

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

'As delightful as
Drew Barrymore herself'
RED MAGAZINE

Wildflower
by
Drew
Barrymore

A photograph of Drew Barrymore is the central focus. She is wearing a light pink, short-sleeved, knee-length dress with a delicate floral pattern. Her hair is pulled back into a ponytail. She is smiling gently and looking towards the camera. In her hands, she holds a single, large, vibrant pink flower on a dark stem with a few green leaves. The background is a solid, bright blue color. The text 'Wildflower by Drew Barrymore' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, cursive font.



India, 2010

INDIA

When I was a child, I had this recurring dream. I believed it took place in India. I just knew it. There was no convincing me otherwise. I was always intimidated by the dream, but I knew the dream had meaning and was not just some silly vision.

The dream goes like this: I am hovering above an everlasting desert landscape of goldish-colored sand. I am gliding over it in my perspective; I am not flying—it is the view from a tiny pearl-colored propeller plane. It's an opalescent vessel that is gently coming in for its landing in the middle of this flat, unending desert. Then the dream cuts to a shot looking at the plane from the side. It is on the ground, and all of a sudden, the door of the airplane opens. The kind that folds down, unrolling open. Then, about ten men in white outfits start coming out of the plane. They are all in white, wearing something like Indian kurta pajamas—long sleeping shirts that go to their knees and light pants underneath. And

they have white turbans on as well. They all start in a graceful manner out of the plane, in single file, and they walk to a hole in the ground. The hole is a perfectly cut rectangular hole, about ten feet wide, about twenty feet long. The men gather around the edge of the opening, leaving the top of the rectangle space unoccupied. Then the perspective goes back to the plane and one last man walks out. He is holding a golden urn. And then he too walks over to the open space and stands there with purpose. Then the shot rises gracefully up overhead, glides up and over the men, hovers for a moment, and then plummets straight down into the hole, making the whole image fade to black.

Now, I am not in this dream—everything I described is what I see—and the dream has never changed. What does this mean?? I don't know. I don't specialize in dream analysis. And I didn't want it clinically or haphazardly dissected by some whack job. This was my little dream and I wanted to keep it to myself. I was nervous about the whole death angle, there being a burial-like ritual and an urn. But I also didn't want to say for sure the dream was about death. Truthfully, I was like, one day I am going to go to India and I might die there. But I also knew that my dream would not stop me from going one day.

Years later, I landed in the middle of the night in bustling New Delhi! The sounds, the smells, it was the crazy chaos you would think it was times a thousand! I was thirty-five years old, single, a little lost in life. Flossy had just died. I was to meet a man named

Shantum Seth, who was a friend of a friend, and he was going to take me around to some places and be my guide. The goal was no tourist surface shit. We dove into this wild place. He grabbed my hand, removed my shoes, and looked into my eyes, and down the rabbit hole we went! I had waited for this my whole life.

When I was a teenager, I read all these books on religion and really got into Eastern philosophy. Taoism and Buddhism. Animism. I read everything. I was just a novice trying to grasp ways in which people could maintain the mentality that *we are all one*. There was a desire in me to believe that people have extraordinary destinies and that, after all, most of our heroes in life are human beings. We can have faith in those people, and just as important, we can be heroes too. We all have the capacity to be divine, but that damn ego always lets some people think they are bigger or better than others. However, I think that nature does not choose who is safe or who gets to live. It's an even playing field out there when a tidal wave or an earthquake comes along. On the other hand, I don't want to get bogged down in a defeatist feeling that we are insignificant. I have to believe in an ability to do large things in small ways, or small things in large ways. I was not raised in any pious setting, to say the least. But I love faith. I love that people have it. I love anything that gives purpose or unites us. Without judgment, of course.

So here I was. Shantum took me to several places of worship so that I could experience the different cultures and beliefs right

in their very houses, churches, mosques, and temples. One Jain, one Sikh, one Muslim, and one Shiva. They all put me in a space of awe, and I was grateful to really be able to feel what these rooms stored inside them. I sat through several ceremonies and prayer sessions. I would pray. I would listen. We walked through huge boxes of water where one's feet would be cleansed before going in, but the water was covered in flies—Western girl, I had to just get over it and deal!

On foot again in the city, I followed the sounds and sights of what seemed like a groovy old Bollywood movie theater! I have sat in the temples of movie theaters my whole life. I wanted to take Shantum into one of my churches, so I grabbed his hand and we snuck in. It was raw and dusty with rickety old seats, a million miles away from Hollywood stadium seating! As we sat there, in the dark, with all the particles of dust illuminated by the light of the projector, I had a true *Sullivan's Travels* moment!

As far as film is concerned, I truly believe in the movie *Sullivan's Travels*! Its message is of most importance. It's about a filmmaker who makes big comedies, and he feels empty and he wants to make a film of depth and substance. So he decides to go out into the world and seek misery, pain, and suffering so that he can then capture them on film purely and honestly. So the man finds it. He ends up, through mistaken identity, being thrown into a very harsh prison. After being in there awhile, one night, the inmates get the privilege of watching a film. It turns out to be a cartoon. While the

inmates are watching, they start laughing. The whole crowd just starts roaring. And as he watches them forget about their problems for just one moment, he sees the power of making people laugh. And this filmmaker has the most extraordinary epiphany! He realizes that there is as much merit in trying to ease people's suffering for a moment as there is in "focusing" on it. To ease someone's pain through a distracting, silly, joyous laugh is his lesson. I know there is suffering, so to escape it for a second is truly powerful. That is one church I am staying loyal to. The Church of Laughing.

We left the theater and continued around the tight alleyways and brightly lit main streets. We ducked into another house of worship. Standing in the church, I turned to Shantum and simply said, "I am afraid." He looked at me. "I'm thirty-five, and I don't exactly know where my life is heading, and I just don't even know what I am looking for."

And he said to me, "There should be no 'I' in what you are saying or thinking or feeling. You have to separate yourself from yourself. You have to realize that 'you' are nothing, and 'we' are all everything." I loved this, and eagerly awaited his next sentence. He looked at me with an easy but true connection and said, "We are all a part of everything. You are the sunshine and the air and a flower in a field. You, and all of us, are in the thread of these clothes. Everything is alive and connected."

It's empowering and humbling, being a lover of animism (to believe all things have a soul). I wanted to feel a part of the uni-

verse, but for now, I was excited at this notion here in buzzing, bustling New Delhi. Where life and chanting and cooking and cars and bikes and beautiful chaos were all around!!! Here, in this Shiva temple, they painted my forehead red, and I had a scarf on my head, and I was starting to shed my Western Self. I still didn't know what I believed in, but to believe in anything that makes you go beyond yourself is key. All my studies as a teenager were starting to coalesce. The guru and I had a meal after my teaching and an auspicious trek through the city! And we ate in contentment and ease. Our energies meshed. We had started the day at around two p.m., and at midnight, when our legs were tired, our bellies finally full, and my heart beaming with all the doors this man had opened, we finally said good night.

The next day he took me through Transcendental Meditation. Three hours of eyes closed, with no movement allowed. Traveling in your mind to wherever you want to go. I have to admit for the first hour I was so uncomfortable. I went from eager student to "let me the hell out of this NOW." My legs hurt, my back hurt, I was actually mad. I may have signed up for this, but I wanted out. I don't actually know what kept me in, pride perhaps, but I stuck with it. And as I cursed him for throwing me into something that was too advanced for a valley girl like me, I started to picture myself as a bird. What kind of bird do you want to be? I asked myself. An eagle! Why not? Let's get majestic, I thought. And so I took off. Gliding higher and higher, I started to fly. All of a sudden my legs

didn't hurt so much. And I soared above New Delhi. Then India. Then I thought about all the places I wanted to go and everything was endless and full of possibility. I soared over the whole world and looked in on friends—it was amazing. Most important, it taught me that we are anything but tethered. We are capable of going anywhere we want anytime we need. Afterward, I had dinner with Shantum's family and ate his wife's food and played with his two daughters. It was so comforting in his home. I may have wondered where my life was going, but for this moment, life was perfect here in India.

After that, I got on a plane and flew to Bhutan, traveled all through the country for a few weeks, then back to India for a while. When it was time for me to go home, I started the long journey at the airport in Rajasthan. When they called our flight over the loudspeaker, the other passengers and I got up and made our way to the plane outside.

OK, here it goes . . .

I walked out onto the tarmac, and sitting there was a small pearl-colored white propeller plane . . . just like in my dream.

I stopped walking and literally went paralyzed. So this was it. The moment of truth. I looked around. It being the last flight out, the sun was starting to set. And when I say sunset, I'm talking, *golden movie hour*. God time. Nature showing off! It was gold!!!! This was the anticipated scenario I had been wondering about all my life. I took a deep chalky breath and decided to face the great

unknown. My knees were wobbly and I felt dizzy. What the hell was I doing?????

The engines roared as we started to take off. The amount of time that had passed had caused the gold of the sun to set to its most perfect pink. Like a cocktail you get on holiday. Blush, or the inside of a seashell... It was as picturesque as anything I have ever seen. Of course it's going to be picturesque! I'm possibly about to die!

We took off.

And as we made our way into the sky, I watched the sun, my eyes burning and my throat hollow. I had palpitations in my heart and was in full-tilt panic. All the meditation in the world was not helping me now. I looked like an animal that knew its unfortunate fate. Wide-eyed! Trembling. I started craning my neck, looking for that bar cart, knowing full well they don't sling cocktails during takeoff. Oh God! I was actually rocking back and forth in my seat. The motion was either going to soothe me or get me dizzy so I could pass out. I was a living promotion for Xanax!

I looked out the window again. I was so struck by the magnificent beauty of the sunset, I sat there, quiet. The silence allowed me to ask myself: What if I did get the chance at life all over again? What would I do differently? What would I keep and what would I leave??? My older self was welcoming my younger self into an early womanhood. This wasn't the death dream it

might have seemed like for all those years. It was a rebirth. I realized right then and there that in life you have to make your dreams come true. Even if there are just the ones you have to figure out. I went from terrified to optimistic. The plane leveled out and so did I.