

Create Encounters**Arisa White****Goddard College: Spring Residency Graduation 2015****March 29, 2015**

Thank you to the graduating class for inviting me to be your commencement speaker. I'm truly honored. To the administration and faculty, parents, family and friends, thank you for supporting them along the way.

Moments of encounter instigate fundamental change on many levels of functioning, and from those experiences you awaken into a deeper knowing of yourself.

Today is evidence of your willingness to create change in consciousness. To create encounters, and in doing so, you've uncovered a broader story of you, and of those around you.

The books you've opened, even the ones you've avoided, broadened you. The people you've engaged, the faculty who advised you, the trees, the snow, the food that went inside you, have all been a source to your awakening. You are stepping into, discovering, recovering, restoring, and reclaiming your humanity.

Every being around you unlocks something you need to know. In a very basic way, each encounter is an offering, a pause to study. Be brave and accept the information given. Be curious and explore what you will do with it.

An encounter brings you to your edge and asks, What is here?

Several years ago, after a devastating end to a romantic relationship, a dear friend said, Arisa you are human.

I was responding robotically to the breakup, and I thought she was insulting me by saying I was human. She reminded me that it was OK to feel, to have the full-Monty of my emotions. Only then, could I begin to heal.

That five-minute phone call helped me face the ways I didn't consider myself human. What was it that kept me in an understanding that humanity wasn't allowed to me? Why wasn't I free to express?

These questions have led to intellectual, psychological, artistic, somatic, and spiritual explorations.

There were a lot of "nots." Ways of not seeing or allowing myself. All the nots put before and placed upon and socialized within me. It's truly binding—nots. Negation. The ways we allow and collide and collude and ignore and turn blind and off to the nots.

We must have to wonder when we consented and from where this consent began that we all became inflexible. When, there you are, needing to be reminded that you're human.

Encounters are the struggle you need to break out of the shell. They will grow you, offer moments to reflect on the ways you've related, and embolden you to put into liberating use the knowledge you've gained. What this does is increase your ability to respond—not react—respond. You become less susceptible to dualistic thinking—black/white, right/wrong, red/blue—you develop an intimate unconditional understanding of who you are, you're genius, the “attendant spirit present from your birth.”

You are already complete and whole, and remember this. The world, as it is now, likes to remind us that we are to be filled, that we come in pieces, and we are fragmented. It's all so linear, and you must follow Big Freedia's, the Queen of Bounce, recommendation to “Release your wiggle.”

Your wiggle as your true authentic self.

Your wiggle as an affirmation to your body as an unapologetic force of nature.

Your wiggle as voice.

Your wiggle as divine.

Your wiggle as feminine.

Releasing your wiggle will be your praxis.

The encounter presents you with possibilities to language yourself less violently in this world.

Value what your experiences, and the experiences that you've inherited, have given you. Give attention to what you consider distant and absent, your silences. Initiate ways to dialogue with those parts of yourself.

I recently traveled to South America to meet my father, after 30-plus years of estrangement. What I witnessed was the mind that created my existence, his point of view, his projections. He spoke of privileges had, then privileges gone.

Born when Britain still held colonial rule in Guyana, his adolescence spent post-colonially, then governmental corruption prompted him to immigrate to the States in his mid-twenties. I listened to the grief he endured and perpetuated. He predicted his father's death at 11 years old. A felon in America, now a deportee, returned to a homeland that does not extend her generousities as she used to. They will not give him a pension he earned for his years served in the Guyana police force. They took the money he deposited in the National Bank, decades ago.

What I've stated, in brief, is how circumstances shaped his life, and how he chose to direct his genius. I bore witness to his suffering and joys, and I could witness my own fears along side his fears, and the bravado that stands in defense, keeping that vulnerable self on lockdown, because to set it free, means I need to change the story, to honor the intelligence of my core, telling me its truth.

What I saw in my father was his dualism, patriarchy-induced insecurities, his contradictions and learned to let it exist without judgment or offense to me. I saw his beauty and his denial as a denial of self. Evidence of his objectification. What I encountered was history, his story that lives in me, and began to resolve the pain we carried for generations.

Use your makers, your many mothers and fathers, as maps to make an assessment of your terrain—physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. Feel from where you can act, where you can “subject” the narrative and be here.

Because here before you is an insurmountable amount of love, to create new pathways, pose challenges, to confront what is absent in the world, to nurture what we need more of, and liberate where freedom is feared. Find ways to prevail, regardless of the circumstances that are given, and move toward that feeling in yourself to adjust what needs to be just. Create the support systems that will encourage you to take risks that are bolder each time.

Our collectiveness consciousness needs you to be courageous.

It is beautiful to have witnessed you come into your own. You are more wave than solid, you are more brilliant than light.

Continue to show up for this commitment you've made before us all to honing your humanity. Embrace your edges, those liminal spaces, the wounds, and smiles, the places of contact, your sensitivities, because that's where your awesomeness is cultivated. Encounter it daily, because your dimensionality is boundless.

An encounter brings you to your edge and asks, Who is here?

You ARE.

Be well and gentle with yourself.