



Blowing in the Wind

Alice Ellerby speaks to **Alice Elgie** about her life as a wanderer

Alice Elgie is a writer and long-time contributor to JUNO. A ‘perpetual wanderer’, she and her family – her husband, daughter, and the family dog – live a low-impact life, often on the road or on a narrow boat, sometimes in the UK, France, Portugal or Spain. When I speak to Alice, they are living on a croft in the Highlands of Scotland. It’s where she was when she wrote her last piece for JUNO, in spring 2021. In that feature, ‘The Magic of Mandala’s’, Alice considers her desire to root down, and to experience a journey not of “miles underfoot” but of “inner growth”.

Finding her in the spot where she left us, I ask Alice whether she’s been on the croft ever since, whether she did indeed root down. But no. Life took a different turn. In that same year, Alice’s mother and niece died within three weeks of each other. She describes a period of deep grief. “I now feel I had some kind of emotional and physical breakdown.” During that difficult time, and the years that followed, they kept moving and, thankfully, Alice found her way through. It was nature, writing and community – passions that continually emerge as we talk – that brought healing. “The creation of my first journaling course in spring 2022 – and the small

group of friends and followers who came along for the journey – literally brought me back into the light.”

Alice offers journaling courses that use nature as a reflective tool. She has a community on Substack, *Slow into the Seasons*, with whom she shares monthly offerings of her writing, meditation and journaling prompts, yoga classes, breathwork and mantra practices. Nature is everywhere in Alice’s work, and I ask her about its importance to her. It stems back to her earliest memories, she says. “My mum was a real nature person, and we were out in nature every day. I’ve always found when I’ve gone through



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tricky things – even as a child, when I would go and sit in the tree at the end of the garden with a cushion – being in nature, I just feel this sense of belonging and this sense of oneness.” She talks about taking lessons from nature – how a windy day might connect her to thoughts of letting go of things – and it’s easy to see how a life that mirrors nature’s changing seasons, that constantly ebbs and flows and is blown by the wind, though at first perhaps seeming untethered, is in fact deeply rooted to all that exists around us. “It’s a calmness, that’s what it is for me. It’s that connection to simplicity that’s always driven our way of being.”

Though she feels she’s a traveller “in the very core sense of the word”, she gets nervous when people think of her in that way. “They think that maybe we’re going to far-flung places and seeing the sites, but our best times are when we bed down in a place, and it might only be for two or three months, but we will often go back over the years and we’ll have made connections, and we are just living.”

Though Alice had always travelled before she met her husband, when their daughter was born, they were living in a house “with a mortgage and proper jobs”. “We had our daughter and we were just like, we don’t want to do this. We want to follow our hearts and spend time together as a family and see different places and experience life.” Initially they thought they might go off for a couple of years before settling somewhere so their daughter could start school, but another way presented itself. “I didn’t even know what home education was, and then we were in Portugal and we met this lady who had a 7-year-old and she was home educating. It blew my mind. That prompted me to buy a couple of books and to find my local home-ed community and the rest is history. My daughter has never been to school.”

Alice’s daughter turns 18 next year. It’s an interesting point from which to reflect on the span of their home education experience and I ask Alice how it looked for them across the years. “We very much followed a child-led approach, I suppose,” she says. “A bit of unschooling, a little bit of curriculum stuff. It was mostly just led by what she was interested in. One year she got into sewing and crafts and she made outfits for

all her teddies – there were many – and we just let her run with that. With reading, we always read to her and she always saw me reading, and then, when she was 8 or 9, I was getting that nervousness, wondering if she was going to ever read on her own, but still trusting. And then, sure enough, she did, and now she’s absolutely a bookworm.

“We had wonderful communities in Portugal, in Scotland, in England. Wherever we go she’s got friends because we’ve always connected with those home-educating communities. I’m sure there were times when I was like, ‘Oh my goodness, I can’t do this,’ but right now, looking back, I’m like, wow, yeah, it’s been really cool.”

It feels a significant moment for Alice, to have completed her part in her daughter’s education. I ask her whether she feels a shift in her role. “I’ve loved that my primary focus has been her life and what she’s learning and learning with her, and it’s been wonderful, but when she was 14, there was a definite shift. By the time she was 15 or 16, I started to deepen my yoga studies because suddenly I had time. There’s always a sadness, isn’t there, that time has gone and they’re becoming an adult, but it’s also exciting to see her moving into that, and I’m equally excited that I’m moving into the things I have a passion for. I’m fully relishing this next stage.”

Alice is now studying Sanskrit as a way of deepening her yoga practice, which “moves its way through everything in my life”. Yoga is much more than a physical practice for her: “It’s a kind of philosophy.” She explains how yoga came to hold such prominence in her life. “When my mum and my niece passed away, I decided to take a leap and do something for me. I took a 200-hour yoga teacher training course, just to deepen my own practice, not with the intention to teach, and everything just came together. I was like, ‘Everything in my life to this point is within this kind of sphere of yoga.’ I’d always wanted to live simply and I’m a vegan and various other things in my life, I knew there was a connection, but I hadn’t quite worked it out.”

Studying the Sanskrit texts, “which hold the answers to the deepest truths of life”, is taking her practice to new depths. “At five in the morning, I sit and I do my studies – and people have been studying this for thousands of years.

It’s a very profound practice for me.” The lines between Alice’s yoga practice, her connection to nature and her life of wandering are clearly drawn. “I’m interested to know why we are here, what it’s all about, how we can get the most out of this experience, and that’s what’s always driven my travels. How can we find truth and feel connected with other people, with the Earth, with higher power?”

These themes are woven throughout Alice’s writing. Her current focus in her work is reflecting on nature and how we might behave in relation to it in each season. “I brought a typewriter because I don’t want to write on the computer any more. It’s almost like mindfulness. Every day I’ve been taking an hour just to write with my typewriter, and I have my thesaurus and my dictionary – the actual books – so I don’t have to look online, and I just take that time to myself thinking about this seasonal thing.” As someone who writes a lot, solely on the computer, I’m curious about how this alters the process. “When you write on the computer, you can change things all the time, but when you write on a typewriter, you have to look around more and think about things before you commit anything to paper, and I like that. There’s something really connected and authentic about that to me.”

Alice is drawn to being offline, and she recognises the challenge this poses in sharing with her Slow into the Seasons community. “I just find it overwhelming when you’re constantly online, and I’m very aware that what I’m creating is potentially overwhelming other people, so I’m thoughtful about how much I share. I try to be mindful of not filling up someone else’s inbox when I’m trying to clear my own. It’s about thinking carefully about what we consume and how much.”

As I speak with Alice, I realise that what’s attractive about her life isn’t necessarily where she lives, as I thought would be the case, but how she lives. I am struck by her attention and deep listening – to herself, to her family, to nature, to humanity. This listening is something available to all of us, wherever we are, whatever shape our lives take. In slowing down and connecting, there is clarity and peace to be found. ●

You can find out more about Alice Elgie’s Slow into the Seasons community at slowintotheseasons.substack.com.