



One of the great Skyros institutions is the 'letter to myself' that participants are encouraged to write at the end of their session. This is posted to you some weeks later, by which time the holiday may seem a distant memory and the letter from Greece or Thailand on your doormat addressed in your own handwriting poses a momentary puzzle until you remember what it is. Looking over these letters provides a map of what I have experienced there and in between.

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My first letter to myself came from Tobago in 1999, the Skyros winter home at that time. I had long wanted to go on a Skyros holiday and by the time I managed it I was in real need of it.

I was working in a stressful, hectic environment with a high public profile as editor of a nationally known weekly magazine. My husband, who had come to live in England with me having never even visited it before, had been unemployed and was finding it hard to settle. I had undergone three unsuccessful attempts at in-vitro fertilization and we were working through the grief of our childlessness.

On Tobago I chose a therapeutic dance course that brought up intense, deep feelings. As I wrote to myself, 'I decided to focus on my womb – reclaiming and loving her, and finding her power and letting that connect with and feed my life forces and other power sources. Hard work'. I asked the group's help to do a fertility dance, imagining some kind of foot-stomping ritual with me in the middle, but what happened was unexpected, different and deeply healing. Our favourite group of local drummers came to our guesthouse and I couldn't stop dancing. I danced and danced and let it all go as I lost myself in the drumbeats and pounded the earth and found my own inner rhythm again. The group watched, applauded, and then joined me; they knew what it meant.

The other themes I worked on in Tobago were my perennial issues of career, marriage and my soul journey. But it wasn't only the courses, discussions and co-listening that brought insight. The Skyros experience of pain, love, laughter and tears in a generally supportive community somehow strips me bare each time, like sloughing my skin, to emerge renewed and attuned, as though every pore is

cleansed and opened. This heightens all my senses so that the experience of a swim, the sun on my face, the brilliance of the flowers, the energy of the group or the beat of the drums are extraordinarily vivid and precious.

My second and third letters to myself, from Atsitsa in 2001 and 2002, picked up similar themes. The discontent with my way of life that I was exploring in Tobago had crystallized into a decision to go freelance, a huge shift that meant rethinking my love of the limelight, my comfortable income and my daily routines. I wrote of my search for freedom, defined as a moment-by-moment choice to be myself as I feel in that moment, 'stop agonizing about the choices and focus on living them, trusting my wisdom and self-awareness to recognize when I need to move on.'

I spent a week learning and practising imagework with Dina Glouberman, 'daydreaming with a purpose', reaching the world of our imagination to reveal the unconscious and often outdated inner images that have brought us to where we are now – and then creating new ones that can lead us to a future that is really right for us. It is about getting in touch with our deepest selves and utilising our inner resources. Nearly all of us found it astonishingly powerful and meaningful – working with our own images and finding amazing inner sources of wisdom, insight and beauty, so close to the surface and yet so rarely accessed by most of us.

By 2003 when I had my first session at the Skyros Centre, I felt I was in better shape but needed to work on letting go of recent tension and getting back into balance. This was hugely helped

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by Michael Eales' dream course, where I learned that although fire is my natural element, I don't always have to burn bright and fierce like a bonfire. 'After a time of fire, a time of water is needed,' I wrote. 'The knack is to find these balances daily, even hourly, not wait until I am off balance in a big way.'

Last year I wrote from the Centre about my tempestuous fortnight there, where I went through a bad time with a friend but gained good support from others to help me through it, understanding why it had thrown me off centre, what I might have done differently, and what I would do differently in future. At the same time the highlights were magical as usual, ranging from Greek dancing at a taverna on the beach to a group walk round the town in silence, guided by Richard Layzell as part of his course on Senses, one of the funniest experiences of my whole life.

Now, back home from the Centre again, I know that my letter to myself arriving in a few weeks will have many familiar themes and some new ones. 'Losing myself' might be one of them. As someone who still works a lot in the public eye, it is wonderful to spend time with people who mostly don't know me and have no preconceptions. I can say as much or as little as I like about my life, and experiment with revealing parts of me that are usually hidden or that I didn't even know existed.

I chose this session because I wanted to experience the end of Apokreas, when the island celebrates its connection with the earth, the underworld and particularly its totem animal, the goat, on which its livelihood has depended down the centuries. Men

and occasionally women dress in goatskins, wear masks and dance through the streets clanking huge goat bells round their waists that drive any demon straight back to Hades. Then all the Skyrians dress in their best, often beautiful traditional costumes, to do their graceful, harmonious circle dances in the main square, feast and drink together in a reaffirmation of community and love. It was exciting to lose myself in the insistent deep rhythm of the bells, and moving to witness the sense of community that creates the context for the holistic Skyros experience.

Skyros has given me many gifts. I have particularly valued the freedom to move between solitude or sociability; the safe space to express and work through pain as well as receive love and support from people I have barely met; and the sense of becoming fully alive and fully myself. I love the opportunities to try out new things or things I have previously found difficult, and to face challenges or follow submerged desires. I have found powerful tools for my inner journey, new friendships, and a renewed awareness of all of life's dimensions, with a commitment to live it to the full. I think it is more than coincidence that the past six years I have been going to Skyros have probably been my best ever.