

**YOU ARE A HEROINE**  
A Retelling of the Hero's Journey

by Susanna Liller



**SAMPLE CHAPTER**



**EMERALD LAKE**  
BOOKS

*You Are a Heroine*

*A Retelling of the Hero's Journey*

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*For my Hungarian grandmother, Susanna Banyay  
Minden szerelmemmel és hálával*



## Preface

It was a blustery November day in 1911 as a passenger train pulled out of the frenzied station in Budapest, Hungary. It was quickly gaining speed when a suitcase suddenly came hurtling out of the train's door. Moments later, a wide-eyed young lady in long skirts leaped from that moving train. A moving train! After picking up her suitcase and wiping it off with the edge of her skirt, the young lady walked shakily back to the station.

Despite what you may think, this is not the story of a fictitious Heroine. No, she was a real woman—a woman who happened to be my grandmother and namesake. She wasn't a daredevil or a stuntwoman. Rather, she was a twenty-one-year-old bound for America to join her fiancé. But she was leaving behind everything familiar: her family, her friends and her country. It was a bitter-sweet parting from her native Hungary.

I'm sure she was nervous, frightened, lonely and excited.

She had only just begun her journey, traveling (alone!) from her quiet village to the bustling city of Budapest to take a train to Amsterdam.

So when the train pulled out of the station and she realized that she had boarded the *wrong* train, she did what anyone following her dream would do—she ran to the still-open door, threw her suitcase out before her, and jumped... right out of that moving train!

I think of my grandmother as a real-life Heroine, but while she is special to me, she's not unique in her Heroine status. You don't have to leap from a moving train to be a Heroine. There are Heroines everywhere you look, as well as in the mirror. And before you dismiss me for saying that you (yes, you!) are a Heroine, let me show you what I mean. You might be surprised.



## Introduction

This book is about something that is old—really old... thousands of years old. Yet this *something* is stunningly valuable for our modern lives.

This ancient something is a particular type of story pattern that is found everywhere, in all civilizations and throughout the centuries. As old as it is, it is still as relevant to us today as it was way back when stories were told orally, before they were written down. This type of story delivers a vital life message—a message so important that it has withstood the test of time. To understand this enduring story pattern and its personal connection to us is crucial to the development of ourselves and our society. That's why it was placed in stories in the first place. What better way to transmit a message that needs to be shared and remembered than in a story?

And guess what? The tradition worked! The story pattern is still with us today, in books and films. The story that I'm talking about is the story of the hero or, more specifically, the Hero's Journey story pattern. The Hero's Journey is about what makes the hero a hero: how an ordinary person evolves into someone extraordinary.

Although the story pattern has been around for millennia, it was Joseph Campbell, author and mythologist, who popularized the idea of the Hero's Journey in 1949 with his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In it, Campbell traces the story of the hero's journey and transformation through the mythologies of the world

and demonstrates that, in these stories, the heroes all encounter similar steps, or milestones, on their journeys. But the most important concept to the book that you're holding in your hands right now is that Campbell believed that those same milestones of the Hero's Journey could be applied to us... to our everyday lives.

These milestones are why I wrote this book. The story of the hero is about you; it's about me. It's *our* story. We are heroes and heroines! It doesn't matter how fantastical the stories are. Their core remains the same—the pattern of the hero progressing through the journey is the pattern of how you progress in your life.

Now here is an important clarification: my book is for women. Yes, I could continue to call you a hero, ignoring the term “heroine.” But I believe women don't hear enough about themselves in the feminine. This book is about the *Heroine's* Journey. It is designed to awaken the Heroine in you.

The plot of the Heroine's Journey is this: a seemingly ordinary person has an experience that moves her from her known world to a very different world. There she meets all kinds of challenges that culminate in some sort of monumental task, like dragon slaying, killing an evil wizard, destroying a ring of power, or vanquishing a witch to get her broomstick! This task transforms the ordinary person into a more fully realized human being who has a new awareness of herself and her capabilities. The Journey births her into who she really has been all along—a Heroine.

You can experience the milestones of the Heroine's Journey in your own life if (and this is a big *if*) you're willing to leave the safety of your comfort zone. It's not much of a story or a real-life transformation if a Heroine just stays in the same, safe environment. What if Dorothy had stayed on Aunt Em's farm in Kansas? She might have escaped the scary parts in the story, like those flying monkeys, but she also wouldn't have experienced Oz and its wonderful discoveries. Only when we take risks can we begin to break through our personal limitations and truly grow.

Even though this Heroine's Journey story pattern is ancient, it is still relevant to your life today—to the life of a modern twenty-first-century woman—and it still brings many benefits. Do you see it? By viewing your life from the Heroine's perspective, you gain the following:

- *You obtain a model for your development.* You learn to identify the milestones along the way so that you can track your progress on the Journey, making the unknown a little less frightening.
- *You learn to recognize the positive in what appears to be negative.* The hardships of the Journey shape—even birth—you into a wiser woman.
- *You discover that everyone is on a Journey.* You're not traveling alone. Many have traveled the same route before you.
- *You realize your commonalities with others.* The mythical and real-life stories reveal that we all search for truth, whether it is truth about ourselves or truth about the world in which we live.
- *You build confidence and self-esteem when you acknowledge your own Heroine story.* You see things in yourself that you might not have noticed before. You value yourself and your Journey more. You're empowered because you learn you've been a Heroine all along.
- *You learn that life is about the Journey.* The most important thing is your willingness to take that Journey, to move out of your comfort zone and embrace the life-altering changes that ensue.

The point of the Heroine's Journey is to birth you into your real self, the self you may have been holding back. The Journey helps you get past your fears. It helps you recognize the unique gifts you have to offer.



None of this is simple. It is challenging to risk being your unique self. It's also culturally atypical. This is why it's important that we learn to trust and respect our feminine nature and how we do the Journey, distinct from the masculine model. When we can give ourselves permission to fully be ourselves, both in our lives and in our leadership practices, we make a real positive impact on the world.

The Heroine's Journey is about our transformation as women. My mission as a coach, teacher and author is to help you recognize the utility, power and wisdom of this simple yet powerful life message, elegantly ensconced within a story framework so that you can chart your life, get your bearings and flourish.

## How to Read This Book

In the first two chapters, you'll learn the context of the Heroine's Journey and receive some useful things to take on the Journey, including a map. You'll also be introduced to three Heroines who'll be traveling with you. In chapters 3 to 7, you'll find yourself traversing the first Journey steps, chapter by chapter. In chapter 8 ("You Own the Perfect Compass"), you'll be given a Task that can help you determine where to focus your life and how to find your direction. This exercise will be very helpful as you travel the Heroine's Journey, but for some, the Task may feel like a distraction from learning the Journey milestones. If you want, you can skip this chapter and continue on, but I highly recommend that you return to complete the Task at some point! In the last chapters, you'll learn about the remaining Journey steps, as well as what life looks like after the Journey. The subsequent components of the book include information to support you on your Journey.

So, are you ready to get reading and to start uncovering who you really are? You're going on the identity search of a lifetime. I think you'll love what you discover!



## Chapter I

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# It's Not Just a Story, It's Your Life

Awaken your spirit to adventure;  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

—John O'Donohue, *For a New Beginning*

The Heroine's Journey, like any Journey narrative, is made up of a series of stages, also called “milestones.” It begins with the main character in her ordinary situation, in regular old life. **Ordinary Life** is what Joseph Campbell called it. The Heroine is going about her usual business. Then something occurs to take her out of that ordinary situation. It may be something external, like a natural disaster. Or it may be an inner urge to go somewhere and do something different. There are many internal and external incidents that push us out of our old patterns, ruts and routines. In Heroine's Journey parlance, this is labeled the **Call**.

The Heroine can heed the Call or refuse it. Usually, if she **Refuses the Call** (which happens a lot), the Call gets louder and more insistent. Think of a wake-up call, which can be most unpleasant. During this unsettled time, the Heroine begins to hear many voices, both her own and others'. People often come

forward, voicing their critiques of the Heroine. *You can't do this! You don't know how! You're not smart enough, strong enough or brave enough!* These warnings and admonitions can also come forward in the Heroine's own thoughts. *I can't do this. I will fail. She will do it better than I can.* And so on.

These are the voices of the **Threshold Guardians**, those who want to keep the Heroine back in the same old place they're used to seeing her, her comfort zone. If she answers the Call—grows, leaves, leaps—they'll feel threatened, inadequate, insecure and lonely. Or maybe they're just concerned for her and want her to stay safe, in the way that *they* define safe. Regardless of whether it's out of concern or insecurity, the Threshold Guardians are skilled at planting doubt in the Heroine's mind. (And the most harmful doubt for a Heroine is when she doubts her own inner knowing.)

Thankfully, there are also people who support and encourage the Heroine. *You can do this! Yes, we've been waiting for you to take this step! You set a great example for the rest of us!* These people are called **Mentors** or **Magical Helpers**, and like Threshold Guardians, they can appear at any time during the Journey.

Eventually, when the Heroine can no longer Refuse the Call by ignoring it, she must respond, though responding looks different for everyone. It can be a small step for some and a big jump for others. It can be hovering on or near the Threshold for a long time or taking five steps forward and ten steps back. This step into the unknown, however the Heroine takes it, is called **Crossing the Threshold**. The Heroine is moving into new territory, leaving the comfort zone of her old life, and traversing an imaginary Threshold into an adventure.

The Threshold Crossing is what I call a **Leap**. It's that moment of, *OK, I may be scared, uncertain and doubtful of my abilities, but I'm going to do this because I know it's what I need to do for me!*

I call it a Leap because it's a sudden, often forceful movement into a new "place." It takes energy and courage for the Heroine

to leave what she's used to and to try something new, whether it's actually *new terrain* (like a new job or a new place to live) or a *new way of being in the world* (such as choosing a different attitude about something, letting go of an uncomfortable relationship, or opening up to a new one).

It's a Leap because the Heroine is crossing over into the unknown, into the void, over the chasm of uncertainty. And because it's unknown, she's often enveloped in fear. It can be scary, but it can also feel exciting. In terms of personal growth, stretching and embracing change is a necessary step in the Heroine's development. It's almost always about acknowledging herself and her own inner voice—who *she* is and what *she* wants, not what *others* want for her.

The Heroine's Journey is ultimately all about the Heroine allowing herself to become herself.

Unfortunately, after the Leap, things don't necessarily get easier.

Once the Heroine has cleared the Threshold, she's on the road of her new Journey. This time period can have all kinds of trials, false starts, failures and successes. It can be like a maze. *Oops, a dead end! Wrong way! Go back to that fork in the road and turn left, not right.* In Journey terms, this period, when the Heroine experiences lots of turmoil, is called the **Belly of the Whale**. It's all about the Heroine being shaken up and tossed around as if she had been swallowed into a whale's belly. (Campbell's use of this term originates from the biblical story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a whale as part of his Hero's Journey.)

Getting tossed around ultimately aids the Heroine in becoming more herself. Many a Heroine has erroneous beliefs about herself that limit her expectations for her life. However, working through challenges and finding ways to recover from mistakes is how she learns. It's about her unfolding into her fullest self and not staying small. Like the proverbial oyster, she needs the grit of the sand to make the pearl.

The Heroine also meets **Dragons** while on the Journey. Dragons are deep-seated and challenging beliefs or baggage that the Heroine has been carrying around for most of her life—baggage and beliefs that eventually become roadblocks on the Heroine's Journey. The Journey illuminates them and offers the Heroine the opportunity to understand, heal and then dispense with them. (Often, heroes are pictured as fighting dragons. However, what I've found from working with women is the more feminine tendency to *befriend* their Dragons! If they take the time to understand how that roadblock originated, women are more prone to understand, transform and integrate an old fear, rather than slay it.)

Fear-based Dragons are much more insidious than the Threshold Guardians. They go deeper—often back to childhood, where erroneous beliefs can take root. Without her awareness, they run the Heroine's life. Her internal voices shout at her, *I can't trust myself. I can't do it by myself. This isn't safe! I will be abandoned if I do that! I will become unlovable...*

The Heroine must persevere to make it through the Belly of the Whale and to conquer (or befriend) her Dragons. Once the Heroine has done this, her next responsibility is to **Cross the Return Threshold** back to her home or place of business or wherever she has her community. She then shares the rewards she gained from this particular Journey. The rewards are known as **Gifts Received** and could be new levels of skill or awareness, more confidence, spiritual growth, financial achievement and so on. The Gifts that a Heroine receives from her hard and heroic work on her Journey can help everyone. Consider the woman who has taken the Journey to free herself from a dependent or abusive relationship or the woman who took the Journey to accept a difficult role in a new job. The strengths and skills gained by such women will benefit those around her. The Journey is a personal experience, but this expansion of herself also improves society.

The last milestone on the Heroine's Journey is the **Freedom to Live**. The Heroine has released, healed or integrated some aspect of herself (a belief, relationship, assumption or misperception) that has kept her from becoming her true self. She now has the freedom to be who she really is. This is the ultimate goal of the Heroine's Journey: to urge, challenge and push each woman into realizing her authentic self and to grow that self into its full potential. Yes, she will be vulnerable during the Journey—she will have to confront difficult situations. But ultimately, if she believes in herself and trusts the process, the Gift of learning to be herself is worth every step she takes on the Journey.

Although it may feel like it, life isn't a bunch of random moments. Those seemingly random moments actually form the time-honored Heroine's Journey. But sometimes you can't see the pattern until you stand back... way back... from a current Journey or until you look back at Journeys you've taken in the past. Every change and challenge that seems random is just a new Journey opportunity.

Our Heroine's Journey is a pattern underlying human experience. It is about transformation and growth. We go through many Journeys in a lifetime. Every Leap in response to a Call signals a new Journey. And we can be on simultaneous Journeys in different areas of our lives. Every change, challenge or situation that confronts us with something new is a potential Journey if we decide to answer the Call. Our Journeys can be confusing and painful, but they bring opportunities for discovery and growth. We develop confidence, understanding and perspective on the Journey. It's a process of self-discovery and self-integration.

## What about You?

Who are you? Where are you going?

No matter how you answer those questions, you have the Heroine's Journey as your centering tool. You can use it as a way

to put your life in context, to observe it from a higher level. Your Journey opens you up to seeing your life in a new light. It has the power to transform negatives into positives.

Instead of feeling shame or guilt and thinking something like, *I've really messed up the last three years*, the Heroine's Journey can help you see a different perspective. *I was flailing around in the Belly of the Whale, and I certainly learned a lot.*

Instead of beating yourself up for procrastination, the Heroine's Journey can help you instead see that you are receiving, and perhaps refusing, a call. Maybe you're simply not yet ready to cross that threshold.

Instead of making you fear the future and worry about where you are headed, the Heroine's Journey reassures you that you're on a time-honored, well-documented path. If you do your part, it will not let you down.

To read more of this book, please visit us at  
[emeraldlakebooks.com](http://emeraldlakebooks.com)





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## **Praise for *You Are a Heroine:* A Retelling of the Hero's Journey**

*You Are a Heroine* is an operating manual containing all a woman needs to navigate her personal journey. Susanna Liller brings myth and theory to life with examples from the lives of real people, including the author, and well thought-out tasks and exercises the reader can use to claim her identity and her place in the world. Use it as a GPS. Refer to it often.

**Patricia R. Adson, Ph.D. LP, coach and psychotherapist**

You would think that a book entitled *You Are a Heroine* would be a beacon for women who want to step out of the comfort zone society fashioned for them—and of course it is. This book is a roadmap for any woman who is ready to claim the day. But this is *also a very useful book for men* who want to better understand the complex journey women have endured for so long—a journey that menfolk can be all but oblivious to. This is a very special era, a time when a deeper truth is finally coming forth. Susanna Liller's brave book presents this truth in a way we can all understand.

**Jack Barnard, writer and creativity coach**

*You Are a Heroine* provides women with important knowledge about the transformative path they walk, while Susanna Liller teaches us about the heroine's journey in a readable, accessible and real-life way. My focus is helping women become bigger players in the marketplace. This book will help all women become bigger players in life.

**Bonnie Marcus, author of *The Politics of Promotion***

Susanna Liller came into my life when I was at a critical juncture, stuck professionally, without a clue as to how to move forward. Through her coaching, I found the strength to take the leap from a miserable, but well-paid, job to starting my own business. Now she is sharing her expertise, wisdom and good humor in this brilliant book. It will benefit any woman who wants to step out of her cookie-cutter role, yet faces daunting challenges. Following Susanna's guidance, readers will come to know that there is a larger framework in which they're operating, a framework that's shaping them into strong, wise change agents in today's world.

**Catherine Fellenz, retired change manager**

With so many distractions and choices to sort through, it's not easy to land on the right life path *for you*. Susanna Liller, a gifted coach and mentor to women, is your sure-footed guide through the overwhelm and into a place of confidence, calm and clarity. No matter what your circumstances or obstacles, reading this book will ease the challenge of finding a way in the world that feels fully resonant and richly rewarding.

**Amy Wood, Psy.D., author of *Life Your Way***

In *You Are a Heroine*, Susanna Liller takes you by the hand to the edge of your heroine's journey and sends you off with a map of the signposts you'll encounter, to know you're never lost. This book serves as a worthy guide to living to the fullest the great story that is your life.

**Gail Larsen, author and teacher,**  
*Transformational Speaking*

*You Are a Heroine* connects every woman to her strong, courageous and transformative self at a time when we all need to be reminded of our resilient nature. In a consistently convincing way, author Susanna Liller sends us the message that our best selves are only a journey away. Her book deliberately describes the Heroine's path in universal and manageable steps and provides a "you can do it" theme as a backdrop. With her personal anecdotes and real life examples of Heroines' journeys, Susanna conveys the truth: that any woman can embark on this challenging journey and emerge whole and transformed as she arrives back home to herself.

**Barbara Babkirk, master career counselor**

In her book, *You Are a Heroine*, Susanna Liller gently nudges us out of our comfort zone and into a place of deeper listening. She helps us to identify our profoundest truths and then inspires the courage and action necessary to honor them. Her expert guidance compels us all to leap—to embrace a life of greater authenticity, satisfaction, and joy.

**Jennifer Richard Jacobson, author of *The Dollar Kids***

Is life getting uncomfortable? A persistent voice is calling you to let go of the known and take a different route. You are attracted by this calling, yet something is not allowing you to move... This is the book for you. The warm voice of Susanna Liller will fill you with confidence and shine a light on the blessings that lie ahead. Trust your intuition. If you are reading this, you are a heroine and all you need to know to embark in your heroic journey is here.

**Blanca Vergara, author of *One Couple Two Careers***



## About the Author

Susanna Liller, like many women, wears multiple professional hats (which she enjoys wearing). She is an organizational-development consultant, executive coach, women's workshop leader, writer and musician. Her career, whether mediating, facilitating or coaching with groups or individuals, has always been about helping people find the path that evolves them to the next level of success. She believes that everyone's journey in work and life exists to transform them to a higher level of being. The challenge, however, is to not resist the change. Susanna sees herself as a guide and motivator in this transformational process.



Susanna lives on a small farm in Maine along with her husband Robin, four overfed sheep, a one-eyed rooster, two chatty hens, Merlin the cross-eyed Maine Coon cat, and a wimpy one-hundred-pound dog named Max. She spends as much time as she can visiting her children and grandchildren. In her "spare" time, Susanna plays the keyboard and sings in a band, which has landed her in the Belly of the Whale more than once! She loves seeing every day as an adventure on her own life Journey.

If you're interested in having Susanna come speak to your group or organization, you can contact her at [emeraldlakebooks.com/liller](http://emeraldlakebooks.com/liller)

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