EMBODYING
SOUL
A RETURN TO WHOLENESS
KERI MANGIS
a memoir of new beginnings

Praise for *Embodying Soul . . .*

"These pages offer the voice of a writer of modern sensibility who dares to leap across time and space to unveil the true nature of soul. Rarely does a memoir have such power and beauty to awaken our own souls in daily life. Read this book!"

—Christina Donnell, PhD, author of
Transcendent Dreaming: Stepping into Our Human Potential

"This is a book about deep living—a book about courage, searching, finding and telling the truth. It shows the rest of us how we, too, can mine the depths of our lives to find what we are really looking for in order to live an authentic, meaningful, and flourishing life."

—Henry Emmons, MD
Integrative Psychiatrist and author of *The Chemistry of Joy: A Three-Step Program for Overcoming Depression through Western Science and Eastern Wisdom* and *The Chemistry of Calm: A Powerful, Drug-Free Plan to Quiet Your Fears and Overcome Your Anxiety*

"In this engaging, insightful memoir, Keri Mangis shares her deep wisdom about the journeys we embark on with each human incarnation, and the soul purpose behind all we experience in our 'skins,' or bodies. Through her highly relatable heroine Sëri, in collaboration with Sëri's soul friend Rasa, Keri unfolds one woman's tale of discovering the Great Truth of our lives and

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the loving purpose for all that we undergo on earth. Ultimately, she shows us how to discover joy. For readers seeking inspirational knowledge about their higher purpose, their soul guides, and the lessons of every life, *Embodying Soul* is a marvelous, heart-opening excursion."

—Christine Warren, teacher and author of
Navigating Change: Conscious Endings, Visionary Beginnings

"New stories are coming through to heal our collective imagination. Keri Mangis's *Embodying Soul* belongs to this emergent art form. Through the lens of her own life story, told with vulnerability, humor, and grace, Mangis invites us into a world where the rich inner landscape of the psyche is always speaking, always full of gifts for us. We receive these gifts—of curiosity unleashed, self-mothering, inner re-wilding—and are set free of the old limits on our imaginations. Be ready, dear reader: adventuring into this book may change you. You may become more aware of the inner conversation between your emotions or begin listening for the voice of your soul, or simply forgive yourself for the times you haven't listened. And you may remember another gleaming facet of who you came here to be."

—Opal C McCarthy
Author of the poetry collection *SURGE*

"Keri Mangis has written a book to be savored over a cup of herbal tea; shared with friends; and, once completed, kept nearby for further reference. Part autobiography, part self-help,

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part soul-realm imagination, it is a flowing stream of gathering awareness revealing a story many of us can relate to. Each of the major emotions becomes a companion along the way, not just an affliction to be ignored, shoved aside, or belittled. And Mangis's inventive, engaging style promises humor, depth, drama, comedy, humility, and profound humanity. This is an excellent book."

—Ronald E. Moor
Healer, teacher, and spiritual guide

"*Embodying Soul*, a courageous piece of work, speaks to the beauty and pain of the human condition. Keri Mangis captivates the reader with her vulnerability, creativity, and insight, inspiring us to explore the true depth of our souls to better understand ourselves and one another. This book is sure to infuse more purpose and meaning into your life."

—Julie Burton, author of
The Self-Care Solution: A Modern Mother's Must-Have Guide to Health and Well-Being and
Founder of ModernWell

"From separation of self to the reclamation of soul, this book is a fascinating sojourn into one woman's life process. Courageously shared, her journey will inspire the reader's own soul awareness."

—Carol J. Murto
Author of *Soul Awareness: A Spiritual Awakening to Self-Knowledge and Healing*

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"A beautifully interwoven tale of the human-soul experience as seen from both sides. Keri's honest recounting of her path to embodiment lends courage to anyone who longs to reclaim emotional wisdom and answer the authentic call of endless curiosity."

—Amy Hallberg, author of *German Awakening: Tales of an American Life*, Certified Master Coach, and founder of Courageous Wordsmith

"The courage of Keri Mangis to engage in a public dialogue with her soul is a feat not to be taken lightly, for her book *Embodying Soul* will shape how we all communicate with ourselves and rediscover the truth of our souls."

—Tim Miejan
Editor and publisher of *The Edge* magazine

"While reading this story, rendered with honesty and grit, I couldn't help but reflect on my own emotional landscape with new understanding. And I was moved by the entertaining and enlightening view of what the soul realm might be like. A cathartic book, to be sure, and a must-read for those on the path of transformation!"

—Tara Cindy Sherman
Tree Spirit Yoga founder, Yoga Alliance Continued Education Provider, and Registered Yoga Teacher

"The author's principal goal is to inform, and the book becomes a kind of self-help guide that encourages intuition, communi-

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cation, and letting go. A nontraditional but effective memoir about one woman's discovery of spiritualism."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Have you ever thought about contacting your soul? Well, this memoir might help you do it.…The book is profound and will help readers look at life with a different perspective and work toward being in alignment with their life, embodying characteristics like softness, calmness, approachability, courage, humility, patience, and strength."

—Mamta Mahavan
Reviewer, Readers' Favorite

"This book gave me better clarity on my own past behavior, current life choices, and future endeavors. It's a gift to escape into another's story while also gaining greater understanding of your own! I will read this book again (and again) and know that each time it will unveil even more."

—Heather Corndorf
mXe founder and movement specialist

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I am not this hair,

I am not this skin,

I am the soul that lives within.

—Rumi

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KERI MANGIS

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To my dearest daughters, Cameron and Kelsey ~
May you both flourish in endless curiosity
as you continue to choose your own life adventures

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PROLOGUE

Family Flags

"Let's begin today by going back to your childhood. What would you say were your family's core values?" asked my rosy-cheeked, spiky-haired, middle-aged therapist while holding a ballpoint pen an inch away from her yellow legal pad, ready to scribble my family wisdom. Her office, tucked in a basement in a suburb of Minneapolis, was comfortable and quiet. On the wall behind her were several framed diplomas and on the wall to my right some abstract art, but the wall to my left, where a clock should've been to ensure clients didn't overstay their sessions, was blank—like my mind.

With a mug of steaming peppermint tea cupped in my hands intended to calm me, I considered what my childhood could have had to do with my current anxiety. I'd already had a few appointments with this therapist during which we'd concentrated on the impact of anxiety on my life. I had told her about the emptiness I felt, my mind's lack of clarity, my trembling body. I had explained how the anxiety also made me feel cold, even while sweating across my lower back and under my arms enough to soak through my clothing. I had revealed that nevertheless most people never suspected my inner turmoil, because I hid my true feelings under layers of self-discipline.

She had asked me what situations triggered my anxiety,

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and I had identified the group settings where participants had to share something personal, like my yoga classes, workshops, or trainings. I explained that when teaching yoga, a group setting where I was in control of the agenda, I rarely experienced anxiety unless it was the first day of a new class, and that, once I got to know my students, no one guessed that I suffered from anxiety. So, I had told her, when some occasion triggered anxiety I just waited for it to dissipate. Teaching yoga, I explained, was a calling that made me feel more whole and alive than in any other area of my life, and I would not, could not, give it up.

She had listened to my revelations and called my anxiety "social" anxiety, though I would have called it "lack of control" anxiety. She had then asked what calming techniques I'd tried. I explained that although I knew all kinds of breathing techniques and positive visualizations and affirmations, in moments of debilitating anxiety nothing worked and all I could do was wait for the situation that had triggered it to end and my body to return to normal. Those had been embarrassing admissions of weakness, but the questions about my feelings of anxiety had made sense so I'd answered them honestly.

But now she was probing into my childhood, which did not seem to honor the urgency of my situation: I was thirty-four years old and married; had two children, both colicky as babies; had spent the last six months battling my fourth case of hives, necessitating my first emergency room visit and a steroid prescription; the yoga classes I was teaching were on hold due to my illness; my marriage was on the verge of failure; and when I had finally felt strong enough to leave the sanctuary of my

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darkened bedroom to drive to Blockbuster to rent a movie, the energy required to engage in retail pleasantries had exhausted me so much I had gone home and fallen asleep, no longer interested in a movie. And here my therapist was inquiring about my long-ago childhood. What did she want to know—the kind of cake that had been served on my fourth birthday? I wondered, sarcastically.

In an attempt to avoid encouraging what I considered my therapist's nonrelevant rerouting, I bit my lip and said, "I'm sorry, I don't really understand."

"Many families have sayings that bond them, like 'We all stand together' or 'Blood is thicker than water,'" she explained patiently.

"Not mine," I asserted, a little defensively, then gave an apologetic shrug.

"Well, let me ask this: Did you receive any kind of verbal instruction about your family identity or how to present yourself in the world?" said my therapist.

Suddenly, a memory formed in my mind like a single raindrop, and I revealed, "When my brothers and I asked my dad what he wanted for Christmas, he always said, 'Good kids.'"

"Okay, and what did that mean to you?" she inquired, encouragingly.

I dropped my head, expecting a protective curtain of long, brown hair to fall around my face, forgetting that I'd recently had it cut short, and replied, "Follow rules, don't cause trouble, stay out of the way. It was just a joke, though. We usually got him socks or something."

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"Were you the kind of kid to cause trouble?" she then asked, pressing me further.

I sniggered and answered, "Hardly. Goody-Two-Shoes is more like it." My self-loathing released a stream of something like endorphins through my body, which felt good, like a smoker taking a long-awaited drag on a cigarette. At least it felt better than being confused and vulnerable.

"Any other instructions or mottoes from home?" she inquired, smiling, her cheeks forming small apples beneath her eyes.

The fact that she wasn't letting this probing go made me suspect I was failing to adequately answer what must've been to her a straightforward question. I felt anxious, imagining her other clients rattling off family mottoes. I set the tea on a coaster on the polished glass table before me, rolled my eyes upward, and strained to hear some other slogan, statement, or manifesto from my childhood inside the cavern of my mind. But all I heard was the North Dakota wind howling.

"I can't think of anything else," I said, attempting a tone of finality.

"Well," she continued, unfazed, "think of it another way. If your family had had a flag flying outside your house, what would it have said?"

I stifled a chuckle. A flag flying outside our house? We never would have let ourselves be so visible. We were a quiet family living a simple, frugal life, with a sense of duty and pride—not an outer pride of flag-flying but an inner pride that worked like an invisible rubber band of resilience, helping

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us snap back into shape when the world's cares pulled on us—except for me, apparently. I wondered what my family would think if they knew I was seeking help from a shrink just to get by day to day and paying for it with hard-earned money, not even my money but my husband's money, since my little hobby of a yoga business didn't pay the bills and my business degree was sitting in a drawer turning yellow rather than proudly displayed on a wall like my therapist's degrees. My parents wouldn't have had time for such psychobabble but would have persevered through any pain, if indeed they had been forced to recognize it.

I considered the two choices I saw before me: A) tell my therapist what I thought about her nosy, irrelevant question, storm out, and never return, or B) tell her nothing about my discomfort, grit my teeth, and muster up a good enough answer to her searching question, as championed by family habits. I knew that option A was not a viable option; at the time, showing frustration or confusion was to me synonymous with admitting weakness, which I felt would leave me dangerously vulnerable.

"Do what you have to do now, you can panic later," my mom had always said, even though I never really saw her panic later. I only heard her crying once, quietly, as I listened at her bedroom door and knew better than to ask her about it, then or later. From her, I had learned that dwelling on emotions, or "complaining," solved nothing, pulled energy away from urgent daily tasks, and took the focus away from building a good reputation.

So option B was what I took. Like opening up a family

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album that had been tucked away in a closet for years, I creaked open my memories of childhood, figuring that my therapist would soon see that my ancient past had little relevance to my present concerns, and then we could begin addressing my anxiety or, if not, I could simply stop making appointments and move on with my life. What I didn't see at the time was how certain family behaviors would turn out to be red flags, revealing internal barriers I would need to surmount before forging an inclusive and loving relationship with my emotions and myself—the very definition of embodying one's soul and a potent beginning for a return to wholeness.

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