

**Kathleen Sullivan's
Dreams, Another Way of Knowing**

**Naked, Stupid, Lost and Other Charming Recurring Dream
Themes**

Nary a week passes without a client presenting a dream in which he/she is naked. For experienced dreamers this scenario is accepted without concern but novice dreamers tend to get quite a charge when they find themselves in the local store dressed in only their birthday suit. This common universal theme is usually recognized as the feeling of vulnerability resulting from some kind of exposure. Depending on the religious or moral upbringing of the dreamer, being seen naked may engender feelings of shame or even guilt. Thus, a naked in public dream may reflect a recent experience or old habit of feeling or being shamed.

Though most dreamers react to the “naked in public” dream scene with some kind of concern, growth and development is sometimes recognized. For example, an extremely shy woman was delighted by this dream scene: *I'm sitting on a kitchen counter, cross legged and totally naked, surrounded by many party people. We are all drinking martinis and smoking cigarettes in long, elegant holders. I feel sophisticated and included as I tell one joke after another.* The dreamer had been attending a series of workshops designed to help introverts overcome the fears of the socially challenged. Obviously, her therapy was effective.

Educated people in all cultures report the distressing dream about being unprepared for the final exam. It has several variations. *I feel so stupid because it is the final exam day and I have never attended classes; have forgotten to study; can't find the exam room; show up to class naked!* An obvious metaphor contained in this dream theme usually suggests a fear, real or imagined, of being unprepared. Rather than relating to tasks or projects, however, it can speak to new stages of life. This is a common theme for people preparing to retire, for pregnant moms and for teens about to leave the nest. Finally, it is sometimes seen as a wakeup call warning the dreamer to get on the ball before it is too late.

Have you been unable to find your car in a large parking lot after an event? This loss is more common in the dream world than in the awake world and it rarely relates to a literal experience. Next time you have the dream consider your car as *drive* or *motivation*. Have you lost your focus or determination to accomplish something?

At times a car represents the human body (personal vehicle). An alcoholic felt terror in her lost car dreams which she experienced during a period when she was suffering consistent blackouts. Her entire self was lost during those times. The dream series helped her face her addiction and begin the process to sobriety.

There are many variations on the lost car theme. One gal frequently dreamed of losing her bike (though she didn't own one in the awake world). This rather flighty

woman found it difficult to live in a balanced way. She was exceedingly dependent on the opinions and physical help of others. Thus, she was repeatedly hunting for lost or misplaced sense of balance and a personally empowered way of moving (bike).

Have you heard the old wives-tale that you will die if you dream of falling and don't wake up before you hit bottom? (I've always wondered how that could be proved.) Many dreamers have hit and lived to tell me about it. I had a similar series of these dreams, always frightening at the beginning but often sublime in the end. A favorite was crashing through the guardrail on the Big Sur coast, plunging a thousand feet, hitting the surf thrilled to discover that my car had transformed into a boat! These dreams, which occurred around the time I resigned my secure teaching job to begin private practice, assured me that there would be life after tenure, my big plunge over the edge.

Let's examine a genre of recurring dreams familiar even to folks who live in Kansas: the approaching tidal wave. Obviously some huge, overwhelming force is surging irrevocably toward land. When asked to relate to that, few dreamers can identify such a threat in their conscious life. So we consider a larger format. A dream study revealed an increase in tidal wave dreams when the collective has been menaced by terrorist attacks, threatening political circumstances, horrific fires, earthquakes, or epidemics. This substantiates the Jungian theory that the ocean represents the collective unconscious. Therefore, when society feels threatened, unconscious forces rage and roil. (Or perhaps, because *unconscious forces* rage and roil, society feels *threatened*.)

Additionally, tidal wave dreams can herald great activity in the unconscious of the individual. During the years of intense dream work that changed my life dramatically, the feeling in my tidal wave dreams changed from initial fear to a longing to walk into the ocean to more quickly meet the approaching wave. Soon I lived in a dream house in the ocean, able to see all around me through walls made of glass. And so I have lived at peace in the unconscious realm for more than twenty years, continuously seeing it's contents through the dreams of clients and friends.

Want to share a recurring theme of yours? Email your dream or question to the address listed below.

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