

# ComoWhAT?!!

*A Series of Thoughts About the WhatWhat Moments of Life!*

By Ericka Vaughn Byrne

## Volume 1

SMALL TALK FOR FUNCTIONING INTROVERTS

### A Letter from the Author

Hi!

My name is Ericka Vaughn Byrne. I'm weird. Or at least that's what people I'm close to tell me. I'm also a dancer, choreographer, educator, and now, writer. I believe in a God who loves unconditionally and invites me to do the same. I believe in love. I recently married my best friend, and we're figuring out life together. He's my funny, kind, sweet, Irish gentleman. He gives me the gift of understanding. He knows me like no one else does and still chooses to love me like no one else can. He's my safety net.

I've spent my 20's trying to pay attention to my story. Digging into the hurts of my past, awakening the hopes of my future, letting go, holding on, crying, laughing, stalling, jumping, falling, flying. I've tried to do the tough work of really knowing myself. I read a lot and have some favorite "[mentors](#)" that have helped shape my journey. A quote from one such mentor, Lynette Lewis, says "A well-defined purpose is your filter." I believe in purpose and vision and the power of naming and owning your specific journey. I'm nowhere near the end of my journey, but I've come to this point. ***I believe my purpose is to inspire and support people in the restoring of their souls and the awakening of their gifts; validating their personal journeys of hope and healing as they move towards real, vibrant, beautiful, satisfyingly full life.*** In everything I do, this is the lens through which I see. This helps me say yes to some things and no to others. This helps me create margin and build my community. I could be sweeping a floor, and if by my doing so someone else moves towards an abundant life then my purpose has been fulfilled. This is me. The core of who I am. Below find a few things you need to know about my writing style.

1. I obnoxiously use hashtags. Not that I use them all the time, but I use them incorrectly and awkwardly, and I don't really care. #sorrynotsorry
2. I love the way words sound and will often-who am I kidding-ALWAYS sacrifice correct grammar for the ebb and flow a group of words can have together. HELLOooooooo run on sentences!
3. I feel things deeply and easily- like crying at Disney's Cars easily.
4. I can't hide these feelings to save my life- just ask my husband. And if by chance you catch me when I'm trying, I'll probably just end up staring at you wide-eyed for two minutes trying to will my face into compliance. #sigh #myface #expressiveproblems
5. I add parenthesis like they're going out of style. And side comments are my jam.

Ok, now you are ready to read.

Love Peace & Chicken Grease,  
EVB

## Introduction

Have you ever looked at your life and thought what is happening? Or what the crap? Or why me? Or this couldn't get any worse! Or, ok NOW, this couldn't get any worse! How about all of the above?? This. is. my. life. It's a crazy sauce world, and I feel like I'm ALWAYS saying comoWhAT?! Maybe you can identify.

So, in response, I decided that this year I was going to write a book about my experience. More like books (plural). You see, several small books, in my mind, is a little less daunting than one big book. I could be wrong- but whatevs. I've always known I would write a book, but I just assumed it would be later in life when I got my "stuff together." But then I started thinking, when will I have my stuff together? What does having your stuff together mean anyway? Can I quantify that? Do I want to quantify that?

I realized having my "stuff together" was always future tense, and I'm ready to admit that maaayybeee it was just an excuse. It made me feel better about doing nothing about the things I knew I was supposed to be doing (how's that for a sentence). It numbed the internal desire to make a change in my life - that unsettledness you feel sometimes when it's quiet and the rhythm of the day has edged away. It's time to stop making excuses. Time to stop moving so fast that I miss the pull to be present in my life. It's time to be present enough to notice my life and whether or not I'm happy with it. And when enough of those moments build up, like it did for me, you decide it's time to do something. So, this is me; doing something. I'm no longer going to let perfectionism stop me from moving forward. One of my favorite quotes is by Marianne Williamson. I think it's worth putting in all my books (see what I just did there?)

*Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate,  
but that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant,  
gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.*

*Your playing small does not serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking  
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.  
It is not just in some; it is in everyone.  
And, as we let our own light shine,  
we consciously give other people permission to do the same.*

*As we are liberated from our fear,  
our presence automatically liberates others.*

Friends (may I call you friends?) Maybe, instead of waiting until we have x,y, and z together, we should be trying and talking, learning and sharing, falling and failing, recovering and doing it all

over again. Maybe, we should give more value to the process, the journey, the path; and focus less on the result, the discovery, the destination. Not that those last three aren't important, they are. I just think my focus ratio could be adjusted. There is something to be said for the lessons learned along the way.

So, maybe you'll enjoy reading this, and maybe you won't. Maybe you'll learn something, and maybe you won't. Maybe you'll laugh, maybe you'll roll your eyes, maybe this book won't prick you in the slightest way. And maybe this book isn't about you...maybe it's about me. Maybe it's about the growth I've experienced in putting words on pages and sharing. And not just any words. My words. My life. My experience. My story. If you have made it this far, I just want to say thank you. You are a witness to my story, and I hope that by the time you're finished reading this, in some way, I will have been a witness to yours.

### **Chapter One: The dilemma**

I spend the whole day in bed. Resting. I barely move, giving into my pleasure muscle. What do I want to eat, drink, watch, do? Whatever it is, I do that. only that. I'm rewarding myself for that which is to come. The incredible amounts of work I will do. The stress I will place myself under for the good of...well, for the good of something. TBD. I'm getting a little nauseous as the day winds down. I know I'm closer to "time" now. I will take myself to get showered. ugh. Showering used to be so pleasurable, but now, it's a road to the inevitable. Despite this or maybe because(?) I spent extra time under the sanctuary of the hot water. Clothes, hair, make up next. I sit. I'm done and only just beginning. I'm tapping my feet, wringing my hands. The room spins. Finally, I hear those dreaded words..."Babe, you ready to go to the party?"

You laugh (or maybe you didn't-whatevs), but this is real life for over 50% of the population. (This statistic has been neither researched nor confirmed by any authority, but it's got to be true, don't you think?) If the above spoke to you in any way, you. are. my. people. You get me, and I get you. And if you're the person shaking your head, well, hi, I'm a functioning introvert and assuming an anomaly to you. You will never get me the way my brethren do, but that's ok. You can still exist in the world. I'm not mad, but I do want to say one thing. Please accept the fact that unlike you, this party is literally sucking the life out of me and respect that in spite of that, I'm still here. Believe it or not, people like you and moments like this matter to us and we do try. Think about this next time you dare give an introvert a hard time for literally falling apart when you change the departure time from 9:30 to 9:35pm. I can't. My heart was set at 9:30pm. I reserved enough energy for 9:30pm. not 9:35, or 9:34, 9:33, 9:32, 9:31, not even 9:30 and 36 seconds. It's 9:30pm. on. the. dot. At 9:25pm, you should have already said your goodbyes. At 9:28, your shoes should be on. At 9:29, you should be helping me put my coat on, and exactly at 9:30pm, we should be walking out the front door. You will NEVER understand this, but for the sake of all that is holy, just be ready to go at 9:30pm. please :)

Now, back to my people. My brethren. My introverts. This book is really for you. I know there is a variety of us out there. The spectrum is wide, but some of us get burned because, on the outside, we are lively, happy, excited, "outgoing" people. We can hang, laugh, have fun with the best of them; but these qualities are totally functional at their core. What does that mean? Of course, we know, but for those extroverts who are still reading this, I'll explain. It means we can do all the things extroverts can do, BUT what happens after our intense "people" exposure??? The crash. We are totally and completely depleted of all energy. Every last drop. The newer the environment, the longer the length of time, the more responsibility that is laid upon us to host, engage, be present (Lord, forbid we are by ourselves) the harder the fall. Depending on these

factors, we are utterly exhausted afterward while our extrovert counterparts are bounding around all over the place, ready for the next opportunity to be "out and about." Don't get me wrong. We can certainly have fun at these gatherings and enjoy ourselves quite fully, but we need to be prepped for this time and replenished directly following. We confuse you because some of us introverts can stand in front of a large crowd and thrive. I mean *live.our.lives* thrive, but send us into the masses afterward for dreaded "small talk," and we crumble. People, being *in front* of large crowds and being *in* large crowds are completely different things all together, but I digress. Back to my people. Why am I writing this book you say? I'm writing it because bloody hell, we need a freaking code book. We need a book to unpack the ins and outs of social interactions. We need a tool, a guide on how to "small talk" or better yet, how to bring small talk inside our turf. Let's take back the game a little shall we? Here are 3 questions to skirt past the fluff without going 10 levels deep. Balance introverts (rarely are extroverts ready for "deep" as quickly and as often as we are. It's ok. we'll get them there slowly).

## **Chapter Two: What's something that has brought a smile to your face this week?**

I love this question. Thinking about it makes me smile. Saying it makes me smile. Answering it makes me smile. It's the type of question that projects happy. It assumes there was something in your life that made you happy and puts you in a mindset of believing it and finding that gem of a moment to share. I think back to a particular tough day, and at the end of it, I was talking to my mom (yes, I talk to my mom every day, and I do mean Er-day. Don't judge) Anyway, mom asked, "so, what funny kid story do you have today?" It made me pause, think back, and search for that story she believed would be there.

So here it is.

4th grade 8:25am \*to protect the privacy of my students, names have been changed\*

Demetri- Ms. Lashley! Ms. Lashley! (this was before I got married)

Me- (walking over) Yes, Demetri?

Demetri- Ms. Lashley, Josh, said my mom has nipples! (points to Josh furiously)

Me- ...

(What I wanted to say) Well, let's see here. I mean, she does, and I'm not exactly sure what you expect me to do...or say to chastise Josh because again, your mom does have nipples. In fact, you do too. Everyone has nipples. Also, it's not even 8:30am. Why are we talking about this? Whyyyyyyyy? Also, do I even want to know how this conversation got started. Also. I can't. Also, it's 8:30am. Also. OMG. Why are we talking about nipples?!?!

(What I actually said) Demetri...finish your drawing, please.

And then I walked away folks. I walked AWAY. I said, "Self. it's 8.30am, and today you get a pass on being the teacher who solves all the problems. Today, you will ignore this thing and let someone else talk with Demetri about the human anatomy."

Moral of the story? 1. Everyone has nipples, 2. Sometimes you get to give yourself a get out of jail free card 3. Tucked amongst the mundane and regular days/weeks/months we live are very real reasons to smile. Find them, share them and invite others to do the same.

### **Chapter Three: What do you love to do?**

Where do you work? What do you do? Not only is this a potentially hot button, because Lord knows, 50% of people are either out of work or out of the work they love and don't really want to talk about the work they're stuck in. (I just made that statistic up, but it's probably true, right? right. You know it's true) People are automatically ranked and shifted and corralled and labeled. Since when did our jobs become the totality of who we are? And everyone has his or her "Auto Answer" for this question. I myself, who love my job, find my brain and mouth going on auto pilot and zone out as I say the little script I've made up, trying to explain what I do in as little words as possible, so as not to rock the boat of social norms. Because who really has time to be authentic and real? And if you do dare, who really has time to hear it? No, when people ask, "what you do?", they want to hear that quick, one-word answer. Teacher, accountant, news anchor, mom, coach, model, assistant, cop, lawyer, pastor, principal, nurse, artist, etc. etc. etc. (And this is where I jump on my soap box- sorry not sorry) nope. I reject the auto-answer and the ranking of people by jobs. As if you can explain the totality of who you are and what you do in a one-word answer. Fine, ok, sure. I'm an educator, but I'm also an artist, an entrepreneur, a leader, a sister, a wife, a mover, a lover of laughter and life. Don't put me in a box (steps off soap box) Hi, I'm back :) Introverts, instead of asking "so...what do you do?" let's go deeper. (because truly, that's where we feel the most comfortable anyway. Can I get a witness?!?) Let's ask instead, "So, what do you LOVE to do?" And watch an unsuspecting someone go from confused at the addition of this new word to a familiar question, intrigued by your interest and then happy to be thinking about what they love instead of living under the pressure of trying to make their job or lack thereof sound better. Can we not do that same old same old? Can we take the pressure off? Please and thank you.

### **Chapter Four: What's the most selfishly wonderful thing you've done over the past three days?**

So, here's me. I have this very unhealthy relationship with the words Selfish/Selfless. I mean, it could have to do with the fact that I'm an extremist (Thank you Mother) and bounce very easily from one edge of an idea to the other edge, jumping-no hurdling over a reasonable, more balanced take on said issue. Because I'm that person, I happily bounced my way right over the bridge of a normal and dove right into crazy town. When I hear the word selfish, I see this definition:

"Selfish: the worst of the worst, the scum of the earth, undeserving of God's grace (because obviously, you can earn God's Grace...For those who don't pick up on my sarcasm, you can't, that's the point. You're not supposed to have to earn anything. It's a gift, but I digress-save that for book 11.0) Back to selfish definition: undeserving of people's goodness, completely wretched. The lowest of the low etc. etc. You get the point."

In direct contrast, my selfless definition reads as such:

"Selfless: Those who are selfless deny themselves their feelings, their wants, their needs. They are constantly thinking of others' needs above their own. They run themselves ragged making sure no one else within a 10mile radius has to lift a hand to do anything while they are around. They are known as reliable, resourceful, responsible (ugly. this word. It is the bane of my existence.). They are the cream of the crop, who are you going to call? Selfless people. They can never say no and will do everything at 100% going 100miles per hour. They nurture and care and

are concerned for EVERYONE at the cost of EVERYTHING, but most often, the cost is just themselves."

As you can see, those words carry a lot of meaning for me, and I imagine they do for you too. Maybe not to the extent of my extreamanism (No, I didn't mean extremism. Yes, I do know I'm making all lexicographers cringe), but you hear it, and it means something. Whatever it means to you, I hope you pause, consider where you are on the spectrum and find the balance. Sometimes, we have to take back those words that have been incorrectly defined in our lives and intentionally redefine their meaning. I'm redefining selfish as filling my tank before I ever attempt to fill someone else's. Knowing my needs, wants, desires, and making sure I get them. ***Selfishness at the expense of another is not what I'm going for, but I also don't want to be selfless at the expense of myself anymore.***

Here's the deal. As with everything I write, take it with a grain of salt. Settle into your own story and be honest about where you are. Maybe this isn't your question. Maybe the question you need to ask is, "What's the most wonderfully selfless thing I've done over the last three days?" As for me, this is where I'm at. I'll always be honest about that. And it's here that I'm trying to find balance. My true center. I hope you find yours.

**Chapter Five: Introverts, we have GOT to protect our energies. First for ourselves, then for the people that we love. Everyone else can get the leftovers, if there are any left! (longest title ever. I know #sorrynotsorry)**

Story. It was the week of my then boyfriend's birthday. He has since become my fiance and now husband (THAT'S another book) Anyway, it was his birthday and my week was jammed pack with things to do. Already off to a bad start. Extra. My work schedule was overly crowded with extras. Extra meetings, extra difficult classes, extra follow-ups to do with team members, extra emails to send, extra long days. Y'all. It was ALL. of .THE .Extra. Not only was I in "extra" work land, but I had decided that Steafan should have not one but a three-part birthday celebration. So much extra. So, after my exhausting work week, we started the weekend with breakfast at his favorite place with some of our favorite friends early, so I couldn't sleep in. Why Ericka? Already, I was done with the day. Next, we went to a vintage toy shop where one of his other friends worked to have a look around. He said we'd be there for only 1 hr. We were there for 3...I can't. extra. Steafan wondered why I was in such a bad mode. His exact words were, "I don't really feel loved." I cried. Sweet Jesus, we have two more celebratory days to get through, and I have nothing left. Whyyyyyyy. The next day, Sunday, Steafan had to be at work at 2pm, so I picked him up earlyish and blindfolded him and drove him around the city to our surprise celebration for the weekend. His cousin's house for lunch and cake. It was great, but he was sad that he didn't have more time with them. What? I'm over here like. Are you kidding me?!?! I had to plan this whole thing via FB (because I didn't have this cousin's number) I've chauffeured you around. They made food, cake and got you a card, and all you can say is, gee, I wish we would have gotten here earlier... I can't win with you. Done. go. to. work. Bye Felicia. Extra. Oh, sweet reader, by this time, as you can probably tell, my tank is WAYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY past empty. I've over extended myself by 10, and we've still one more day of celebration to go. Awkward smile. Cricket, cricket, cricket.

Monday. D-day. The biggest of the bday celebrations. Bowling, pizza, and beer with a group of his pals. Why on a Monday night you say? Because I'm a recovering, overachieving perfectionist and we just HAD to do something on his actual birthday. Lord forbid we just sit our butts down somewhere (smh). This day was the mother of all days. I worked until 2pm. Steafan worked until

12pm. We then had offered our services to help one of his friends move. Why? I... sigh. It pains me just thinking about the impossibility of this day we created. So, as soon as I was done with work, I met Steafan and the "moving crew" at the old house where we spent the next three hours packing, loading, driving, and unpacking. I had to pull Steafan away at 6:15pm and say, babe, you have a party that starts in 45 minutes. We need to shower, dress ourselves and get there. We need to go now. Period. Say goodbye. Way to talk to your boyfriend on his birthday when he's helping another friend move, Ericka. Way. to. go. We hustled and hurried, and there were tears and words. As we sat in the bowling alley 45 minutes later, (don't ask me how that happened) we had empty, exhausted looks plastered on our faces. We had done the absolute most, and now we had to go host a party...yeaahhhhh (voice trails off) This would be an easy enough feat for my extrovert boyfriend, but me?? Let's just say it was all a blur. I tapped into some insanely deep resources my body stores just in case a natural disaster, war or famine hits the USA. I had to use those resources people. You get me? At the end of it all, I cried. I cried because I had SOO not understood or listened to my body that I created a mad world in which I could not live. I cried because my sweet boyfriend got the VERY worst of me on his birthday weekend. I cried because I realized my limits (I hate those). I cried because my plans had backfired on mostly me. What's the moral of this story? At all cost, protect your energy. Look ahead and make sure you have enough time space, rejuvenation first to service yourself, then yo crew, then the "others." People, if we don't take care of ourselves, literally, nobody else will. You know the extent of your capabilities and personal "resources" so don't go beyond what you can do. Screw people who don't get it or say you have more. Screw them, and if you don't know the extent of your internal resources, learn it quick, friend. For the sake of all that is holy, learn yourself. I look back at that weekend and feel sad because the most important person to me got the last of my resources and saw the worst of me. I was able to be chipper and gracious and kind to everyone else, but Steafan got my tears, exhaustion, snippy words and attitude. Introverts, learn from my tale. Figure out what your limits are and then at all cost, protect them. You have a lot to offer the world, but not if you're constantly overextending yourself and one straw away from completely losing it. Stop that madness. Stop it right now.