you admire me and say I inspire you

And you wish to be like me,

It comes with a little warning

Be very clear on your vision

Know your deepest, most intuitive, organic Self

Because when you come up against forces and resistance of the most  
unimaginable kind

Especially the ones closest that cut the deepest

Be prepared to remain unwavering

And with this, I sincerely welcome you to the other side of life

The side of FULL EXPRESSION

Of "unboundried" exploration and expression of YOUR SELF

Here lays a gift of such beauty and wholeness

The HOLY You

# Chapter 1

## CONTROLLING THE UNCONTROLLABLE

“Fear is but a hair before Love; in the Religion of Love,  
all things are sacrificed”

- Rumi -

**M**y high need for control comes from the *loss* of control I felt as a child. Rendered what I deemed “powerless” by parents who raised me in a strict cultural and religious upbringing, where everything about it (or at least everything that stood out for me) included the words “can’t”, “no” or “not allowed to”. The list was endless. Name it: I couldn’t do it. Have it. Say it. Wear it. Drink it. Feel it. Touch it. Think it. Experience it. Name it... I dare you!

Somehow it all existed on that endless list of “Don’ts”. I have this visual of an ancient parchment scroll burnt at the edges, long as hell (I definitely was not allowed to say ‘hell’ in its context as a curse word), hanging from the puffy white clouds in heaven, reaching down to me on earth until it touched the hem of the ankle-length dress I was forced to wear. The scroll contained a long-ass list of everything I couldn’t do or be.

From wearing shorts or pants to owning a TV. Hell was the reward waiting for me if I didn’t obey. Strangely, when uttered as a warning of my impending doom to coerce me into fearful obedience, in this context, “hell” was considered an acceptable word to use. The threat of receiving a sprinkle of pepper in my mouth was the least of my concerns. It was the detailed descriptions of a very hot hell, teeming with gnarly devils that curtailed my rumbustious self. Through the fear of this horrific ending, and without real context for why these rules applied, I was tamed (controlled) into submission throughout my youth.

The moment I moved out of my parents’ home at age 20, in an act of complete rebellion I decided that I, and only I, would be in control of anything and everything that had to do with me.

But much like the practice of water torture, the sooner the victim understands it is better to submit, the sooner the pain will end. The efficacy of this practice is foolproof. And since that list of don’ts was imprinted during my childhood years, it stuck, and I submitted. Raised on a diet of “thou shalt not have thine own mind”, I simply didn’t know *how* to stand up for myself. So, there I was living as a complete contradiction. On one hand, I went on the offensive and took control of everything I possibly could. On the other hand, when I really needed to stand up for myself, I could not.

While my rebellious self presented the face of a tough cookie, my trapped inner child reacted differently. In one of the greatest paradoxes about me, my learned behaviour saw me defaulting to playing small when it mattered most. I had learned to make myself as small as possible so that my free-thinking self

didn't frustrate those around me.

I stopped speaking up.  
I stopped valuing my own thoughts and ideas.  
I stopped being authentic.  
I stopped feeling worthy.

I hobbled through life, ping-ponging between extreme “dominance and control” and “complete weakness” – always feeling at odds with myself.

Right into my late forties, when anyone said “you can't” or “don't”, or when someone even as much as interrupted me before I had a chance to finish my sentence, it felt like they were taking away my right to use my voice and have a say. It felt like my right to exist had been eradicated. Dramatic, I know. But yes.

Over the years, I went to great lengths to change this muzzled feeling. Interestingly it was in my mid-forties that this feeling reached a tipping point soon after my parents came to live with me. Although, now an adult, my dad still habitually overrode decisions I made at my own house. He often went ahead and did things that I had expressly asked him *not* to do. Conversations about this proved impossible. I felt strapped in a straitjacket, my inner Self squirming, almost unable to move.

The feeling of being gagged, especially as an adult, triggered in me something so vile, I often spewed my words as poisoned arrows just so I could get it out and express myself. So that not only the person in front of me could hear them, but I could hear them too.

These pent-up outbursts created immense discomfort for people in my life since my defiance was imbalanced and knew no boundaries at the time. In these moments, I burned hot as the very hell I had been warned about throughout my childhood. Often what could have been delivered more appropriately came raining down like brimstone instead.

I recall how 47-year-old me felt the rage of 17-year-old me. Deep inside my body, the anger of a hormonally charged teenage girl pulsed insanely, feeling like an incensed voodoo doll that had been instantaneously resurrected. “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” goes the saying. Well, I think that phrase was coined based on how anger burned in me when overruled or dominated by a seemingly more authoritative figure. I felt like the poster child for “Hell hath no fury”. Add being wrongfully accused, and the lid on Pandora's box would get popped.

Like conjoined twins, the two extremes of my personality sometimes uncomfortably, but obligingly, coexisted side by side: the insolent woman with a dormant volcano just waiting for the right set of conditions to erupt, and the submissive girl who had given up her voice.

But the truth is, eventually I came to see that neither version was working for

me. My outbursts were either attracting so much anger in return from those around me or my inability to speak up left me feeling used, abused, and unseen. I wasn't getting anywhere with myself. Something needed to change. And that something was ME. But first I'll tell you how "not speaking up" nearly saw me kissing my own ass goodbye.

Knock, knock.

Who's there?

Fear.

Fear who?

FEAR EVERYTHING!

# Chapter 2

## A VISITOR NAMED FEAR

“Where your fear is, there is your task.”

- Carl Jung -

**I**t was that early childhood loss of control that first invited in the undesirable visitor named Fear.

Thinking back to my childhood and that list of “Don’ts”, which also included no cutting of hair, no going to parties or school outings, no discos, no anything. Essentially being excommunicated from an entire community yet forced to live in that same community. Bizarre.

As a result of all the exclusions that came with that single-worded disclaimer “NO”, I was often in the dark and I didn’t know many things. And right there is where I found the origin of my Fear.

Fear first took root when I was publicly reprimanded by my grade 4 teacher for not doing my homework, all because I had not watched the news as instructed the day before. I recall as if it was yesterday... how Mrs. “R” announced the requirements for the Oral Test at the end of our English lesson.

“Class, tonight you all have to watch the news on TV. Tomorrow you will each have a turn to stand up in the front of the class and, in your own words, tell us about a story you had watched on the news.”

That was one of the first times the anxious butterflies made their appearance in the pit of my stomach. They appeared because even as the class started to nervously chatter about the assignment, my nervous system spiked for a completely different reason. We did not have a TV at home.

We could easily afford one, but we were not allowed to have one as a principle of the church I was raised in. I certainly couldn’t tell my parents I needed to watch the news somewhere. Sitting at the dinner table that night, I quietly rolled the much-hated peas around on my plate, unsure of which I ‘hated’ more: the peas, or my parents for not having a TV.

The butterflies never left me. They fluttered all night.

The next day, as luck would have it, the typical pattern for getting called up in school prevailed. Whether a teacher selected from the top of the list in alphabetical order by surname or whether they started from the bottom by first name – my name starting with the letter Y and my surname starting with A – inevitably, I was almost always selected to go first or second. That day was no different.

She announced: “Let’s start with surnames in alphabetical order.”

Scanning the page, she frowned for a brief moment then continued: “Ummm... okay then. Yolanda Arendse, you’re up first.”

In my head, I cursed the “Adonis” kid whom I think was absent that day.

While I had always been a storyteller, there was no way I could concoct a fictitious story about real-life events broadcast on the news. Still, I got up, walked to the front, and centred myself on the piece of sticky tape on the floor. My head remained down as I kept my eyes glued to where my little feet were neatly planted.

Silence.

“Yolanda, you can start,” prompted Mrs. “R”.

Silence.

Mrs. “R” waited a moment.

“Yolanda!?” she simultaneously exclaimed and questioned. Hot tears welled behind my eyelids. I couldn’t look up. Everyone would see.

A moment later I watched as one salty tear escaped my eye and landed with a plop of betrayal on my black school shoe.

Two more tears followed in quick succession.

( Continues in book )