

## **Stay Soft**

**Jessica Otto**

It came to me in the car, during one of the 26 hours a day I spend taxiing myself or my people the approximate distance of From Here To Eastern Siberia And Back.

Twelve Times.

Squared.

It likely was fueled by a giant mocha that was predestined to spill all over my lap, but the revelation that made its way across my brain was this: I've spent the last 44 years waiting for life to just calm down. I've put valuable pursuits off while waiting until life settles. Until things stop breaking and people stop being jerks and appliances stop needing repairs and relationships stop needing so much time and attention. Until people stop hurting my feelings and money stops running out and to-dos stop buzzing around my head like pests. What I understand now is that life calming down is nothing more than the fantastic mythical unicorn: It doesn't exist in the wild, or at least in these parts.

When I walk (or, more accurately, drive) through life waiting for easy things, waiting for an end to inconvenience or to downright hurtful moments, I begin a slow burn toward resentment. I begin to become bitter and angry toward the situations and people in my life who just aren't making it simpler for me. I begin to be prickly and hard and rage-y, and doesn't that just sound like the person you want to spill a mocha at Starbucks with? But I don't like hanging out with that version of myself much either, so I am learning to remind myself, over and over again, despite the hardness and toughness of life, to Stay Soft.

All around us, we feel the pressure and the pushing to be hard: to have a hard body, to draw a hard line, to conquer a hard challenge, to take a hard stance.

Stay soft.

Life will hand us challenge after challenge. We can try to protect ourselves, hide ourselves away. But hurt will find us.

Stay soft.

We must not let the painful things make us hard, because in that rigidness, we will fracture and crack and splinter. And we will cause others to break against our unyieldingness.

Stay soft.

We can be the paradox: That softness is strong, that gentleness is greatness, that giving is gaining, that peacemaking is powerful.

Stay soft.

We can stop letting the fire of life's agonizing pain burn us down to a hard lump of rock. Instead, we can let that hurt become a match, a light to the fire inside of us. The heartbreak and the injustice we have suffered can burn up and become fuel, not for more destruction but for the battle of fighting more injustice and for the comforting of heartbreak all around us. We can let our own fire become a torch with which we light the lamp of the next person, and the next, and the next.

Stay soft.

It means we will get pummeled again, you and I. But the armor of anger offers no protection anyway; it is more a bludgeon than a shield.

Stay soft.

In a world of cynicism and bitterness and rage, we can be Hope-bringers and Peacemakers and yes, Fighters, too. It won't be by accident. It won't be simple. It will only come as we walk into the dark cave of pain with others, sitting with them, learning from them. It will only come as we let ourselves wait in the hurt, not passively, letting hurt do its work of smoothing our rough parts away. But we can't stay in the dark cave. We must always look for the light...the fire of our fellow torch-lighters, the faint glow of the sky outside, the light that will always lead us home.

Softly.