

Sally Dukes Interview

Karen Wyatt: [00:00:00]

Today I am very happy to welcome my special guest, Sally Dukes. Sally lives on a small Greek island in the Cyclades, previously from Nantucket, Hawaii, and the Bay Area. Amazing, all of incredible places. Sally draws inspiration from the sea, gardening, and hiking. As a small business owner, psychotherapist, editor, and middle school teacher, Sally drew upon her childhood near-death experience as a strength.

Her memoir, which was just barely published as we're recording this, titled *Drummer Girl: A Story of Life After Death*, gives voice to resilience in the face of the unknown. True [00:02:00] healing does not come in a pill or a prescription. It comes when our stories are heard and our humanity recognized and honored.

Sally believes in the power of narrative as medicine, and *Drummer Girl* is her narrative, her truth. You can learn more about Sally and her work at her website, sallydukes.com. So Sally, welcome and thanks for joining me all the way from Greece.

Sally Dukes: Oh, thank you for having me. Appreciate it.

Karen Wyatt: I thoroughly enjoyed reading your book, and so I've been excited to have a chance to talk to you about it.

But as we were discussing right before we started to record, it's, not a book that you can just simply, summarize or give a synopsis of in a few bullet points. I wanted to just ... I just wanted to tell you I felt your book has this dreamlike quality to it, and I don't know if other people have described that as well, but it's almost as if while reading it, you're [00:03:00] painting the story in a sense, like painting it with these various colors.

that's how it felt to me. I'm inside this beautiful watercolor painting that keeps shifting and colors merging and blending and, you're painting the story, and it's beautiful to read and something that I feel like I will return to and, read multiple times because I think my impression of it will change as I change and as I grow and learn new things.

Sally Dukes: Wow. Thank you very much. That's very kind.

Karen Wyatt: it, it's ... I wanted to explain to listeners right away that this, again, like we said, this isn't a book that I'm just gonna ask you to, what are your top 10 points or ask you those kind of questions we might ask sometimes about a nonfiction book.

It's a book that really has to be experienced by people, I think.

Sally Dukes: Yeah. I [00:04:00] think, it's a journey, right?

Karen Wyatt: Yes.

Sally Dukes: So you don't enter the journey in the middle. I think you have to take the journey with the book.

Karen Wyatt: Exactly. Exactly. And you take us along in a beautiful way, through some of the terrors and yet the beauty that exists even- Even amidst the difficulties in the book.

But I, wanted to start with, because the book really draws from a near-death experience you had early in childhood, and I wanted to start by just having you talk about that a little bit for listeners.

Sally Dukes: Yeah, that was the... That's been the, I don't wanna say driving force, but, it's been with me my whole...

since I remember, because I think I was three and I was undergoing heart surgery, and I experienced a, A, a big orange machine with a black conveyor belt that I was strapped to, and I was being taken into the [00:05:00] dark, into the void, and I remember screaming, and I remember there were other people around, but they weren't really people.

They were like... I don't know what they were, because I don't know. and I went in, and I remember in there, like my heart, the reas- one reason I needed the heart surgery was because my heart, it had a hole, but it beat really loudly, and people could hear it. And I remember when I got into this tunnel, there was no sound.

There was nothing, and then there was a light at the far end, and I remember being captivated by it as the conveyor belt took me towards it. But as I got close to it, the entire tunnel filled with, violet light, but it wasn't really light. It was like violet energy, like a... But it, was like a feeling.

It, it was re- it, was almost like it [00:06:00] wrapped itself around me, and it was just love. It was ju- and I can say love. I don't know what it was, but it was the most beautiful thing, and this is from when I was three. And people have said, how can you remember that?" And it's how could you forget that?"

Do you know? I can't... I touched something, and for the rest of my life, I've been looking for that, because it was just so powerful. I always wanted to know how to get back to it or how to understand it, and i- it's not something that you'd really talk about with your family or your parent. I never talked about it because it...

I did. I'd had to-- They took me back to the surgeon because I was screaming, having terrible night terrors because of that, and he, told me to tell him the story. And I, I don't know how I did at that age tell him the story, but as I told him the dream, he had a, just a pad and yellow lined, [00:07:00] paper, and he drew a picture of an elephant on, So it was just a pencil dra- drawing of an elephant, and he said, "Take this home. Hang it over your bed, and you'll never have the dream again." So I did tell that story to the surgeon, and it was a joke in my fam- let her sleep under the elephant so she won't wake us up, do you know? But-

but that was my-- that's when it went, when I went underground.

Because then I didn't talk about it or, exper- try to find answers for it until I became maybe high school it started to come back, the feeling. The isolation. You feel isolated because you had an event that you can't really talk about because there's really no words, because there really is no language for what I experienced because language is in this body, and I wasn't in this body.

Do you know?

Karen Wyatt: So-

Sally Dukes: Exactly [00:08:00] So it was p- difficult, but that, I love g- you asked me a question and I went over here. But-

Karen Wyatt: Oh, no, but that's perfect because that's what it is. It's this whole- Yeah ... this journey's like a cloud in a way That we can wa- that we can wander through. But, it's exactly, was a numinous experience, I think you used that word- Yes

in the book. Very. And ineffable. There are not words that could adequately describe it. And imagine for a three-year-old with no, very little- No, no way ... life experience- no context, no language or words from it. I'm curious how you, to really wonder how you did describe that to the surgeon. Yeah, I

Sally Dukes: do wonder, 'cause I write about it, then I'm like, wait a minute, how, could I have told him?

But I told him because I got the, elephant,

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, And, I'm, I was actually really impressed that the surgeon did that. I know. That he had the presence of mind to draw the elephant for you [00:09:00] because what an amazing guardian in a way, as like a, the, the remover of obstacles, Yeah, I know. Ganesh, the elephant. That's a great one. Y- yeah, And how powerful that was to have that hanging over your bed as just something that you could hang onto as a child, in a sense, for protection, and to know you really are safe even though you can't explain what has happened to you.

Sally Dukes: Right.

Karen Wyatt: and over again, other people in your world could never understand what happened to you either. And, that-

Sally Dukes: because probably I'm not describing it properly or because, but a lot of people haven't ever had the experience, right? Exactly. So how could they understand? And it's very fr- it, yes, a lot of people didn't understand what I was trying to do or find out or understand.

and still to this [00:10:00] day, don't probably understand. But I had to do it, I'm 73, and I'm like, for 70 years this has been walking beside me. I'm gonna have to write about it.

Karen Wyatt: I think a lot of people who've had near-death experiences describe that the experience itself changes you and how you see the world and see things around you.

And at three already, you don't have a lot of views of the world yet to be changed, but it shaped something in you. Sure did. And that makes it, it's difficult to tell people and difficult for other people to relate if you try to tell them.

Sally Dukes: Yeah, and so I didn't. But the ... It's, and it's also isolating- because you, have this, and you're looking for it, but and no one else that, I ... The only thing that was when, I, don't know how old I was when I realized that it was actually a near ... I didn't know it was a near-death ex- I didn't know what it was, but it wasn't until I found some [00:11:00] literature on it.

I don't know when Raymond Moody came out, but I was older, And-

and I said, "Oh, my God. Oh, this, happened to other people, too. This isn't just me." And that's when I, put the name to it, near-death, but otherwise I wouldn't have, I didn't know what it was. I would just say it was, it, like I got touched by the numinous or I,

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. a- and even it's so luckily we have that name near-death experience because that at least allows people with these amazing, incredible experiences in their lives to connect with each other with a common name, so they can say, "Oh, yes. I had that." Yeah. And so it allows those people to come together and share their stories and be heard at least, so that, you don't feel like you're the only person wandering around out there.

Sally Dukes: , But I found, , did you [00:12:00] read Sebastian Unger's book, My Time of Dying? No. In My Time of Dying?

Karen Wyatt: No.

Sally Dukes: So I was really curious because In My Time of Dying, I wanted to see what happened, and he had a near-death experience under surgery just recently, And his father came, and then, he didn't die, and then he spent forever, I don't know how long, trying to figure out what happened, and trying scientifically, intellectually, And finally, a nurse said to him, why don't you just let it be," I think this is what she said. "Why don't you just consider it sacred? Why do you have to find out what it is?" and that's how I feel about it is like it's a sacred experience. I, there's- I don't really have words to put or figure it out, and I know there's all these things in the news about, this is what happens scientifically, but I don't even care because I know for me what [00:13:00] my experience was.

Karen Wyatt: Exactly. Exactly, which is the, heart of it all. That's what makes it sacred is that it is an experience that came to you, that was for you in that moment, and I really think, science and medicine fail us because they're so rational. They have a d- really difficult time looking at something that is beyond the rational, that there, aren't words for.

Sally Dukes: Yeah, exactly.

Karen Wyatt: It... Yeah. A- and that- It

Sally Dukes: is beyond ...

Karen Wyatt: maybe, I think, and even this may have been your experience too, that you end up feeling judged or criticized by those institutions 'cause they don't understand what you've experienced. But instead of simply saying, "We don't know how to explain it," they, may try to give you a diagnosis or pathologize it- or somehow make- Yeah. Yeah, make you feel like there's something wrong with you that you had the experience, when in fact it's an incredible gift.

Sally Dukes: [00:14:00] Yeah. that's good. I did have a lot of trouble with trying to talk to people about it professionally. and, and, I, imagine that happens to kids anyway, children.

I'm not... I was an adult, when they have to say... Because people say they, "How could you even remember? They're two years old. What, they don't remember that they were in the hospital alone or they're, they don't remember." But they do, Children do remember. And-

Karen Wyatt: Exactly. They just may not remember it in the way we remember things as adults.

They, don't have a lot of specific words attached to that memory, but they remember images and, feelings in their, body, and emotions that were, present. Exactly. And so your description of that violet sense of warmth and peace as love, that makes total sense to me that is what, you experienced, and I think that [00:15:00] sounds like the perfect name for whatever it was that was- Thank you

enveloping you in that dream.

Sally Dukes: that's why I think, I, I, don't wanna die, but I'm not afraid to die because I know that it's going to be beautiful, and I wish people weren't a- I know why you're afraid to die, 'cause you don't wanna leave y- your loved ones and people that, you know, and all of this. I know that. But it is a beautiful thing, and you only find love.

That, they, that someone wrote that death is the great compassionate one. It's not gonna be scary. It's gonna be beautiful. And, and I, feel confident saying that because I had that experience.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. you got a glimpse beyond the veil of the other side. That is so powerful, and I think, that's one reason it's so [00:16:00] important for your story to be told, because not everyone gets to see what you saw or experience that.

But to hear about it, and the beautiful way that, that you describe it, and also other scenes from your life, it's as if you, you, help us enter it a little bit, of that experience for ourselves, and I think that can be really comforting for people.

Sally Dukes: I hope. I hope that, And the other thing was that, you're not alone.

When you go to pass, there are people from your past that are gonna greet you and help you. I don't... Someone said, are they people?" I don't know. They're not people-people, but you, they're, you're gonna recognize. it's a homecoming. It's-

Karen Wyatt: Yes. And even at that young age of three, you understood, these are loving presences that are here for me, that are, are- [00:17:00] Yeah

are, present just for me , out of love.

Sally Dukes: So yeah.

Karen Wyatt: in the book, you describe some of the journeys that you undertook to just trying to understand this experience, trying to find an answer or find a way of explaining it, spiritual journeys. And, I found it so fascinating, that you spent time in India, you spent time in Burma at a, 90-day silent meditation retreat, which sounds unimaginable.

and just talk to us a little bit about , those experiences on your travels, what you were looking for, and what did you find or not find It's

Sally Dukes: interesting because, I was reading this article, and they were speaking about a pilgrim taking a pilgrimage, and how a pilgrimage is different than a journey.

Because a journey you have a set starting point, a set ending point, you know [00:18:00] where you're going with intention. But a pilgrimage, you-

something's burning inside of you, and you just go, and then you go to the next... it just, it leads you, but even if you're not conscious of it, you're being led by this, inner burning, this inner pull.

So I feel like that's what it was, more than a planned... I was in a 90-day meditation retreat in Massachusetts, silent meditation retreat, when I saw, on the side of the meditation hall, a violet energy come through the window and move down the, side of the hall, and I knew. I knew what it was, and I, I, recognized it, and it just made me feel like, I've gotta go find out

i have to study this further. I have to... I can't go back to the life that I lived, was living. So I did go [00:19:00] back, but I also incorporated these other travels every year. Because I owned seasonal business on Nantucket where I could, close every year in October and reopen in, April or May, so I had all winter to do study, to tromp around the world looking for myself.

So- that led me to India, and in India, that was, I thought, I always loved India, even as a child when I didn't even know what, anything except from what the World Book Encyclopedia showed me, and I thought, "I'll go to India because everything will be revealed." And, nothing's revealed all at once.

I think the revealing comes from within. I thought I would go to these places to be told or to be shown, but it's, it was really to find my truth, to keep coming back to myself, and not getting the answers from outside, but looking within to [00:20:00] find the answers that I already knew the answer to.

Karen Wyatt: And it seems like India was really a confrontation with death in, in many ways, just because in their culture and society, death is so much more visible than it is, in the US. And celebrate,

Sally Dukes: celebrated.

So it's not, it's not behind, it's not in a church, it's not ... People aren't dressed, in black.

And they ... I was in Varanasi, and it's, the Hindu- where the Hindus go to die in, so they can get rid of karma. And they're... Anyway, th- they would celebrate. They'd bring the corpse down. They, of course they were wailing and grieving, but it was a celebration because this body was now free.

The soul was now free, and the body was going to be cremated, and there was a whole new cycle. And people ... I loved [00:21:00] seeing the celebration, and,

colors and music and dance. And, then I came home, and it's, dark and, dreary, and you don't even say death. I don't know. You're, you're a hospice doctor.

Did people talk about death? I'm-

Karen Wyatt: Oh, no. That's the entire reason I started the podcast is because I'd written a book about death that I couldn't get anyone to read. Everyone was terrified, and I thought, "Wait a minute. Something's really wrong here that we can't even say this word publicly." Yeah, the word, right?

I'm gonna start having conversations with people, and all we're gonna talk about is death, and I'll post those so maybe people will start getting comfortable with the idea that it's okay to talk about it. And you can actually talk about it and laugh, and you can talk about it and feel joy, and, weep as well, but that it's, filled with all of the, full range of human emotion.

Yeah. And it's part of life. We should not- That's it ... be [00:22:00] ignoring it and separating it

Sally Dukes: Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: So I, can just imagine, I've never been to India, but I can just imagine a culture where death is not vilified or kept in the closet or, sanitized, and where we try to put makeup on death so that it doesn't look like what it is.

Yeah ... I can imagine that's freeing in a way.

Sally Dukes: It was. It was liberating to see that. It was, a joy, and to, see that, it's, They come down to burn the body. It's a, ceremony. It's been going on for e- since eternity on that, ghat. And, It's just what it is, the cycle.

It's the cycle of life. It's t- it's reverent. It's, it was beautiful to see that.

Karen Wyatt: Exactly. So- A- and it makes me think how much of [00:23:00] our humanity do we lose if we choose to ignore death or pretend like it doesn't exist somehow, to not look at it and not talk about it, and not make it part of our life.

it almost feels like in some ways that's part of some of the troubles that we go through as a society from time to time is just, is not being able to embrace the full cycle of life and death.

Sally Dukes: Exactly. I think you're right. I see that.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. And so y- you did another 90 days silent retreat, in, Myanmar now, Burma- Yeah

at that time. which that part of the story w- was I could not even, I just could not even imagine what you experienced there, but you describe this full spectrum of, being hungry all the time Of mosquitoes, and spiders, and snakes, and yet just [00:24:00] the beauty of it, and the rhythm and the pattern that, you got into from day to day.

And I imagine what I felt from it is a calmness and peace in a sense. And I don't know, tell us more about that.

Sally Dukes: Yeah. you also read that I c- ex- had a diary, a calendar that I scratched off every day because- Yeah Yikes. what, I learned, I think the most, I just had to give in. y- I just had to be present because there was nothing.

I signed up for it. I was there, and as much as all those things bothered me, the snakes, and the spiders, and the mosquitoes, there was a, sense of knowing that I was in the right place and, but also a not knowing of what was happening to me because nothing was happening. I went to find out about this experience to try to break down [00:25:00] the barriers in my mind to, to have an understanding of the numinous, and that didn't happen, and I couldn't figure out why I went because I wasn't getting what I wanted.

But what I realized later was that it was very important. every step you take in life is very important for the next step. Yeah. It was very important to, to, for me to go through that.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, it seemed to me that part of that process was a breaking down of the ego's idea of what life is about, and the obstacles the ego sets up for having a genuine spiritual experience, and that it was really the ego that was suffering and wanting to go home And complaining.

in that, whole process, so many of the things we go through in life are like that. We just have to get through it somehow. We just have to show up every day and do the walking and the sitting [00:26:00] and- Yep, and take whatever- And know

Sally Dukes: your ego. Know, you know, that's what it is. But-

Karen Wyatt: Yeah

Sally Dukes: really, and they scream.

Karen Wyatt: It is not easy, and yeah, the realization, "Oh, this is my ego," doesn't make it any easier. It, yeah, and so yeah, I could imagine, the ego may have thought, "I'll sign up for this, and I'll become enlightened, and it will just- Oh, I did ... come to me really quickly." I

Sally Dukes: I was... Yeah. If I was gonna be a yogi, I thought I, this will be my life.

no.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Yeah, because probably for the ego, the 90 days, that's just barely touching the surface of- ... of ego. It might take 90 lifetimes or 9,000 lifetimes- Exactly. Exactly ... to learn everything that needs to be learned. But, I love that you shared that with us because it seems like a really vulnerable time in [00:27:00] a way when you were not sure why you were there, and yet you stayed.

You stayed. Yeah. You went through each and every day of it, and that's remarkable because even reading it, I think, "I would have to leave. I would have to run away. I don't know if I could

Sally Dukes: survive." But there's nowhere

Karen Wyatt: to go. I guess that's true.

Sally Dukes: Unless there'd been a forest.

But that was good that I stayed. I,

Karen Wyatt: Yeah ... did it. That's true, and that's maybe in those times of life, that's all we're asked to do is just, just get up every morning a- and just find a way, to get through it for that day- And then mark your red X on the calendar.

Sally Dukes: But it, was a very deepening experience for me, and, it taught me a lot about myself.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Yeah, and I, it's fascinating to me this search, I [00:28:00] think all of us in some ways we're on various searches in our lives trying to find meaning or understand what is this about? And, you in addition, you had a picture of something beyond this life that you wanted to understand too, something far bigger than just the day-to-day of why do I have this job or why - Yeah

why did I meet these people, but something beyond that. So your search h- was even more compelling that, you were trying to understand the cosmos in a way or the universe, all of life. and most of us we're just trying to figure out, how come I was born with the hair color I have or ... Oh yeah, I have

Sally Dukes: that too.

Don't

Karen Wyatt: worry.

The, full spectrum of questions that-

Sally Dukes: Yeah ...

Karen Wyatt: that, searching for answers. I app- appreciate so much that you talked about why death is not something to fear, and [00:29:00] I'm wondering if it's, if that's what you hope people will take away from the book, and are there other things that, that you hope people will discover in those pages?

Sally Dukes: Oh, I know. I, really hope that people won't be a- that it isn't the people that even, that are dying, it's also the people that sit by their bedside while they're dying that they, need to know that it's okay. The dying people are already on their journey. They're already transitioning, and they don't even have the consciousness that we have on this side right then.

they're moving. Do you know? And, not to feel guilty sitting there or, or, if you leave and they die because I think that they need to travel without you. I think when the time comes, they need to go. and I also think that ... So the grief, and you're, you probably know a lot about this, but this is my feeling.

Grief is on this [00:30:00] side of the veil. we, we grieve, and it's painful because we live in this body and th- but they've moved. , they're over here. They're on their journey, They're facing love. They're with people that have passed before them.

They're accompanied. They're good. They're good. they should be blessed. it's, it's a beautiful thing.

Karen Wyatt: That's so true, and I'm really glad you brought that up and that you wrote about that. In your book, you wrote about, uh, people you know and care about who have died and your experience with that.

And as a hospice doctor, I saw all of those things. I think you're exactly right. It's really the loved ones who sit with a dying person who suffer more, have more fear and more worries about death than the person who's actually- Yeah ... experiencing it, because the p- the person sitting with them can't, cannot see what's being seen or, feel [00:31:00] it or know.

So it is very reassuring to hear someone talk about that, and also to say to people, "Don't be afraid to go to your loved ones who are dying. Don't be afraid to go visit them, to express your love, and see them before they die, because that might be something important for you to do. But also, it's okay if you're not there when they actually die."

And all that in hospice, over and over we try to reassure people about that because it happens so frequently. So

Sally Dukes: often, right?

Karen Wyatt: Yes. That, oh gosh, the devoted daughter who sat at her mother's bedside 24/7, and the one time she got up to do something, her mother died while she was gone. And

Sally Dukes: that's why we think, right?

Because we need to make room for them to make the crossing.

Karen Wyatt: Sure, because even their attachments to us might keep them here, might- I know ... might keep them. It's hard to separate from that when someone's in the room with you, loving [00:32:00] you and, touching you- Probably. Yeah, yeah ...

Sally Dukes: yeah.

it's a difficult thing.

Karen Wyatt: it, it's difficult to, make that final passage. Sometimes when people would say to me, "Why is my mother staying here so long? We thought she would die a week ago, and she's still hanging on." True. "Why?" No. And then ... Yeah, exactly. We find out, because we made sure that there's always at least two people in the room with her constantly," and so

Sally Dukes: Oh.

Karen Wyatt: But that's, it's just such, a really interesting point that dying itself is, a solitary act. It is the separation of whatever our spiritual essence is from this physical body. It takes some work, I think, at least from watching it happen over and over. It seems to me like for a lot of people there's, it's a process to do that separation.

It is.

Yeah, and so it, it may require solitude [00:33:00] and quiet and alone time just, to do that very work and make the separation.

Sally Dukes: I think you're right, and I think that, they s- they sleep a lot. And my mother used to sleep a lot, and when she'd wake up she'd say, oh, I was with..." the people that were already...

She was already being, I... She was already moving that way, because her dream state was moving that way.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. Yes, and, so many of the things we hear people saying from their death beds about the, saying the names of people who have died before them- I know. I love that. Love that ... and even pointing to a corner or, making it obvious that they're seeing something, someone is there.

Those stories f- fascinate me, and I, felt really privileged to get to be a witness to some of that through hospice.

Sally Dukes: Yes, I bet you did. That's, I, I think it's fascinating. I think we, I don't think we should turn away from death. I think that we [00:34:00] can be there to see all of it, because it's, I don't know, it's what it is, right?

Karen Wyatt: Exactly, and also just allow it, because there is a natural process of dying, and in s- in some ways medicine has done everything it can to try to interfere with that natural process, and that is heartbreaking to me. And through

hospice I saw how beautiful it can be when we just allow death to take its own course.

But if we step in and we try to intervene with artificial means, we create so much suffering for the dying person and their family.

Sally Dukes: Yeah, I like that.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. And so I think that's probably been part of the, mission that I've been on, is wanting to reassure people, don't avoid hospice. Let hospice be there to create a little container to, to help you support your l- your loved one as they're dying, [00:35:00] and hopefully to educate you about how to be with a dying person.

Though there are lots of hospice people who don't necessarily know that either, but-

Sally Dukes: That's good.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

Sally Dukes: It's important. It's important.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. This is some of wisdom, it seems to me. because I don't know if in India if it just seems like this is a, normal part of life that people understand, and they already have wisdom about it, and we do not in our Western society as a rule.

Sally Dukes: I, I, would agree with you, and I could be ignorant in saying that. But that's how I saw it. That was my experience of it.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

Yeah. I, I'm s- I should not speak so definitively from my perspective. But we know. We know. [00:36:00] Because that doesn't mean everyone in India is accepting of death- Exactly.

Exactly ... or feels comfortable with death. I should not say that. It's just that death is handled so differently and, as you said, celebrated. And, I think we're beginning to open our eyes a little bit. There are, there are celebration of life,

memorials that happen now, or some people celebrate life before they die, and we're just beginning to contemplate some of that.

Sally Dukes: I don't know about that, but that's interesting.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. I don't know if, do you, would you say your experiences have shaped any of your th- your thinking about your own death whenever that comes, and- Oh, no ... how you imagine it?

Sally Dukes: isn't that interesting? I, I feel like I'm being, bravo because this is what's gonna happen.

I think it will be difficult to leave. It'll always be difficult [00:37:00] as long as we're in this body, it's gonna be difficult. But I think I know that the, when you start to transition, it, you're gonna be okay, do you know? I mean- Yeah ... it's gonna be good, so that's all I know. Yeah. And that's why, I'm, curious to see what happens to me.

Karen Wyatt: I love that you say that because that's exactly the word that I use wh- when I talk about, thinking about my own death or what my end of life would be. I'm just curious to see what happens and how it unfolds. And when people always ask, what plans did you made? What are your wishes? How do you want it to be?"

I'm actually, I'm more curious to see how it is. Yeah, exactly. What, what happens, how does it unfold, rather than trying to put parameters on it or f- try to force it to be something my mind thinks I want it

Sally Dukes: to be. Yeah. I like that.

Karen Wyatt: I want to experience whatever it is, whatever comes. [00:38:00]

Sally Dukes: I know. I'm, for so long, I was like, I want to get back there," but then I realized to get back there I had to die, and I really wasn't ready yet because I have a family.

So it was like a kind of a double-edged sword. So then I wrote the book so I don't have to die yet. No.

Karen Wyatt: do you have any sense of that, that violet, warmth and life, that it is around you still but you can't see it?

Sally Dukes: I see things differently than people, I know that, and I feel things differently. but it, I can't say it's the violet light. I think it's that I Just see things differently than people. That doesn't make sense, does it? But-

Karen Wyatt: It, does in, a way. You've seen something that other people have not seen, and it changes how you see everything else.

Yeah. And [00:39:00] there are no words to explain that really.

Sally Dukes: That's right. That's right.

Karen Wyatt: though I do wanna say again, in your book Drummer Girl, y- you do a really beautiful job. Your descriptions are beautiful and lovely, and as for me, it felt, as I said before, more like a painting, like you painted a picture for us to help see with you that goes beyond the words that you used to create the picture.

And I don't know if that makes any sense to you, but-

Sally Dukes: Oh, that was nice to say. Thank you.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. and I wanna mention that it is also a short book. It's it's a book that people could easily read in one sitting in a, or in a few days, but it's actually a book that should probably be read more, more slowly and savored in a way over time, from the way I've experienced it.

I don't know if you have any thoughts about that.

Sally Dukes: I can read it really [00:40:00] fast, and then I can also slow down and read the chapters you know, think about it because ... Everything's different in the book. Every chapter's different. And, I think you could read it several times and get something different out of it each time.

And I was curious because when I asked for endorsements, people came back with how it touched them, but it didn't touch them. Everybody was different, but it didn't touch them the way I thought it would touch them, but they got something out, something different out of it than... So everybody can, there's something for everyone in there I think if you read It,

Karen Wyatt: it's so very true. There, there is something for everyone, and there will be even more for everyone if they, if a later time in life after various

experiences have happened, they could go back and see something in the book that they didn't recognize the first time they read it. Yeah, I like

Sally Dukes: that.

That's good. '

Karen Wyatt: Cause it has, a truth and a [00:41:00] wisdom about it that sort of, it transcends our rational awareness, if this makes any sense, right now. And so as we keep growing and learning and seeing things, we will be able to perceive more and more of the message of, the book over time. That's, how it strikes me.

And so did you have a feeling when you were writing the book that the book was writing itself in a sense? Yeah, exactly. the words were coming through you? It, it- 'Cause it, feels that way. Yeah.

Sally Dukes: It did, a lot of this was- was journal entries from actually being in Burma and being in India .

And then I had all this, but I wasn't gonna write a book, and then I started to put them together, and I thought, oh my God, there's this, is the theme. I've been looking for, searching for m- my truth, So then I, put them together, And then I had to go back and remember what it was like there and [00:42:00] paint the picture, because, the words weren't enough.

I felt like you had to, it had to go down, had to have depth.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And it does that so very well. And, I d- I have one question that just occurred to me is do you still have the drawing of the elephant that the surgeon made

Sally Dukes: for

Karen Wyatt: you?

Sally Dukes: No. No, because I wrote, I think I wrote in the book that, it fell off the tack.

my mother just had it tacked, and someone just threw it away. they, it, that's the thing, someone just threw it away. It didn't, mean anything to anyone else.

Karen Wyatt: Just one of those impermanences in life that- Yeah ... you had to let go of. But the memory of it is still so vivid.

Sally Dukes: Yeah. Exactly.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. And then, oh, you wrote about having a little, like a security- Oh, yeah ... piece of cloth.

Sally Dukes: Still have it.

Karen Wyatt: But, but- Can't

Sally Dukes: be ashamed.

Karen Wyatt: No, I I- [00:43:00] I love that because, this continuity through life of something that helped you when you might have felt scared that was, a support to you or a sense of safety, something, whatever it meant to you when you were very little.

And to still have that in your life now as you get older, because life is still scary of- Yeah ... plenty of times and-

Sally Dukes: I

still need, the buffer. I still

Karen Wyatt: need it. Yeah. We all do. We all do. gosh, it's, Sally, it's been just such a pleasure to talk with you. Thank you. And, I really thoroughly enjoyed reading Drummer Girl, and, I thank you for writing it.

And because I'm sure it was amazing and challenging at the same time to write, and that even more so putting it out in the world probably-

Sally Dukes: I know ...

Karen Wyatt: has its own fear associated with it.

Sally Dukes: Vulnerability. Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Very much being vulnerable, sharing [00:44:00] your story. But as, as you've written, like the story is really the medicine, and I think your book has the power to be a medicine for so many of us.

And so that's why I'm excited that we had this chance to talk about it- thank you for having me ... and to share it with our audience out there.

Sally Dukes: It was a pleasure to speak with you and meet you. Thank you.

Karen Wyatt: yes, such a joy. And, so the book again is titled, Drummer Girl: A Story of Life After Death.

Fantastic. And Sally, i- is it available anywhere and everywhere?

Sally Dukes: This is it. Oh,

Karen Wyatt: beautiful ... yeah, everywhere.

Sally Dukes: it's, IngramSpark. Their Ingram did it, so it's everywhere. I'm in Greece, and they ... I got mine from the UK,

Karen Wyatt: And, the cover as you were showing, it, is this sense of this beautiful watercolor painting with vague images, and that you [00:45:00] feel that same sense.

You're in the painting wandering through it with you- Yes ... throughout the book, so very beautiful. Thank you, Sally.

Sally Dukes: Thank you.