

Wisdom From The (Not So Secret) Order of The Titanides: Vol. 12

**"A self that goes on changing is a self that goes on living..."
- Virginia Woolf**



Dear ,

Maybe it's the start of the new decade, 2020, or the fact that I'll turn 55 this year. Or maybe it's my frozen shoulder that reminds me I'm no longer 20 years old. But I've been thinking about late in life re-invention lately.

It all started when I was chatting with my lovely co-author of *Why Didn't Anybody Tell Me This Sh*t Before* and our new Titanides Queen of Content, Laura Gale. As often happens when we get together, we easily slipped from talking about content strategy into talking about our work and life.

Laura confessed she was struggling with a secret fear. She said, "I'm worried I might have peaked too soon. What if my best work is behind me?"

Now, Laura is only 32 and she started her career as a writer, editor and marketer very young. She enjoyed a lot of success early in her career. But lately she's been wondering what's next.

She asked me, "What happens if I get bored of writing for clients, or marketing no longer appeals to me? Will my work still be valuable if I decide to start over again after all the time I've invested?"



(Jennifer Wells, 2019)

Laura isn't alone. Women worry about this at every age. We worry that we'll get stuck. We worry about stagnating. We worry that our family choices will limit our career choices. We worry we will peak too early... or too late... or not at all.

Our fears are not unfounded...

The Perils of Middle Age

Honorary Titanide, Maria Popova of Brainpickings.org, wrote a recent blog post on middle age reinvention. [Popova shared the story of pioneering education reformer, Elizabeth Peabody.](#)

Peabody explained that the danger for women isn't when we are young and ambitious...

"The perilous time for the most highly gifted is not youth ... the perilous season is middle age, when a false wisdom tempts us to doubt the divine origin of the dreams of our youth; when the world comes to us, not with the song of the siren, against which all books warn us, but as a wise old man counselling acquiescence in what is below us." – Elizabeth Peabody



If you've achieved a certain level of success in your career or your business, it's easy to slip into complacency. It's especially tempting if you have work that you are good at, colleagues and partners that you enjoy working with, and a nice steady income. It's the lure of safety and security that trips us up.

Ironically, the safer and more successful we are, the more resistant we become to taking risks. And yet, without risk there is no growth. It's why "Not-So-Secret Lesson #11" in our book is "Never stop growing yourself."

Peabody herself was a fantastic example of re-invention. She founded the first English-language kindergarten in the US. She was the first to translate Buddhist scriptures in America. She opened the first foreign-language bookstore in the US. She was a leader in the transcendental movement. And she was the only female member of Boston's all-male lending library until they kicked her out after only 30 days.

The antidote to middle age complacency is not acquiescence. The antidote to stagnation is re-invention. You want to always be looking for your next move. To quote Virginia Woolf, "A self that goes on changing, goes on living."

Intellectual Restlessness and Creative Reinvention

I've done a lot of reinventing myself throughout my career. I started out as a copywriter for a small publisher in Cincinnati called F&W Publications selling art books through the mail, long before Amazon was invented. When I was downsized less than a year later, I went to work for a temp agency.

That's how I landed a job working at The Carl Solway Gallery for my oldest and dearest mentors, Carl and Elizabeth Solway. That job turned into a decade of learning about contemporary art, meeting my husband, and starting a family.

Then Carl sent me off to get my MBA and that's how I discovered the venture capital world. Eventually, I ended up working with scientists and entrepreneurs at early stage medical start-ups. I built financial models to help them get funding for their discoveries.

When I got pregnant late in life, I decided I didn't want to keep up the pace of the venture capital world anymore. So I re-invented myself again as a fundraiser for a local non-profit company. But the paycheck wasn't enough to support our family, so I started looking for a side hustle.

That's when a friend of mine reached out to me. He was working with a local options trading firm, Schaeffer's Investment Research, and he needed someone to write emails to options traders. The two of us had started our careers together at F&W Publications over a decade earlier. And that's how I became a copywriter for the second time in my life.

Then, eight years ago, my son tried to commit suicide and was diagnosed with mental illness and addiction. My life was turned upside down once again. That's when I became a coach and mentor for others struggling with these issues. And I began telling our story and speaking publicly about these issues on stages.

Eventually, speaking and training about mental illness and addiction turned into speaking and training about copywriting. I began using my mentoring skills to help coach and mentor other copywriters at AWAI, at Copy Chief Live, at Money Map Press and more.

About this time, I gathered a small group of women for conversation at dinner in Stamford, Connecticut and the Titanides was born. Now five years later, I'm find myself leading an online community of female marketers, entrepreneurs and copywriters...

No matter how far they wander, rivers always end up at the sea...

On paper my journey looks completely random. But if you look closer, you'll see that it actually looks like one of those connect-the-dots drawings I used to do at my grandmother's house as a kid. At first all you see are a bunch of disconnected dots on the page, but when you begin to connect them, a complete picture emerges.

All those skills I honed working with contemporary artists at Carl Solway Gallery are incredibly helpful when dealing with creative entrepreneurs and copywriters. The lessons Carl taught me about running a small business keep my advertising agency profitable today.

The hours I spent building pro-forma financial statements at the VC fund come in handy while creating a business plan for the Titanides. The lessons my son taught me about detachment and surrender make me a better mentor and leader today.

None of it feels random. It just feels like the natural evolution of my life, my heart, and my talent. Each step in the journey adds more knowledge, more wisdom, more skills and these are the things that will inform your next step.

At our first ever Titanides Conference in 2017, writer, musician and programmer, Karina Bone gave a breathtakingly beautiful talk about rivers. [Patrons can watch it here.](#)

It turns out that there actually is a pattern underneath all that wandering...

"After a lot of mapping and measuring, scientists figured out that every river will follow a path 3.1416 times longer than the shortest possible route from their origin to the sea." Rivers take their time, but they always end up at the sea." – Karina Bone

How do you know when it's time to move on?

You never know where the journey is going to take you. Your job is to pay attention and to be open to change. To be willing to let go of the need for certainty and 'knowing' and be willing to step into the non-knowing.

Everything you do and experience brings new skills and perspectives, but until you've lived the thing, you don't know what perspective you'll gain.

So, you can't know what the future holds. You have to trust that the skills, and the

experience you get from living, will together show you the way.

Your only job is to stay curious and open.

So how do you know if it's time to move on?

I love this advice from Oprah Winfrey from our book. She says...

"Life is about growth and change. When you are no longer doing that – that is your whisper; that is your whisper that you are supposed to do something else." – Oprah Winfrey

From copywriting to nipple tattoos

Titanide Shannon Housley started to hear that whisper after she turned 42. She was bored with her current copywriting and marketing business. She wanted to do something else, something that could make a difference in women's lives.

But she didn't know what... Then she read an article about reconstructive tattoos and everything fell into place.

Shannon discovered that skilled tattoo artists are creating hyper-realistic 3-d nipple tattoos for women who have had breast reconstruction surgery. These tattoos are less invasive than nipple reconstruction and look as good as the real thing.

Shannon knew she wanted to help breast cancer survivors feel confident and sexy again. So, she found the leading expert on restorative 3-d tattoos and went to Philadelphia to train with her. Then she returned to Cincinnati where she founded The Housely Institute for Restorative Ink, www.housleyinstitute.com.



Shannon also founded her own non-profit pinkinkfoundation.org to help women who can't afford the tattoos. She was recently nominated as a 2020 Health Care Hero by the Cincinnati Business Courier.

Shannon stopped by my office last week to brainstorm some marketing and storytelling ideas she has for her new business. We ended up talking about Facebook advertising and Shannon shared her frustration with Facebook which does not understand that nipple tattoos are not porn.

(It reminded me of the time Facebook decided the Titanides was a swinger's club. You wouldn't believe the ads they were serving up on our page!

In true Titanides style some of our members started offering copy critiques of the ads like, "less bust more benefits" ... But I digress...).

The point is, Shannon is using all of the same copywriting and marketing tools she used for her clients for years to launch her new business. But she's doing it in a way that feels new and challenging and fresh. One that leaves her feeling inspired at the end of the day instead of drained.

From e-commerce to Iowa caucuses

And Shannon isn't the only one who turned her copywriting and marketing skills into a new career...

My sister Jennifer Wells was a big part of the Titanides for several years. Before that, she spent over a decade as a project manager for an online marketing company that launched e-commerce websites.

Jennifer successfully launched hundreds of sites for luxury shoes, gourmet fruit, antique car parts, guns and ammunition, equestrian supplies, and more.

Like Shannon, Jennifer heard the whisper. She knew she wanted something

more, but she wasn't sure what. Now at 50 years old, Jennifer is re-inventing herself as a political activist and she's using all the skills she learned in her e-commerce job and at the Titanides to succeed.

A few weeks ago, Jennifer created and launched an event for the women's march in Cincinnati, complete with sashes in honor of the 200th anniversary of the suffragettes (many of whom are honorary Titanides). Her idea was so popular it caught on and women were messaging her from cities all across the U.S.



Then Jennifer created a Go-Fund-Me-Campaign so she could travel to Iowa to help with the caucus. She is using all her branding and marketing skills to help her candidate get elected and to find a new career in politics.

Like Shannon, Jennifer is learning new skills and stretching herself to grow.

Never stop learning!

According to honorary Titanide Solange Lopes of TheCorporateSister.com, learning new things is one of [the best ways you can avoid the dangers of stagnation...](#)

"As working women especially, we have so much on our plates that we end up foregoing our need to learn and evolve at work and in life. We no longer make learning and growing a priority, and sometimes even believe we know enough to advance in our careers and lives. We tend to get stuck into familiar patterns and cycles that keep us not moving forward in our careers..."

Learn to spot and use any and every opportunity to learn something new in your

career. Whether it's increasing your knowledge of a certain field or industry, learning from a client, or picking a colleague or manager's brain, you want to use your workplace as a source of growth and learning..."

Reinventing yourself means taking risks to try something new, something outside of your comfort zone, something you've never tried before. It's scary but the rewards can be incredible.

If you're wondering, like Laura, if you have what it takes to start over, read this inspiring story, "[Changing Channels](#)" in the Washington Post. It features an amazing collection of bad-ass women rocking the world in their 50s, 60s, 70s and beyond.

Trust me, you'll want to stand up and cheer!

I'm nominating all of them as honorary Titanides, including Suzanne Watson, who went back to medical school and became a doctor at 57 while working full time as an Episcopal priest.

Or Patricia Forehand who retired from the public-school system and became a standup comic.

Or my favorite, Baltimore native, Ernestine Shepherd who became a champion bodybuilder at 82 after avoiding exercise for years. I sooo want to find Ernestine the next time I'm in Baltimore and invite her to our Titanides lunch!!!

If they can do it, you can too.



Ernestine Shepherd at her home in Baltimore. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

"The antidote to stagnation, therefore, lies in surrounding oneself with people of creative vitality..." – Maria Popova

Laura is wise to be afraid of complacency, of growing bored with her current path. But the good news is, if you surround yourself with vital, creative, women, you will be inspired to discover a new path. One you may never have considered before.

Elizabeth Peabody understood the power of creative communities. In addition to her long list of re-inventions, she opened a bookstore in her home where she held her own version of the ***Titanides Literary Salon***.

Together with fellow reformer and writer Margaret Fuller, Peabody hosted conversations about the "great questions" facing women: What were we born to do? How shall we do it? Proving these questions are not new to you and me, they have been asked by women for decades if not centuries.

When I get scared and wonder if I have what it takes to reinvent myself yet again, I remember that I am surrounded by women of extraordinary creative vitality. YOU inspire me to keep growing and changing and learning. Today I'm looking forward to one of the most prolific and exciting decades of my life... in menopause no less!

So, dear Laura, do not fear the future. I have no idea where this current road will lead you, but I have complete confidence it will be amazing, incredible, something you never expected and that it will require all of your prodigious talents and inspiration to pull it off. I'm looking forward to it!

Love,

Marcella

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