



ROBERT MOSS

Author of *The Secret History of Dreaming*

ACTIVE  
DREAMING

Journeying Beyond  
Self-Limitation to a Life  
of Wild Freedom

“Writing about dreams, Moss is eloquent and authoritative,  
a wise teacher.” — *Publishers Weekly*

“*Active Dreaming* is a soul-nurturing, imagination-firing book! Avowed storyteller and webmaster of dream landscapes Robert Moss challenges us to dream *forward* into our personal and collective futures to give the Great Story of humanity meaning and purpose. The dreamscapes he conjures are full of surprises and hope!”

— Dorothea Hover-Kramer, psychotherapist and author of *Second Chance at Your Dream* and *Healing Through Touch*

“If you are searching for a way to reconnect with your authentic self, read *Active Dreaming* by Robert Moss. This book’s timeless techniques and thoughtful guidance will bring you back to the springs of personal wholeness. I highly recommend it.”

— Robert Waggoner, author of *Lucid Dreaming*

“Robert Moss’s *Active Dreaming* prescribes medicine to heal the pervasive drought of dreams in our society. From stories to dreams to instructions on how to navigate the bountiful ocean of dreaming, we readers journey toward the heart of what it is to be human. Illuminating, compassionate, and practical, *Active Dreaming* will inspire dreamers of all ages and walks of life everywhere.”

— Denyse Beaudet, PhD, author of *Dreamguider: Open the Door to Your Child’s Dreams*

“Dreaming may be our most important natural resource, one that everyone has access to and one that can never run out. Robert Moss teaches us how to tap that resource for the benefit of our waking lives and the healing of our world. Robert is a wizard of the Dreamways and a master teacher. In this exciting, outstanding book he works his special magic, giving us practical tools for bringing our dreams to life and our lives to dream. No one does it better.”

— David Spangler, author of *Subtle Worlds: An Explorer’s Field Notes*

“Robert Moss’s invitation to ‘wake up and dream’ opens the door to the world within the world of our sleeping and waking dream life, where the self merges with the Self. In a book both enchanting and practical, he provides the compass and map for the journey and serves as wise, compassionate, and soulful guide.”

— Judy Reeves, author of *A Writer’s Book of Days*

“Robert Moss’s extraordinary dreamwork, in my opinion, comes from the fact that he is not confined, as are we psychologists, to scientific rationale, methods, and explanations. Instead, his background in journalism has opened his mind as a storyteller. In *Active Dreaming*, Moss helps us explore the immense possibilities in consciousness that our dreams reveal, leaving us in a new world of meaning and adventure.”

— Henry Reed, PhD, author of *Dream Medicine*, known as the father of the modern dreamwork movement

“This book sits at the intersection of poetry and practicality. Robert Moss speaks to a world we each inhabit and only dimly understand. Read this book. You will be a little more awake and a little clearer, and you will probably greet the world with a little more acceptance.”

— Peter Block, coauthor of *The Abundant Community*

“*Active Dreaming* is a jewel of a book! This is an important, practical guide providing powerful tools to chart a way to choose and live the life we desire. Robert Moss’s teachings are clear and empowering. *Active Dreaming* is a book that we can continue to turn to for deep wisdom, rich teachings, and inspiration time and time again. This book not only helps us to personally transform our lives but also provides a path to transform the world we live in.”

— Sandra Ingerman, MA, author of *Soul Retrieval*

“In *Active Dreaming*, Robert Moss shows how we can be active participants in our dream world. *Active Dreaming* is one of the most practical guidebooks on dreams currently available. Highly recommended.”

— Larry Dossey, MD, author of *Healing Words*

“Robert Moss gives readers a road map to chart our courses through life, complete with suggestions on how to find the perfect balance of passions and skills to live a life we love. Thanks, Robert, for reminding us and for providing inspiring directions on how to live each day like a holiday, as well as showing us how to become dream guides for others!”

— Patricia Garfield, PhD, author of *Creative Dreaming*

# ACTIVE DREAMING

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*Conscious Dreaming*

*The Dreamer's Book of the Dead*

*Dreamgates: An Explorer's Guide to the Worlds of Soul, Imagination, and Life beyond Death*

*Dream Gates: A Journey into Active Dreaming (audio)*

*Dreaming True*

*Dreamways of the Iroquois*

*The Secret History of Dreaming*

*The Three "Only" Things: Tapping the Power of Dreams, Coincidence, and Imagination*

*The Way of the Dreamer (video)*

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Self-Limitation to a Life  
of Wild Freedom

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*To the midwives  
of a dreaming society*

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## Making Every Day a Holiday

Today is the first day of your new life. When you opened this book, you put yourself on a road that will lead you to manifest your life dreams. To follow this road, you'll want to define who you are and what your life project is all about. This is essential, because the human being is an animal that must define itself or else be defined by others. Let others tell you who you are, and you can find yourself trapped in the cage of other people's needs and expectations rather quickly. You can find yourself stuck inside a frame and required to forever remain the same. You might be bent double under the weight of a past history you want to let go of but can't because others keep strapping it on your back. You might find it hard to breathe under the low ceilings of the little box houses of other people's limiting beliefs about the world and your role in it.

This book will help you get out of those cages and frames and chart your own course in life, to a place of wild creative freedom I call the Place of the Lion. To get there, you need to find your essential life story and tell it and live it so that others can receive it. If you don't know that your life has an essential story, then you have probably been trapped in a little story, one of those confining stories spun by others that crush your ribs and pinch your throat so you can't breathe, let alone speak up. You have come to this book because you are ready to break out and claim your bigger story, and to learn to tell it so well that others will not only hear you but also welcome what is most alive and creative in you. When the lion speaks, *everyone* listens.

You are going to learn an approach to life that I call Active Dreaming. This approach includes paying attention to night dreams, but it is not only, or even essentially, about what happens at night. It is a method for conscious living. When you become an active dreamer, you'll notice that the world speaks to you in a different way.

As I write these lines, I am poked by a friend on Facebook with a quote from Henry David Thoreau: "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined."

This quote is hardly obscure; there's a whole industry devoted to reproducing it on T-shirts, aprons, posters, bangles, and fridge magnets. Maybe you have it on a coffee mug, as I do.

Thoreau's words are brilliant, practical advice for conscious living, but only if we can brush off the cliché dust that settles when something is quoted so often that it loses its punch.

So try this, right now, with the words in front of you. Say them out loud. Now make them your own by saying something like: "I go confidently in the direction of my dreams. I am living the life I've imagined."

Are you feeling some forward movement? It requires a next step. You now want to decide on one thing you'll do today (or tonight) to act on what is now your living, personal affirmation that you are following your dreams (present tense) and you are living the life you've imagined. Don't be vague, and for goodness' sake don't try to be spiritually correct. You'll do one thing to get a great life plan

working. Could be as simple as filling that Thoreau mug with another jolt of java to make sure you're wired for some fabulous problem-solving or creative effort — or some chamomile tea to make you sweet and mellow.

This little plan for brushing the cliché dust off Thoreau is an example of the practice of Active Dreaming as a way of conscious living. We receive what the world gives us as a prompt to turn in a certain direction and make a creative choice.

Active dreamers are choosers. We learn to recognize that, whatever situation we are in, we always have a choice. We choose to stop running away from the monster in our dreams — who may turn out to be our own power hunting us — when we brave up and turn around to confront it. We choose not to buy into self-limiting beliefs or the limited models of reality suggested by others. We learn from Viktor Frankl, an exemplary active dreamer, that we can grow a dream of possibility even inside a Nazi death camp — and that when we can grow that dream strong enough it takes us beyond terror and despair to a place of freedom and delight.

In Persian tradition, there is a knightly order of spiritual warriors known as the Fravartir. They choose to enter this world to fight the good fight. They move in this world with the knowledge of a higher world. They are attuned to a secret order of events beyond the facts recorded in the media and our day planners.

Active dreamers engage with this world in a similar way. We are choosers. We know who we are, where we come from, and that our lives have meaning and purpose. And that part of this purpose is to generate meaning and help others to find meaning in their lives at every opportunity. As Viktor Frankl taught us, rising from the hell of Auschwitz, humans require meaning just as they require air and food and water.

Stories are better teachers than theories. This book will help you find your bigger and braver story — the one that can give you the heart and guts to get through the darkest day — and have that story heard and received by others. So let's start with a story from the road, to give you a sense of what it means to be an active dreamer on an ordinary day.

MY FIRST FLIGHT OF THE DAY IS DELAYED, and when we land at Chicago's O'Hare airport a voice from the airline informs me that I have missed my connection and have been rebooked, on a combination of flights that will get me to my destination seven hours late, much too late for the dinner and evening event I have planned. Oh joy. But wait — my watch tells me I may just have time to dash from one end of the vast airport complex to the other and make my connection after all.

When I arrive, breathless, at the departure gate, the plane is still on the ground but the doors were closed one minute ago, and no, there's no way they'll open them. "But you might be able to catch another flight to Seattle," the gate agent tells me. "It's leaving in thirty minutes." How can this be? The other flight has been delayed more than three hours. Another run, to the other end of the C concourse where things don't look promising. Above the press of anxious, long-delayed faces, I see on the announcements screen that a dozen people are on standby.

I size up the three gate agents at the desk. One has dressed with slightly more sartorial flair than the others and has a rather exotic name: Valerio. I pick him as the man to consult.

"Valerio," I tell him, "I suspect that you are a magician. And that it will be your pleasure to magically up a seat for me that doesn't currently exist on this flight." He receives this statement matter-of-factly, with just the slightest twitch of the laugh lines around his eyes and mouth. It doesn't look good, he regrets to inform me. I now pull rank, just a little, by mentioning that I fly a lot and therefore have priority status. Okay, that could help, but he can't promise anything. I'll need to check back later.

Twenty minutes later, everyone has boarded the plane except for the standby passengers, who do not include me. They are closing the door when suddenly I am slipped a boarding pass, the one that shouldn't exist. Soon I am in a middle seat at the back of the bus, my knees jammed uncomfortably against the back of the seat in front of me. And I'm feeling celebratory.

Maybe picking up on my mood, the fellow sitting to my left initiates a conversation. Soon he is telling me his life story. Stan is a salt-of-the-earth, blue-collar guy. He's worked for thirty-three years for the same company, making and marketing fire prevention equipment, and they have treated him well and he feels confident that his pension will be there when he retires. It's the thought of retirement that scares him. Three of his male friends dropped dead within six months of retirement. He'd like some help with this, and asks me, quite directly, what I would suggest.

"Tell me what you love to do," I respond. "Tell me what you like to do for the sheer pleasure of doing it."

He thinks about this for a bit. Then he says, "I love the water. I used to go scuba diving. I grew up near the water, on Rhode Island, where there's a beach down the block whichever direction you take."

"Are those the beaches you think of when you picture yourself at the water?"

He tells me he's relocated to North Carolina because of his job, and there's a beach he likes there as well.

What else does he like?

"I like being with family, with community." He grew up in a big family, one of twelve siblings. They didn't have much, but they had each other. "And I like giving back." He explains that he and some of his brothers banded together recently to buy their parents a house. As I said, this guy is salt of the earth.

What else does he like? "I like the perfect martini," he says with a naughty grin. "None of the sissy fruit drinks."

I turn the discussion to skills. What is he really good at?

"Cooking breakfast."

I'm surprised by his immediate, unconsidered reply. He recalls that as a kid he was often the one who took charge of getting breakfast on the table for his enormous family. "And I loved doing it. I liked the sense of looking after everybody. And I didn't have to wash the dishes after cooking the bacon."

What else is he good at? He knows a lot about preventing, containing, and putting out fires. He's great in the water and behind a wheel on the road. He's a team player and a connector.

After a while, I say, "I'm going to say a few things to you, and I want you to pretend you are listening to a description of a man you don't know. Would that be okay?"

He's intrigued. I start telling him a story about the passions and skills of a certain man, and he needs to bring the two together. As I talk, I raise and lower my cupped hands, as if I'm juggling. As I raise my left hand, closer to the heart, I talk of passions, ranging from giving back and looking after a big family to drinking the perfect martini. As I raise my right hand, I talk of skills, from putting out fires to cooking breakfast.

"So what can you see that guy, who has this combination of passions and skills, doing in the second half of his life?"

Stan thinks for a moment, then says, "Owning and running a diner on the beach in North Carolina."

"A diner. Really?"

"Yes, an old-fashioned family diner."

"Where you cook three hundred breakfasts."

“At least. And where they can mix up one mean martini.” There’s that naughty grin. “Hey,” Stan says, clapping me on the shoulder, “I gotta thank you. I’m feeling more juiced and mobilized than I’ve felt since I started dating. I’m already working out a business plan for the diner in my head, and I think I know the perfect location for it. I guess you’re in the wrong seat on the wrong plane all for me.”

He takes a pull on his beer and asks, “What are you going to do when you retire, Robert?”

“You know the answer.”

I wait for him to find it. “Oh — right — you’re never going to retire, because you love what you do.”

“That’s right. I think the great trick in life, wherever you are in the journey, is to do what you love and let the universe support it. When we do what we love, every day is a holiday.”

I was happy I was in the wrong seat on the wrong plane that day. The wrong plane got me to the Seattle airport at the time the right plane was supposed to arrive, though my bag took another twelve hours to catch up with me.

I’ll put up with just about anything that has story value, and there was a great story here, one that I retold with gusto at dinner with my students at a training for teachers of Active Dreaming that night.

The story of the man whose dream turned out to be a diner by the beach is a taste of what you are going to find in this book. We do better when we are willing to meet the unexpected and improvise when our plans are screwed up. We do better still when we wake up to the fact that we go through life as synchronicity magnets, attracting to ourselves people and events according to the attitudes and energy we are carrying. When we are charged with purpose, our magnetism increases. When we are following our calling, we move in a natural field of dreams. We draw new allies, events, and resources to us. Chance encounters and benign coincidences support us and ease our passage in ways that are inexplicable to those from whom the spiritual laws of human existence are hidden.

What Stan and I did together on the plane is an everyday example of how we can help each other grow dreams for life. At the end of that flight, he had his retirement plan, and I had the pleasure of helping him create it. Cooking breakfast for three hundred people in a diner might not be my dream for later life, or yours, but we must never judge how other people follow their chosen callings (as long as they do no harm to others or the earth). The trick is to do what you love and let the world support you. Active dreamers seek to turn all work into play, so that every day is a holiday.

## Three Modes of Active Dreaming

Here's an open secret: dreaming is not fundamentally about what happens during sleep. It's about waking up. In ordinary life, we are often in the circumstances of sleepwalkers, going through the motions, trying to keep up with preset schedules and to meet other people's expectations and requirements. We let other people determine what's important. We let them define who we are and what we are able and *not* able to do and become. Ruled by habit and the need to get through the daily grind, we forget that our lives may have a larger purpose.

Dreaming, we wake up to a bigger story. The moment of awakening may come in a sleep dream when we get out of our own way and it is easier for us to encounter something beyond the projections of the trivial daily mind and the consensual hallucinations that weave much of our default reality. The awakening may come in the liminal zone between sleep and waking that the French used to call *dorveille*, which literally means "sleep-wake." It may come in a flash of illumination during a walk in nature, perhaps at the moment when the sun rises above the mountains and opens a path across a lake. The awakening may be hard won. It may come at the price of illness, defeat, or despair, of events or recurring disappointments that push us down and back so hard we have to re-vision and revalue everything we once held to be given. We may have to go through a dark night of the soul before the sun shines at midnight, as ancient initiates described the moment of entry into the full experience of the Greater Mysteries.

The initiation may come in the way familiar to true shamans, when a power of the deeper life seizes us and tears us apart and consents, when we are re-membered, to become our life ally. Angels can appear as fierce as tigers, or as tigers. We don't really need to hunt our power; our power is forever hunting us. To awaken to the guide in our lives, the one who does not judge us and is with us always, we don't have to cross the desert and fast on the mountaintop, unless we have forgotten that the soul of the soul is always near, and is lost to us only when we are lost to it.

So what is *Active Dreaming*? The phrase is a provocation designed to shake us free from the constricting and constricting assumption that dreaming is a passive activity, something that happens when we go to sleep and that may or may not amount to anything more than random chemical washes in the brain, the processing and dumping of "day residue." I am tremendously grateful for the gift of spontaneous sleep dreams, the ones we don't ask for and often don't want. They hold up a magic mirror in which we can see ourselves as we truly are, which can be embarrassing and mobilizing. They goad us to perform course corrections when we have gone badly off track. They serve as a voice of conscience. They preview challenges and opportunities that lie in our future, giving us the chance to make better choices on our life roads. Sleep dreams show us what is going on inside the body, diagnose developing complaints before medical symptoms present themselves, and show us what the body needs in order to stay well. We solve problems in our sleep and can wake with clarity, energy, and direction in a life.

project that we lacked the night before. And, as the First Peoples of my native Australia teach, our personal dreams may be a passport to the Dreamtime, which is far more than the Dumpster of the personal subconscious; it is the larger reality in which we can meet the ancestors and our authentic spiritual teachers. It is the “all-at-once,” where the time is always Now, from which the events and situations of our physical lives emanate into the smaller world of clock time and linear sequence.

We say, “I had a dream,” not knowing a better way to speak. In truth, it would sometimes be more accurate to say, “A dream had me,” because certain dreams do come upon us, as the hawk comes upon the rabbit, talons outstretched. We receive visitations from a friend or family member who has died and who may come with an urgent need or message. We are overwhelmed by a great wave that may be a preview of a tsunami out there in a far ocean, or that may represent the immensity of the power of an emotion rising within us — and perhaps within our family or relationship — that could overwhelm our ordinary reason and balance.

I work with sleep dreams in all these varieties, and many more, and welcome them to work on me. But Active Dreaming is far more than a method for decoding sleep dreams. If you are new to this approach, let me invite you to set aside any prior conceptions of what dream analysis or dream interpretation is here and now, at the door. We are going on a journey to far more exciting places. While the techniques involved are fresh and original, they are also incalculably ancient. We are going to reclaim ways of seeing and knowing and healing that were known to our early ancestors and that kept them alive on a dangerous planet and enabled them to communicate with one another and with other forms of life in the speaking land around them.

Active Dreaming is a way of being fully of this world while maintaining constant contact with another world, the world-behind-the-world, where the deeper logic and purpose of our lives are to be found. It is a way of remembering and embodying what the soul knows about essential things: who we are, where we come from, and what our sacred purpose is in this life and beyond this life. When we lose the knowledge of these essential things, we are lost to our bigger story. Not knowing who we are or what we are meant to become, we can do unthinking harm to ourselves and others.

Active Dreaming is a discipline, as is yoga or archaeology or particle physics. That is to say, there are ascending levels of practice. In any field, the key to mastery is always the same: practice, practice, practice. Ask any musician. In *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell surfaces some interesting data suggesting that the difference between someone who is great at a certain activity and someone who is only good at it is that the star performer has chalked up no less than ten thousand hours of practice. That sounds about right to me. What’s that? You’re scared by the notion that you have to put in ten thousand hours to get great at this Active Dreaming? Relax: you can practice every night and every day, and those hours will mount up fast. It won’t feel one bit like “work,” because you’ll find it wonderful fun, constantly energizing, and capable of putting a champagne fizz of excitement and entertainment in the air in any environment whatsoever. And you are ready to start today, because the time is actually always Now and you have the material and the opportunity.

Active Dreaming offers three core areas of practice.

First, Active Dreaming is a way of *talking and walking our dreams*, of bringing energy and guidance from the dreamworld into everyday life. We learn how to create a safe space where we can share dreams of the night and dreams of life with others, receive helpful feedback, and encourage one another to take creative and healing action. We discover that each of us can play guide for others, and that by sharing in the right way we claim our voices, grow our power as storytellers and communicators, build stronger friendships, and lay foundations for a new kind of community. Indigenous dreamers maintain, wisely, that if we don’t *do* something with our dreams, we do not

dream well.

Second, Active Dreaming is a method of *shamanic lucid dreaming*. It starts with simple, everyday practice and extends to profound group experiences of time travel, soul recovery, and the exploration of multidimensional reality. It is founded on the understanding that we don't need to go to sleep in order to dream. The easiest way to become a conscious or lucid dreamer is to start out lucid and stay that way. As a method of conscious dream navigation, Active Dreaming is not to be confused with approaches that purport to "control" or manipulate dreams; it is utterly misguided to seek to put the control freak that is the ego in charge of something immeasurably wiser and deeper than itself.

Third, Active Dreaming is a way of conscious *living*. This requires us to reclaim our inner child and the child's gift of spontaneity, play, and imagination. It requires us to claim the power of naming and to define our life project. It invites us to discover and follow the natural path of our energies. It calls us to remember our bigger and braver story and tell and live it in such a way that it can be heard and received by others. It is about walking in everyday life as if we are moving through a forest of living symbols that are looking at us (to borrow from Baudelaire, who saw these things with a poet's clarity). It is about navigating by synchronicity and receiving the chance events and symbolic pop-ups on our daily roads as clues to a deeper order. Beyond this, it is about grasping that the energy we carry and the attitudes we choose (consciously or unconsciously) have a magnetic effect on the world around us, drawing or repelling encounters and circumstances. When we rise to this perspective, we are able to welcome the things that block or oppose us as opportunities for course correction or as tests that will confirm us in our calling if we are willing to develop the courage and clarity to pursue it.

As Stephen Nachmanovitch writes in *Free Play*, "we can depend on the world being a perpetual surprise in perpetual motion. And a perpetual invitation to create." To live consciously is to accept the challenge to create, which is to move beyond scripts and bring something new into the world.

IN PART 3 OF THIS BOOK, we'll learn that this approach is not only for individuals and friends and families but also for communities, and that it will stimulate our deeper attunement to the cause of the earth. Active dreamers become Speakers for the earth and rise to full awareness of the truth of the indigenous wisdom that tells us we must be mindful of the consequences of our actions on others down to the seventh generation beyond ourselves. Active dream groups can offer a model of intentional community and can foster a new mode of leadership devoted to empowering each member to claim her voice and play guide to others as they learn to speak and embody their own truth.

In the appendix, we'll study documents from a possible future in which a Commonwealth of Dreamers has emerged, guided by priestess-scientists who are applying the gifts of dreaming to mend our world.

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PART 1

Wake Up and Dream

*Dreams are the guiding words of the soul.*

— CARL JUNG, *The Red Book*

## Punch a Hole in the World

*The child's psyche is of infinite extent and incalculable age.*

— CARL JUNG, “The Development of Personality”

To understand dreams and reclaim the practice of imagination, we must look to the master teachers: our inner children and the children around us. When very young, children know how to go to magic kingdoms without paying for tickets, because they are at home in the imagination and live close to their dreams. When she was four years old, my daughter Sophie had adventures in a special place called Teddy Bear Land, where she met a special friend. I loved hearing about these travels and encouraged her to make drawings and spin further stories from them.

One day Sophie sat down beside me and asked with great earnestness, “Daddy, would you like to know how I get to Teddy Bear Land?”

“I’d love to.”

“Sometimes I take the Sun Gate. Sometimes I take the Moon Gate. Sometimes I take the Tree Gate. Sometimes I take the Rainbow Bridge. And *sometimes* I just punch a hole in the world.”

I’ve never heard anyone say it better. To live the larger life, we need to *punch a hole in the world*. This is what dreaming — whether we are sleeping or waking or hyperawake — is really all about. On our roads to adulthood, we sometimes forget how to do it, just as older children in the *Chronicles of Narnia* cease to be able to see Aslan as they approach adolescence and become more and more burdened by the reality definitions of the grown-ups around them.

When we listen, truly listen, to very young children, we start to remember that the distance between us and the magic kingdoms is no wider than the edge of a sleep mask. True listening requires us to pay attention. To *attend*, according to its root meaning in the Latin, is to stretch ourselves, which requires us to expand our vocabulary of understanding. We owe nothing less to the young children in our lives. When we do this, we discover that they can be our very best teachers of how to dream and what dreaming can be.

### What to Do When You’re Eaten by a T-Rex

“I was eaten by T-Rex.” Brian, aged seven, is rocking in his seat with excitement, but his voice is very soft. The fifteen kids in the circle, plus parents and grandparents, lean forward to hear him. We’ve gathered to spend a half day together at a local retreat center for a playshop I love to lead called Dreaming with Children and Families.

“Did T-Rex swallow you in one gulp?” Brian’s grandmother asks, making a gurgling in her throat as she mimics something very big taking a big gulp. “Or did he kind of munch on you?”

“It was a *big* gulp.” Brian’s eyes are gleaming with excitement. “Then I was falling down, down

into T-Rex's belly. I found two eggs. I cut them open and there were two baby T-Rexes inside. They came out and they killed the big T-Rex and I was fine."

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"How did you feel?" I ask.

"Grrreat!"

You don't analyze a dream like this, whatever the age of the dreamer — at least not until you do something to grab the vital energy of the dream and embody it and bring it through to the present. That isn't hard with Brian's dream. We have a room full of excited kids, and kids are naturals for dream theater.

"Hey, Brian, would you like to playact your dream?"

Brian can't wait. He chooses the two youngest children in the group, an angelic four-year-old named Abby who has just created a picture of one of her own dreams with crayons and sketch paper — a picture of a wild thing she has given her own name — and a toddler who has proved a virtuoso with maracas and other noisemakers from our communal music box.

"Aunt" Carol, our host at the retreat center and a gifted counselor and dream teacher, is picked to play the snapping head of T-Rex, a tricky role since she can't stop beaming and laughing. There are plenty of dreamers, kids of all ages, to make up the body and tail of the beast. Soon the monster we've made is roaring and thumping around the room. Brian, playing himself, darts around, trying to hide behind the furniture; his fate is preordained. He is swallowed by T-Rex. He rolls over and over playacting his descent into the belly of the beast. Way down deep inside, he finds the eggs and frees the baby monsters, who return the favor by saving him.

This is wild and happy and just-so, and everybody wants more.

We turn other kids' dreams into theater, and each time a new strategy emerges for dealing with dream monsters. A ten-year-old girl tells us a dream in which she's at school, on her way to lunch when a "short monster" appears and starts eating her classmates. "He couldn't eat me, because I kicked him in the face."

Playacting that one produces a stampede as a very small boy, thrilled to be playing the short monster, pursues the dreamer's classmates until he is laid flat by a pretend kick to his face. Everyone laughs as the dreamer dabs at the slime the short monster has left on her foot.

A thirteen-year-old girl in the group is menaced in her dream by people behaving like monster. She puts on bat wings and flies off to a special place where she can be safe. The scariest adults in the dream are the ones who remain strangely frozen, as if they have been encased in blocks of ice, which she tries to avoid the attackers. In a later scene, she is at a wild ocean. When she plunges in, she becomes a killer whale and swims with delight with an orca friend who comes to join her. When she shape-shifts back into the form of a teenage girl, the grown-ups are no longer a threat to her. She has brought power back from the place of the killer whales.

THESE ARE SCENES FROM A SINGLE AFTERNOON of dreaming with kids and their families, the way our ancestors used to do it and some indigenous peoples still do. We had started out right, by drumming and making cheerful music to call up the dreams that wanted to play with us. Then everyone grabbed art supplies from the center of the circle to make a drawing of a dream.

Also at the center of the room, we had placed a huge toy box full of stuffed animals and puppets and plastic lizards. I invited the kids to grab any animal they liked. Then, since we were on traditional Mohawk Indian land, I had them join hands and voices in singing a simple Mohawk song that calls the Bear — and with it, all of the other animals — as helpers and protectors.

Don't cry, little one.

Don't cry, little one.

The Bear is coming to dance for you.

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The Bear is coming to dance for you.

We discussed how, if you have a scary dream, it's good to know you have a friend who can help you out and take care of you. Little Abby came over to me and whispered confidentially, "I have a bear. And I have lots of dream friends."

We broke every half hour for snacks of orange slices and chocolate chip cookies.

Toward the end, I opened my dream journal to a page where I had drawn a picture of Champie — the cousin of the Loch Ness monster who reputedly lives in Lake Champlain — swimming in the East River in front of the island of Manhattan, with delighted kids riding on his back. This was an image that had come to me spontaneously in a recent drumming circle.

I told the kids and their parents and grandparents: "A journal like this, where you draw your dreams and write down your stories, is a treasure book. I hope everyone here will now start keeping a treasure book. Ask the grown-ups who brought you to help you find the right one. They can help you write down the words if you like. But there's one thing about a dream journal everyone should know. It's your special book, and if you don't want Mommy or Daddy to read it, you should tell them: 'This is my secret book.' And they must respect that."

I asked if there were any questions.

Hands went up all around the room.

"Can we do this again?"

"Can we do it every month?"

"Can we do it every *week*?"

"Hey," I responded, "you can do it every *day* at home or at a friend's house now that you and your families know how much fun it is."

## When Kids Dream the Future

Children don't have to be told that we are all psychics in our dreams. They know this, because they have psychic experiences in their dreams all the time. They see into the future, they encounter the departed, they see things happening at a distance and behind doors that are supposedly locked against them. The problem is that very often the adults around them won't listen, sometimes because they are afraid of what the child may be seeing.

I once led a series of dream classes for sixth-grade schoolchildren as part of a "talented and gifted" program in a school district in upstate New York. At the start of each class, one of the questions I put to the kids was: "Has anyone dreamed something that later happened?" On average, nine out of ten kids said they had had this experience. A tough young boy who looked like Rambo immediately shot up his arm, eager to tell his story. "We went on family vacation in Myrtle Beach. I dreamed the whole ride from the airport, turn by turn. I kept trying to tell Dad which way to go, but he wouldn't listen to me. So we spent an hour getting lost and doubling back, because Dad doesn't believe in dreams."

My friend Wanda Burch, the author of *She Who Dreams*, remembers what her son Evan saw in a dream when he was just three years old. Although this is a family of dreamers, the parents did not understand the dream until it began to play out in waking life — at which point the dream prompted the quick action that may have saved mother and child from serious injury. Here's how Wanda told me the story that unfolded at their home in the Mohawk Valley of New York:

My son was just a bit over three years old and already sharing great dreams. He told me he had dreamed about “the dogs” and was terribly frightened of the dream, but seemed unable to express why they terrified him so much. My husband was working very hard and was really exhausted on the evening of a board meeting, so I offered to drive him the fifteen miles from our home in the Mohawk Valley.

Just as we closed the door of the house, Evan began screaming, “The dogs, the dogs!,” pulling on my hands. I had to pick him up to get him in the car, and told him over and over again there were no dogs. He calmed down. When we dropped off my husband and prepared to drive home, Evan got agitated again, looking out the back window and telling me there were growling dogs. We spent a few minutes discussing nightmares and things he could do with the dream in order to work with it. I don’t recall what I told him at that time, but he was usually quite capable of dreaming his own solutions to his nightmares, so I was surprised this one was scaring him so much.

We drove back home. The same scenario began again. I had to carry Evan into the house. This time he was screaming so hysterically I could barely pick him up. He calmed down again in the house. Time to pick up my husband. Again, Evan was hysterical, thrashing around in a desperate attempt to avoid getting in the car.

When we returned to our home with my husband, Evan started screaming. I was struggling to get him from the car to the house. When we were just feet away from the glass-enclosed porch, I heard the most terrifying barking and growling. I turned in that instant to see a pack of wild dogs coming over a slight rise just yards away from the cottage. I literally threw Evan into the porch, screaming at my husband to close the door and stay in the car. I barely made it through the door to slam it against several of the dogs as their bodies lunged against the porch. Several crashed against the door and walls of the enclosed porch before they whirled around and ran off with the pack.

If I had not been able to throw Evan into the porch and myself after him, we would have been in serious trouble. At this point, my son was completely calm, staring out the window at the dogs as they vanished into the creek bed. He looked at me and said, “The dogs!” I said to him, “Yes, I got it.”

My son has shared his dreams, big and small, with me all his life — and still does, now that he is in his late thirties. I turned to him in my darkest moments when I was experiencing doubts about my ability to heal from a life-threatening illness. I asked him, “Am I okay? What are you dreaming?” I’ll never forget his response: “You are fine. I am dreaming you into the future.”

If you have any doubts about our ability to dream the future — and to use our night previews possible future events to make better choices and change things for the better — listen to a young child telling his or her dreams. And consider how *you* may be required to recognize and act on clues the possible future contained in the dream you are hearing. To put it mildly, children are not independent players on the stage of life. They need us not only to listen but to help.

I once led a dreamplay session for a group of at-risk inner-city kids in New Haven, Connecticut, hosted by the local Police Benevolent Association. A beautiful fourteen-year-old girl told a dream in which she gets off a bus on a winding mountain road and is attacked by two wild dogs with red eyes. The dogs didn’t sound like regular dogs, but the description of the rest stop on the mountain road was very literal and specific, though she said she’d never been to a place like that in regular life. We were

lucky that day to have a counselor in the room who recognized the dream locale. “She has just described a rest stop on the road we’ll be taking to summer camp in a couple of weeks. I’ll be on the bus, and I promise you nothing bad is gonna happen at that stop, because I’ll be there to make sure that.”

## Helping Kids to Make a Secret Book

Luca had not yet turned four when he climbed into his mom’s bed in the middle of the night and told her the following dream:

I was running away from a huge T-Rex who was chasing me. Then I remembered, “Wait a minute, I like T-Rex.” So I turned around and told him, “Hey, you’re my favorite dinosaur!” And he picked me up so I could ride, and then we went to the beach together.

In the morning, Luca asked his mother to write the dream down for him. Luca did something inside his dream we all want to learn to do. Instead of running away from something scary, he turned around and faced it, on its own ground. Luca’s mom did the essential first thing that adults need to do with kids’ dreams: she *listened*. At Luca’s instigation, she then did the next most important thing: she helped her young child to *do something fun* with a dream, which in this case simply meant writing down so the story would be a keeper.

Luca often told his dreams to his Aunt Chele, an active dreamer who had been keeping a dream journal for many years. Inspired by Aunt Chele’s example of writing her dreams in her journal, Luca’s mom provided Luca with the most special book any of us will ever have — a book filled with the magic of our dreams and imagination. If we are privileged to have access to young children, one of the greatest gifts we can give them — and in the process, ourselves — is to encourage them to record their dreams and stories in a book that will become a journal. I did this with my own daughters. When they were very young, they would do the pictures and I would write the words for them. They took over more and more of the writing as they got older, until, at age nine, they were keeping their journals by themselves and for themselves. Then the same thing happened in each case. They said to me, in effect, “That’s it, Dad. This is my secret book, and you can’t read it anymore.”

Now *that’s* a journal. The secret book of your Self, not to be shared with anyone without permission, which should not be given lightly.

## Nine Keys to Helping Kids with Their Dreams

Here’s what we need to know about listening to children’s dreams and supporting their imaginations:

1. *Listen up!* When a child wants to tell a dream, make room for that. Make some daily space for dream sharing. Listen to the stories and cherish them for their own sake.
2. *Invite good dreams.* Pick the right bedtime reading or, better still, tell stories. Help your child weave a web of good dream intentions for the night — for example, by asking, “What would you most like to do tonight?” Encourage children to sleep with a favorite stuffed animal (whether teddy bear or T-Rex) and make this a dream guardian.
3. *Provide immediate help with the scary stuff.* If your child was scared by something in the night, recognize that *you* are the ally the child needs right now. Do something right away to clear out that negative energy. Get a frightened child to spit it out (literally) or draw a picture of what

scared her and tear it up as violently as possible.

4. ~~*Ask good questions.*~~ When the child has told her story, ask good questions. Ask about feelings, the color of the sky, and exactly what T-Rex was doing. See if there's something about the future. Say what you would think about it if this were your dream. Always come up with something fun or helpful to do with this story. Open up the crayon box, call Grandma, and so on.
5. *Help the child to keep a dream journal.* Get this started as early as possible. With a very young child, you can help with the words while she does the pictures. When your child reaches the point where she closes the journal and says, "This is my secret book, and you can't read it anymore," *do not peek.* Give her privacy, and let her choose when she'll let you look in that magic book.
6. *Provide tools for creative expression.* Encourage the child to bring dreams alive through art, dance, theater, and games and to draw or paint dreams. Gather friends and family for dream-inspired games and performance. Puppets and stuffed animals can be great for acting out dreams. This can also be dress-up time. It's such a release for kids to portray Mom or Dad or other grown-ups in their lives — be ready to be shocked!
7. *Help construct effective action plans.* Dreams can show us things that require further action — for example, to avoid an unhappy future event that was previewed in the dream, or to put something right in a family situation. A child will probably need adult help with such things, starting with your help. This will require you to learn more about dreaming and dreamwork, as you are doing now.
8. *Let your own inner child out to play.* As you listen to children's dreams, let the wonderful child dreamer inside you come out and join in the play.
9. *Keep it fun!* When you get the hang of this, you'll find it's the best home entertainment you can enjoy.

Notice two things that are not on this list but that would be at the very top of a list of what *not* do with a child's dreams:

1. *Never* say to a child: "It's only a dream." Children know that dreams are for real, and that the scary stuff that comes out in dreams needs to be resolved, not dismissed.
2. *Do NOT interpret* a child's dreams. You're not the expert here; the child is.

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