



BODY BRAVE
recovery for every body



KAREN'S EXPERIENCE: WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED



Feeling desperate about what to do next, Pradeep and I began searching for other paths to healing for our daughter. I know how much Sonia valued her Indian heritage, and so one day we took a day trip to Toronto, where we explored Gerrard Street with its many Indian shops.

I hoped that the bustling atmosphere of this part of Toronto would lighten her mood. We were soon immersed in the sounds of Bollywood music, the smell of roasted corn and spices, and the shimmer of Indian silks. Sonia did brighten a little.

On our walk back towards our car, we noticed a sign on the wall of an old red-brick building, which read "Want a glimpse into your future? Tarot Card readings - \$50!"

Sonia and I looked at each other, and then simultaneously said – *Let's do it!* By this point, she'd been struggling with her eating disorder for seven years. We'd tried so many treatments and so many therapies, but nothing had resulted in lasting benefit. We desperately needed a new strategy.

Sonia followed the man into an interior room while I paced around the dingy waiting area. A chart on the wall displayed a bewildering array of images – the "Wheel of Fortune" card, surrounded by snakes and a sphinx-like creature; the "Tower" card, showing a man falling from a high tower towards a churning ocean; the "Magician card", with a mysterious robed figure holding a globe and compass. My mind was racing, filled with conflicting thoughts. *What am I doing here? I don't believe in any of this stuff...*

The minutes dragged by. Eventually Sonia emerged, accompanied by the grey-haired man. He smiled at me and said, "Your daughter is a remarkable young woman - very insightful."

I thanked him, paid the \$50 and turned to leave the office, my mind still whirling in confusion. We emerged onto the street into brilliant sunshine, blinking as our eyes become accustomed to the light.

"So what did he say?" I asked, burning with curiosity.

"Well, the guy would draw a Tarot card from a deck. Then he related the meaning of each card to my life, and my future. It was actually kind of cool," Sonia replied thoughtfully

"Tell me more!" I said, my heart pounding.

"The first few cards had scary meanings - danger, change, turmoil - stuff like that. But the last card he drew was the Strength card. It showed a picture of a woman holding the jaws of a lion. The lion looks fierce, but the woman is totally calm..."

"Hey, that's really inspiring!" I say, feeling a sudden upspring of hope.

"Yeah...the guy said that the Tarot cards showed that I was going through a rough time, but that things are going to get better soon. He said that I have great inner strength," Sonia said.

On the drive home we were both silent, absorbed in our thoughts. This conversation was the longest one I'd had with my daughter in months. She'd been lost in the depths of the eating disorder and the depression that followed it.

As I negotiated my way through the busy traffic on the way home, I reflected about my brief encounter with the Tarot reader. I remembered his warm smile, and his comment about Sonia being a remarkable young woman with great insight. I'd been too flustered at the time to respond to his comments. But as I mulled over the encounter, I suddenly thought - *He truly saw Sonia, as a whole person. He saw her as someone with intelligence and capability, someone worthy of respect. So different from some of the physicians who'd treated Sonia in hospital!*

Although I was skeptical about the scientific merits of the process, the Tarot reader had offered us a hopeful narrative. Even if that narrative was primarily an act of the imagination, it was powerful. For surely that is the purpose of imagination – to create new stories in our minds, stories that can lift us beyond our present circumstances and help us to dream about possibilities.



I realized that the stories I was creating in my mind about Sonia's illness had become very dark. I struggled with feelings of hopelessness about the future, obsessing about the possibility of Sonia's death. These dark thoughts were associated with a slide into a serious bout of depression. Fortunately, I was still connecting with the psychotherapist family doctor that I'd met several years ago. She took me firmly in hand. She raised the dose of my anti-depressants and got me onto a much stricter self-care routine.

I talked to her about our experience with the Tarot reader, telling her that he'd gave me a glimpse into my daughter's true self – her brave, funny and brilliant self. The 5 year old girl who could tackle a bully at school to help a friend; the 8 year old who delighted in her colourful and exciting life in India; the 10 year old who made friends easily and loved jokes and laughter; the 11 year old girl who travelled all by herself to India to visit family; the graduating high school student who walked off the podium with so many honours and awards...I also remembered a trip we'd taken together - a multi-day hike to a remote valley in the Himalayas. When I was gingerly crossing a slope of broken scree, high above a deep gorge, I felt the loose stones beneath me began to slip. Sonia shouted, "Mom!

Watch out!” She stepped forward to extend her hand, and pulled me to safety. That courageous, loving and brilliant young woman had been devastated by the eating disorder, and at times I had lost sight of her altogether.

I discussed these reflections to Pradeep that evening.

“I must keep those images of Sonia alive in my mind. Right now, she’s so lost in the darkness of the eating disorder – but she is still there.”

Pradeep nodded. “I think what your Tarot experience is also telling us is this: We must think “out of the box” now... We’ve tried everything that the formal system of eating disorder care has to offer – it’s had some benefits, but nothing seems to last. I say – let’s go looking for answers elsewhere.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I think she must come with me on a trip to India. She needs to reconnect with her loving extended family and be in a radically different cultural environment. Time in India may help with some of the identity issues she’s been struggling with, as a biracial woman.”

“I like the idea in principle,” I replied slowly. ‘But now is the worst time to go – it’s the monsoon season, boiling hot, raining all the time...and infectious diseases are rampant at this time of the year.”

“Let’s consult Sonia- lay out the risks and possible benefits.”

Sonia agreed readily, to my surprise. Within a couple of weeks, we’d booked a flight to Delhi for Pradeep and Sonia. With trepidation I watched them disappear through the departure gates...What would be the outcome of this dangerous venture?

~Dr. Karen Trollope-Kumar

