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Ruth Trujillo-Pertew

Ruth Trujillo-Pertew, LCSW & Forest Bathing Facilitator
North Shore Forest Therapy

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Loretta Ames

Renovation for the Soul

by Donna Martini
Oyster Bay, NY

For two years now, I have been renovating my house. I liked the rooms and the furniture. Nothing was wrong with them—and that is what was wrong with them. Almost everything was in good or great condition, and I could not justify the work or money needed to redecorate, even though most everything was over 18 years old.

Then I had a more than irritating skylight leak in the master bathroom and was forced to rip down wallpaper and re-sheetrock. As I pulled paper and scrapped glue, I saw a twenty-year-old paint color emerge. Memories came flooding in, and I realized how much emotion these walls had stored. I allowed myself to go there, just for a moment, to feel the pain, fear, anxiety, dread, and a whole lot more.

The master bedroom and bath were where I sought solace after my divorce and later, a few relationship break-ups, as well as the death of several loved ones. It was the place I laid sick for months, recuperated from four surgeries, and almost died from complications due to autoimmune disease. It was where I prayed and sometimes tossed and turned at night, talking myself out of a dismal future.

I worked with this knowingness for some time as I ripped things down, cut holes in sheetrock, spackled, sanded, and painted. I was determined to make this a restorative space, free from any unproductive or unhealthy remnants of the past.

While undergoing the process, I noticed the complete mess I was making in several rooms of the house—and that's why so much time passes before we renovate, right? Sometimes the in-between stages seem so much worse than the condition we start with. Anyone who has taken on a restoration task knows, though, how wonderful it feels to finish—to see the final results, especially when we do the work ourselves.

But the thought of a completed project was not all that kept me going. I felt free. I felt empowered. No matter how uncomfortable I was taking on each challenge, I did it anyway and noticed myself becoming more in tune with what I wanted. And something else I did not count on…fearless resolve!

Projects I never saw myself doing on my own—never had to do on my own—were now on the agenda. Fear of heights, lack of appropriate tools and skill, and my dyslexic brain taking inaccurate measurements—what used to hold me back was no longer a deterrent. It would seem that the more I challenged my scared little self to purge and repair my house, the more my body and mind purged and repaired as well. Suddenly, there was the need to buy power tools, an extension ladder, and all sorts of fasteners, screws, and brads. I read every tool's manual and poured over countless do-it-yourself videos. I realized there was no task that was too big; there was only ambition that was too small.

First on the list, the cracks in the master bedroom's fourteen-foot cathedral ceiling…no problem! Fixing those led to the furniture being refinished, then the spare bedroom and living areas were tackled, five closets cleaned, and four hundred and fifty pounds of clothes donated. There was furniture sold, given away, or transformed; curtains and rods changed...nothing was sacred; nothing was held onto. If the energy attached to objects did not feel right or good, if I didn't need it, it didn't get to stay.

A year into my renovations and immediately after a bout of Covid, I sat at my kitchen table sipping morning coffee in the near dark. A wave of construction bravado came over me, and I grabbed a hammer and crowbar and started tearing down the non-load-bearing wall blocking all my light. Twenty-year anxiety about how I would work in the radiators and electric were no longer a challenge. As the sun's rays flowed through the open studs, ideas, brawn, and resolve were flowing through me.

During this time our family realized that my 81year-old mother had to leave her fifty-year residence. I took on the job of staging her house so we could sell it, and then my son and I reconstructed an entire floor in my house so she would be comfortable moving in. I worked tirelessly and enthusiastically night and day. Where this energy came from is a mystery to this day. Fortunately, her house sold quickly and with the help of my two children, she moved into her new space with little stress. Doing all of my prior "home" work in my own space prepared us both for this... a miracle, for sure.

As my renovations come to an end, now, there are just some odds and ends and one room left to do—my office. I had no conscious reason why I left that room till last until very recently. While lying in bed, I heard in my head, "You are going back to school!" A strong urgency and knowingness came over me that I needed to study psychology and earn a professional degree. So you know, I never wished to go from coach to counselor or psychologist but on this day, I knew incorporating both was my destiny.

Throughout my entire life, the thought of school brought to mind so many scary memories of being a dyslexic kid. I self-taught as an adult so as not to bring myself that stress, not to mention all the consideration for the time and money it takes to get an advanced degree. Now, though, dyslexia has become my superpower, and any uneasiness about money, hardships, or time have no effect on me.

After two weeks of research and due diligence, I successfully enrolled. My former office—the place I conducted business, wrote books, and drew cartoons—is on its way to becoming a library fit for a sixty-year-old student.

And so it goes, the Soul knows even when we do not. I find it quite amusing the method mine used to lead me through. The truth is I followed each step to the nth degree no matter how crazy or unfathomable it seemed or how much construction chaos I had to live in. All of this to prepare for a newly renovated life I didn't even know was about to unfold. All of this due to a leaky skylight; a most fortunate occurrence, if ever there was one. ✧

Donna Martini *is a wellness activist, coach, and author of several books, including* **The Ten Commandments of Divorce** *and* **My Mini Book of Mighty Mantras**. *She wants readers to know that she was a construction consultant in her prior career and took all necessary safety precautions before undergoing these projects. Donna also wants readers to know that the money for these projects and for school came as serendipitously as the guidance. She writes this reminder: "When we envision what we want without worry about the how and when, the ways and means seem to just flow right in."*