

"Quiet the noise around you; soften its pitch. Our deepest stories are our best teachers. Let the weapons of the weak – the poison, the nagging, the gossip – burn themselves to ash. Cast them to the wind. Take back the permission to succeed. Make it yours."

Elissa Altman

I.

Permission is a game changer. When we embrace permission, we can achieve anything we set our mind to. With Permission we can start and finish our abandoned projects, have those difficult conversations, set boundaries and not care so much about the consequences, we can rise-up from despair, depression, and anxiety, and finally fulfil our unique purpose and potential. But without permission, we spin around in endless circles of procrastination, self-doubt, and indecision endlessly ruminating on the shame and guilt we carry from the past. Without permission to move on we continue to punish ourselves and others for what's been done to us and said to us; we're frozen in time by the people who broke our heart and silenced our spirit. Without Permission to heal and close emotional wounds we're powerless to end feelings of shame, criticism, and the judgements that rule our lives; we feel unable to walk away from old loyalties and commitments that no longer light us up. Without permission we believe that *this* is the best we can expect. We stay in harmful situations painfully detached from new emotional pathways unable to turn our resistance into permission.

2.

I needed so many permissions to write this book. I really struggled to put my needs first and invest time and resources into a project of my own. What was I missing? In therapy I advise anyone who's stuck and lacking motivation to unravel emotional blocks by writing their thoughts down on paper even if those thoughts consist of just one word written down over and over again. So, I walked my talk, grabbed paper, pen, and a cup of tea, and wrote down my thoughts. After several messy pages of moaning and blaming I tore up the paper, took it outside, and set it alight. As I watched the fluttering embers of my flame-edged thoughts float out into the Universe I asked whoever was listening to tell me what I needed to know. Later that night, several hours after watching my burning thoughts lift and twirl in the breezy night sky, I felt deflated. Ready to give up on my highfalutin idea of ever writing a book I googled 'inspirational thoughts'. Yawning I scrolled aimlessly. Oprah, Jung, Lincoln, the Dalai Lama, Oscar Wilde, Gandhi, Churchill, Shakespeare, until sandwiched between Einstein and Angelou, I read this quote from Elissa Altman:

"Take back the permission to succeed. Make it yours."

'Permission to succeed'. Three little words that would end up changing the trajectory of my entire life. They sounded simple in theory, but in practice?

3.

Creative writing tutors tell you to write the book you want to read, so I did. A book about Permission; *how* to get it, *where* to get it, and more importantly the reason *why* we don't already own it. I needed to understand what it really meant for us to consciously take back permission, what it looked like, felt like, and the difference it would make to my emotional blocks. Look up the word 'Permission' in a thesaurus and you'll see replacement words like 'consent,' 'approval,' 'blessing,' and 'agreement'. Growing up I'd never been given approval, blessings, or agreement. How many times had my permission been sought before things were done and changes were made that affected me? Never. I wrote down the times I'd given up and walked away because I couldn't give myself Permission to commit and work through challenges. It made an ugly, shameful, list. Despite being all too aware of the debilitating impact of my past emotional traumas, I still hadn't learned to give myself Permission to receive good things or good people into my life, so I rejected both and lived with the painful consequences.

If I was to start and finish writing this book, I knew I'd need shedloads of Permission to stop my people-pleasing-confrontation-denying personality from caving into the demands of the stronger personalities around me. I'd need Permission to reject all accusations of selfishness (looks like I'd need another shed for that one), Permission to believe I was genuine and not flaky, Permission to know I was trustworthy and not up to no good conning people and offering false hope. Next, I'd need Permission to believe I deserved to write a book (who *did* I think I was?), Permission to feel safe about vocalising my experiences, Permission to give volume to my opinions and speak up, and I *definitely* needed Permission to feel comfortable with any criticism and judgement I'd receive, as well as plenty of Permission to allow it to happen without defending or justifying any of it. But the biggest one of all, the one that threatened to capsize my dreams and drown them for good was non-negotiable limitless Permission to put my needs first before anyone else's. My Needs. It was like rolling a big fat lie around on my tongue. My. Needs.

I learned early on in life that getting my needs met didn't seem to matter; in fact, it was clearly a shameful, selfish, greedy, and ungrateful expectation to have. I remember the day, aged around 5, when I'd asked my mother for a snack. She had her

back to me at the kitchen worktop, the radio was on, I tapped her arm, and requested my lemon squash and biscuit. I remember how she gripped the edge of the worktop and swayed slightly. About 5 seconds passed, I tapped her arm again, and she continued to completely ignore me. Keeping her back to me, she silently left the kitchen on a cloud of sadness clearly wishing she was anywhere else but near me.

Many traumatic things happened to me in my childhood, but from that specific moment, I became aware of feeling unsafe to express any requirement, preference, like, or dislike. I had no voice, I didn't matter. My family home was frightening, stressful, and chaotic; I know now it was also full of secrets and lies. There was no 'Safe Haven' where I could feel protected and relaxed; there was no consideration or sensitivity shown, just humiliation and embarrassment. I kept things to myself, secrets of my own, so as not to upset or offend anyone; there was no encouragement to speak up, and no space for my needs or feelings.

In those long days of rejection, dismissal, emotional neglect and physical abuse, the blueprint for my life was formed: I was to be a co-dependent people-pleaser, a perfectionist, and a socially anxious procrastinator. These patterns of learned behaviour would shape my life in the decades that followed,

a little girl conditioned to forget her needs and put everyone else's feelings first.

As an adult who was once a little girl without a voice, I often weigh up the pros and cons *before* I speak up to work out the cost to my peace of mind. So, unsurprisingly, as I thought about writing this book, I got to thinking about all the permission I would need to give myself if this time, I was to finish what I'd started. I'd need Permission to literally shut the door between me and the rest of the house - no more 'leaving the door ajar in case you need me.' I'd need Permission to work in peace and quiet, to finish my train of thought and round-off a sentence. I'd need Permission *not* to go to the supermarket, *not* to do the laundry, *not* to surf the net. Permission to claim blocks of uninterrupted time and ignore distractions; Permission to put myself first for hours every day and commit to my project. I'd need Permission to start early and work late refusing to feel pressured by the 'sit down and relax' mentality of the people around me. I reminded myself that achievement on any significant level takes time and consistent effort. I would need Permission to ignore distractions, to deprioritise long breaks for coffee & lunch, and to begin my working day with focussed intentions like any other conscientious person with a job to do. I'd need Permission to clear my mind, to stop ruminating on problems

that were out of my control, Permission to remain in my chair at my laptop and not under the duvet watching Netflix and eating cake. I'd need Permission to change habits and 'learned behaviours' that kept everyone but me happy, and Permission to setup and keep my boundaries - regardless of the consequences. I'd need Permission to feel good about saying: 'sorry, not today,' and Permission to refuse temptation to negotiate and compromise when I set a deadline I intended to keep. I'd need Permission to remember 'no' means 'no' and, again, Permission to 'never-mind' the consequences.

4.

I finally started writing this book during the *first* lockdown - remember that? On a moment-by-moment basis I continued to reward myself with Permission to keep meeting both my emotional and practical needs, to ignore grumbles and sighs from elsewhere in the house, doors left to slam shut, loose floorboards groaning under unusually heavy footfall, spilt cups of coffee followed by loud expletives, metal cutlery swirled against metal sink. I point-blank refused to trade badly timed interruptions for typing a well thought out sentence that would otherwise vanish like mist from my mind.

Despite the stress headaches, I continued to give myself Permission to sit tight, Permission not to rescue, Permission not to react, Permission to allow new habits to create new patterns. If I was to see this project through to completion what had always been profoundly unfamiliar *had* to become my 'new familiar'. Old ways of being and doing had to make way for progress, fulfilment, and growth. I continually reassured myself that I was not a bad person for wanting this - it was a normal expectation to have. Undeniably, claiming Permission to prioritise my needs above the needs of other people gave me so much more than I ever expected.

Giving myself Permission to write this book, to slow down and get more done, to leave others to their perfectly capable ways of doing things in my absence began to transform deep-rooted beliefs I held about not deserving to put myself first. Old habits were finally dying albeit with a little initial resistance. My heart would still race and my stomach churn as my hypervigilant radar tuned in to external mutterings, resentments and frustrations echoing beyond the small writing space I'd created for myself in the least inconvenient way I could manage. Intrusive noises always left me wondering: is confrontation looming? Maybe, but it would pass, I was safe to continue for now. My ever-protective brain reminded me to be careful not to upset people as I ventured

into fresh territory and continued to carve out time for my own projects. I was delighted to find my new patterns opened-up ways to help me transform old painful wounds. My brain also reminded me to be careful, that some people don't like to see others flourish if it means they'll end up unseen and unheard. Is that, I wondered, why such vitriolic resentment is the outcome when someone who is used to getting their needs met is suddenly not the centre of the Universe? Is that the beginning of narcissism? That's a whole other book.

Note: If you can relate to what I'm saying then please think about who it is that manipulates you into consistently meeting all their needs before you meet any of your own. When someone's energy is overpowering, controlling, and intimidating it sucks the air from around us and we can't breathe - it's why we hold our breath in stressful situations so we can have reserves of air if we need to run away. Behaviour like that feels emotionally violent and, especially if we have a trauma background, it can feel safer to deeply repress (depression) our needs. I see you; I was you. Here's your permission slip to stop pleasing others and start pleasing yourself instead.

Look at it this way: when we reclaim permission to meet our needs, we're modelling something empowering and life-

changing for other people. They begin to give *themselves* Permission to grow and evolve, Permission to fulfil their purpose and potential. When we stay on our game and leave them to theirs, they adjust. If we refuse to allow the toxic power of other people's needs to derail us, we grow not only as people but as empowered people. With time they'll feel O.K with their 'new familiar' just as we have with ours. Like me you may have learned long ago to navigate bad moods and violent rages; we walked on eggshells to keep the peace and quite often as adults we find ourselves in similar circumstances and relationships. If that's you then you need to give yourself Permission to Let Go and Permission to Leave.

5.

In this book you'll discover how to get the Permission you need to stretch your wings and fly, Permission to heal from the shame and guilt that's forced you to 'be good'. You'll discover the Permission to rise-up and allow your most powerful self to emerge from underneath the layers of criticism, judgement, and disapproval, Permission to surrender everything you're emotionally attached *to* but profoundly detached *from*. You'll find Permission to comfortably reject who and what doesn't fit you anymore even when shame and guilt threaten to drag you back in. Permission is powerful. We understand Permission.

We know we need it, what it does, what it's for. We've looked for it since birth. It's the fuel that drives our right to decide what's best for us, it's the force behind achievements, it determines how free we feel, it's the 'secret sauce' poured lovingly over accomplishments. Permission delivers the courage we need to believe we are capable of incredible things.

My wish for this book is that it opens your heart and mind to the Power of Permission, that it supports you to fulfil your potential, and shows you how to compassionately reclaim Permission to stop doing things that no longer light you up. You've spent too long waiting for Permission to do the things you want. My hope is that this book helps you understand why and how you surrendered your Permission in the first place.