

## AUTHENTICITY

Written by Denise Yamada.

Bertram is my friend and my acupuncturist. I feel good around him—emotionally and physically. He’s just a feel good kind of guy. I first met him about two years ago. He was the very first person I saw when I arrived at the check-in table at a seminar I was attending. He was part of the team putting together the gathering and greeted me as though I were an old friend. The expression on his face was saying *hello, my friend, it’s great to see you*. This often happens to me because people in my city think of me as a friend even if they’ve never met me in person. As someone they’ve invited into their homes on television for 15 years, I *am* an old friend. But the way Bertram greeted me that day was different from that. It felt safe and open and....vulnerable. And that doesn’t even describe it. I don’t think the language has been invented yet to adequately describe emotional and spiritual states of being. It’s like he wasn’t some man named “Bertram”. In that moment, he was unconditional love and acceptance to me. It would become clear to me very shortly why I experienced him this way. It’s because Bertram is *authentic*.

Look up the word authentic and you’ll see that it means “faithful and trustworthy.” Related words are “dependable, reliable, sure; solid, sound, straight; authoritative, cathedral, standard.” (Cathedral? Whoa.) It means “being exactly as appears or is claimed,” synonymous with “genuine, real, right, true, and unquestionable.” More related words are “knowable, recognizable; honest and pure.” As far as I’m concerned, when you look up the word authentic, Bertram’s picture should be there.

There was a painful journey with a major detour before he arrived at that day to greet me with the boundless smile and instant relatedness. The journey began a year before we met. Bertram was 43 years old at that time, happy, handsome and healthy—or so he thought. This was a man who knew healthy—he was an acupuncturist with a thriving practice and devoted patients. He took good care of himself and always had. He exercised regularly, ate wisely, was a non-smoker and happy at home, living with his soon-to-be bride, Kare. Appearances can be so deceiving, can’t they? In actuality, Bertram was a heart attack waiting to happen. Taking a

self-inventory and looking at areas of his life where he was being inauthentic and cleaning them up saved his life—quite literally.

Bertram's first inkling that something was wrong came in January 2000. He'd been an avid runner for years. But running had become difficult; he couldn't keep up his pace. *I just have to work out more and harder*, he told himself. *I must be slacking off*. Then in June, he noticed that swimming had become a challenge. *This is ridiculous*, he thought. *I practically grew up in the ocean*. There was no arguing with the big waves confronting him that day and he had to turn back. He felt an incredible weakness, a very specific pressure in his chest, and shortness of breath. He had never felt anything like this before. Come August, he was still talking "that guy shit," as he calls it. *Nothing's wrong here. I just need to work out more*. As he was walking up the hill to work, his chest began to hurt again, with that very specific pressure, like a vise gripping his chest tighter and tighter. He finally started to worry about his physical well being. But the fear of losing his girl won out. He could *never* tell Kare. She would never want to be with him if she knew his secret. So he brushed aside yet another episode of warning pain.

In September, Bertram was having a conversation with a friend about integrity. To him, integrity used to be about being right or being wrong. But in this conversation, they started talking about integrity as living your life with nothing hidden. What was staring him right in the face? That he was hiding his chest pains from the woman he loved and wanted to spend the rest of his life with. He knew at this rate, it wouldn't be a very long life. He knew there was something seriously wrong—but he had no idea just how critical his condition really was.

This was no small job. First, he admits had to console the little boy inside him. He was scared. Not so much about the chest pains, but about whether his fiancé was going to give him the heave-ho for being damaged goods. *Why would Kare want to spend her life with a worn out old loser like me?* One look at her face and he knew he could do it. He told her he'd been having chest pains for nine months now. It was so perfectly simple and easy to tell her. She said *What are you going to do about it?* Obvious. He called his doctor that day. The doctor did an EKG on Bertram. One look at the results and his doctor sent him to a cardiologist. That doctor did an angiogram.

That's the procedure where a catheter is inserted into an artery, usually in the groin area (ouch), and guided through the arterial system into the heart and into the coronary arteries. Then dye is injected through the catheter into the bloodstream and x-rays of the heart and coronary arteries are taken. This allows the doctor to see the blood flow through those arteries. In Bertram's case, there wasn't much flowing going on. The cardiologist told him, *We have to do a six-way bypass tomorrow.* (Good grief! I've never even heard of a six-way bypass, have you?) It was like Bertram didn't even hear him. *Oh, I don't think so, doctor. Kare and I are having a party tomorrow to celebrate our upcoming wedding, and I have patients tomorrow, too. What's the alternative?* All right. Let's give him a break. What 43-year-old man expects to be told he needs six-way bypass surgery? The doctor was blunt. *There are no alternatives. Your arteries are so clogged that you could die tomorrow.* That got his attention. He was admitted to the hospital immediately for surgery the next day.

Kare was grateful that Bertram had finally told her the truth. But it provided little relief at this point—she was afraid she was going to become his widow before she could become his bride. And there was never *any* thought of bailing on the man she calls her soul mate. In fact, his revelation made each moment with him all the more precious. First, though, she had to overcome the state of shock she was in after hearing Bertram's diagnosis. After the angiogram, the doctor told Kare that Bertram needed six-way bypass surgery. She could not understand him. The words did not make sense. He said it again. She looked at the doctor, absolutely thunderstruck. *Are you speaking English to me? This doesn't make any sense.* So he took her to see the videotape he had made of the angiogram. One look at the tangle of clogged arteries on the screen and Kare knew her beloved was a breath away from death's door. But there was never a question in her mind: Even though their wedding date was still eight weeks away, she was committed for life, in sickness and in health.

The night they spent together in the hospital awaiting the surgery was a long one. Kare was afraid that even the stress of knowing he was going to have surgery was going to give Bertram a heart attack. But once Bertram reached that moment of supreme authenticity with himself and his fiancé, everything shifted for him. Already a powerful

man, he became even more powerful. He was still scared, all right, about having his chest cut open and his ribs cracked to get to his broken heart, and he was upfront about it with the first surgeon of the team who visited him the day of the operation. The doctor told him it was appropriate for a man of his young age to be petrified—because his arteries were very nearly petrified themselves! While the doctor prepped him physically and emotionally for the surgery, Bertram had an idea. He wanted the doctor to create with him a vision or an intended outcome of the surgery. He knew the doctor would partner with him on this because the surgeon had already told him he believed in God and asked Bertram if *he* did. It was like the doctor wanted to get as much help as he could! Together, Bertram, Kare and the doctor created this master plan for the day: *Surgical expertise performed with perfection*. For his part, Bertram created *absolute outrageously rapid healing*.

As each doctor and nurse on the surgical team came in to see their patient before surgery, Bertram directed their attention to the white dry erase board on the wall of his room. *Surgical expertise performed with perfection*. It became everyone's mantra. For the duration of the surgery, it would be their reason for being. They were united in their cause.

Kare and Bertram knew that he would be on a heart/lung machine during the operation and that the human heart stops when the machine is employed. They knew that he would have a choice in that moment to leave this life behind and not come back. She asked him not to leave her; they had their whole lives ahead of them, so much to live for. He promised to come back.

And he did. After five hours of surgery, the doctor came out and reported that they had accomplished their intended outcome: *Surgical expertise performed with perfection*. Now it was up to Bertram: *Absolute outrageously rapid healing*. He kept his part of the bargain, too. Five weeks after the surgery, he returned to work. Two-and-a-half weeks after that, he and Kare were married.

It was a beautiful celebration. Their love was palpable and enfolded everyone there. The greatest wedding gift Bertram gave to his bride—and himself, too—was his authenticity. Before he told her the truth, his secret was in the space between them. When he stopped

hiding his condition, he opened the space between them. And since nature abhors a vacuum, what rushed in to fill that clear and pristine space? Love. Love is the absence of anything in that space because love fills that space. The bigger that space, the more love there is. It was a powerful way to begin their marriage. With the great success of Bertram's surgery behind them, they put to work once again what had served them before. They created a vision for their relationship: *Bertram and Kare Furman are love, exploration, community and connectedness*. And I can tell you unequivocally that they are all that.

\*\*\*