

Karen’s Story

Shame researcher Brené Brown states that, “Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy -- the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.”

So here I am owning my story. My name is Karen and I am fully recovered from anorexia. It has been quite a journey to get here. I questioned if I would ever be here, how, when, and what it would look like. Standing before you today is extremely surreal. Even when others believed that this day would happen, I had trouble believing it for myself. But to understand how I got here, we need to journey back into the past.

My story begins as the youngest of three girls. Everything was okay on the outside, but on the inside, I was extremely sensitive and deeply affected by things that were happening around me. When I was 6, I started competitively swimming during the summers at my parent’s swim club. This is a club that I had been going to all of my life where all of the kids were wearing bathing suits and only some of the adults were. My dad would swim laps every day but my mom only occasionally would put on a bathing suit I overheard almost daily conversations from both my parents and their circle of friends at the pool for years about how someone should or should not be allowed to be in a bathing suit based on their body. This body shaming always continued throughout the year, judging the dresses or clothing choices of exclusively women on TV or in the community. I never wanted to be spoken about in those terms - about not deserving to be in a bathing suit or certain style clothing - and I very quickly realized that, for me, being small equaled an ability to not be judged based on my appearance and potentially be seen for who the real Karen was: just a little girl wanting to live life. I have vivid memories of my sister’s friend asking if I weighed more than or less than the bag of sand that was around the base of a basketball hoop in the driveway. I immediately jumped in and said I weighed less. I somehow felt worthy declaring that I weighed less, perhaps assimilating all of the chatter I had been hearing about bodies, size, and shape. It felt good saying it and I often didn’t feel good.

I began to not physically feel good chronically when I was 11 years old. I was in extreme pain and articulated that with both my mom and pediatrician. Years later, I was diagnosed with endometriosis, a condition that can cause extreme pain related to menstrual cycles. My pediatrician repeatedly told me that I was fine, that I was just developing. Well, I wasn’t just developing. I was in such severe pain that I saw a pediatric gynecologist who not only prescribed me hormones to try to regulate my body at the age of 14 but also prescribed narcotics to combat the crippling pain that was causing me to miss school and check out from a lot of life. To have been dismissed by my doctor for several years about the status of my body was devastating to my sense of self. I started to learn unhealthy coping skills to help me feel not only physically better but also emotionally in control. Hello eating disorder. New eating disorder rituals and routines ironically were introduced to me by another pediatrician. Not her fault entirely, but she certainly didn’t have the wherewithal to warn me about what could happen by using and abusing certain medications. These eating disorder behaviors made me feel like I was in less pain. But I wasn’t in less pain. Rather, I was numbing my own physical and emotional pain through the eating disorder.

Despite surgery at 14 that led to diagnosis of endometriosis, the pain did not subside. And the physical feelings of not feeling good eventually evolved to not feeling good enough. I was constantly compared to my sisters, by my parents, their friends, and my teachers. I was never just Karen; I was always another S girl. I got questions like “Are you going to do X like this sister or Y like that sister?” At the beginning of school years, teachers would verbally exclaim their delight that there was another S girl. Both sisters were musically talented, intelligent, and driven. They both had a love for Judaism that my parents were incredibly pleased with. And it’s not that I wasn’t those things in the grand scheme of life, but in the microcosm of my family, I felt less than. I couldn’t get into the caliber of schools that my sisters attended nor achieve the musical accomplishments that they had. But in the darkness of finding my own way, the eating disorder led me down the darkest path of being the smallest - the one thing I could be better at than my sisters.

My first devastating spiral was in the winter of 2012 when I was 16. I was excited for my junior-senior semi formal that I was going to with a boy from my Hebrew school. The fact that he was Jewish made my parents extremely happy and willing to bend their rules to not have boys sleep over as we were both going to the same Hebrew school the next morning. But as it turns out, he wasn’t the “good Jewish boy” that neither my parents nor I had hoped for. And I didn’t feel like such a good girl after the sexual assault that night. I didn’t tell anyone what had happened because I thought it was my fault, that I had done something terribly wrong. I stuffed that experience into my memory box, not letting it out in a healthy way. I spent the next 8 years punishing myself for what happened that night. As a 16-year-old not knowing how to deal with what had happened, I became hyper sexual, engaging in illicit behavior more so than usual to try to normalize what had happened. Any time I was entering into a potentially promiscuous situation, I would wear the same pajamas that I had worn that night, punishing myself repeatedly for what happened. I was retraumatizing myself every time I put on those light blue pajamas with dark blue flowers. They were the softest pajamas I had ever owned and were the epitome of innocence. But that night, I lost my sense of safety and my already dwindling self worth. And loss is a theme in every one of my eating disorder spirals.

The sexual assault in 2012 exacerbated everything that had previously been occurring into a whole new state of disordered existence. But nobody noticed that anything was wrong even though I was essentially begging for someone to see or hear me. One teacher did see me and was concerned, but only because my school work performance was declining. The teacher called my mom one afternoon, and when my mom confronted me, I confessed about having an eating disorder. After confessing, I felt invalidated by those around me and felt even more isolated, confused, and ashamed. I also felt like a failure. I had neither been a “perfect” anorexic, not getting caught and still excelling in school, nor the “perfect” daughter, joyfully going through life without the outside world chaos affecting my life and school performance.

Despite this initial reaction, eventually my mom brought me to my pediatrician and I started weekly weigh-ins and saw a dietician and a therapist. A treatment facility was discussed that summer, and I wish that I had been forced to go. Maybe I wouldn’t have spent the next 8 years destroying my emotional, physical, and spiritual body. I had become a really good liar and I lied to everyone including the team of people who were trying to help me. I didn’t trust anybody; I only trusted my eating disorder. I didn’t see the point in being better. Why? Because the eating disorder was the one thing I felt like I had control over. The one thing that was my own. If I couldn’t be smart enough or talented enough, I could be skinny enough. Trauma and feelings of inadequacy from not being seen or heard led to a full blown eating disorder.

There were many other contributing factors, including a challenging relationship between my two older sisters. My role with my siblings and my family was as peacemaker, and I always felt like a failure in that domain. I did not feel validated by my parents, especially my mother, and I felt she took her frustration out on me. I was severely depressed and anxious and was isolating myself from people so I could spend time swimming laps - the one thing I had in common with my dad and the one time of day that my dad wasn’t frustrated or expressing his anger about work, bills, or whatever I or anyone else had done to upset him. My eating disorder tried to shield me from the chaos that was my life. I immersed myself in my own world of behaviors relating to food and exercise to be in control and to escape. Each marker I set for myself would have promises of finally feeling good enough, of finally being loved, and finally being seen and heard. But I never did feel good enough. I never felt seen. I never felt heard. I never felt like I was enough just that way that I am.

In college, the loss of the notion of childhood simply by being out of my childhood home triggered a spiral. Later, another spiral occurred when my paternal grandmother passed away. Loss again. The story continues. I had a predictable pattern going: any time I experienced a perceived or actual loss, I found comfort in eating disorder behaviors.

Another spiral happened during my senior year after I had met another “good Jewish boy” who I very quickly became engaged to. It had been a whirlwind romance - meeting at my middle sister’s wedding, him breaking up with a girlfriend for me (first major red flag), driving up for long weekends, the I love you’s, the proposal 2 months in (hello second red flag), etc. His status of “good Jewish boy” pushed me more deeply into the relationship, as religiously, I would somehow finally be on par with my sisters by also marrying a Jewish guy who claimed that he wanted to live in a Jewish home. When my maternal grandmother became quite ill and quickly passed away, he was there for everyone - offering tea or coffee or anything else. He was so sweet and so thoughtful. But there was one problem - he was a narcissist. And narcissists have manipulative tendencies to get people in their web, and once they are good and there, they break you down. That’s what he did. Nobody really questioned my weight loss or exercise during this time because I was a bride - it’s what brides do, or so society tells us. He was verbally and emotionally abusive, and although my parents expressed that I could cancel the wedding, I told myself that I’d be disappointing everyone if I called it off. What I really did was disappoint myself by not taking care of Karen.

On the day of my wedding, I was at a weight that I would see again several years later. What I truly lost throughout my marriage was me, who the real Karen is, what she wants, likes, believes, how she wants to live her life. I spent 2.5 years being verbally and emotionally abused and controlled. I was given spending limits for groceries even when I was the primary breadwinner. I was told what I could and could not wear. When I came home with a haircut that was dramatically shorter than what my hair had been, I was met with “I never agreed to marry someone with short hair” and then was given the silent treatment.

Everything came to a head in March 2010 when my then husband came home after a month of being away on business and pleasure. In hindsight, it was all pleasure. Long story short, he had been lying about his whereabouts and who he was with. When I discovered this information after he was presenting with more-than-usual erratic behavior, he expressed that it was my fault that he didn’t tell me about his whereabouts because I would have become angry. Wouldn’t you have become angry if your partner was galavanting around California and England with a girl who “just got him” and that girl wasn’t you? The night that I confronted him with this information, I feared for my physical safety. As I was hiding in the corner of my apartment next to kitchen knives, that night was the first night in perhaps my entire life that I stood up for myself and paved my own way with only a regard for what was in my best interest. I called two friends - one who immediately let me move in with her, her husband, and their three kids (including a newborn baby), and another who called off sick from work and came to my apartment in the morning after he had left for work to help me call movers, find a storage unit, and pack up my things. But this second friend did one more thing for me that day - she called a psychiatric facility nearby so I could get some help. I hadn’t been sleeping and I was quite hysterical. I had an appointment that afternoon, was prescribed medication, and was offered a chance to attend an adult psychiatric day program. I said yes because I needed help to get Karen back.

The adult day program is where my work began. I was diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and PTSD, not only from the situation that occurred with my then husband, but also because throughout the nightmare of my marriage unraveling, I had started experiencing flashbacks to that night back when I was a junior in high school. To cope with everything, I had an eating disorder spiral that hadn’t initially been on the radar of the people in the day program. So a dietician and therapist were brought in and it was suggested that I contact the affiliated eating disorder program, which I did. I was offered the time to participate in an intensive outpatient program for eating disorders, but I told them that I needed some time to finish my semester in grad school. Even though I had stopped working due to a medical leave, I still felt like I needed to do something for myself. But, truthfully, the eating disorder was telling me I didn’t deserve help.

6 weeks after discharge from the adult day program, I did intake at the eating disorder center, completely of my own volition. Except by the time I walked into the center, I was no longer an intensive outpatient candidate. I was on the verge of inpatient or partial hospitalization. When asked why I had waited so long, I burst into tears and told the intake coordinator that I didn’t have anything left to control. I was spiraling out of control. I had nothing left. I was doing intake at a treatment facility by myself, without anyone to hold my hand. I felt so lost. The promise of feeling found and being safe made it okay. I finally saw the point in getting help: I no longer could tolerate feeling this way, barely functioning. Do you remember the weight that I mentioned from my wedding? My intake weight was the same. How incredibly telling that I was at a weight on the day of my wedding - a day that is supposed to be the fairytale start to a fairytale life with a fairytale ending - that would have sent me to treatment. Ironic? No. Poetic? Yes. This weight at the start and end of my marriage was like bookends, marking the beginning and end of the horrific nightmare that was my marriage.

I am not going to take you through the nitty gritty of partial hospitalization, intensive outpatient, moving back home, and getting an outpatient team together. The one thing I will tell you is that when I was in treatment, I told myself I didn’t want to be a “frequent flyer.” I didn’t want to be someone who had admission after admission, never truly doing the work. So I did the work, fully immersing myself in the treatment process, including finally destroying the pajamas that I’d been holding onto for 8 years. But, during the years that followed, there were several periods in particular - all of which continued with the pattern of loss equals eating disorder - that I would have benefited from more intensive treatment. But I had doctors who would tell me that I was still okay even though other members of my team didn’t concur. The eating disorder latched onto the notion that I didn’t need more help. The eating disorder tried to tell me that I didn’t deserve more help. Shame got in the way - shame of spiraling out of control and needing more help, shame of acquiring a label of “frequent flyer,” and shame of everyone in my family being so incredibly “hush hush” about my situation, which inevitably reinforced the notion that having an eating disorder is something to be ashamed about. I was surviving during this period, going through a nasty divorce in which I literally had to buy my freedom, working full time, going to grad school part time, and generally continuing to live a life filled with anxiety and depression. And of course, recovery from an eating disorder is a full-time job as well.

Despite these periods, I wanted recovery. Truly wanted to be free but couldn’t imagine what that would feel like, how it would present, and when or if it would ever happen. However, once grad school was over, the divorce was finalized, and I was “just” working full time and doing recovery work, an amazing thing happened. This is something that is encouraged by many eating disorder professionals but something I never came across or heard about: separating my eating disorder self from my true self. This truly shifted my work. It was an evolution, but through all of the work I was doing, I discovered that I was Badass Karen and the eating disorder was a bitch. And she was aptly named Eating Disorder Bitch. I never shortened her name, that’s just who she was. But for here, we will call her EDB. And with this separation came more power, the power to strengthen Badass Karen with whatever armor and artillery she needed to take down and utterly destroy EDB. Things like yoga, getting a proper amount of sleep, consistently nourishing my body, moving my body in a joyful way, journaling, self care - these were all things that built up Badass Karen. Not doing those things helped EDB’s voice become louder and more aggressive.

During this time, there was another persona that I identified as well: cave-woman Karen. Cave-woman Karen showed up at nights when I was too groggy to ignore her aching hunger and would simply eat. For a long time, when I woke up in the morning, EDB would get in the way and punish Cave-woman Karen with the eating disorder. Once I started honoring Cave-woman Karen’s role as physical and emotional nurturer, EDB started to lose power. By continuing to consistently nourish my body during the day, Cave-woman Karen came out less at night because she didn’t need to. By feeding Badass Karen, I was letting Cave-woman Karen rest. Now when I’m hungry at night, I honor that sensation and reinforce my hunger cues by nourishing my body. Cave-woman Karen had my back, and although it took me a long time to appreciate her, I am so grateful that she supported me and didn’t back down.

Two summers ago, in the midst of my last spiral when EDB’s voice was making a lot of noise and I was struggling to maintain Badass Karen’s position of control, I made my way to MEDA, participating in groups and having skills sessions. Brené Brown states that, “We can't be brave in the big world without at least one small safe space to work through our fears and falls.” Although I had providers with whom I felt safe, that status quo wasn’t propelling me towards full recovery and I wanted more from life. In both groups and skills sessions, I repeatedly practiced skills like speaking my truth, feeling my feelings, setting boundaries, and advocating for my wants and needs. I took those skills to the big world as I fought for my parents to remove a scale that was in my childhood bathroom, which had been a source of deep anguish for most of my life. When my parents finally moved the scale to a place where I couldn’t find it, I felt safer. The removal of the scale supported Badass Karen’s position of control and took away EDB’s power. I also finally felt seen and heard by my parents.

When I was in the treatment facility years prior, my dad asked a provider how long recovery took. Although I intellectually knew that no recovery journey is the same and there is no perfect recovery, EDB was telling me that I was, yet again, not good enough. At this point I was running out of time and was becoming extremely anxious and putting unnecessary pressure on myself to be something or somewhere that I wasn’t. Ironically, I was squashing my ability to be fully recovered by not surrendering to however long recovery took and whatever recovery looked like.

In *Living Beautifully With Uncertainty and Change,* Pema Chödrön states:

When we resist change, it’s called suffering. But when we can completely let go and not struggle against it, when we can embrace the groundlessness of our situation and relax into its dynamic quality, that’s called enlightenment, or awakening to our true nature, to our fundamental goodness. Another word for this is freedom—freedom from struggling against the fundamental ambiguity of being human.

From my eating disorder interpretation, what Pema Chödrön is alluding to is abandoning the black and white rules, rituals, and routines of the eating disorder and embracing the gray of life, which is where life truly occurs. I needed to surrender, to just let it happen however it was going to happen, and to start being a little kinder towards myself.

There were lots of twists and turns on this road to recovery. Last year, I took a medical leave from my job and have since completely changed my line of work. I don’t function well in a system where I feel like I’m never good enough, and as my previous role as a special education teacher, I felt like I was never doing enough for anybody. This combined with my predisposition for anxiety and depression left me being unable to leave my apartment for days at a time. Although I could have become crippled by the notion that the medical leave was a punishment, I somehow was able to embrace the situation and frame it as a gift: a gift of time and space. It was an opportunity to surrender to the change and find freedom from anything and everything that was plaguing me. I chose to be in search of life that was lived joyously. I was committed to being my most authentic vulnerable self while on this journey that had become coined “my happiness journey.”

The journey to full recovery in and of itself is all over the place. There is considering it, and wanting it but not knowing how to get it, and then trying, and slipping, and falling, and getting up over and over again. There is falling flat in your face with an epic sensation of “How am I ever going to get back up again?” But here is the black and white for me: You get up every time. And every time it gets a little bit easier. And then there is less getting up because you’re falling less. And then you’re not falling and slipping; you’re there in recovery. Not “just” there, but truly there: wholeheartedly present and immersed in this thing we call life. But this life is new. Life without an eating disorder feels like what I imagine young children feel when they are learning how to walk. You’re stumbling all over again, but this time, the falls feel less like falls and more like small or large victories along the way.

One of the victories along my journey was feeling like I could own the word “recovered.” Some time last year, I was desperately trying to figure out if I could say that I was “recovered” or if I was “in recovery” and not really clear how I would transition from “in recovery” to “recovered” and if somehow one meant something greater than the other. The fact that I was struggling with what to say was enough data to indicate that I wasn’t ready for the “recovered” word. I was definitely in recovery, continually making progress and strides to wade through the muck and feelings that previously my eating disordered thoughts and behaviors had served to mask. And my goodness, I was unleashing a beast who was constantly feeling her feelings and using her voice. But that beast wasn’t ready to own her new place in this world. So where do we go?

Well, literally, I went to Mexico for a month last summer. Mexico was a place of complete transformation. Every summer, for as long as I can remember, the chaos of bathing suit season was extremely triggering and devastating to my body and sense of self, both from the comments my family made about who does or doesn’t deserve to be in a bathing suit to fitness professionals advocating “summer slim downs” or being “bikini ready.” But here is the truth: every body deserves to be in a bathing suit. And the purpose of moving my body is not based on seasons, but rather feeling strong and empowered all year long and preemptively supporting my 120-year-old body. I wanted to do things differently last summer. So, I journaled, very specific, positive journaling. Historically, I would start journaling with the intentions of being kind to myself, but it would inevitably become dominated by EDB’s self-abusive chatter about my food, exercise, body, love-ability, etc. So to combat that and let Badass Karen shine, I got a new journal that had inspiring, positive quotes on each page with only about a page available to write for that day. This helped remind me to stay positive and to focus my thoughts, or to just be thoughtful about what I was creating.

Back to Mexico. It’s over 100 degrees there in the summer, so you wear bathing suits and not much else. I spoke a lot about bathing suits with professionals for years prior to last summer. And I spoke about bathing suits last year as well. But the difference came about in the journaling both before and during the trip. I encouraged myself in my journal to have backup plans for being in a bathing suit when eating. Different style bathing suits, sarongs, and dresses made a lot of sense in that plan. And instead of getting down on myself if I employed my backup plan while eating guacamole and chips and drinking coconut water out of a coconut at the beach every day, I applauded that girl for her courage to live life. And, an interesting thing happened throughout my time in Mexico: I started focusing less on the bathing suits and backup plans. Some days, it didn’t even register that bathing suits were something that I historically struggled with. I was not only living life, but I was also kicking some serious ass.

And an even cooler thing happened to me in Mexico: my recovery work shifted again. One particular evening, towards the end of the month there, I was watching the sunset on a bluff overlooking some of the most dangerous waves in Mexico. I just sat and observed, and this is what struck me: In nature, there are moments of stillness even as the most dangerous waves crash against the rocks. There are moments of uncertainty, particularly for the hundreds of crabs that just hang out on the rocks with no sense of where they will be in 5 seconds. But the crabs still live. And the waves still crash. And there will still be moments of calm even in the loud crashing of the waves. It struck me that this is how I needed to live my life: I needed to ride the waves wherever they take me. I needed to surrender. Life is not going to always be loud with eating disorder thoughts and behaviors and life is not always going to be easy and quiet. If I let go of the “shoulds” and “should not’s,” and make myself available to what may be, I not only survive, but also thrive.

So, how did this translate to real life? I tried to emulate the sea creatures. They surrender to whatever the elements have in store for them. And I, too, needed to surrender, to this notion about where I should or shouldn’t be in this stage of my recovery. Instead of focusing on what wasn’t, I focused on what was. And what was was real progress. Wearing bathing suits when I want to without thinking twice is huge for me, and it’s where I was and it’s where I am. Progress also included feeling my feelings and being open and honest about that; speaking my truth to benefit my own being; setting boundaries and being clear about those boundaries with those around me; advocating for my wants and needs across all domains of my life; and allowing myself the time to figure out who I want to be in this world without a time limit. I was making strides in areas of my life that had really never been unearthed, yet why I was holding on to another black and white idea of what recovery should be? I think I get it from my dad: My dad thinks in a black and white manner, as evidenced by asking about a timeline for recovery. I felt trapped as he asked, “How much longer is your journey going to take?” around the end of the time that the doctor had quoted to him. It sounds and felt worse than what he intended. He lives in a quantitative world and my recovery journey - my happiness journey - was and is very much so qualitative.

So yet again, I had to surrender. I had to let go of thoughts about where I should be and accept where I was. And where I was was vastly different from where I had been, previously being terrified of letting the eating disorder go because I had nothing left. But now, I had so much. Perfect? No. But I created a mantra for myself: that I am perfectly imperfect. Size and control were no longer my goals. Loss no longer triggered me. I starting seeing and hearing myself as opposed to placing value on others seeing and hearing me. My goal was to live life according to my rules and to be fully present. To do so, I surrendered to whatever may be and stopped pressuring myself to be something that I wasn’t ready for. In being my most authentic, vulnerable self, I had to accept that I was right there in recovery, on my way to recovered, but with no expectation of when it would or would not occur.

Also in *Living Beautifully With Uncertainty and Change,* Pema Chödrön states that, “Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark.” I think this is the recovery journey as well. We take step after step no matter how dark it is because it’s about the journey to the light. But even when we get there, it’s not final. We keep living, as life constantly ebbs and flows in this perfectly imperfect existence. I used to tell myself that I was doing the work because “there is no other choice.” But it is a choice. And I choose love, light, and compassion every time over hatred, darkness, and indifference. In other words, I choose Badass Karen over Eating Disorder Bitch.

I used to live in perpetual fear of relapse and when the feelings of being okay were going to disappear. Brené Brown calls this “foreboding happiness,” and in this place, you’re not actually living; you’re frozen, in this terrible state of suffering. But with surrendering to what was and what wasn’t, the depression cycles were less severe. The relapse fears weren’t as prevalent. It’s what happens when you let whatever is going to unfold actually unfold without pressuring yourself for time or presentation. Yes, you need to fight to recover. It’s literally a fight for your life. But living in a state of anxiety based on suffering propels you further down the eating disorder spiral, telling yourself stories about how you’re not good enough. And I know this for certain: I am good enough.

In early 2016, I had been going to groups at MEDA for a year and had been feeling extremely solid for many months. I was approaching things from a non-eating disordered lens, I was setting boundaries, advocating for myself, feeling my feelings, nourishing my body consistently, acknowledging if body image thoughts were coming up and readily able to identify how and why they were occurring, thereby making them dissipate quite quickly. I had experienced loss and I didn’t cope via using my eating disorder. I was rocking it. So when the question of the next step for group came up early this winter, months after letting go of when “recovered” was going to happen, it became clear to me that something was different. And that something was that I was fully recovered from my eating disorder. I had surrendered and immersed myself in the work, and I got to “recovered.” I thought I would feel relieved, but the truth is that the stuff that the eating disorder served to mask doesn’t cease to exist simply because you’re recovered. Life still happens - it’s still utterly chaotic sometimes. But the chaos isn’t transposed into thoughts about my worth, body, or value when it has nothing to do with that - the eating disorder and her thoughts are not me and do not define me. My truest self is Badass Karen, who is fully recovered from an eating disorder.

As a side note, we have talked some about eating disorder land being black and white with some gray in between. To me, black and white has connotations of suffering. My preference is to think of the world in terms of red and white - the mixture of the two is pink, which just happens to be my favorite color. Red and white have its place - like boundaries, deciding what is okay and what’s not okay. And all the shades of pink, in my eyes, are just filled with endless opportunity. Vulnerability and authenticity exist in the pink. Riding the waves wherever they take me exist in the pink. And in this pink world, you can find your way out of the darkness, out of the shame. When you let go and experience all of the shades of pink, when you don’t hold on for dear life to the edge of the stream, you can experience your deepest awareness and understanding of who your Badass Karen is and what your colors are. And just as Cyndi Lauper sings in “True Colors,” “Your true colors are beautiful.”