

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a red blazer over a white shirt, is holding a glowing lightbulb in her right hand. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is a blurred city skyline at dusk or night, with warm orange and yellow tones. The lightbulb is the central focus, emitting a bright glow.

# The first whisper

Nicole  
**MARTINS**



School of  
**NEUROPRODUCTIVITY**

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*Your intuition is always right.*

It could have been just another first day of law school—but the hurricane wasn't the only storm waiting for me.

I was 25 years old, standing at the edge of a dream I had worked so hard for: law school. I was older than most of my classmates, and I didn't care. I was thrilled. It felt like I had finally arrived at the beginning of the life I was meant to build.

**Sometimes the biggest warning signs don't scream, they whisper.**

And mine was whispering before I ever stepped into the classroom.

## **The Lie We're Told**

Here's one of the biggest lies we've been told: that intuition is "just anxiety," "just nerves," or "just being dramatic."

We're conditioned to trust logic over instinct. To respect facts over feelings. To ignore the little internal voice because it doesn't come with a spreadsheet, a lab result, or a peer-reviewed footnote.

But what if your intuition is not irrational at all? What if it's your brain processing information faster than your conscious mind can explain? What if the body knows before the mind catches up?

## **What would your life look like if you listened the first time you felt something was off?**

Because I can tell you exactly what mine looked like when I didn't.

The First Whisper: Two Weeks Into Law School  
A week before law school started, I was in Florida visiting home. I was excited and nervous, filled with anticipation on getting my law career started. My flight to Michigan was almost canceled because of a hurricane. I barely made it out of Florida, and when I finally landed, I was frantic. I didn't get the calm, organized, "fresh start" I had imagined. My books, notebooks, and unnecessary number of highlighters were not in order.

And then, classes started. I felt uneasy. Not just nervous. Not normal first-day jitters. Uneasy in a way that clung to me – like I was wearing a heavy winter coat I couldn't take off.

At first, I explained it away: new state, new environment, big expectations, demanding academic setting. And yet, the feeling didn't leave. My intuition kept pressing the same message into my chest: "Something is wrong."

At the same time, my parents, the people I had talked to every day of my adult life, were suddenly hard to reach. My phone calls went unanswered and seldom returned. The few times I did connect with my parents, the conversations were rushed. It was...odd.

Two weeks passed and the rhythm of communication didn't get any better. Finally, I got my mom on the phone for more than two minutes. She spoke softly. But a loudspeaker interrupted her words. That sound was unmistakable. It was a paging call in a hospital.

I asked rapid-fire questions: where are you? what's wrong? Are you ok? why have you been ignoring my calls? She lied at first. Then, realizing I didn't believe a word she was saying, she came clean: "I'm fine. I am in the hospital... I have cancer. But I feel perfectly fine."

Except she wasn't fine. She had stage 4 lung cancer. It was terminal. And my life was never the same.

### **When Intuition Becomes Grief Before It's Real**

Sometimes intuition isn't just guidance—it's early grief. It's your body preparing you for a truth your mind isn't ready to hold yet.

I spent the next 18 months commuting from Michigan to Florida to be by her side as often as I could. And when it was clear the end was near, I dropped my classes mid-semester to spend her last months by her side. We had moments of sheer joy,

laughter, and so many heartfelt tears too. We had conversations that were painfully difficult and others that were so trivial, but I learned to cherish so deeply. She fought an 18-month battle then died peacefully at home. My body knew before my mind had the chance to catch up.

**My intuition was right from the beginning. It always was.**

### **The Second Whisper: My Dad**

Four years later, I was 29 when my dad called me. After my mom's passing, he relocated to North Carolina to be closer to my brother. On that call, he asked to be picked up and cared for through the last phase of his life. He had been sick for years and claimed for longer that he was on the brink of death, so part of me felt annoyed.

But my intuition said, “This is different.” So I listened. I flew from Florida to North Carolina and drove him back to Fort Lauderdale. The moment I saw him, I knew: he was weak, thin, and his eyes looked like they were already halfway somewhere else. My annoyance evaporated. Concern filled my entire body. Still, I stayed calm, because intuition doesn’t just warn you. It equips you.

My dad came up with a plan: “If I die during the drive,” he told me, “pull over calmly. Call 911. Follow the ambulance. Everything will be fine no matter what happens.”

He made it through the 12-hour drive. That was an intense drive, not because of the miles, but because of what every mile represented. I wasn’t just driving across state lines; I was driving through the reality that my father was nearing the end of his life. Every long silence, every shallow breath made me wonder whether the next moment would be the moment. I

had one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the responsibility of keeping him safe physically, emotionally, spiritually. The road felt endless, but I was painfully aware that our time wasn't.

As soon as we arrived in Fort Lauderdale, I found hospice placement the next day. His first night in hospice, I sat beside him until he fell asleep. I got up to go home, but something urged me not to leave and not to be alone.

I called one of my best friends, someone he considered a daughter. She somehow made it to the hospital in rush hour traffic faster than a bullet train. We slept on an uncomfortable pull-out chair right next to him. And when we woke up... he was already gone.

**He died how he wanted to: in his sleep, but not alone.**

My intuition was right to get to my father then to stay at the hospital—and to seek support—because going through that experience was difficult, but it would have been exponentially worse alone.

### **The Third Whisper: The Half Marathon**

Years later, I was 35 when I ran my first half marathon. The training schedule was rigorous, but I stuck to it. Leading up to race day, I felt off. I had a nagging cramp-like pain in my stomach. I chalked it up to menstrual cramps, training strain, and nerves. Race day arrived and it was exhilarating! Thousands of people lined up before sunrise. The energy was electric. I was nervous and nauseous, and the pain shot through my midsection again.

My gut thought, “That doesn’t feel right,” but I convinced myself it was anticipation. Three times during the race I nearly quit because the pain was so intense, but volunteers cheered: “You can do it!”

“You trained for this!” “Don’t give up now!” So I silenced my inner voice, pushed on and finished. The race was brutal, far worse than all of my training combined, not because of the miles, but the pain I felt was so intense I felt like I would pass out.

The next day the pain was so excruciating I could barely walk. Then breathing became difficult. I could no longer ignore what my inner voice had told me days before: this doesn’t feel right. I finally decided to go to the hospital, though I was sure it was appendicitis.

Instead, I learned I was pregnant. A wave of joy immediately followed by devastating news: the baby was not alive, and my life was at risk. I had an ectopic pregnancy, which ruptured my fallopian tube, and I had unknowingly been hemorrhaging for days. The doctor on call was actually my personal doctor. He looked me dead in the eye and said, “It’s bad. I don’t know if I can save you.” Those were the last

words I heard before being wheeled off into emergency surgery.

I'm happy to report I alive and well. I later learned I had lost over two liters of blood, and my doctor shared that in his 25 years of practice, he had never seen a case as severe as mine.

**Ignoring that inner voice didn't make me stronger, it made the consequences bigger.**

### **Why “Gut Feeling” Is Not Woo-Woo (It's Neuroscience)**

Intuition feels mystical, but research suggests it's the brain and body processing subtle cues before conscious reasoning can explain them.

Neuroscientist António Damásio's research—often discussed in connection with the Iowa Gambling Task—showed that people can develop bodily

“somatic markers” that steer them away from bad decisions before they can articulate why.

**Your body detects patterns before your mind can label them.**

### **What This Has to Do With Estate Planning (And Why I’m So Passionate About It)**

Today I’m an estate planning and probate attorney in Florida. And when I work with a client who hesitates to have a hard conversation about incapacity, family conflict, guardianship, or end-of-life decisions, I recognize that look.

I often tell my clients: you don’t avoid pain by postponing the truth—you just postpone preparation.

In my world, the consequences of ignoring intuition show up in very real ways: families torn apart,

preventable conflict, and loved ones left without clear instructions. Again and again, clients tell me, “I knew I should’ve done this sooner.”

If you take nothing else from my story, take this:

**Listen the first time!**

## **A Practical 3-Step Method to Strengthen Your Intuition**

Most people don’t lack intuition—they lack practice trusting it. After having learned hard lessons by silencing my own intuition, here is an easy method you can repeat anytime that I have come to rely on:  
The 3-Step “FIRST” Method

**1) FEEL IT** – When something feels off, pause for 30 seconds. Ask: Where do I feel this in my body? Tightness, heaviness, restlessness, nausea? Your body is the first messenger.

**2) INVESTIGATE IT** – Ask: What information might my brain be processing that I haven't named yet? Write down your best guess. Give it language.

**3) RESPOND THE SAME DAY** – Take a small action while the signal is fresh: ask the question, make the call, book the appointment, set the boundary.

**Intuition without action becomes anxiety.**

### **The Cost of Ignoring the First Whisper**

Looking back, my intuition was right at 25. Right at 29. Right at 35. It warned me, guided me, and protected me.

So here's what I want to leave you with:

**The first whisper is always the clearest.**

Nicole Martins

If you've been ignoring that inner voice, I'm not here to shame you. I'm here to tell you what I wish someone had told me: listen the first time.

Because your intuition doesn't exist to make you afraid. It exists to guide you home—to truth, preparation, and a life lived with your eyes open.

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