

Broken Open—and Emerging More Whole: Loss, Joy, and Reinvention through Community

By Thomas Mengel

There is a particular kind of exhilaration that comes not from soaring, but from choosing to jump. —Søren Kierkegaard



Photo 1: "Dizziness", Signal Hill, St. John's, NL (Photo: author)

I have jumped many times. I stumbled often. I hope to jump again.

I have not always jumped with exhilaration or from solid ground. Some of my most important leaps began with a slow, private recognition that something essential had stopped working—a marriage that no longer provided the closeness I was yearning for, a faith whose beliefs no longer matched my understanding, a professional identity which has run its course. The jumping came later. First came the long, uncomfortable season of sensing or knowing that something is off.

Looking back across 25 years of transformation, what strikes me most is not the difficulty—though there was plenty of that—but the extraordinary richness that came from taking those leaps honestly: acknowledging both what was broken and what was possible. Each jump opened a world I could not have imagined from the ledge before it. And each world, it turns out, was populated by remarkable communities of people who became the real substance of my story.

This is an essay about reinvention—the full version, which includes both the courage of the jump and the weight of what precedes it and of what is left behind. About what happens when you choose, repeatedly and with your whole self, to grow. And about why the communities we build and belong to are not the backdrop to that journey. They are the journey itself.