Changing State to
Change my State
Over the past weeks I have felt a deep pull toward my home away from home in dorsal. I have turned away from listening, not wanting to hear what my nervous system needed me to know. I think somewhere inside I knew that the message was vital for me to hear and would change my world in ways I wasn’t ready for. The fear of what I would hear kept me from listening.

So while I teach others to tune in and listen to the wisdom of their nervous systems, I kept turning away and my dorsal despair kept growing. When I finally turned toward and tuned in, I heard with absolute clarity that I needed to change how I am living and working. My nervous system had a clear answer to the question we often ask ourselves, “If you had a year to live would you keep living the way you are now?”.

That was the mobilizing moment when I was able to begin to move out of dorsal. The message I heard when I listened to my inner wisdom was that I am drained and not finding ways to fill. My autonomic tank is running low on ventral and my dorsal despair is taking over.

The outcome of my listening is that I am changing state to change my state. I am temporarily leaving my life-long home by the sea in Maine to be near my daughter, son-in-law, and two granddaughters in Illinois...to be woven into their daily lives and not just connected by computer. I’ve never lived outside of Maine away from the sea and I’m not sure anything would have prompted me to take this leap except a global pandemic.

Through this experience, I’m reminded again how hard it is to practice tuning in and attending when what we hear so often brings a request for change. Change requires us to let go and take a leap. I’ve made many leaps in my life. Some of my landings were graceful and others were messy. I am trusting this leap will bring a safe landing.

And while this is a huge leap for me, not all listening brings this magnitude of change. So as I make my leap, my invitation to each of you is to turn toward your nervous system and listen to what it wants you to know in this moment.

Is there an invitation for you to make a leap of your own?
Finding glimmers is a way to add a drop of ventral to your day.

Perhaps you’ve played the “I Spy” game. I spy with my little eye something… that begins with a D, is blue, round… etc.

The possibilities are endless for what you can “spy”. In the game, the people playing with you then try to guess what it is. What happens if you invite your nervous system to partner with you?

We can find our way to glimmers by saying, “I spy with my autonomic eye a glimmer” and then looking around to see what brings a ventral micro-moment.

It’s a playful way to remember to stop and notice the glimmers that are all around just waiting for us to find them.

See what happens when you stop and spy with your autonomic eye…
WHAT DEB'S UP TO...

The past several weeks have been filled with new adventures. I had the opportunity to talk live on air to BBC 6 Music in London about music and the nervous system, and making musical maps. It was great fun to talk about the power of music to help us connect with our states, and feel the paradoxical effect of being with survival states safely - and even enjoyably - as well as feeling the richness of all the flavors of ventral. We are not alone in our experience when we are surrounded by music.

An unexpected invitation from O Magazine resulted in a mention of Polyvagal Theory and my work in the September issue. I love the last line in the section, “This is more than a new approach to discussing and processing trauma...it’s the basic organizing principle of how we are human.”

Continuing the theme of understanding how we are human - I am just finishing a book for Sounds True for a general audience and I hope that neuroception will become a household word! Polyvagal Theory is truly becoming known outside the world of therapy and weaving its way into everyday conversations.

The first copies of the Flip Chart have shipped and I’ve been receiving photos of colleagues with it and hearing stories of how they are using it. I love seeing and hearing about the creativity each of you bring to this work. I welcome those messages as they are definitely glimmers for me.
A number of years ago I was invited to do a webinar and I couldn’t find a way to say yes. I was afraid to have my thoughts and words recorded, worried that I would be stuck in one moment in time and my work wouldn’t keep growing. My nervous system felt too many cues of danger and kept me from saying yes for a long time. The very first recording I ever did was with my colleague Deirdre Fay, and which is now called “The Pied Piper of Polyvagal Theory”. Deirdre helped me take that leap and find a safe landing.

Now my days are filled with writing and recording, and although I still worry that I will look back and it will be too late to change something I don’t like, I’ve discovered I can stay anchored in ventral and usually remember that nothing is actually written in stone... that my work continues to evolve and new recordings offer people the opportunity to explore with me.

For the past few weeks I’ve been spending many hours recording teaching pieces for the new hybrid Foundations series. The new format will allow me to teach through the recordings and offer flexibility for participants. The hybrid structure was created out of necessity because full days on Zoom are too great a challenge for most of our nervous systems and it has turned into a rich experience of teaching.
I have discovered I actually enjoy the recording process and feel like I am connected to people not just talking to my screen. Although my social engagement system still longs for face to face connection, I imagine my colleagues listening and that remembered reciprocity keeps me anchored.

Anchored is a word I love and is the title for my upcoming Sounds True book.

I grew up around the water and anchors are essential to safe navigation. An anchor is dug into the ocean floor with enough line between the anchor and the boat to hold the boat safely in one place - but with leeway to move in response to changes in the sea and wind. Safety comes with a firmly embedded anchor and the right amount of line. When we are anchored, we have a sense of being held in safety and trust so we can venture out without becoming adrift. From our anchor in ventral regulation we have room to explore the world around us.

In these challenging times it is hard to stay anchored. I know I often feel that sense of being untethered and need to grab an anchor. As I say the words grab an anchor, my hand reaches up to hold onto something. Our anchors are the dependable things we can reach and hold onto.

Below is one of my favorite exercises from my Polyvagal Exercises For Safety and Connection book, and one that I teach in every webinar. I’m sharing it here in the hope that you will each find the anchors that keep you tethered to your ventral energy – and able to safely navigate what feels like stormy seas.
A Quick Guide to Ventral Vagal Anchors

Link to Book - Polyvagal Exercises for Safety and Connection

**Who**

Reflect on the people in your life and make a list of the ones who bring you a feeling of being safe and welcome. You might also have a pet who fills that place. First identify a person or pet who is present in your life. Then, if you wish, you can expand your search to also include people who are no longer living, people you haven’t met but who bring your ventral vagal state alive, and spiritual figures.

**What**

Think about what you do that brings your ventral vagal state alive. Look for small actions that feel nourishing, relaxing, and inviting of connection. Keep track of the things that bring moments, or micro-moments, of ventral vagal regulation.

**Where**

Take a mental tour of your world and find the physical places that bring you cues of safety. Look around your home, your neighborhood, your community, your workplace, a place you feel a spiritual connection. Bring to mind the everyday places you move through. Take note of the environments and name the ones that activate your ventral vagal state.

**When**

Identify the moments in time when you feel anchored in your ventral vagal energy. Take a moment to go back and revisit those experiences. Bring them into conscious awareness and write them down.