

The ReAuthored Life

I was 10 when I first began to experiment with writing. It was an epiphanous moment, while composing stories about Willy (the Australian mascot for the 1984 LA Olympics)—not only could I read stories written by others, but I could write my own. My first was an epic about a yellow dog who lived on a farm (scribed on a cheap note pad Mum used for her shopping lists). I still have a small amount of regret that I never quite got around to writing the scene featuring the windmill, because our farm didn't have one.

When I was pregnant, I discovered the power of narrative in a brand new way: this was the transformative and connective energy of personal narrative in a shared, witnessed space. In simpler terms, this was women sitting in circle telling stories of their lives in raw, honest and vulnerable ways. The magnetism of those stories lead me into my first publishing experience, as editor of *Down to Birth* magazine, which ultimately lead me down rabbit holes as an editor and publisher of fiction, while sharpening my own fiction writing (which lead me down different rabbit holes of horror, dystopias and science fiction where I was fascinated by the intersection of technological advancement and how it changed what it meant to be human).

These different threads of writing and authorship collided a few weeks after my 40th birthday when I realised I had the power to rewrite any of the stories my identity was based in. I could choose the lenses through which I viewed the world and shaped my reality, and who I wanted to be in them. At the centre of this, was a story not originally written by me, but one I had contributed to, unknowingly for the most part, through both conscious and subconscious recitation: I am a victim of rape; I am a survivor of sexual violence. I had kept it relevant with those "I am" statements, despite desperately not wanting to be defined by that trauma. Rewriting the foundation story of my sexual identity was profound, because after more than two and a half decades of trying unsuccessfully to heal the sexual trauma at the heart of that identity, of going around in circles, commanding authorship and rewriting that core story, opened avenues for the real healing I had longed for.

It is no surprise that my years-long personal dalliance with tarot became the pulsating heart of my spiritual awakening in 2015, alongside an epic tumble into a shamanic type of meditation. And not

too surprisingly, it was all wrapped up in narrative. Quite early on, I was pushed to read for others after only reading for myself for more than a decade. It was easy for me to use a narrative framework and sensibility for tarot, because as a professional editor, it was applying skills I had elsewhere, to a different form of storytelling. It freed me to not have to memorise the myriad of nuances in a deck of cards. I'd always seen tarot as a space for a shared dialogue, and a narrative framework was perfect for this: what is your old story? What could your new story? After all, I knew how transformative rewriting a personal narrative could be. It was the easiest way to show up in the world to help others because at the heart of it, humans are hardwired for storytelling.

We learn best by hearing the experiences of others who have come before us. We also grow listening to those who we are travelling side-by-side with. Storytelling connects us with others to form a shared experience and at its purest, does not demand the surrender or subjugation of our own stories, because we are all equals around the archetypal campfire. Storytelling brings meaning and relevance to our realities, to our highs and lows. It is the language of both light and shadow, of devastation and celebration. Storytelling is most profound and pervasive when something beyond our sphere of knowing is told with heart. This is when storytelling becomes captivating. That energy has a darker side though; it can also hold us captive when it is our own story, catching us in repeating patterns and cycles of behaviour that makes us scream, makes us weep or simply demands that we give up.

"Why does this keep happening to me?" I wrote over and over in a journal in 2017. For all that my awakening had thrown me open in unexpected and powerful new ways, and for all the wisdom I was devouring and the change I was experiencing, the circumstances around one particular relationship resisted transmutation to something better. I threw everything at it and yet the same disempowering cycle continued. Eventually clarity came when I was able to see the role the emotion deep at the heart of the story was playing. Addressing that previously unacknowledged emotional foundation of despair allowed the story (and the circumstances) to finally shift, so I wasn't recreating despair over and over again. A new-found liberation followed, and my understanding of the mechanics of narrative matured.

2020 brought two new things into my world; the result is this workbook and the companion journal. This year, I studied counselling for the first time, as part of my psychology degree. With it came an introduction to narrative therapy. The earliest permutations of *The Re-Authored Life* harken back to August, with theory bouncing off tarot, but it took several months for this to form up as it appears here. Thank you to Christina and Carolyn who both held space for me to talk through the bones of what was wanting to be birthed, helping me through their insights, to better understand the shape and flow of what I was trying to create. The second part was an expanding appreciation of the power of the words we wrap around our experiences, our hopes, dreams and fears, and the need to be truly conscious of those words. For me, putting the word "trauma" around my experiences supporting my son within the

industrial education paradigm opened the possibility of healing after 13 years. Claiming the title of "word witch", to explain how I turn up in the world, was also born of it.

Out of this long evolution, out of this long convoluted but ecstatically transformative relationship with narrative, the art of storytelling and tarot, *The Re-Authored Life* is born. It combines for the first time the magick of elemental language with narrative shifting. It is presented as an invitation into five cycles of re-writing within each of the four elements. It is my hope this offers the greatest of flexibility, so you can meet your desire to re-write a story at your own pace and within the element best suited to serve the narrative shift. It joins the beauty and grace of the old Lyrical Songbook, revised and updated to reflect my evolution, expanding last year's yearly journal to a comprehensive two-part workbook/cartomancy workbook and journal of around 400 pages.

The Elemental Witches

In 2017, my Fire Witch "K" first appeared in meditation as the midwife gifted to me by The Universe to assist with my next round of deep healing (or what we've affectionately come to call "levelling up" because who doesn't love mashing up spiritual growth with a little gaming lingo?). Over the course of the next 12 months, three more elemental witches arrived: Margaret, my ancestral Earth Witch; Lisette, my 11th century murderess self as Air Witch and lastly Nayyirah, my (cosmic) Water Witch, who is older than time itself. These four became my circle of wise women. Through them I have come to appreciate the power and magick of the elements. I haven't specifically sat and worked "fire magick" or "air magick" (though I do love a good candle ritual or cleansing dark moon blaze), instead I have sat in deep conversation with these facets of myself in meditation and allowed their perspective to guide me into previously hidden places. With their guidance and wisdom, I have been able to enter into increasingly difficult areas of shadow work.

Sometimes I know who to call on. Other times I sit and share what my problem is and call in who is best qualified to help. Lisette is brilliant for a little ruthlessness, when doubt undermines me. She's also a great business mentor. "K" is all about power, leadership and the masterful wielding of magick. Margaret is practical and her no-nonsense approach always brings me back down to earth (literally!) Nayyirah and I have the newest of relationship and it is through her, I have braved exploring the depths of my emotions and how they heave and (if I'm luckier) ripple across time and lives.

I invite you to explore your elemental facets and aspects (especially those you feel least comfortable in) and be open to however they come to you. It may not be as Witch-Selves but I expect they will be no less powerful in how they arrive to know you better. Simply call in one of the elements and surrender into what that energy is excited to share with you.

The Elements

These are the elemental associations I've come up with as a starting point, especially for those who are new. I invite you to develop your own elemental vocabulary and imbue it with your own meaning.

Fire speaks to desire, passion, energy, propulsion, creativity, excitement, action and expansion. When scattered or overwhelmed, fire energy returns to equilibrium via centering. In tarot, the element of fire is associated with the suit of wands.

Air speaks to thoughts, the mental space, information, logic and rationale, understanding, curiosity and self-expression. When scattered or overwhelmed, air energy returns to equilibrium via focus. In tarot, the element of air is associated with the suit of swords.

Earth speaks to the body, the physical space, structure, practicality, growth, work, grounding, nourishment and patience. When scattered or overwhelmed, earth energy returns to equilibrium via grounding. In tarot, the element of earth is associated with the suit of pentacles.

Water speaks to emotions, the heart, relationships, receptivity, flow, connection, imagination, magick and spiritual spaces. When scattered or overwhelmed, water energy returns via clarity. In tarot, the element of water is associated with the suit of cups.

How To Use This Book

The spreads here follow a pattern: overview, breaking down the old story, the void, calling in the new story then anchoring and integrating the new story. The book begins with Fire, but this does not have to be where you begin. You may want to start your exploration of and experimentation with this work in a different element. Know there is no single "right" or "correct" way to use these spreads, there is only what feels right and works for you. Flip through, experience the languaging around the elements, feel into where alignment or resonance is and follow that. I have always tried to design tarot resources which can be hacked by the individual to suit where they are and what they need, providing enough structure but also enough space to support this. Because, whether you believe it or not, you are the expert of your life and you are also the Wise Woman (or Man) of your experience. You now what best supports you. Turn inward and trust yourself.

You may want to do a cycle over a four week period, doing the main and beginning spreads in the first week, and the subsequent three spreads over the next three weeks to work across a lunar, solar or calendar month. You may want to spend one week on one spread, three on another, a few days on the next, so on and so forth. Alternatively, you may want to work through one cycle across a season.

Again, there is no right or wrong way to do it, only what best supports you. In 2021, you may only want to work in the element of Air, and in doing so, repeat the Air cycle multiple times over the course of the year. You may want to work with the same story, peeling multiple layers back over the course of a year, working through each of the elements. Alternatively you may want to work different stories with different elements. This is your journey and you get to decide how it unfolds for you.

Each elemental cycle is broken down into five smaller interrelated cycles. Parts of first spread are separated out and expanded bit-by-bit in the next four spreads giving the work anchors in both the past and the future as you work through it in the present. Like life, everything builds on and deepens the work preceding. In trialling the spreads, I used a combination of tarot and oracle cards, using an oracle deck in card 'C' in the main spread—the Heart of the Void position. You may want to just work with oracle cards or just with tarot. Or use one deck for the main spread and a different deck(s) for the expansion work. Some spreads may lend themselves to just tarot and others to oracle. Mix and match at will.

The delineated positions in the spreads which are thinner and not marked, these refer to where the spreads intersect with your own experiences. The Void spreads are a perfect example of this, where there is only one card in the spread and branching from it are five blank spaces; these refer to your own experiences of visitation, and how they unfold for you. These are not intended for cards. They may end up being slips of paper specially cut, or springs of flowers, leaves, poetry, whatever appears to form up the five spokes and the experience each one represents.

Lastly, each spread is concluded with journaling space for a supportive ritual (The Void spreads have space for two rituals!). I have not specified what that ritual might be, as everyone has their own preference (like me who quite likes to burn things). Some of my favourite generic rituals involve candles, salt baths, writing affirmations, burning lists, meditation on a specific question, talking with my elemental witches, working with the allies attached to the shamanic work I've been doing this year with Kate Wildrick, pulling cards on the dark moon and automatic/free writing. I also love sitting in circle and listening to the experiences of others. You likely know a dozen different rituals. If you can create a ritual congruent with the element (or know of one) that's fabulous. If you can also time it with a supportive lunar cycle or astrological alignment, even better. However, intent, openness and willingness to be present to do the work, will always supersede any physical tools you use or the astrological energy. Anything external to you, can never be a substitute for your full presence, dedicated focus, willing heart and authentic intent. You are the seed, the drop, the spark and breath of this work, first and foremost, and always.

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