



Women
**Breaking
Barriers**

A collection of inspiring personal stories from fourteen extraordinary women about resilience, reinvention, and breaking barriers of adversity and limiting beliefs to create a life you love.



Copyright

Women Breaking Barriers

Copyright © 2016 Marquita A. Herald
All Rights Reserved

Resilient Living Publications

License Notes

This ebook is intended for your personal enjoyment and enrichment. Although it is a free publication, it remains the copyrighted property of the publisher and contributing authors. Neither this publication nor any parts may be reproduced in any form or by any means, sold, or used for commercial purposes without express written permission from the authors and publisher.

Contents

Introduction	4
Waiting to Exhale by Lydia Brown	5
Life, Death, or Dialysis! by Suzie Cheel	10
When Wonder Woman Needs a Time Out by Kimberly Dalferes.....	14
How I Discovered the Person I Was Meant To Be by Lesly Federici	17
Looking Back To Look Forward by Beverley Golden.....	22
How I Freed My Mind and Learned To Think For Myself by Dana Gore	26
What Are You Waiting For? by Julie Gorges	32
The Blessing of Second Chances by RoseMary Griffith	37
Obstacles Are There To Show You the Way by Marquita Herald.....	42
The Value in Stopping by Nicola McLeod	47
How I Beat Depression to Grow a Successful Business by Donna Merrill.....	51
My Journey from Victim to Victory! by Phoenicia Oyeniyi	57
How Did I Get This Old? by Jeannette Paladino	61
3 Important Keys to Make Decisions That Really Matter by Vatsala Shukla.....	66
Closing Thoughts	71

Introduction

Everyone loves survival stories because they give us hope, and encourage us to reflect on who we are and what matters most in life. Occasionally they remind us of our own mortality.

Women Breaking Barriers is a collection of fourteen inspirational stories about perseverance, reinvention, and overcoming, and at the heart of each story is a woman who has chosen to embrace her personal power to become the driver in her own life journey.

While there are many insightful lessons included in these stories, the common thread that runs throughout the collection is that we each have within us the ability to overcome whatever obstacles we may be facing in life ... and never doubt that you are worth the effort!

Call it what you will, resilience, inner strength or personal power, the truth is we are born with far greater capacity than we could possibly imagine, it's just that most of us never truly test ourselves by pushing through our fears and self-limiting beliefs.

Keep in mind that barriers come in all shapes and sizes, and not all have to do with adversity. Sometimes your greatest barrier is self-acceptance and the ability to declare to the world that you love yourself enough to prioritize your own needs.

Of course, in the end, it is up to each of us to decide whether to walk away from the lessons and insights of a story or to step into the possibilities it offers.

But if you are inspired enough by what you read in the following pages to risk venturing into unfamiliar territory in your own life, I encourage you to use the links provided to connect with the authors who have shared their stories here to learn more.

Remember, choosing to own your life is the first step toward releasing your hidden power and discovering your true potential.

Marquita

Waiting to Exhale

By Lydia Brown

In 1995 a movie called *Waiting to Exhale* came out. Before I even heard what the movie was going to be about I was impressed with the title. Someone said the words and I literally sucked in my breath and a light bulb went off.

From the time I was a young girl I was forever perplexed about why I walked around not feeling like I was inside of my own body. I was miserable by myself, and yet I could be in a crowd of people and relieved if no one spoke to me.

My fear was that I would never be able to measure up because I felt I had nothing of value to share with others. I had been conditioned to express myself and feel on command, something which, according to my dad, I did not do at all well.

Little did he know I did it with such perfection that it killed me spiritually.

When I heard the phrase “waiting to exhale” I immediately knew that this was what I had been doing, not realizing how it was stagnating my growth. This resulted in many failed relationships, most importantly the one I needed to develop with myself.

When I was a young girl and my father walked by I would freeze and hold my breath as if this would somehow prevent him from noticing me and saying something like, “you’re stupid”, or “you will never be anything,” or even worse, pop me in the head.

It would be several minutes after my father left the room that I would realize that I’d been holding my breath and that my chest was hurting and my body shaking.

Our family television time was not like you see on television shows or in the movies. My father dictated what we laughed at and if you laughed too long you got hit on the head or yelled at.

Crying annoyed my father so after his verbal or physical abuse he would demand that you not cry or get another pop in the head, or worse. In other homes, children received whippings we received beatings.

I remember one day my mom and dad took us to Coney Island’s play land and we watched other children running ahead of their parents, eyes big and bright yelling with joy. When our family got to the gate my sisters and I had that same look of joy on our

faces but my father soon put an end to that. He told us that if we made a move without his permission he'd beat us and take us home.

We froze in our tracks and just watched the other children and parents move past us.

We finally entered the park, walking close to our dad, and then he looked at us as though wondering what we were waiting for, and said: "Go on, have fun!"

All four of us ran a couple of steps ahead but since none of us trusted how much fun we would be allowed to have without crossing his invisible line of disapproval, we remained close, only moving ahead a few steps at a time, repeatedly glimpsing back to watch for signs my father's mood had shifted.

Over the years I'd learned from countless slaps upside my head not to smile, laugh or cry out loud. I became adept at smiling and laughing on the inside and yet barely shed a teardrop at a funeral.

People used to ask me all the time why didn't I find something funny and I didn't understand what they were talking about because it was years before I became aware that my emotions were being carefully shielded from display.

I could be laughing hysterically on the inside but those feelings would never reach my face nor would I make a sound.

This did not help the perception people had of me. I knew that I was not the unfriendly insensitive person others believed me to be, but for years I couldn't say that to anyone because it took that long for me to figure out what the problem was.

When I first heard the phrase "waiting to exhale," it brought relief because it gave me a point of reference, but it wasn't enough of a catalyst to create change.

In 1994, after becoming an alcoholic like my father, disappointing family members and fulfilling his prophecy that I would not do well in life, I ended up in rehab. And thank God I did!

Treatment is where I learned that I had a voice. It was there I found people actually interested in what I had to say, and once I realized I could express myself without physical or emotional retribution, boy did I open up!

It was at this period in my life that it was suggested that I go into therapy after leaving treatment. At first, I resisted, not because I didn't see the potential value, but because I was raised to believe you don't share your personal business with outsiders.

But reflecting back on my “waiting to exhale” experience, I declared “My father taught me that and I am not listening to him anymore.”

So a few weeks later I went to therapy and was able to work with a wonderful woman. Susan had me write a list of my accomplishments personal and professional.

Would you believe how surprised I was at all that I had done well in life? I just never took the time to pat myself on the back. As soon as I accomplished something I would feel good for a fleeting moment and revert to thinking like my dad that I was not good enough and move on unhappily with another task trying to find that sweet spot where I would feel purposeful.

After several weeks of counseling with Susan, I shared with her that I had not cried in years. She tried to conceal it but I could tell she was astonished.

I explained that as a child in our home crying could get you hit so I taught myself not to and had not even been able to cry at my grandfather’s funeral. I felt guilty about it, but I just couldn’t.

I described to Susan how over the years it got to the point that when I tried to let myself cry my head and chest would hurt so bad I truly believed I would have a heart attack, so I continued to live my life not crying.

Then it happened, I started to cry. First, the tears just filled my eyes until I could not see. Then they streamed down my cheek. As expected my head started to hurt and my chest felt like it would explode, but I did not stop. I thought I would rather die doing this than continue to hold back. I cried like a baby and eventually I felt my shoulders relax like they hadn’t in years.

When I stopped I told Susan that I felt like I had just run my soul through a filter and all the bad stuff was gone. I smiled so much as I spoke to her my cheek muscles began to hurt. I had not used those muscles much for many years.

When I left Susan’s office I vowed to begin recognizing and commending myself for my accomplishments, large and small. That daily I would write down what I had accomplished and go to a private place to give thanks to God, smile and give myself a “way to go girl.”

That period was one of my most significant breakthroughs because identifying that I wanted to be able to feel and express all of my emotions has led to many remarkable changes in my life.

I began to take authentic joy in setting goals based on the new vision I had for myself rather than trying to prove I was good enough to my late father who had never recognized my worth.

My life's mission then became to live, love, laugh way before I heard of Bessie Anderson Stanley's quote. "Live well, laugh often, love much"

I have no regrets about being a recovering alcoholic because that was my path to freedom. It has been the journey that taught me to see my worth and the value of having people in my life who also see it.

It's a joy to be grateful for what I have and for what God has planned for me.





About the Author

Lydia Brown, MS, CSAC, MAC, ICADC

Lydia Brown is a wife, mother, and grandmother living in Virginia. She has over 20 years experience with regulatory compliance in the field of alcohol and substance abuse and is presently a hired consultant for programs seeking to become CARF accredited.

When she retired as a substance abuse treatment program director Lydia decided to become a blogger and network marketer. She is the editor and author of Addiction Treatment News blog.

Since starting an online business she has coached many online and offline business owners on how to use social media effectively to build a business and is a contributor to the article, *31 Entrepreneurs Share Mind Blowing Small Business Growth Ideas Using Social Media*.

Connect with Lydia at <http://addictiontreatmentnews.info>

Life, Death, or Dialysis!

By Suzie Cheel

Life, death, or dialysis was the choice I was given on July 16th, 2011 when I found myself a patient at our local hospital.

I was surrounded by a group of doctors and nursing staff. I have little recollection of the details, but apparently, the specialist was sharing his diagnosis and prognosis and the action he was proposing to take.

The bottom line was that my autoimmune system had gone rogue, resulting in a total kidney failure and something called glomerulonephritis.

The specialist proceeded to explain that only 25% of people fully recover from the condition, and those who actually live to tell the tale face the prospect of a possible transplant or life on dialysis.

I said "Well, I will be one of the 25 %. I am going to meditate and use my Law of Attraction tools to see myself home and healed."

It's worth noting that at the time there were 3 of us in the hospital with similar kidney failures. One died, one continues on long-term dialysis, and I am here to share my story.

No doubt this was all very difficult for my family and friends, but I think I was already so focused on recovery that some of the negative information wasn't getting through to me. Looking back, maybe that wasn't such a bad thing.

Fortunately, from that point, things began to move forward more positively.

One week later, while I was sitting in the dialysis chair in the renal unit, I had a powerful experience. I was having my final dialysis treatment and the first of many plasma exchanges. I was in a meditative state, and I received this message after I decided to focus inwardly on looking for meaning behind what I was going through.

The very clear message was to take a new direction and focus on both my life and my business.

The message was:

“Love – that is what this is all about, Suzie. It’s all about love. You will be healed when you see and feel only love for yourself first and then you will be all that you have to love and to give. When you are totally anchored in inner peace and the feeling of pure joy that will allow the awakening that is already in you to emerge. That’s the inspiration: that is the ripple effect.”

This was my true wake up call. Who me? I have been working on my self-love for more years than I can remember. I bought the very first edition of Louise Hay’s *You Can Heal Your Life?* Then there are all the other books I have read, courses taken and the list goes on.

I realized I then had to stop and reflect on what had been going on in my life that could have caused my body to want to stop. And although this is hard for me to acknowledge because I pride myself on being a super multi-tasker, I realized that I had got to a stage of overwhelm.

At the time I was getting ready to launch a new program and expand the Change Warrior series I had launched a few months earlier. I’d also just started to paint again. The list went on and on.

Clearly, there was more to learn.

It was not long before that was brought home to me and I had a relapse and found myself back in the hospital in November 2011.

This was the real wake up call. Something had to change!

The first thing I focused on was my diet. I was already a health-minded cook but decided I had to do more. I went alkaline and there is no doubt in my mind it was a major factor in healing my kidneys.

Then I determined to give myself the time I needed to heal and to address the issues of self-love and patience. This turned out to be a challenge to my multitasking mind, and a friend had to remind me that rest was my most important work.

But I was a slow learner, so, even more, events came along to make sure I did rest.

One day, just as I’d declared how good I was feeling, I tripped over the root of a tree and fractured my humerus, in addition to bruising my ego. But it effectively slowed me down.

And so, I wrote in my journal, meditated, practiced Ho'oponopono (An ancient Hawaiian ritual of reconciliation and forgiveness with the mantra "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I love you. Thank you."), along with the Emotional Freedom Technique.

Five years later I still follow these practices most days. They serve to shift the fear, uncertainty, and doubt that come when I fail to love myself unconditionally.

I continue to paint as well – mostly intuitive hearts. From the painting, I then channel a message that has become the weekly Heart Whisper. So in learning to fully embrace the love that is me, I have learned that I must trust me, the whispers of my heart and my body.

Do I always listen? No! I still slip back into old patterns, but now I recover much more quickly. So my emotional resilience is also improving.

I can see that the path I have been on since 2011 has transformed much of my life, especially my health, and given me clarity on how I can live my dream of creating huge ripples of change in the world one person at a time by helping them learn to love themselves and their lives.

There have, however, been continuing challenges in my journey of healing. In particular, crush fractures in my back and osteoporosis, both after effects from the powerful drugs that saved my life.

Ever the eternal optimist, I choose to see these lingering effects as a reminder to ask for help and to be kinder to myself. I must accept that I am not superwoman and that self-care is central to self-love and being the change I wish to see in the world.





About the Author

Suzie Cheel

Suzie Cheel is the Heart Whisperer and creator of the Heart Whisper Daily Guidance Oracle Cards, a certified Law of Attraction Trainer, intuitive coach, artist, inspirational speaker and author of the upcoming book, *Lucky to Be Alive: How I used the Law of Attraction and the Power of Self-Love to Save My Life*.

She has a Graduate Diploma in Social Communication and a Master's Degree in Applied Science (Social Ecology).

Suzie is passionate about making a difference in the world and draws on her own experiences to help others who desire to achieve transformative change in their own lives. She has been able to inspire many people through sharing her story of saving her life through applying the principals of the Law of Attraction and learning to love herself.

With her soul mate Des, she lives on Australia's Gold Coast, and when she's not working she enjoys cooking, a glass of red, walking on the beach, and connecting with nature.

Connect with Suzie at <http://suziecheel.com>

Special Offer

Manifest Your Heart's Desire: Become More Abundant

Free 3 Part Video Workshop

<http://suziecheel.com/loa>

When Wonder Woman Needs a Time Out

By Kimberly Dalferes

Kimba is NOT Wonder Woman. Not even close. I don't have access to a magical invisible airplane that can transport me into the city in a quick minute (but wouldn't that be crazy cool being that commuting worships at the temple of suck?!). I can't whip out that golden lasso of truth to cut through the BS.

My reality is that weekends pass when I don't get any of my s**t done. Assignments and laundry pile up, deadlines loom, in-boxes become cluttered. If I've learned anything in my journey to the middle-aged cheap seats (MACS) it's that I can dream of being Wonder Woman, the gal who has her proverbial stuff together, but sometimes even Wonder Woman needs a nap.

Therefore, I recently put Kimba in a giant time-out. Life was getting a bit too jumbled and I was also facing a big decision about going back to work full-time. After six weeks of assessment and a little soul-searching, I've made some midlife adjustments.

What My Midlife Time-Out Assessment Revealed

I need (and want) to work full-time.

I'm getting back into the swing of the demands of 40+ hours a week and so far so good.

The silver-lining here is that commuting provides a goldmine of writing inspiration (queue up the woman I observed this week doing her hair and make-up on the metro, I certainly admired her steady hand with the mascara!).

I need to make more time for family and friends.

Trips to California and Florida this past month to visit friends and family confirmed that time with loved ones trump everything else.

I can't be all-in, all-Virgo, all the time.

This is a lifelong struggle. But multi-tasking on steroids is a young woman's game. I used to believe that if I didn't do it all, and do it well, I was admitting defeat. But, up in

the MACS, we can look around and see when things are getting over-scheduled, and all-consuming, and adjust accordingly.

This was a baby step, but I had a proud moment yesterday when I forced myself to go shopping without a list – AKA Virgo blasphemy.

Yes, I forgot to buy toothpaste, and I spent a little more cash than usual, but it was kind of liberating to think: *Hmm... what looks good for dinner tonight?*

What I Commit to Doing Differently

I gotta get my health back on track.

Thank you menopause fairy for throwing my body into a tailspin... said no one ever. As of today, I commit to taking back control of my health. This means changing the way I eat (any gluten-free tips out there, I'm all ears!), the way I exercise – wearing the Fitbit right now as I write, with the alarm set to get me out of this chair at least once an hour, and the way I sleep (no more late night Jimmy Fallon, will have to catch you on the DVR my virtual friend). And, I'll need to find a weekend yoga class – feel free to hold me accountable!

I gotta start saying “no” more often.

No does mean no. And even for the times that I say yes, I can and will make my “yes” conditional. There's no shame in limiting your commitments. That volunteer board work might now mean more meetings by Skype vs. in-person.

I'll continue to carve out time to write.

No way am I'm giving up the MACS blog. However, I may scale back a bit with the novel development and with other freelance writing work, as time permits. Well, unless the New York Times calls, or Washington Post, or O Magazine... I'd like to keep to posting new articles on MACS each Friday, but if it slides into the weekend then so be it.

Here's to the new and improved midlife Kimba, gainfully employed and newly balanced.





About the Author

Kimberly Dalferes

Humor writer Kimberly “Kimba” Dalferes is a native Floridian who pretends to be a Virginian. She’s an accomplished king salmon slayer, estate sale junkie, and sometimes writes books, including *I Was In Love With a Short Man Once* and *Magic Fishing Panties*. Dalferes’ essays have been featured in diverse publications including *The Roanoke Times*, *Feisty After 45*, *Reflections On Smith Mountain Lake*, and *Erma Bombeck Writers’ Workshop*. Dalferes’ humor column, *Dock Tale Hour*, has been featured in *Laker Magazine* since 2014. She’s also had a limerick published in *The Washington Post* which she emphatically claims as a legitimate publication cred. You can also find her hanging out on her blog *The Middle-Aged Cheap Seats*, where midlifers come to sit, laugh, and “occasionally” drink tequila.

Connect with Kimberly at <http://kimdalferes.com>

How I Discovered the Person I Was Meant To Be

By Lesly Federici

“I’m sorry,” the doctor said in a slow, quiet voice standing at my mother’s bedside in the hospital. The doctor continued.

“She has two weeks to live and I know you were just diagnosed with Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum. I’m so sorry to have to give you this news.”

And that was that.

Oh, I immediately felt transported to another planet, disconnected from everything tangible, nothing to hold on to, to ground me. Did I really hear that? I know she heard what the doctor said because she mumbled “two weeks.” And, at that moment, sadly, I saw the light of hope vanish from her eyes.

Crap! I’m still a child at 40! How can you leave me now! What am I to do! Who will I turn to! What am I going to do with all your stuff!

My mother died peacefully exactly two weeks later. I was with her. And there I was with the heartbreaking task of sorting through her stuff, giving things away day by day. I tormented myself over disposing of her false teeth. For weeks I dreamt she came back looking for them.

Was my mother really gone? I finally stared at an empty apartment before I closed her door behind me for good.

That was a bad time in my life for sure. But the curveballs kept coming. I had my own diagnosis to deal with within weeks of my mother’s death which totally disrupted and changed my whole life, the present, and its future.

Pseudoxanthoma Elaticum (PXE) is a genetic disorder that results in blindness, abnormal skin appearances, heart, and gastrointestinal (GI) problems. The origin is a missing enzyme that results in abnormal calcification in elastic tissue in the body. The calcification forms porcelain like lining in blood vessels that crack and lead to potential internal hemorrhage in the eyes and the GI track.

My mother was blind and I inherited this disorder from her. She was never diagnosed with PXE because no test was available to diagnose it until recently.

Yes, I am partially blind having no central vision only the blurry support of my peripheral vision. There is no cure or medicine to cure its progressive nature.

So, everything changed in my life.

At the time I was a Registered Nurse toying with the idea of becoming a Midwife. We had just bought a brand new car. My son was two and the future looked so exciting. But my new reality was that my husband became my chauffeur since I could no longer drive a car or work as a clinical Labor and Delivery nurse. I especially struggled with the loss of independence as a result of having to depend so much on my husband to get around.

Who do I turn to now, to pull me out of this mess?

Of course, I was depressed for a while but I also realized in time that I had choices. No one was going suddenly swoop in and pull me out of this mess, it was up to me.

Fortunately, my mother was a great role model because in spite of her own blindness she traveled around town (using her limited peripheral vision) on a three-wheeled bicycle she affectionately called *Bula the Grape*. Oh, she was a colorful character indeed. What I learned from her was keep going. Your life doesn't end when you have a disability, in fact, it can be a new beginning.

So, what can I do without eyesight? That became the question and the drive to create a new future.

I became a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator, a Reiki Master, a certified Life Coach, and Hypno-counselor. I created my very first website devoted to online childbirth education in 1998 and taught classes online.

The Internet saved me because it gave me the opportunity to reach millions of people and I didn't have to drive a car!

All these years later, at the wonderful age of 62, I think the timing of my mother's death was also a gift. Emotionally painful as it was, it taught me to reinvent myself and turn inward for answers. Because, no one else can really pull me, or you, out of despair, only we can.

It takes awareness, strength, self-trust, believing in yourself, and tapping into abilities you can use to enhance your own life.

The challenge to "reinvent" myself was a catalyst for learning new skills and more importantly build self-confidence.

At age three I was placed in a foster home, and throughout my early childhood was placed in other family homes to be cared for while my mother worked and went to school to improve her financial standing as a single mother.

For years I felt unwanted, the poor kid who others felt sorry for and took care of. I never fit in, nor had many friends throughout my school years to speak of. I was very insecure.

So here I was faced with so much inner turmoil and negative beliefs cultivated and reinforced through circumstance and how others responded to me through the years. Then BOOM! Life changes and it's time to crap or get off the pot, right?

Ironically, my mother's death gave me the sense of freedom to become the person I was truly meant to be. Suddenly I had a blank book to begin writing a new life story, new goals to aim for, and ways to go about them. I no longer heard her expectations. I heard my own. I developed a *just go ahead and try it and see what happens* attitude.

Which brings me to now.

The hardest lesson I've learned and take action on now in my life is to depend on me, my intuition, solving my own problems, answering my own question – who can I go to?

ME!

And MOST importantly of all, trusting my instincts and believing I'm capable with lots to give and share with others.

With this arsenal of inner strength, I've implemented many things: Created my own websites, written ebooks, taught others internet skills, own and maintain a membership site for bloggers online called PAC (Power Affiliate Club).

With each life experience I've had there's always been an underlying layer of inner wisdom waiting to present itself – if, I was willing to see it. And that's the key I think to live a happy and productive life. Being willing to explore, discover, and embrace the parts of you that hold you back, and trusting the innate ability to move past them.

No one knows me better than me. I had to learn to reject what others thought of me and discover my true self separate from the circumstances of my visual disability. It's not easy to let go of troubling experiences but if you can it's surprising what can come from it.

Embrace, accept and flourish so that you can become the person you are meant to be.

For me, the real riches in life are the incredible breakthroughs I've experienced and the ones ahead of me. I don't fear them. As challenging as they may be, or not, I know I'll survive, learn, and continue growing from them.

What am I finally trying to say? Believe in yourself no matter the circumstance.





About the Author

Lesly Federici

Lesly Federici is a Registered Nurse (RN) who specialized in Labor & Delivery. Since 1998 she's been building websites, especially blogs, and helping others do the same. She is the CEO and owner of the Power Affiliate Club (PAC), a blogging community focused on providing education, support, and promotion of members through interactive engaging programs. She's also created coaching programs such as Robin Hood Mentoring and the Do It Workshop. Lesly is also an artist and an author.

Connect with Lesly at <http://poweraffiliateclub.com>

Looking Back To Look Forward

By Beverley Golden

“Don’t look back, you’re not going that way.” It’s an interesting quotation I’ve seen floating around the Internet and although I agree that our past doesn’t have to define our future, I also know that our past offers a rich tapestry into who we are today.

My own life has been peppered with health issues, so I know that looking back has offered the opportunity to heal and transform my life so I could, in fact, move forward.

My last health crisis was possibly my most challenging and had me rather spontaneously choose to fly off to a renowned clinic in Germany desperate for answers to my mysterious and sudden health decline.

A few days after settling in, the doctor I’d already come to love, pulled the lone chair over to my bed, slowly sat down and reached over to take my hand in his. His gentle blue eyes looked directly into mine. He took a breath and smiled a half smile before he spoke. His words were not what I was hoping to hear.

He reminded me that the soul does not care if the body heals. His next words devastated me. “Things seem to be getting worse. There is very little hope for healing on a physical level. We suggest that perhaps you should pray.” Here I was alone, four thousand miles away from home and even these doctors had no new options to offer me!

My daughter’s haunting words came flooding back to me. My frail 89-pound body felt agitated as I sat impatiently in the wheelchair at the airport waiting to board the plane. Without any warning, she had looked into my eyes and said, “Mom, it’s okay if you want to go to Germany and die. You’ve suffered so much, that it really is okay if you can’t do this any longer.”

My heart sank, yet I mustered all my physical energy for a smile, replying, “What are you talking about? I’m not going to die. I still have a lot of things to do in this lifetime. Don’t worry. I have no plans of dying just yet.”

The gravity of my situation quickly became evident in Germany, but I’d always found a way to bounce back before. Always. Why should this time be any different? People back home believed I was facing insurmountable odds and that it could go either way. I might live, but I might die. In reality, the odds were more in favor of me dying.

When I took off my clothes for my exam with the head doctor, I was shocked by the reflection staring back at me from the full-length mirror. I silently gasped, “What has happened to my body?” Amazing what clothes can hide. Only three months earlier I was a healthy and vibrant 129 pounds. The stark reality of how critically ill I was started to hit home. Would it even be possible to heal this time?

Although I was not a religious person, I prayed. I had people back at home praying too. Everyone was expecting a miraculous recovery for me. Or so I thought. My brother later told me that like my daughter, he thought he might never see me alive again after saying goodbye at the airport.

The staff at the clinic had warned me that my life would have to change dramatically; that it was unlikely I would *ever* be able to travel again. They encouraged me to accept that my life would be extremely restricted from now on. This was perhaps the most traumatic news, as I loved traveling to new places and meeting new people. Seems I’d become a prisoner in my own body.

Three-and-a-half weeks later, just before I was about to return home, I received what sounded like a hint of positive news. Although the head doctor had at first seen extremely limited possibilities for healing my physical body, as the days went on, everyone saw my relentless inner fight and the determined light in my eyes. He offered me a small glimmer of hope that there might be more chance for healing than originally predicted. He cautioned me that my condition remained extremely critical and things could still go either way.

Test after test and therapy after therapy and I was heading home looking as unhealthy as when I had arrived. There was no noticeable change. There was no unnoticeable change either. Generally, on a physical level, there was absolutely no change at all.

My strong belief that each of us is guided by the spiritual world carried me through and I continued asking for guidance and support for my healing. My relentless inner belief and trust that I *would* heal kept me going. Each day became a fight for survival.

Once home, the severe malnutrition continued to threaten the quality of my life. Every ounce of perseverance was needed to keep moving forward. Synchronistic circumstances led me to Arscura - School for Living Art and I said “yes” to their therapeutic program Art for Life.

As someone always looking for the quick fix or the fastest way to the end result, I learned about embracing process and continued to transform the underlying issues that had led to my physical illness. I learned that you could be healed and still have a physical illness. This became a profound lesson for me to embody throughout my

healing. I also learned that physical illness rarely happens only on the physical level and that we must transform on all levels, emotional, spiritual and physical, to be truly healed.

It's inspiring when people who knew me back then say I give them hope of what is possible. Hope is a fascinating thing. It isn't about sitting passively waiting for an outcome that may never happen. It's what I call *active* hope. Where you believe in all possibilities and consciously take action from this place of hope.

Where being told something is impossible ignites you to see what is really possible when it comes to the human spirit and healing. One of the things I absolutely know for sure and encourage others to consider is that 'there is always another way' and that we must continue to ask questions to find our way.

Many times, my mother in desperation at seeing me so sick had all but cried, "Nothing is working!" Now I smile and think, "*Everything* was working". For me to have fully experienced this healing journey, it could never have been just one thing that worked. There was no magic bullet. I was always looking for answers *out there*, trying every new thing I heard about. I had to learn the hard way that the answers were always in me. Healing is an inside job.

Learning to trust my intuition has been key. Had I listened to all the advice and suggestions from others so many times in my life, (especially those who warned me not to go to Germany and to accept the many doctors' words as gospel), perhaps I wouldn't have made it to where I am today. My experiences have confirmed that it's always about individual choices that resonate for us and who we are. We are all on a unique journey.

My intuition has continued to guide me and lead me back to full health, living a life much grander than I could have ever imagined. Going to Germany was the first step of many that allowed me to finally transform the lifelong health issue I'd carried from a young age. In the process, I created new paradigms of possibility when it comes to health and healing.

It also opened up the opportunity to write a book about my life and my health challenges and to work in the health and wellness field to support others to live their healthiest and most vital selves. Through all this I see how looking back is an important way to heal and transform the past and to clear the way to create and move forward into the future we want to live. A reminder that each time we look back, it is an opportunity to meet our past in a new way and see how far we've really come.





About the Author

Beverley Golden

Beverley Golden is a writer, raconteur, peacenik and health & vitality consultant, who loves testing unconventional ways to shift paradigms in the playing fields of health and wellness, storytelling and creativity as a path to world peace. She courageously uncovers the humor in life's crazy situations, offering hope, while promoting inner wisdom through the written word. "Trust your intuition even when no one else sees your point of view" is her signature mantra.

Her best-selling book, [*Confessions of a Middle-Aged Hippie*](#), bursts with anecdotes from her years in the entertainment industry, coupled with her stories of survival from a life lived with health issues. Her passion is turning the 'impossible' into the possible, using her own health and healing experiences, to support others to live their life to the fullest. She shares her thought-provoking observations on the Huffington Post, among others.

Connect with Beverley at www.beverleygolden.com

Special Offer

You're invited to a **Complimentary Wellness Consultation** to create a personalized health and vitality program individualized for you. Begin with the [**True Health Assessment**](#) and it's customized three-part report that identifies your top health risk factors, maps out a recommended lifestyle plan with ways to improve your health and provides you with nutrition recommendations based on your assessment answers.

Once you completed, I'll email you to set up your consultation on Skype or by telephone. If you're committed to your health and are ready to give it the care and attention it deserves, I'd love to support your journey!

How I Freed My Mind and Learned To Think For Myself

By Dana Gore

One might assume it's easy to think for herself.

And one may not be correct.

At least, that was the case for me. Quite frankly, it seems to be the case for a lot of us, from what I've observed.

There's a difference between *thinking you think* for yourself, and actually doing it. The only way to truly know the difference is to break free from your programming.

Like I did.

I'll share my story with you in the hopes that maybe you'll recognize a piece of yourself in me. I feel we all share a consciousness, so when I talk about my experience, I'm hoping it'll inspire something within you to free your own mind too.

How I Freed My Mind and Learned To Think For Myself

I thought I knew what life was all about.

Like most people, I believed the stories I'd been told about what it meant to be a worthwhile human being, what success looked like and what I needed to do to fit in and be accepted by society.

I also believed that in order to be beautiful, I had to be thin, shapely and to look like the models you'd see in the magazines and on the runways.

I literally made myself sick trying to feel pretty. I wound up so obsessed with all of this that I developed eating disorders that ruled my life for ten years.

And I tried to be likable, even though I was brimming with anger because the world around me seemed so foreign that I felt as though my life must have been a mistake because I just didn't belong anywhere.

I know this sounds like a sad tale, and it was. The reason life felt so awful all those years is because I was attempting to mold myself into something that wasn't realistic for

me. And chances are, the conditions we're brought up in may not have been realistic for you either.

Let me ask you:

- Are you living your truth?
- Are you a people pleaser?
- Are you engaging in activities that truly bring you joy and well-being?
- Do you honestly think for yourself and make your own decisions – independent of the good opinion of others?

I sure wasn't.

But a few years ago, after changing careers and transforming my body into something I finally felt proud of, something happened.

I woke up.

It had been brought to my attention that life wasn't as I thought it was. And as I sat and watched the world as I knew it deconstruct before my eyes, I was left with a question.

"If everything I believed to be true isn't, then what is true?"

And as if the Universe heard me, I received my answer immediately.

"That's for you to discover – now that you've finally been deprogrammed. Just float for a while and see what you learn."

And from then on, that's exactly what I've done.

The funny thing is, it seems that **not knowing** holds the key to enlightenment. It's when you allow yourself to suspend your beliefs (even for just a while) and observe them with a mind open to everything, yet attached to nothing that you'll finally see what true freedom is all about.

See, once I realized that my take on life wasn't my own, but a combination of things like:

- My emotional reactions to my surroundings.
- A result of having been conditioned by society to think, believe and act as others.
- A response to my personal experiences rather than my observing them as well.

I understood that in order to free my mind, I'd have to let go of what I thought was objective truth and understand that clarity was only an option once I became someone who would question themselves and the world around me.

Thinking for Yourself Can Be a Lonely Experience Sometimes

I don't say this to upset or scare anyone.

I only point this out because once you finally do break free from the programming that controlled you and your life you may find yourself in your own good company for a while.

Those who knew you to be a certain way might not recognize you, or they may want to continue to believe the illusions they've confused for truth - and you now represent a threat to their ideas of "normal."

Freeing your mind and thinking for yourself is an act of immense courage and bravery. I want you to understand this because you need to know that separating yourself from the crowd is truly the only path to authentic freedom.

However, should you choose to walk the road less traveled, you'll not only survive it, but you'll thrive. That is, you will if you can see what may come your way during the process and prepare yourself to remain the warrior you'll need to be as you discover your authentic self.

That's what I had to do, and while there have been some lonely times I wouldn't trade any of them in because I AM free.

We are all the imaginations of ourselves. Everything we think, feel and believe – we ultimately bring into the world. This becomes reality as we know it. So if we want to become free thinkers, we have to allow some wiggle room for our perspectives and challenge what we've absorbed throughout our lives.

Sometimes, the most beneficial changes that take place show up in the form of a deconstruction of sorts.

We see this sort of thing happen when it comes to relationships, jobs and even body compositions belonging to people who desire improvements. What *has been* undergoes a demolition as the new foundation, constructed from a higher level of awareness, takes time to build.

For a while in between the old and the new, a period of floating and uncertainty may show up. And as you draw up the blueprints for your new career, relationship, body, or even your new home, it's during this time of "nowhere" that you're imagining the new conditions of your soon to be "now here."

When it comes to freeing your mind and learning to truly think for yourself, you may go through a phase that appears as though you're nowhere. Your old ways of seeing things will cause you to realize they no longer serve you.

And perhaps they never really did serve you well – other than to provide the pain that gave rise to the contrast necessary to push you to desire something different.

During your period of nowhere, you learn what you'd prefer *now here* to look and feel like, and you'll use your imagination to create your life deliberately instead of by default – which is what you had been doing until now.

That's what happened to me.

I faced myself and my shadows. I saw the world for what it is - a series of thoughts, ideas, and conditions that stemmed from the will of others.

Once I gained this insight, I was able to break free from the programming and start trusting the innate wisdom within me since I was no longer looking outside of myself for enlightenment.

And it's been a wild and interesting journey ever since, but one I wouldn't trade for the world.

There was a time I thought I had nothing unique to say to anyone. Yet here, I am talking to you about what I've learned about life.

These days, I no longer suffer from low self-esteem because my worth isn't dependent on society's standards – of anything.

I am completely free of my eating disorders and body image issues. In fact, I have a very healthy relationship with food that is based in abundance.

I live in the world, but I am not of the world.

My message is unique because my mind is free. And you too have something unique to add to the mix, my friend. It'll just be up to you to be brave enough, and resilient enough to become your own guru.

I hope I've helped to offer you some valuable tools to go on this (sometimes) scary, yet wonderful journey toward real freedom.

Just know this:

If you think you are alone at times, you aren't. And if you need proof, just pick up this book and allow the words to inspire you toward your greatness.





About the Author

Dana Gore

Dana Gore is a health and fitness professional, author, wellness coach, and freelance writer, fascinated with human consciousness.

She provides a practical and realistic approach to healthy living and self-awareness and is the creator of iammyimagination.com which is a blog dedicated to healthy living, creativity, and personal development.

It is her stated aim to provide guidance to the public about how to achieve optimal health in a safe and structured manner.

Dana has had a love of writing for many years and has written hundreds of articles for many websites, blogs, magazines, and digital newspapers. Her topics mainly center on her passions for healthy living, personal growth and development, and creative self-expression.

This love of writing and for helping others led Dana to write her first book, *A Simple Guide to Exercise Safety (What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You)*, for which she received an award of merit. Inside she takes a look at taking back personal responsibility when you are exercising and it is suitable for fitness enthusiasts and those who make a living from that line of work.

Dana has recently published her second book, *Streetwise Philosophy (A Bullshit-Free Approach to Spiritual Maturity)*. Her third book, titled *Choose Awareness (How to Free Your Mind and Become Your Own Guru)* will be released in early 2017.

Connect with Dana at iammyimagination.com

What Are You Waiting For?

By Julie Gorges

Have you ever had a cherished dream that you let go of because you doubted yourself and allowed a crippling fear of failure stop you?

I almost did.

When I was in my early 20s, I decided to take a writing class at the local college where I discovered my passion for creating stories. When the course was finished, I immediately signed up for another class, checked out every book on writing from the library, and started attending writers' conferences.

Sure, dreams of becoming a professional writer bounced around in my head constantly. But I didn't dare call myself a writer and I was too afraid to start submitting my work. So, I called writing my "hobby" and kept signing up for more classes and conferences.

Until a fellow attendee at a writers' conference asked the dreaded question, "What are you waiting for?"

I was speechless and shrugged my shoulders.

"If you want to write, write," she said a bit impatiently. "I think you're taking all these classes and attending all these writer's conferences as a way of putting off writing that book you've been telling me about and sending it out when it might be rejected."

Ouch! Sometimes the truth hurts.

I was comfortable just dreaming about becoming an author one day. It was fun envisioning my novel on the shelves of Barnes and Noble and my first book signing. It was so easy to tell myself that I needed to learn more about the craft of writing and wasn't ready to submit my work to agents and publishers.

That way, I didn't have to face my fear that people would laugh at me because I didn't have a college degree. That my submissions would sit in a huge pile and be ignored by literary agents and editors since I didn't know anyone in the publishing business. That my friends and family would roll their eyeballs if I dared to express my dreams of becoming a writer out loud. That I would become so discouraged by the countless rejections sure to come my way, I would give up and watch my precious dreams dissolve.

I had a ton of excuses. Over a million books are published each year in the U.S. alone. Who could compete with that? Besides, I had a toddler by that time and was working a job. Where would I find the time to write and submit my work? What would I have to show for all my time and effort in the end? Doesn't everyone want to be a writer, but how many actually make it?

Even so, that woman at the writer's conference had struck a chord.

What was I waiting for? Did I want to go to my grave with regrets that I never pursued my passion and my dreams of becoming a writer? That I never even tried? Would I wonder what I could have accomplished if only I had mustered up enough courage to break through my self-imposed barriers?

With the woman's words echoing in my head, I got up the nerve to send off my first short story and, sure enough, weeks later, got my first rejection. The standard, impersonal letter stung, but I gritted my teeth, swallowed my pride, and sent my story to the next magazine. In the meantime, I finished a correspondence course and started my first young adult novel. After gathering enough rejections to cover a wall, I became discouraged but kept submitting my work to magazines and working on my book.

Many of my fears came true during this time. If I drummed up the courage to pronounce myself a writer, people immediately asked if I'd ever been published. When I had to confess the answer was no, cynical looks ensued leaving me completely demoralized. Many asked me if my dreams were realistic.

Frustrated, I swore off writing countless times, but I kept going. And you know what? Six long years after I took that first writing class, my first short story was accepted for publication in a small literary magazine. Later that year, I sold an article I had written for one of my college classes to a regional parenting magazine. The following year, I sold an anecdote to *Woman's World* – my first national publication.

Am I glad I faced down all those nagging self-doubts and fears? You bet!

I've been working as a professional writer for more than 25 years now. During that time, I've had a non-fiction book I co-wrote published by one of the big-time publishers, McGraw-Hill, landed a literary agent, published two young adult novels, won three journalism awards, and had thousands of articles published in magazines, newspapers, and websites. I even lived out my dream of seeing my books on the shelves of Barnes and Noble along with book signings. This past year, I've added blogger to my list of achievements and am working on my fourth book.

Self-doubt and fear of failure can hold you back from stepping off the starting line, let alone participating in the race. However, there are a few steps I took – and you can too – to break through those barriers.

Surround Yourself with Supportive People

Keep those toxic, negative people out of your life. You know who I mean. All those people who shoot down everyone's ideas because they don't have any of their own. Naysayers who poison your mind with stories of failures. So-called friends who raise their eyebrows with eyes full of doubt that make you feel like you're the biggest fool in the world.

Instead, turn to those people who lift your spirits, bring out the best in you, validate your dreams, and support your journey. In my case, I was lucky to have a husband and mother who cheered me on every step of the way. Their relentless faith in me and my dreams was encouraging and inspiring.

And don't forget to support yourself. Don't be your worst enemy. Give yourself permission to fail and try, try again. Turn off all those negative thoughts in your head. Live courageously. Take that leap of faith to be who you want to be. Believe in yourself even in the face of disapproval and discouragement.

Accept Failures as Lessons

Don't look at your failures as defeats but as life lessons.

Those rejection letters, bad book reviews, and criticisms I gathered over the years helped me improve my writing and develop persistence and determination.

In fact, there is so much you can learn from setbacks. You'll evolve both personally and professionally, learn how to tackle obstacles more efficiently, reprioritize your life to make way for success, re-envision your goals, make necessary adjustments, and learn to never give up.

Celebrate Small Successes

Be proud of every step you take toward achieving your goals. Don't wait for that "best seller" before you celebrate. Take note of small accomplishments and successes to build your confidence and inspire you to keep going.

In the early days, I kept a bulletin board above my desk with clippings, acceptance letters, and even encouraging rejection letters to remember my early accomplishments.

Do I still struggle with self-doubts? Sure. Writers never stop getting rejection letters. When I first started my blog a few years ago and struggled to find an audience, the dismal numbers depressed me. When I tried writing humor for the first time, those same old fears snuck up on me. What if I'm the only one who finds this funny? Writing is never easy.

But I've learned how to deal with those pesky doubts. Now I know, if you never get out of your comfort zone, you'll never discover what you're capable of accomplishing.

So go ahead, put yourself out there. Conquer all those doubts and fears! Who knows what can happen? What are you waiting for?





About the Author

Julie Gorges

Julie Gorges is an author and award-winning journalist who writes about finding happiness, adventure, and fulfillment as a boomer.

Her blog, Baby Boomer Bliss tackles challenges facing the 50-plus crowd such as aging parents, stress management, coping with loss, retirement, and empty nest syndrome with refreshing candor and humor.

Connect with Julie at www.babyboomerbliss.net

The Blessing of Second Chances

By RoseMary Griffith

Being on the receiving end of a good push is not always a terrible thing. Especially when it's a friend...a really good friend...pushing you over the edge of self-inflicted barriers and into a gaping chasm, forcing you onto something new.

Friends, those people who have nothing but your best interests at heart, are catalysts for encouraging new things. They're the ones who keep us from seeing the awful that could come from some attempt and instead focus our eyes on the dreaded sameness that will be our lives if we don't change.

I'm flung out there, and as I'm falling, I'm thinking: WHAT THE HECK?

Then my feet hit the turf and I start walking and this brand new trail I've discovered starts to feel good underneath my boots.

Sometimes the push is a more gentle suggestion. Like in May of 2009 when I was stuck, positively (or negatively) stuck, and had no idea how to extract myself from the mire and get moving. In under a year, we'd lost our parents, a dear uncle, and a good friend. The months were tumultuous and I was rolling and tumbling through the days of them. I was bound by these deaths because I couldn't see any way through, any options for coming out the other side of deep grief.

We kids spent ten days nursing Mom during the end stages of lung cancer. Humorously, I was the kid she constantly wanted around. We found this hilarious because throughout life Mom and I tried each other's patience—perpetually. But there it was. With the bedrooms occupied by siblings, I'd start sleeping in the nearby living room. I'd hear mom stir or dad would murmur, hating being in a separate bed from her. I'd drag my blankets and pillows in and curl up on the floor at mom's feet. When she grew particularly agitated, I'd crawl into the narrow bed and hold her in my arms.

I repeated this nightly because as I prayed for guidance on what to do, the answer that I continually received was: Love Your Mother. Against the callousness I'd built toward my mom for painful exchanges, I heard this recurring edict.

With my heart open and old pains surrendered, I loved my mother.

That kind of openness amid loss drains your emotions to empty. Yet, in her alternating moments of pain and lucidity, mom and I healed. She would cling to me with the

strength of a titan and I would weep tears of joy that our masks were gone, and the walls accumulated in 49 years of being her daughter tumbled to pieces. We shared honest affection.

Next was the slow surrender of dad in his battle with ALS. Losing my father, whose sense of humor never waned throughout his pain, devastated me. I'm the original Daddy's Little Girl and long ago gave up trying not to be her. The thought that he wouldn't be here to see me turn 50 was too much to bear.

It wasn't ten days of loss with dad; it was fourteen months of gradual and painful decline. We lived with the erosion of dad's independence as he became less able to do things alone, yet we never saw him lose his dignity.

Dad knew when it was his time. With the clarity of voice we hadn't heard for months, he said: "I love you," to my older sister and me as we tucked him in. More holes were ripped into our hearts. Dad arranged for a haircut, for us to gather friends and family...there was a list. The next day he was gone.

I looked at this path, gazed down another, threw a feeler out here, a question or two that way. I tried to keep my old life operating. After all, I'd had it for several years and was happy enough with parts of it.

I was left with a consuming HR management job in a company run by an [insert adjective here] person I did not see eye-to-eye with. My heart was in tatters. I sat listening to him once more pontificate about how wonderful he was and brilliant and worth so much money and...I carved fingernail arcs into the palms of both hands to avoid crying out: Shut up!

My universe continued falling to pieces. *This* stopped working. *That* took a plunge to the deep end. And the *other thing*? I've no idea where it went.

Instead of asking for the strength to ease the passing of my parents, I prayed for direction.

In discussing my stagnation with my older sister she offered the quiet suggestion: Why don't you stay with us until you figure things out?

What? A Montana winter with my best friend and her husband, two insane Airedales, a niece, nephew and spouses all within close proximity?

The idea percolated a short time because the moment that door opened, as soon as I thought of the possibility of spending recovery time with her, everything changed. The bottom of the ugly abyss I'd been facing started to rise up and it was covered in

beautiful green earth.

I slept. For the first time in years, I slept through the night. I awakened clear-headed, ready to attack the days.

God provided clarity on this choice and enabled every step to go smoothly and coated in blessings. Taking the decision out of my hands and placing it into prayer told me what I needed to do to move on. I gave notice, told friends, and dismantled my world. I smiled more.

I learned many valuable lessons during my sabbatical:

- A healing road trip from Pennsylvania to Montana with my brother. We talked about our parents, laughed at life with them and enjoyed being siblings.
- How splendid my relationship with my sister has become—especially compared to us as teenagers. Ouch to monumental battles. Why didn't our parents send us to military school? Separate military schools.
- What a cool person her husband is: supportive, humble, funny.
- How to live with two crazy Airedales. I want one.
- That I could, out of a desire to contribute, cook—including meat and poultry that I haven't eaten in twenty years.
- Open my mind to participate in a Bible study and what that meant to my growing faith.
- I don't ride horses anymore due to an abundance of stitches from past attempts, but I fed them and laughed as they snorted steam into the brisk air.
- I conquered cross country skiing. Again. I learn this every time I ski.
- Developing daily writing into a disciplined habit that continues.

The list could continue but the point is that being the Adult Nanny was what I needed and more than what I thought it would be when I set off on the adventure.

The book and movie versions of *Under The Tuscan Sun* vary. Yet they each tell a moving story of shaking up your normal, of not settling for status quo, of taking the road untaken. Was my move financially sound? Nope. I used vacation funds and set a

budget. Was it logistically logical? Nope again. Pittsburgh to Red Lodge, belongings stored willy-nilly. Did my decision save my soul? You betcha.

Life twists and turns and God fulfills questions in His unexpected, delightful, soul-provoking ways. Our job is to move forward, to listen, to dive in when the answers present themselves and most importantly: to never ever be immobilized by fear.

So, any cliffs I can push you off of?





About the Author

RoseMary Griffith

RoseMary has been mad about getting the written word onto the blank page since before age 12. She got as happy as could be when computers came along so that she could read back what she wrote.

Recovering from a nearly perfect childhood in the countryside of western Pennsylvania has led to adventures from coast to coast, multiple islands, and jaunts around Europe on trains, buses and in some wickedly driven taxis.

When she graduated from college, she told her father she wanted to buy a Winnebago—the premier way to travel the USA in the 1980s. He laughed at the notion and admitted to the wisdom of that idea when she was in her 40s and they were discussing her many full household moves (her uncle says she's in witness protection) over the years.

Connect with Rose Mary at <http://musingsfromaredhead.com/>

Obstacles Are There To Show You the Way

By Marquita Herald

Fear didn't run in my family, it galloped. I grew up watching those near and dear hide behind curtains, protecting family secrets, and clinging to the comfort and security of daily sameness.

So what was it in me that refused to simply follow along in the family tradition? Others certainly did, and yet at some point, I chose a different path.

It could have been one of the many self-improvement books I consumed, perhaps an inspiring quotation, the stars perfectly aligned, or maybe it was that stubborn streak I'd been blessed with finally coming into full bloom.

Sounds impressive, right? Well, making a bold commitment to never let fear rule me didn't mean I would never again bump up against it. Oh, no! I've been scared out of my mind on more than a few occasions!

Like that time I faked my way into a job.

Getting My Foot in the Door

From the moment we arrived in Maui I knew I wanted to work at one of the resort hotels. I told my friends, and they laughed because I had no travel industry experience. I decided I'd work in sales so that I could travel to the different islands on business. They thought that was hysterical because I had no sales experience either!

Then one day I saw an ad in the paper for the position of secretary to the resident manager of a resort condominium. I'd been a secretary on the mainland so I knew I could do the job, and immediately made an appointment to be interviewed.

There was only one small obstacle.

Shorthand was required, and I didn't even know what it looked like. But I saw this as an opportunity to get my foot in the door, so I came up with a plan.

I found a book on a version of shorthand called Speedwriting. It was three days before my appointment and I spent every minute of it learning how to use this system to write really, really fast.

The interview went so well the manager hired me on the spot, and the best part was he never even asked me about my shorthand skills. Yippee! I was in the door and on my way to my dream career!

A week later I reported for my first day at work. Imagine my surprise when I learned the man who'd hired me had been fired and sitting in his office was the head of the condominium board of directors. He was an older man with a scowl that appeared to be permanently etched into his craggy face.

The first thing he asked me to do was come into the office so he could dictate a few letters.

Oh, crap!

I did pretty well on the first two letters, but then my hand started getting tired, and by the fifth letter, I was scribbling desperately trying to keep up.

I worked through the night to make sense of those notes.

The next morning I tried to keep busy while waiting for some kind of response ... but nothing, not a peep. He signed the letters, dictated a couple more, and so it went for the rest of the week.

I began to think that somehow I'd managed to get through the episode with my dignity intact when he asked me to step into his office. And there we sat looking at each other, him leaning back in his chair, and me (heart thumping wildly) smiling innocently perched on the edge of mine.

Just as I was about to jump up and scream, "Okay, I give, you got me, I'm leaving now!" he said, "Well, I thought it was time we have an understanding between us. It's obvious that you don't actually take shorthand, at least no shorthand I've ever encountered."

Busted.

I opened my mouth to deliver the apology/resignation speech I'd been rehearsing all week when he did something that was totally unexpected, he smiled. Smiled!

Then he said, "The thing is, you're a much better writer than I am. So here's what I think we should do. From now on, forget the shorthand, or whatever you've been doing. I'll tell you what I want to say and you write it in your own words."

And that was it.

We worked together for the next six months, and I actually ended up really liking the old coot. Then a job came along that would take me a step closer to my goal so I left.

What I had no way of knowing at the time was that getting through this little challenge would turn out to be practice for a dealing with a whole series of much bigger obstacles on the path I'd chosen for myself.

The REAL Test

For the next year I learned as much as I could about the hotel business, networked like crazy, and finally landed a job as the administrative assistant to the manager of one of the largest resort hotels on the Island.

The position came with a generous paycheck, plenty of perks, and a great boss. I was immensely grateful for it all, but never forgot for a moment that where I *really* wanted to be was across the hall in sales.

So near, yet so far ... and no clue how to get there.

Then one day I was going through the mail and noticed a small article in the corporate newsletter about an executive training program.

It was a one-year internship and upon successful completion, the individual would be eligible for an entry level management position. The training programs were for housekeeping, engineering, food and beverage, accounting ...and sales.

This was my shot!

Of course, there were obstacles. For one thing, the program had been created for graduates of University of Las Vegas Travel Industry School of Management so there was no path for an employee of the company to participate. In fact, no one had ever even considered the possibility.

It took a year of campaigning and threatening to quit, but finally, they agreed to open the program to me – sort of. I would go through the training on a part-time basis on the condition that I continued working my full-time job.

So I got my foot in the door, but not many were happy about it.

My boss later admitted that he had intentionally made it as difficult as possible for me to complete the training because he didn't want to lose me as his assistant. He never expected me to finish.

Friends and family didn't hold back their disapproval either. Why would I give up a well-paying secure job to risk going into a new field? What if I failed? What if I hated working in sales? What was I thinking?!

So, you see, the challenge was far greater than just trying to juggle a full-time job and a training program. I was putting all of my energy into pursuing a dream that nobody could see but me.

If ever there was a point where fear could have derailed me for good it was surely now. But I was so focused and determined it never had a chance to take hold.

So for the next several months during the day I was at my desk and at night I worked rotating shifts throughout the hotel learning the business from top to bottom. I often fell asleep at the kitchen table studying, and there were many nights I didn't remember the drive home, but I kept at it.

Despite the grueling schedule, I completed the one-year program in ten months. But there was one more step. The entire executive team of the hotel grilled me on every aspect of operations for four solid hours.

Then suddenly it was over and I found myself surrounded by dozens of my fellow employees patting me on the back, cheering and piling on leis along with heartfelt congratulations. I smiled and nodded as I worked my way to the nearest bathroom and closed the door.

Standing there with my back to the wall, I slowly slid to the floor and sat there with my head in my hands letting it all sink in, flashing back to so many barriers I'd pushed through to get to that point.

Obstacles don't block the path, they are the path.

And so I moved across the hall and began my new career as a sales manager and continued advancing in the industry I'd grown to love. I'd begun with a dream of inter-island travel and ended up working in international sales and traveled the world.

Eventually, I became the director of sales and marketing for a major visitor attraction and an active member of the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau.

It's true I've taken risks, and there have been times on my path that life has been pretty lonely, but that is what comes with challenging yourself to reach your full potential.

There won't always be someone there to cheer you on just when you need it, and sometimes you'll be the only one who can see the dream. But if you can learn to approach obstacles as opportunities to grow, you can achieve anything you truly desire.





About the Author

Marquita Herald

Marquita Herald is a personal development and resilience coach, author, blogger, founder and chief evangelist at Emotionally Resilient Living where she challenges people to think about things in different ways and not just accept the status quo, to pay attention to their lives and take responsibility for their choices, and believe, really BELIEVE in their ability to grow beyond their circumstances and direct the course of their lives

Her professional background includes a successful career in international sales and marketing, followed by a decade as an award-winning life and small business coach.

She makes her home at the edge of a forest in beautiful Oregon and is an *unapologetic* workaholic, avid reader and lover of road trips, the occasional game of golf, all dogs (especially Lucy), peanut butter cookies and red wine.

Connect with Marquita at <http://www.emotionallyresilientliving.com>

Special Offer

Discover Resilient Living is a highly targeted and actionable digital guide designed to help you begin creating a roadmap to build a more confident and resilient life.

The Value in Stopping

By Nicola McLeod

I share this story in the hope that my experience will resonate and perhaps inspire you too to occasionally *stop*, even if only for a little while.

Early last year I made a decision that the time had come to make some serious changes in my life. I did not want to continue feeling the way I had been ... stuck, lost, depressed, undervalued and overwhelmed.

My goal was to have these changes firmly in place by my 40th birthday.

At the time I began this journey to create change I was fatigued and in a dire state of physical and emotional burnout. My son (who was born premature and suffered from breathing difficulties) now has a weakness in his chest and as a result is prone to asthma. So he always seems to catch every bug going around and worse than most, resulting in many sleepless nights for us both.

This summer I took a giant step toward achieving my goal and gave up life in the corporate world; the regular income, job security, and pension. I felt to the core of my being this role neither fulfilled nor inspired me and that my true passion lay in finding a way to help others.

I also believed this misalignment was a huge contributor to the feelings of burnout I was experiencing. One of my core values is integrity, and it had become clear I was not being honest with myself and that needed to *stop*.

And yet, in some respects, I've been busier than ever. In the past sixteen months, I've retrained as an accredited and certified life coach, NLP practitioner, and hypnotherapist. I invested in various personal development courses and coaching programs, and in doing so discovered my strengths, weaknesses, triggers, saboteurs, values, and learning styles.

I have reached out to Facebook groups, and other social media platforms, online and offline, connected with some amazing people who I know will be lifelong friends, and I have begun to attend regular networking events.

Through this process of developing knowledge, confidence and valuable skills in order to be of service to others, I've also learned a lot about myself. I realized (finally) that the only approval I need in order to do something is my own. I have walked on broken glass

and I am planning a firewalk too! I have learned to love myself a little bit more each day. This has not been an easy journey, but I have laid an incredibly strong foundation and my business is going forward.

I have also discovered a passion for helping other women identify their purpose in life and begin building a lifestyle around that core intention. No excuses, no apologies. This is what I've spent the last 18+ months working towards and have poured my heart and soul into it.

It has been an exciting time, but one that has come with many highs and lows, and recently I found myself once again experiencing those familiar twinges of burnout.

My little boy had fallen ill and the usual feelings of concern and frustration in equal measure quickly arose accompanied by the all too familiar internal chatter, "Oh great, another week of no sleep." "Is this ever going to stop?" "Am I ever going to actually launch this business?" "How will I ever be able to help anybody else when this constantly happens and everything has to stop?"

The good news is that my level of self-awareness has grown substantially over recent months and so for the first time ever I was able to reframe those thoughts and choose to see this as a time to just *stop*, be with my son and to rest and reflect.

And I did just that, stopped everything; the preparation associated with building a new business, trying to be all things to all people, and saying "yes" when my soul was screaming "NO!"

This concept of *stopping* is a very new thing for me. There have been many times in my life when I should have listened to my mind and body and stopped, but I didn't. And I have actually really enjoyed it! In *stopping*, I have discovered the true meaning of self-care. I feel a true connection to myself through the mediums of journaling, meditation and just being.

I have gone for long walks with the children, stopped to look at the frost covered leaves on the ground, watched the planes land and take off at the airport, found squirrels, noticed again the wonder of nature and watched geese fly south for winter, and I have rediscovered my love of cooking.

We have been eating wholesome, healthy, home-cooked meals and I feel so nourished and good about myself as a result.

I am also reading voraciously again and learning a lot in the process. The break has cleared my mind and taught me some valuable lessons about achieving a healthy

balance in life, and as a result, I have had many ideas about how to take my business forward in a way that is completely aligned with me and who I am becoming.

I feel I am finally discovering my true purpose in this life.

So, what has *stopping* given me?

- I have a sense of inner peace and more prolonged moments of joy than I have had in years.
- I have found the ability to choose to stop the monkey chatter in my head when I need to, thanks in no small part to the coaches I've worked with and the amazing training in conjunction with life coaching and NLP.
- I have finally found the ability to achieve a consistent flow, something which I have previously only experienced sporadically.
- I am more present with my children.
- I have been able to take a more global viewpoint of situations in my life instead of getting bogged down in the drama and the detail.
- I also seem to have lost my desire to control things and I'm quite content to just be and let things flow.

Someone said to me recently, we are not human doings, we are human beings - and those words resonated so deeply with me.

Always ready to test out a new theory, or a new way of being, an opportunity has of course presented itself. My husband's job is under threat. Ordinarily, I'd be thrown into a panic since he is currently our only source of income and we have very little savings.

However, instead of repeating old patterns of panic, despair, negativity, I invested some quality time to write about my thoughts and feelings in my journal and that created a sense of calm along with the realization that this has not happened yet, if it even will, so we should count ourselves lucky. There is always something to be grateful for. Some of his colleagues have not been so fortunate.

No matter what happens, I am confident in our strength and ability to deal with it, and that we will be okay. I truly believe the Universe really does have our back.





About the Author

Nicola McLeod

Nicola McLeod has a 14-year corporate background in the investment management industry in a role that neither fulfilled nor inspired me. With a BA degree in Law & Management and a background in law and financial regulation, the thought of leaving my well-paid, secure job to follow my dreams was terrifying. I suffered low self-confidence, had no direction and felt completely overwhelmed with life and its responsibilities, I had to take a step back from everything to recalibrate until I figured out my way forward.

In the space of a year, I retrained as a life coach and NLP practitioner and took myself on a deep journey of introspection and personal development. This gave me the clarity and courage to create the life I want to live which fits around my family. I now find my work fulfilling and I get to work with amazing women like you, and it never fails to light me up each and every day.

Connect with Nicola at www.definingyou.co

How I Beat Depression to Grow a Successful Business

By Donna Merrill

Over the years, I've held myself back from doing many of the things I wanted to in life because of my chronic depression.

Instead of just getting out there and making things happen I sometimes failed to take action out of fear that I wasn't good enough, that I would never be able to accomplish the things I wanted to in life.

On days when I felt particularly vulnerable, I couldn't even get out of bed. Every aspect of my life suffered from low self-esteem and self-doubt.

The Chicken or the Egg ... Which Comes First?

I always assumed that my low self-esteem was caused by depression, but with experience and the help of therapy, I began to understand that it was the other way around. My low self-esteem issues were the source of the chronic depression.

Whole days could come and go when all my thoughts were filled with doom and gloom. I wondered if I would ever have a satisfying relationship if I could ever get a job that I was happy with.

There were no rational reasons for my chronic self-doubt, and yet at times it was all consuming.

Years of therapy helped me to recognize that the source of much of my childhood depression and dysfunctional attitudes stemmed from family, friends, and relatives leaving me with the impression that I was not good enough, nor was I expected to make much of my life.

It turned out this wasn't so much about me as a person, as it was about the fact that I was *just* a girl. During my formative years, the accepted role of most women was to take care of the home and raise the children while men went out into the world to work a *real* job and support the family.

Society and our cultural norms had changed, though, and the time had come for me to change as well.

New Challenges

One day, I met a woman who owned a dress shop and she shared with me a few stories about her daily struggle with depression. What really caught my attention was how she had not let her depression prevent her from successfully operating a business, in fact, she said it had helped her feel better.

So, I said, what the heck. Maybe throwing myself into a meaningful enterprise was exactly what I needed to get over my insecurities. Maybe I just needed to get tough and start taking action in life instead of always thinking about how *someday* I might get around to it.

I decided to stop talking so much about my issues and start acting on my dreams in life. Oh, I was scared. I doubted myself, and deep down inside, I don't think I really believed I could do it.

But I rose above the doubts and depression, got out of the house and actually launched my own little business.

The doubts lingered, but then things started happening to make me feel better about myself. I made the first month's rent with ease, and by the sixth month, I was making a good profit.

Hey, I was a successful entrepreneur! How about that?

Over the years that I operated my shop and intuitive consulting business, I was able to take care of my family and send the kids to college.

I had finally broken through the fear of being financially independent.

Reinforcing My New Freedom

It sounds simple enough. Just get out there and start making things happen. But for someone who suffers from depression, things are never simple.

My new freedom required continual reinforcement. It took a lot of energy for me to simply get out of bed every day and continue running my business.

In fact, being agoraphobic, it took me several weeks to be able to leave my house. But I was doing it, turning my business into something that I could be proud of.

Of course, there were still challenges.

I relied heavily on the security of my small routine to stay grounded. I took comfort in seeing the same people and the same faces every day. And whenever I signed on a new client, I would grow anxious because I was entering unfamiliar territory once again.

So, I still had issues to deal with. But I had made a major breakthrough, and little by little I began to feel better about myself.

Moving Forward

An important lesson I've learned about the nature of success is that you are either moving it forward, or you're letting it slip away.

The little business I had established had limitations. There were only so many people I could attract to a brick and mortar location, and I wanted to find a way to reach out to more people, and in newer and bolder ways.

You might think that showed great inner strength. But it scared me to death.

However, I was anxious to move things forward with my business and with my life, so I decided to take my business online.

That meant interacting with people in new ways and actually led me to establish a whole new business. I would still be reaching out to help people but doing it in a different way, and from an entirely new platform.

I decided to start blogging and make that the center of my new business model and this meant I'd be doing a lot of writing.

Talking To Myself

At first, I was fearful about blogging because I'd never considered myself a good writer. I didn't know if I could be prolific enough to establish a blog that people would follow.

But in therapy I learned that every time a thought arose that I wasn't good enough, I should flip it around to serve me better. So when that little voice in my head said "I'm not good enough" I simply replaced it with "I know I can do this" and kept repeating it over and over to myself.

Some people call these little snippets positive affirmations, I call it self-talk. Whatever label you want to apply, I was learning to talk to myself in a new, more supportive way.

I was adopting a whole new type of self-talk and it felt like a breath of fresh air to me.

Breaking Barriers

Self-talk really saved my life then, and it continues to today. I am now running and operating a successful online business and blog.

My blog is Donna Merrill Tribe, and people always tell me they love to visit because my articles make blogging seem so simple. That always makes me laugh.

Blogging is an incredibly powerful way to build an online reputation and business. But it's far from simple.

None of the things I have accomplished ever came easily.

I'm always facing barriers to my success, and I'm always looking for the strength and resources to overcome them.

As my blog keeps growing and becoming ever more successful, I continue to struggle with self-limiting beliefs that sometimes lead me back to bouts of depression.

But lapses into depression have certainly become less frequent and less severe. They are not as intense and they don't last as long as they once did. So while I continue to deal with barriers to my success and happiness, I've become much more functional in dealing with my self-limiting beliefs.

In other words, while I can't really prevent the intermittent recurrence of the symptoms of depression, I can now act immediately and effectively to reduce and control their effects on me, and on my business.

Speaking of Business

As exciting as it is for me to be running such a successful blog, I still sometimes hear that little voice in my head trying to tell me "No you can't." But when I do, I remind myself that *can't* is a word that I no longer accept. I do everything in my power to persevere and stake my claim to "Yes I can."

One thing that helps to keep my energy up and mood in balance is to take a break in the routine of my day. This prevents me from losing perspective and helps me to stay refreshed so that I can accomplish more and remain confident.

I also frequently make a point of reminding myself that I have the power and authority to do whatever I want to do in life.

After all, I am running a successful business.





About the Author

Donna Merrill

Donna is a leading professional blogger and blogging coach. She has created many popular training programs for bloggers and also operates her own dynamic coaching club, the VIP CLUB for bloggers.

Connect with Donna at <http://donnamerrilltribe.com/>

Special Offer

FREE Guide... [**4 Things I Did To Build My Blog Using Only Free Traffic**](#)

My Journey from Victim to Victory!

By Phoenicia Oyeniya

I would like to take you on my personal journey from an insecure, awkward teenager to a woman on the road to fulfilling her purpose.

I was a reserved child who enjoyed reading books whilst my sister played with our friends and cousins. I liked the escapism books gave. I struggled to interact with others and books provided me with a way out. I would say I was fairly happy in primary school. It was a one form entry school, therefore, most pupils knew one another well.

I had a culture shock on attending secondary school. I was way out of my depth. I hated the crowds of pupils and those who attempted to dominate and set themselves apart from their peers. I had few friends and no real desire to engage with the majority of my peers. There were elements of mild bullying for the first few years. I rose above it but it maximized my fear of people.

The final two years of secondary school were certainly the worst. Several pupils transferred from other nearby schools, three of which were boys, hell-bent on making my life a misery and they succeeded. They verbally abused me and said some pretty nasty words; 23 years later, I remember these words but refuse to write or type them. I would rather they stayed as horrible memories.

I have never felt so low in my life and had suicidal thoughts almost daily. I truly do not know how I survived. I certainly hated myself and felt I was somehow to blame. I recall believing if I was pretty, fashionable, outgoing and popular I would not have been a target.

My relationship with my family deteriorated. I was moody, snappy and barely spoke to my mother and sister. I became a recluse at home. This was obviously a coping mechanism. My mother was concerned but could not put her finger on why I displayed such unhealthy behavior. I was consumed by the bullying but did not have the emotional intelligence to open up to someone. It did not dawn on me that I could have requested, begged even to be transferred to another school.

Unfortunately, the bullying continued right up until the day I left secondary school. My grades suffered and my exam results did not meet the expected levels. I remember reading my exam results and feeling utterly disappointed in myself. I felt angry as I knew

I had the potential to achieve far greater than this.

Moving on to college and university, I came into my own. I started dating, wearing make-up and experimenting with my hair and clothes. Of course, the insecurities were still brewing deep within and I learned to put on an act when in front of friends. Even at this point, I struggled to feel accepted, to know that I was okay, that I was enough.

At the age of 22, I began attending my cousin's church. After six months, I became a Christian. It was the right step for me but I will not lie and say my life changed overnight, I was still me trying to get through the challenges but with a new found level of faith and hope.

I realized how little I liked myself, in fact, I would go as far as saying I despised who I was and constantly fought off negative thoughts as they came at me like bullets from a gun. When negative situations occurred, I would relay them right back to my teenage years. There was no real connection between the two, I simply made them up in my head.

I met my husband aged 27 and immediately saw the great qualities in him. He could not fathom why I was so insecure. It concerned him as it also made me a reactive person and extremely defensive. I questioned the motives of everyone and I mean everyone.

My husband encouraged me to write out scriptures and words of affirmation and pin them around my home. When typing the words, I honestly did not feel I possessed any of the great characteristics. I did not view myself as a person with depth or any great abilities. I printed, laminated and hung the affirmations on the inside of my wardrobe.

I admit it felt weird reading them aloud daily to myself but I did it anyway. Each day I was speaking over my life in a positive sense and it slowly began to impact on my thought pattern. To this day I still own these documents and I smile to myself on looking at them.

Planning ahead gives you a clear focus in life and stops you from "going with the flow". For the last six years, my husband and I have written clear goals; both personal and for us as a family.

We encourage one another to step out into the unknown whilst scared. I have put myself forward for a number of events in which I am required to speak and sing in front of an audience. I am nervous but determined to overcome my fears. Standing in front of an audience highlights just how much I have progressed over the years.

I made the decision years ago that I would not allow my insecurities to stop me from moving forward. Often I "do it scared". The key point here is I "do", therefore I am an overcomer. My fears do not influence my decision making. I do not take myself so seriously. I can laugh at myself and even better I can cope with others laughing at me.

When one is so uptight and self-conscious the focus is primarily on self. Choosing to focus on others helps us become more selfless, with a heart to meeting their needs. I serve in two ministries at church on a voluntary basis. I always walk away feeling uplifted when I have encouraged or inspired an individual. Even listening to someone offload can restore their faith in people and remind them that they are special and cared for.

I will finish on this note; overcoming is not always winning, it is not always coming out unscarred but it is you choosing to remain standing in the face of adversity. It takes strength to stay and endure and it also takes strength to walk away in order to protect your dignity and values.

Your past has gone, you cannot rewrite it. Accept it and instead focus on the changes you can make today.





About the Author

Phoenicia Oyeniya

Phoenicia Oyeniya is a Christian, wife, and mother of two beautiful children living in Kent, United Kingdom.

She works full-time in a management position, runs a church women's group, a worship team and blogs! She has been a blogger for little over two years and wonders why on earth she waited so long!

After battling low self-esteem and bouts of depression throughout her teenage years, she now has the confidence to recognize her skills and expertise and use them to encourage and impact on the lives of others. She now sees her potential and acknowledges she has just as much to offer as the next person.

Connect with Phoenicia at <https://organisedlady.wordpress.com>

How Did I Get This Old?

By Jeannette Paladino

Never in my life did I envision becoming an octogenarian, but that page in my life turned last year. Me!? Only old people get to be that age.

But I'm not old, at least not in my head. And I'm in great physical shape. No rocking chair for me.

The temptation when hitting a milestone age is to look back and not forward. For sure, I've contemplated my life experiences. But something else happened on that fateful day: I stopped worrying about what other people think of me.

How lucky I am to have reached an age when I don't have to obsess about who I'm going to be when I grow up, or about building a career or finding a mate. Been there, done that.

In contemplating my life, though, I can clearly see that I traveled through distinct phases. This is in retrospect, of course. Each of these phases involved fears to be faced and barriers to overcome.

Maybe sharing my life experiences will help those coming behind me to understand that life has its ups and downs. You can't avoid them. It's how you respond to the lows that will help shape your life.

I Was a Late Bloomer

I was a late bloomer in many phases of my life. In my day, most women were destined to become teachers, secretaries, or nurses. I became a secretary. It was only after my dearest friend married I decided that, maybe, I should consider attending college.

Coming from a modest background, I'd have to find a way to finance my education without help from my parents. And in those days most kids didn't get student loans – I don't know if government loan programs even existed then.

I hadn't taken a single college prep course, but somehow I sneaked past the gatekeepers at Hofstra College (now University) and registered for a public speaking course in the night school. That went well, so I registered for another course the next

semester, and pretty soon I was working eight hours a day, dashing off to school in the evenings and taking three courses that let out at 10:45 pm.

Eventually, I quit my job, went to school full-time, and graduated in four years with a degree in Journalism and English. I continued working full time for the business newspaper that had employed me part-time while I was in school. I had \$90 in my bank account on the day I graduated.

On to the Big Apple

At age 28, I finally moved out my childhood home and into New York City with \$500 borrowed from the bank. I went to work in the PR department of BBDO, a large advertising agency.

I loved New York from the moment I arrived. I felt as if I had come home. What a great place! But I had no friends and the early days were lonely. New job, new apartment, new city.

Eventually, I began to make friends and enjoy all the wonderful things New York has to offer: theater, the performing arts, great museums, Central Park and more.

I also plunged into the dating scene. I envy those friends who married early and I feel for the young people today who are looking for their ideal mate. I have to say I felt that, for the most part, dating sucked.

Meeting the Love of My Life

As the years passed that included a couple of relationships, I decided that maybe marriage wasn't for me. I had made great friends and held mostly satisfying jobs. Life was good.

Then, one day, something magical happened. It was totally unexpected: I met my future husband.

Charles always insisted I tell people the story of how we met. He thought it was so much fun. A friend invited me to join a group of 11 other women. Each month one of us would host a cocktail party and invite two single, eligible, available men. At first, I thought if I knew two eligible, available men, I wouldn't need to belong to this group.

Through friends who gave me their names, I invited two men in September and two men in October. I almost didn't attend the October soiree as I had to fly to Boston that evening on business. I decided last minute to stop in for an hour before taking a taxi to the airport.

As I was standing by the door to the apartment chatting with some people, Charles and his friend Chuck walked in. We chatted ever so briefly and I learned he was a widower and that his wife had died earlier that year. Both of us wandered off to talk to other people, and an hour later as I was walking out I happened to spy him sitting on a couch.

I don't know what possessed me to go over to him, but I did and told him I was leaving. I asked him, "Are you having a good time?" He responded, "Not really" and offered to drive me to the airport. As I got out of his car, he kissed me gently on the cheek and we made a date for the following week.

Fast forward: We met on October 29th and were married the following June 5th.

Facing the Future

How blessed I was to have 33 wonderful years of marriage to Charles – traveling weekends to our log home in upstate New York, meeting the inevitable challenges of life, becoming a friend to his sons, and then grandparent to their children.

I could hardly remember my life before I met him. Then his health started to fail and I essentially became his caretaker in the last two years of his life. Oh, how difficult those years were for him and, to a lesser extent, for me.

At his memorial service, as he had requested, I played the Intermezzo from "Madame Butterfly," his favorite opera.

Now, widowed in my 70s, I looked forward to the rest of my life. What would I do? Where would I live? How would I cope?

Those are not easy questions to answer no matter your age. While Charles was ill, I started rebranding myself. I decided after years of being a senior communications executive in major companies and agencies, I would go back to my core competency – writing. I could do that from home, as I served as his caregiver.

I decided to take a blogging course and plunged into learning about social media. That became my entry into the new world of communications and the start of a new life alone.

Then, in my 80th year, I moved from my beloved New York City to Sarasota, Florida. I always thought I would live out my life in the city, but I discovered there is life after New York. Friends and family marveled that I would make this move all on my own.

But I viewed it as just one more barrier to push aside. That's what life is – a series of barriers, some that are real and some that we erect for ourselves. My advice to young people is that you will confront many barriers as you move through life, but you *can* overcome them.

Maybe this saying that I have framed on my desk will help you during your dark days:

*When you start doubting yourself,
Remember how far you have come.
Remember everything you have faced,
All the battles you have won,
And all the fears you have overcome*

There is no barrier too tall to overcome if you keep faith in yourself.





About the Author

Jeannette Paladino

Jeannette Paladino began her career as a business reporter. Currently, she is a business and social media writer, veteran blogger and project manager. She helps organizations and executives build brand awareness for their companies in blogs, annual reports, and other written materials as well as on social media.

One of her specialties is helping LinkedIn members create their LinkedIn Professional Headlines and Summaries to reflect their personal brands.

Connect with Jeannette at <http://writespeaksell.com>

3 Important Keys to Make Decisions That Really Matter

By Vatsala Shukla

Decisions – to decide or not to decide, that ISN'T the question!

Did you know that sitting on the fence or not taking a decision is as much a decision as one where you decide to do something after much deliberation or even an impulse reaction?

Looking back in time, I've made many decisions, some good, some bad, some were the only ones possible in the situation and some gave others the courage to make the same choice because they saw the value in following the example of a respected peer.

No matter what you opt for, there will always be 3 keys to a decision and you alone can take action. Nobody can tell you what to do; it is yours along with any consequences.

My story is one that many corporate professionals can relate to. We've all been there and done that. But not everyone has had the courage to listen to their Inner Voice until a major life event occurs and they are compelled to take action.

Many years ago, I resigned from a job that I loved for health reasons created by an initial misdiagnosis by the doctor, a fight with death to live and lack of subsequent recuperation time because the *High Command* sitting in Paris just didn't get it that employees were not machines but humans who couldn't sustain non-stop 80 hour weeks.

My mind was strong but my body was in dire need of rest. After much soul searching and gentle but persistent persuasion that there was a life outside of the workplace, I took up my parents offer to come home and recoup.

It was a tough decision because, among my peers, nobody gave up high-flying corporate jobs in the name of health and here I was preparing to leave for Tunis to do the unthinkable. I had no plans for the future because the need of the hour was to ensure that I was there in the future.

So there I was at an outdoor café in the trendy Old Town area of Warsaw with a good friend who was in town on business for a cup of coffee and a chat. Even though I didn't care what anyone thought, I was very sensitive about the topic which would come up and feared that my decisions (or lack thereof) would be criticized. When they were, I

was honest that I didn't have a plan. I'd create one when I got to it like Scarlett O'Hara in Gone with the Wind (sans Rhett Butler in the picture).

Imagine my surprise when my friend said he understood where I was coming from but not taking action about the future was a decision by default and that it was for me to decide what I wanted to do. As always, he was right.

There was a happy ending to that story. During my 6 month sabbatical, I learned French (an item on my Bucket List), regained my lost health and landed a job where the pay and position were on par with the previous one but with more prestige. I loved my new job that had 40 hour work weeks and humane employers. I'm still in touch with the staff even after all these years.

Yet I was shocked to find out that ALL my colleagues in similar roles across the region had resigned at the same time. One of them had been diagnosed with diabetes although there was no family history. Another had problems on the home front and wanted to save his marriage (His wife having served the ultimatum to her absentee husband.).

It seems that they had been sitting on the fence about giving up a 6 figure paycheck but when they found out that I was quitting, they decided it was time for them to also take stock and move on. High Command at Paris was subsequently transferred to a back office in New York and never heard from again (a very good decision by the owners, if I may say so).

The point is that we stepped out of our comfort zone, finally understood that we mattered most and made a decision.

No matter how you reach a decision, there are 3 keys involved.

Key #1: It's Our Call

You always have the power to make decisions involving your life. There are times when we cannot control the situation but even then, we have the power to decide which direction we want to go.

We can decide to resist, accommodate or just go with the flow.

At any point in time, we get to decide our actions, our responsibilities, and our perspectives. Of course, others will try to persuade us to follow their view but we retain

the power to decide our stance and take responsibility for our choices. In the words, it's our call.

When you decide not to do anything about a matter that is important to you, you are basically saying that you accept the status quo even if it means being unhappy because you do not want to create ripples that might actually help you to get out of a situation for the better. In this case, exercising passive acceptance too is a decision.

Key #2: Decisions Require Action

In order to bring about a required change in your life, it is not enough to decide and then sit back and do nothing. Even in the Law of Attraction and Creative Visualization, the basics of manifesting our desire require that we take inspired action.

Action gives results otherwise your decision is no more than intent.

If you think about it, you make decisions every day. It may be as simple as what you will have for breakfast or what you will wear. It could be an impulse purchase of a pair of shoes which are on sale. It could be a life altering decision like moving city or changing your job.

The common factor that you would notice in all these decisions is that you then took action or even a series of actions to transform the intent into a reality and set your life on a path that you would not have taken but for the decision plus action.

Step #3: Embody Your Decision by Taking Action

At this stage, you will realize that something has to give. If you truly want change, then be willing to do so, and commit to doing an action that signifies this decision.

Taking a decision means taking responsibility for the outcome of that decision and being accountable to you for the realization of that decision.

I recommend stepping back and assessing where you are now and where you really want to be. Think and decide on what steps are required to get you there.

Creating change will be overwhelming and even daunting but if you break it down into an action plan and decide on just 1 baby step which you can take immediately, the intent will turn into a decision provided you actively take steps in the right direction.

The only caveat I offer is that your actions should be taken after considering all available information and seeking more details while in the process of exercising the power of decision.

Avoid impulsive decisions or those made in the heat of the moment or under the influence of a strong emotion. Pay attention to the trigger for that emotion. Most of the time, the emotion is a manifestation of a deeper issue which needs to be addressed separately before taking action that can change the course of our life.

It all starts with exercising the power of decision to change that which no longer serves you or is no longer aligned with the person you are. If you follow the 3 keys, your decisions will be the right ones and for the highest good of all concerned.





About the Author

Vatsala Shukla

Vatsala Shukla is an FCA from ICAEW, a Certified LIFE Coach, Master SPIRIT LIFE Coach, Kindle Author and recognized Goodreads Author. A self-confessed student of Life, Vatsala helps spiritually-minded professionals who've hit a speed breaker in their career or businesses requiring radical & innovative intervention create breakthroughs with customized solutions that tap into their hidden talents and skills. Her Signature System guides clients to fit the pieces of their unique puzzle achieving desired results with holistic transformation.

Vatsala calls her practice Karmic Ally Coaching and her career and business coaching programs incorporate her 25+ years of international experience working for global majors as well as metaphysical techniques and exercises to facilitate holistic transformation in her clients. She manifests her dream of being a Change Catalyst through her award-winning blog, Self-Help & Coaching Kindle books and self-study online courses at Teachable.

Connect with Vatsala at <http://karmicallycoaching.com>

Special Offer

Self Improvement Strategies – The Karmic Ally Coaching Way

A special workbook to facilitate the first step to becoming your own change catalyst.

Url of gift page <http://karmicallycoaching.com/your-self-improvement-strategy-starts-here/>

Closing thoughts ...

I hope that you found these stories inspirational and thought provoking. Please keep in mind that there is nothing magical or special that happens to people who choose to take responsibility for their own life.

It's just that at some point, they choose to commit to doing the work. They choose to risk and take action. And most importantly, they choose to be true to themselves.

And if someone's story encourages you to push through barriers in your own life, I hope you will take a moment to reach out and let them know their story made a difference to you.

Come to the edge ... he said.

We can't, we're afraid ... they responded.

Come to the edge ... he said.

We can't, we will fall ... they responded.

Come to the edge ... he said.

And so they came.

And he pushed them.

And they flew.

~Guillaume Apollinaire