

The Body as Vessel: Listening Beyond the Fire

For years, I treated my body like a machine. I pushed it, sculpted it, and demanded it perform. As a trainer and coach, my body was my business card — proof of discipline and drive. Then illness arrived and quietly dismantled that story.

Suddenly my body was no longer a source of pride or proof. It became a place of pain, uncertainty, and limits I could not will my way past. I felt betrayed — I had taken such care of my body, why was it failing now? What I eventually understood was that my body was not failing. It was speaking.

I knew it was telling me to stop, but I didn't know what it truly needed. It shook me. I was fluent in discipline and pushing through — but I had no vocabulary for listening. Illness was asking me to relate to my body in a completely new way: not as something to control, but as something to understand.

Those first attempts were clumsy. Rest didn't feel like rest. Slowing down felt like failure. My worth had been tied so tightly to performance that listening felt impossible. Yet my body kept whispering the same thing: stop, soften, listen. It felt like learning a foreign language where silence carried as much meaning as words.

Painting became the place where listening slowly began to make sense.

For me, painting has always been more than art — it is ritual, a way of sensing my inner state without forcing it into words. When illness stripped me, I returned to the canvas not to create something beautiful, but to feel. Some days the brush held my tears; other days, color opened space for light inside me. Creativity was the language my body had been speaking all along.

When I entered sacred ceremony that November, I carried this practice with me in my bones. My body trembled. My breath caught. Grief moved through me, and my body carried me forward. In that fire, I experienced my body as a vessel — a living intelligence that held and guided me.

Illness had already begun to teach me that vitality is not force, but presence - the willingness to inhabit my body fully in fragility and discomfort — rather than trying to override it.

The body remembers what the mind forgets. It holds collapse, resilience, grief and life. When we listen, the body reveals what it needs to feel alive.

For many women in midlife, this is a difficult reckoning. We've spent years giving, striving, and pushing through, overriding fatigue no matter what. One day the body says, quietly or loudly: enough. Not as punishment — but invitation - to stop performing, to soften, and honor the vessel that carries us.

If you are in that season now, know this: your body is not your enemy. In pain or limitation, it is still carrying you. You may not fully understand its language — but the more you listen, the clearer it becomes.

The work that has taken form from this period of my life carries that return to the body at its core: the cost of living in survival, and the slow, honest work of coming home.

The full-color literary volume I am releasing this April, *Remembering Myself – A Journey Through the Threads of Time*, gathers the paintings, poetry, and prose created as my body and life were breaking open — the creative works that carried me into a new relationship with myself.

It is not a wellness manual, but a record of what happens when we stop overriding our body and begin trusting it as guide.

Follow the release at www.dkhillard.com.