

*LIFE  
MANUAL  
FOR 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY  
WOMEN*



***LIFE MANUAL  
FOR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
WOMEN***

Created by  
Svetla Bankova

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I'll love you forever.



## ***INTRODUCTION***

This book is created and dedicated to all the women seekers in the world. It is intended to help us, our daughters, sisters, girlfriends, wives, and others who are looking for guidance and support.

As one Cree storyteller said: Stories are Beings. You invite them to live with you. They will teach you what they know in return for being a good host. When they are ready to move on they'll let you know. Then you pass them to someone else.

I created this book because I truly believe that it will sustain you in times of challenge, frustration, and failure and it will confront you in times of confusion, pain, and loss, as it did with me. It may truly become a lifelong companion, offering continual insights and wisdom in many areas of your life because it's created from the wisdom of so many remarkable women, but at the same time women like me and you.

There were no special requirements to become a part of this book. The only thing I requested from the authors was that they write through their own experience, about something they went through; about a lesson they learned and want to pass to other women. I know the book found each one of them, and they found a way to express their wisdom to the world.

All of them are professionals in their field, yet they are also mothers, wives, girlfriends, and, in general, just women.

*"Life Manual for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Women"* contains the wisdom, experience, life stories and hearts of 21 great women. Each and every chapter in this book contains possible meanings for your life, a lesson readily available to you to take with you and apply in your life immediately. Their stories may help you to recognize a new truth, provide a new perspective, or a new way to perceive the Universe.

They are not just stories. They are lived out by the authors, they are events that really happened. They will speak directly to your

subconscious mind, they will remind us of what is finally and truly important.

This book will give you decisions, solutions, and “what to do” in many aspects in your life and I truly encourage you to read even between the lines because this book contains almost 50 years of wisdom crossing boundaries and ages and remaining untouchable for the years, space, and generations.

This is not a book that you read in one day. I recommend you read these stories like sipping from a fine glass of wine, in little sips that will give you the time to reflect upon each story's meaning and implication for your life.

You'll find authors from different countries, women just starting their career, and women at the sunset of their lives. They all wanted to share. Their wisdom will cross years, seasons, boundaries, oceans, and times to serve you in your journey, called LIFE!

And then, pass it on to share the wealth.

The book was created with you in mind and it's - it's priceless! I hope that all their messages will reach your heart, as they did mine.

Enjoy!

Svetla Bankova

## **A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE...one old love she can imagine going back...and one who reminds her how far she has come.....**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE....enough money within her control to move out and rent a place of her own even she never wants to or needs to...**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE..... something perfect to wear if the employer or date of her dreams wants to see her in an hour....**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE...a protection handy, but not too handy....**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE....a youth she's content to leave behind...**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE...a past juicy enough that she is looking forward to retelling it in her old age..**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE...a set of screwdrivers, a cordless drill, and a black lace bra...**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE..... one friend who always makes her laugh....and one who let's her cry...**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE... a good piece of furniture not previously owned by anyone else in her family...**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE.... Eight matching plates, wine glasses with stems, and a recipe for a meal that will make her guests feel honored.....**

**A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE.....a feeling of control over her destiny.....**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ...how to fall in love without loosing herself...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ...how to use a stick shift ..and a plunger**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW...how to set boundaries, go camping and grow something...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW...her mind and when to change it ...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW....how to dance crazy all alone, to be a princess and get over it, believe in the perfect man and get over it...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW....how to read, flirt, shock, listen, sing and thank God...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW...how to raise a child ...or not; see a wrinkle and be reminded of her youth, not her age...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW...how to quit a job, break up with a lover, and confront a friend without ruining the friendship...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW... when to try harder...and when to walk away..**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW... that she can't change the length of her calves, the width of her hips, or the nature of her parents ....**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW....that her childhood may not have been perfect... but it's over**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW...what she would and wouldn't do for love or more...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW... how to live alone ...even if she doesn't like it..**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW...whom she can trust, whom she can't and why she shouldn't take it personally...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW.... Where to go...be it her best friend's kitchen table...or a charming inn in the woods....when her soul needs smoothing...**

**EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW...what she can and she can't accomplish in a day ...a month...and a year....**

**Unknown Author**

***AN INTERVIEW WITH THE  
DREAMS***



## ***NARCIS NOSHAD***

How many 22 year olds can say that they have been steadily employed since the age of 12? This is indeed a reality for marketing executive/entrepreneur Narcis Noshad. Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia to a family of entrepreneurs from Iran, Narcis was always taught the value of hard work. While achieving honor student status in school, Narcis was always working, whether it was in her family's restaurant, clothing retail, telemarketing, sales or customer service. In 2001, Narcis attended Georgia State University where she focused her studies on business administration and marketing. She graduated in 2005 with her Bachelor's in Business Administration. Throughout college, Narcis was on the board for the American Marketing Association where she was Director of Career Development. She also represented Sony Pictures Inc, promoting Columbia Pictures and Screengems Films. Concurrently, Narcis used her expertise to plan and participate in promotions for Verizon Wireless, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Dent Wizard and Skirt Magazine. In June of 2003, Narcis co-founded 6 Degree Relations, an entertainment-focused public relations and marketing firm, with longtime friend Dina Marto. Since then the company has represented such notables as V-103 radio personality Ryan Cameron, renowned artist Anthony Liggins and FrenchKISS Atlanta boutique. Additionally, 6 Degree Relations has also

planned and promoted events such as the Alicia Keys album listening party, the Mario album listening party, Ryan Cameron's Cigars on the Rocks and the EEI CEO Roundtable Discussion and Awards Ceremony. Finally, Narcis has planned and executed social and business events for many other corporate entities.

Being an avid supporter of arts and entertainment, Narcis is an active member of Americans for the Arts and the American Marketing Association. She enjoys reading, listening to music, watching movies and loves theater; she visits NYC for a week at least once a year to attend as many Broadway shows as she can. Narcis plans to eventually leverage herself to a position where she can use her experience and expertise to help others achieve their dreams within the entertainment industry; she also plans to travel throughout the world helping those less fortunate.





## ***AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DREAMS***

### **1. How do you see yourself regarding your career in 10- 15 years from now?**

In 10-15 years, I plan to be an accepted expert in my field of entertainment marketing. At that point in my career I hope to have played an integral part in the launch of many successful and innovative new products, acts, ideas, movies and concepts. I hope to have developed my company to a point where we are known as the “go-to” people for marketing a product and making it golden. I also want to appoint and groom associates to run the business so that I can move on to other ventures.

### **2. How do you see yourself regarding your personal life 10- 15 years from now?**

In 10-15 years, I hope to be happily married to a handsome, ambitious, family-oriented prince charming. God willing, I plan to have three kids and perhaps adopt as well. My goal to be able to devote a majority of my time to my family, while continuing to grow as a woman. I would like to continue my formal education in something I enjoy, not necessarily for career enhancement. At that point I want to be completing the groundwork for charity work all around the world that will become my life’s work as I grow older.

### **3. What one change would make the biggest positive difference in your career life now?**

Being born to a family from a country with a culture disparate from the United States has been challenging. Growing up in the United States, and feeling 100% American, my cultural views and values have not always been in sync with my parents, who are the most important people in my life. These differences manifest themselves in how my parents view my

career and personal life. While maintaining my undying respect for them, being able to gain their acceptance and support in everything I do would help me become more confident in my decisions and actions.

**4. What is your biggest challenge in your career/ life right now?**

My biggest challenge currently is how I should continue to grow and develop in my career. My business partner and I started our company in the middle of college, which was kind of backwards. We have been fortunate to find success early and work with some great people within the industry who put their trust in us and our work. However, being a recent college graduate, I have the dilemma of continuing to devote my energy and time to grow the company, or put it on the back burner and find a full time marketing position somewhere where I can expand my skill set. Working for yourself does not provide a steady paycheck, but you have control over your work time and pay. Essentially, if you don't work, you don't get paid.

**5. If you know you could not fail what is the one thing that you would do with your career or personal life?**

Ok, I am going to mention two things, one realistic and more relevant to my life right now, and one far-fetched dream that will not be so far-fetched one day. If I knew I would not fail, I would devote 100% of my time into growing 6 Degree Relations, LLC. into the most successful PR/Marketing company in the South. After I had achieved that point of success, I would follow my dream of becoming a Hollywood actress/producer/director. I have always had a passion for movies and the movie making process.

**6. If you know you can get the answer of any question right now, what would be this question?**

What will my life really be like in 10-15 years? I have an idea of what I want it to be and I understand the importance of visualizing things in order to enhance making them happen. However when I think about it, 15 years is an incredibly long time! Fifteen years ago, I was seven years old and my life now is so totally different from when I was seven years old. It would be interesting to be able to look into a crystal ball and really see the future.

**7. What is your biggest fear regarding your career/ life? What are you mostly anxious about regarding your life/ career?**

My biggest fear is not being able to achieve my dreams and then regretting things I have done or not done in my life. My family is the driving force in my ambition to be successful. My father left Iran just prior to the Revolution to create a better life full of opportunity for his future family. He might not have been able to achieve exactly what he wanted to, but I believe he did a great job of raising kids who will chase their dreams and make every effort to see them happen. I just pray every day for wisdom and strength to do things that are right and that I will be able to give back to my family and those who have helped me along the way.

**8. If you need an advice about career of life in general who would you ask?**

I am lucky to have been blessed with so many wonderful people in my life. My family has stayed together through the toughest of times which has given me strong values and the strength to move forward when things aren't so good. Although we may not see eye to eye on every issue, it seems that the older and more mature I get, the more my parents make sense and sound right. My best friend in the whole world, Dina Marto, is

one of the smartest people I know, and she is also one person who I can say knows everything about me. We have known each other since adolescence and have carried our friendship through college, business and beyond. She is someone I can always trust to tell me the honest truth about an issue and usually can see things that I may not always catch at first glance of an issue. These people in my life make it all worthwhile to be here every day.

**9. If you are missing something in your career or life what is this?**

I am missing my parents' emotional support and approval in my career and personal life. We get along great and I love them dearly, but I think that they are not always happy with some of my decisions as to how I choose to live my life. This is a change in landscape that will not happen overnight, and will take some time and hard work. However, I believe the benefits far outweigh the required efforts because there is nothing like the feeling of solidarity and completeness of having the support of your family in all of your endeavors.

**10. What do you hate (dislike) about yourself now, but you can laugh about anyway?**

I find myself shy in some odd situations and I just think it's hilarious! I am usually not a shy person to those that know me; but there are surprisingly some professional and personal situations where I have found myself shy and less than effectively communicative.

**11. What contribution do you want to make to the world and leave behind you?**

When I leave this earth, I want to be remembered as a good person with a good heart who always had good things to say. I want to have raised a stellar family and have been successful in my career. I want to

have traveled the world and helped those less fortunate. I want to have been able to help people achieve their dreams and aspirations. I want to have remembered those that encouraged and helped me along the way. Finally, I want to have had fun doing it all.



## **NANCY S. MURÉ**

**Nancy S. Muré** was born in Brooklyn, New York and grew up one of three children. Brooklyn is where she still calls home. Ms. Muré is the author of the bestselling story *The Caterpillar that Wouldn't Change*, an inspiring story about never giving up. She is also the author of *Massimo's Meatballs*, *The Pizza Man and the Parrots*, *Papa in the Sky* and *The Really Jealous Jimmy Crab*. She consistently incorporates the recurring themes of perseverance, determination, and acceptance in her stories which inspire personal growth. Nancy is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Before writing motivating stories for children and their parents Nancy earned a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Psychology from Hunter College in NYC. When she isn't writing, Nancy enjoys cooking, music, reading biographies, recreational running, skiing, weight training, time with her children. She has also been featured on the Food Network. <http://www.nutritionistnancy.com/>

## ***WHAT DO YOU WANNA BE?***

Whenever I see a butterfly I stop and I marvel at its lighthearted, flitty nature. Instantly I feel an immeasurable sense of joy, mystery and beauty. I often think about what it would be like to hop on its silken wings and sail up high, occasionally dipping down to breathe in the divine scent of every poppy flower along the way.

The magic of the butterfly is its story of growth, evolution and finally, its freedom. The butterfly begins as a caterpillar trapped in a cocoon, growing slowly and eventually breaking free from its home to realize its full potential as a butterfly whereby it is free to live life to its fullest.

Like the caterpillar, we too can grow and blossom into our full potential to freely express ourselves and our talents before the entire world. The only difference between us and the caterpillar is that we have the power to choose, and we can choose in any and every moment to remain a caterpillar or continue to grow and reach our full potential as does the butterfly. Only when we choose to become a butterfly, can we enjoy life to its fullest. Only then can we be free to live life with all of our senses, to taste all the fruits, experience all the colors, and feel the wonders, joys and intricacies that life has to offer.

### **The Power of Choice**

How we use our power of choice is determined by our motivation and inspiration. It is determined by our passion and desire, by our *Wanna*.

Only with *Wanna* can we achieve anything in life. *Wanna* is the starting point. It is our choice that can then turn into a commitment. If we keep our *Wanna* alive we can keep alive our commitment.

The caterpillar's life is mapped out and therefore it has no other choice but to become a glorious butterfly. What would it be like if we

humans had our life mapped out too with no choice but to nourish ourselves for the sake of liberation?

I'd imagine myself in culinary heaven enjoying every morsel of every meal, gloriously nourishing myself for the sole purpose of growing and having the luxury of a long restful slumber. During that restful slumber, I'd morph into this gorgeous, colorful, energetic and boundless creature! I'd burst my front door open, step out from the porch, confront the world, inhale deeply; smile the widest smile I can muster, then off I'd go sailing off freely and gracefully without a backward glance. I would inspire the world by just being me.

When we have *Wanna*, we are endowed with the feeling that we can do anything: We are empowered because we can conquer worry, doubt and fear. With *Wanna*, we can choose to unburden ourselves from our past experiences by letting go of everything that holds us back. We can forgive and set ourselves free from the past. With *Wanna*, we believe that we are capable of doing anything if we really choose to and if we have an understanding of "Why" we want that something. With sufficient desire, *Wanna*, we exhibit the willpower, discipline and determination to propel ourselves forward and initiate a change for the better.

The irony is that we can have the wondrous world of the butterfly. We can choose to view our growing pains as something to be welcomed. Along with the daydream of eating and living like a caterpillar is the inevitability that we may reach a point in our life's journey where we will become immobilized.

## **Why do we need *Wanna*?**

While the caterpillar is filled with the pain of physical growth, we are faced with the pains of emotional growth. Our growing pains may mean we experience emotions such as insecurity, disempowering thoughts, fear, self-doubt, and the inability to let go of the past or forgive.



Our growth becomes easier when we understand these feeling and that they are part of the process of growing.

**Fear:** When we get stuck in our comfort zone, fear takes over and we become trapped, afraid of change and growing. And so, our fear of failure prevents us from enjoying thrilling adventures and new experiences. When we open our eyes to possibility and have a true desire to grow and change we can overcome fear, call upon our inner strength, evolve and realize our full potential.

After the catastrophic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> many people developed a fear of flying and I was one of them. I chose to remain grounded because of the possibility there may be another attack. I was scared that flying was no longer safe and feared that if a similar incident occurred, my children would be without a mother. By choosing to stay grounded, I allowed fear and doubt to stop me from experiencing future possibilities, opportunities and adventures.

**Letting it go:** There can be no new beginnings without endings. Often we find ourselves living in the past, holding onto something that no longer exists or holding onto a pain, wound or resentment. Only when we release ourselves of the past, can we initiate change in our life. When your choice is to forge ahead, it is necessary to let go – of past hurts, a bad relationship or even a death. Sometimes we need to become aware that we must let go of trying to control every aspect of our lives. Sometimes we need to let go of guilt, grief, dependency, blame, shame, anger and denial.

Letting go entails understanding at an emotional level that the incident is over, it's in the past and that we can choose to release the suffering and remove ourselves from a feeling of being a victim.

I remember feeling so disappointed, hurt and angered by a family member that I went "stone cold." I was unable to discuss or confront the issue for almost two years. The hurt, pain and anger manifested itself within me and I directed it as silence toward others. I was no longer able to function happily within my family. It was as if the blanket of my pain had covered everyone and I couldn't let it go. This situation created so much

discomfort and tension in my personal life that it felt like a noose was slowly tightening around my neck. I could only release myself of this baggage by choosing to let it go - to release the pain, suffering and anger.

Once I was able to evaluate my situation and gain new understanding about what had caused my disappointment, hurt and anger, then I no longer took the issue personally, and began to understand why I had shut down emotionally. Now I was ready to forgive and rebuild my relationships.

**Forgiving:** We view the world through our own windows and sometimes the dirt on those windows creates a film that distorts our view of the world. When we view the world through our own dirty windows, the gunk of our life experiences and our choices, we are looking out through a filtered view of the world. When our windows are darkened by our own smears and blotches we are unable to see our true potential. Ultimately, we have the power to clean our windows by forgiving ourselves and others. By having *Wanna* we can choose to let go of our past experiences, start clean and let the sunshine in.

In his book, *Finding God, Spiritual Strategies to Help you Find Happiness, Fulfillment and Inner Peace*, Patrick Wanis, Author, Human Behavior Expert and Life Coach, explains forgiving as the means to express understanding for what happened. "Forgiveness involves letting go of the suffering and pain, the hurt and fear. It involves releasing the other person from our hold on them and their hold on us."

Forgiving can be viewed as something we do for ourselves. It is for our own spiritual growth and healing. When we are disappointed, hurt or shamed by the actions of another person or even our own actions, we hold on to that energy and it prevents us from experiencing love and expressing our true selves. The longer we hold on to painful thoughts and negative emotions the more they gnaw at our spirit. We do this by taking things personally.

I have a friend who recently experienced an extramarital affair. When she discovered that her husband was in love with another woman

she confronted him with it and he in turn blamed *her* for the failure their marriage. Like a sponge absorbs water, she took on his blame for the ending of their relationship and thought about what she could have done to prevent it. Feelings of anger, hate, sorrow, pity and rage swelled within her. She felt like a failure. Ultimately, the couple filed for divorce.

The burdensome feelings of failure and despair about the ending of her marriage and the sudden disintegration of her family were an albatross for my friend. She realized she needed a starting point, a place to begin anew and that it wouldn't be another town or address - that it would have to be inside of her. She choose to begin her process of forgiving.

She released herself of blame by accepting that people often do things to satisfy their own needs and that it is because they cannot cope with their own problems that they seek escape;

She realized that the man she wants is a man that would never leave her during;

She realized that she is worthy of love and a happy relationship and that if she doesn't let go of her damaged relationship she would never be emotionally free to experience another, more satisfying relationship;

She thought long and hard about what her contribution to the ending of the marriage was, considered what she needed to do to address her own issues, and forgave herself.

Despite the fact that she was heartbroken from the shock of the affair, the rejection and the breakup of her marriage, she chose to forgive her husband for feeling the need to seek the companionship of another woman to alleviate his marital issues and she came to the realization that that was all he was capable of. When she met the other woman she came to a point of compassion and understanding by realizing that she had this affair because neediness, selfishness, desperation and insecurity and desperation for love and affection. Then like a balloon sailing up toward the clouds, she let it go. By understanding, forgiving and letting go of her

anguish, she unleashed herself of his emotional hold on her and became free to embark on the journey of healing.

**Believing in yourself:** When I think about my teen years I remember the pressure to be popular, pretty, thin and worthy of friends in school. Many teens succumb to peer-pressure and go to the extremes of hurting themselves by depriving themselves of healthy food in order to be thin or to gain a sense of control over their world. But the opposite occurs and their body becomes weak and they feel more emotionally helpless than before.

How do we undo the damage we did when we realize that where we end up isn't where we want to be?

We begin by believing that we have the power within us to change it. In the classic film, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy struggles to get back home to Kansas. She makes it home only after she awakens to realize she has the power to get back to Kansas by simply clicking her heels three times. Believing that we have the power within to conquer obstacles will propel us forward so that we can get what we want out of life.

## **How can *Wanna* Help us?**

As human beings we tend to take things and people for granted and unfortunately we often find out that we only appreciate something once we've lost it. This epiphany can be humbling and is often the time to reflect on what it is we have what we had or who we lost. The fact that we have a choice gives us the power to appreciate and express gratitude. Having *Wanna* awakens us to appreciate everything and that is the catalyst to effectively initiate a change. When we express feelings of thankfulness, appreciation and acknowledge and praise another's involvement in our life we make them feel valued and they in turn will value and appreciate us.

## ***Why do you Wanna?***

Having the desire, the “want to” or the passion for something motivates change, and gets us started on our path to liberation and joy. Knowing “why” we want it, will keep us there. Human Behavior Expert and Author Patrick Wanis states:

“Why we want something is more important than what we actually want. Until we truly understand why we want something we cannot even be sure or convinced that is what we truly want. Our power comes when we know why we want to achieve or have something. Then we can focus on what it will give us. When we are clear about why we want it and what having it will give us, then we can conquer all huge obstacles and stick it out when the going gets tough. Being completely honest with yourself about why you want something will determine whether you will be happy and satisfied when you finally get it and will help you decide now if you want it at all.”

## ***How do we apply Wanna?***

It is wise to be aware of our motivations for we can easily misdirect our *Wanna*. Countries have been destroyed and wars started by having *Wanna* to do the wrong thing. It is necessary to choose to channel our *Wanna* into a positive motivation and use *Wanna* as the solution for peace and happiness. Since our choices determine who we are, who we become, where we go and what we do and accomplish, it is our responsibility to ourselves and the greater good of the universe to direct *Wanna* wisely and positively.

Every day we are challenged about how we are going to apply our *Wanna*, our motivation. In every moment, we have the power to choose how we will respond and what choices we will make.

Yvonne Pierre is a young African-American woman who did not allow tragedies, hardships and struggles to hold her back from pushing for what she believed in:

At an early age Ms. Yvonne Pierre was faced with challenges, but she refused to use the tragedies, hardships and struggles as excuses to hold her back. She chose to use her past as fuel to make a difference. The journey she was faced as a small child and adolescent almost made her throw away her dreams. Her father was murdered when she was only 2 years old. Molested from the age of 5 until she was 10, she was later date raped twice. Having to cope with so much at a young age, made her start to give up hope in herself and life. By the time she reached high school she was already an alcoholic, and felt she had to drink to be sober. Education was becoming unimportant, as she was banned from public school. After witnessing the murder of a close friend and losing many others around her to drugs and violence, she decided she wanted more out of life.

She made the choice to finish high school and tried to go to college, but failed the entrance exam the first time. Barely knowing how to read and spell, the embarrassment alone made her push harder than ever before. Studying night and day to pass the basic entry exam, she later went back and passed it. Overcoming a first year that was a bit of a struggle, she became an honor roll student. She then graduated 5 years later with not one, but two degrees: one in Accounting and the other in Business Management.

Today, at the young age of 33, she is drug free and possesses a very positive attitude. She is a proud mother of two boys. Her youngest was born with Down Syndrome. Both boys were the inspiration behind her company's name, Zyonair's Unlimited, LLC which is dedicated towards launching an online magazine whose sole purpose is to promote positive Down syndrome awareness through celebrating the ABILITIES of individuals with special needs, offering resources and more importantly giving HOPE.

Yvonne Pierre took many desperate situations and challenges and flipped them. She demonstrates that having *Wanna* arises from a low-point in our lives - that we have the control and we are the only people who can exercise that control. Low points, or being at the end of our ropes, can be viewed upon as sad or debilitating or can be a time of rediscovery, when we pull strength from places deep within us that we've never tapped into before. It is our choice. Calling on her inner strength propelled Vaught to morph into a butterfly.

*Wanna* can be the difference between the choice of happiness and sorrow. *Wanna* penetrates the "little voice in our heads" to motivate us when we need that proverbial "push" to make things happen if we really *want* them to.

Allowing ourselves to grow and change is a wonderful display of character. Remember, the caterpillar has no choice but to grow and become a butterfly. It grows from a caterpillar and then becomes a butterfly without conscious thought, worry, doubt, fear, happiness or sorrow. We as caterpillars go through the emotional metamorphosis by reconditioning our conscious thought in order to grow spiritually and improve our lives, and grow and change and become butterflies with integrity.

I often remind myself that the butterfly gives so much to this world. Once we discover the "want" to live to our full potential and make the choice to grow and change, we too can be butterflies, sharing our talents, beauty, joy and gorgeous wings with the world.

*Nancy S. Muré*

### **What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

The thing I love most about approaching mid-life is having a better sense of who I am. When I look back I realize that who I am today is a direct result of my life experiences; the people I've loved and lost and the two precious loves I've gained through my beautiful children. I've grown so

much through the experience of motherhood and when I look at who I am today, I'm happy to have had the experience of reliving my youth through raising children and being re-taught life's little lessons by teaching them. I have been humbled by loss and blessed with good health, a good attitude and good friends. As cliché as it sounds, experience really is the best teacher. Generally no matter how dark the day may seem, when we love and approve of ourselves there is light.

**What do you hate the most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

I make it a practice not to hate anything or anyone. What I dislike about midlife though are the platinum hairs that are beginning to show and the little "laugh" wrinkles appearing around my eyes that weren't there a decade ago, which are constant reminder of approaching midlife.

Yet physically, due to a fit and healthy lifestyle, I still feel like a kid. I find that most people use their age as an excuse not to do things, which makes me laugh because approaching midlife is not a crisis, it's a rite of passage, based on life's lessons which should encourage us to be bolder and braver than we were in our youth without any excuses.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

If I could go back and chat with my younger self, there would be many reminders for I have learned so much. I would remind my younger self that we are small in comparison to this universe and not the center of it. I remind her to be more patient. Tell her to be more sensitive and less critical. I would laugh with her and cry with her. I would trust her. I would tell her to give more and take less.

The most important thing I would share with my younger self is the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness is something we do for ourselves. The



act of forgiving dares us to imagine a better future, one that is based on the possibility that hurt will not have the last word. Forgiveness challenges us to forgo destructive thoughts and believe in the possibility of a better tomorrow. Forgiving teaches us to let it go; it humbles us, then sets us free from pain so that there is healing and spiritual growth.



## **LYCA SHAN**

**Lyca Shan** is the published author of "*Firewalker*" and has always known that she would write a book; even as a child she said that somehow she knew she was meant to share a vision through writing one day. She saw the process of writing *Firewalker* in part as therapy "to try to make sense out of the chaos" that was her life. She began work on *Firewalker* in December of 1999, and spent nearly 3 years writing it in her spare time. Granddaughter of Dr. Thomas Harris, author of the best seller, *I'm Okay, You're Okay*, Lyca Shan's first love has always been writing.

In 1989, after leaving what she refers to as the cult she grew up in, the only environment she had ever known, Lyca moved to Washington, where she put herself through school by working odd jobs such as bartending, modeling, acting, and housekeeping. She graduated with an Associate in Computer Science in 1994 and has worked as an infrastructure analyst and Systems Engineer for major fortune 500 companies ever since.

**About her Book:** *Firewalker* is Lyca's courageous story of her first-hand experience with cult indoctrination. This book illustrates - in captivating detail - the horrors of growing up in a cruel environment of mind control and physical isolation. It is Lyca's compelling account of falling victim to the cult mentality, and finding the inner strength to break free as

well as the will to share the vision that "Our past does not dictate our future. Firewalker is also available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com

Currently Lyca Shan is in the process of developing a 3-week program called "Firewalk Through Your Fears" which centers around learning to listen to your own inner voice through the process of journal writing. This program also delves into using the power of language to redefine "problems" in a way that will let you see new solutions, altering your interpretation and experiences of events in a way that allows you to create more empowered belief systems for yourself.

Visit her website [www.breakingthelimits.com](http://www.breakingthelimits.com) or contact her at [lycashan@gmail.com](mailto:lycashan@gmail.com).



## ***THE FIRE WALK***

Think all things possible, and they become so. Only in the barren earth of disbelief, does our life lay fallow...”

*Excerpt from the author's journals.*

Red sparks circled their way up towards the night sky, dancing an odd tempo to the music. Then the clapping began, at first slowly, in rhythm, then faster and faster. The air, fraught with emotion, felt oddly alive.

Wheelbarrows of glowing coals were pushed from the fire pits. Crewmembers in black t-shirts carefully moved through the crowd, shoveling the hot embers onto the ground in long rows. The heat pressed upwards and the smell of wood smoke filled the air.

I found myself quickly at the front of the line. Nothing but an overwhelming sense of strength flooded through my mind. The red coals spread out in front of me, vibrant in the darkness; I could feel their heat on my face.

I stood, feet firmly planted on the ground, and brought my fist down to meet my open palm. I had practiced this move, imagining walls falling before me, oceans parting, and all the power of existence drawing into me in that one moment. A lightness of being filled me, as if I could float over the very earth itself.

“Coolmoss...” I chanted the mantra aloud as I stepped forward with long, purposeful strides, eyes skyward. My feet hit the coals and I felt as if I were walking on a pathway of crushed velvet. It pressed softly up under my feet, barely warm to the touch. By the time I reached the end it had happened all too quickly.

At that moment I became all that existed. Enveloped by the light of the fire-walk, the night sky bore silent witness to the stirring of my spirit.

“Firewalker” the word lingered in my mind, mine and not mine. Every door lay unhinged and every path lay open. All that had ever held me back now seemed a dim shadow in a distant land.

But perhaps I should let you know how I ended up here, walking barefoot across a path of red-hot burning coals.

Let me take you back now, a few weeks in time...

An orchestra of crickets and cicadas loudly herald summer in the Deep South. Warmth wrapped around me comfortably as I stretched, enjoying the sun on the large deck overlooking a vine-covered rail. Who could have guessed I would be in the lush woods of Georgia? Me, a Damn Yankee at that.

The telephone interrupted my reverie, prompting me to wind my way into the kitchen through piles of boxes.

“Hello?”

“Lyca, I finally caught you, you’re a hard woman to catch up with.”

“Connie, it’s so good to hear your voice.” I could practically see her bright smile through the phone line.

“How’s Georgia? Are you settled into your new place yet? I can’t believe you’re bouncing around the country again.”

That’s me, the worldly traveler. And you know what they say, if you want to play with the big boys...

“So how much did they entice you with to relocate this time?”

“Perks, perks, perks.”

“I love how blasé you make it sound. I wish I was burdened with such offers. Of course then I’d have to be a computer geek like you.”

“Pen-pocket holder and all.”

“Just not my style, I’m too high fashion for that.”

“If it’s any consolation I’m living out of boxes at the moment.”

“Don’t you miss working with little ole me?”

“Always, I asked them to ship you out as part of the deal, but they wouldn’t go for it.”

“Ha, ha. Do you have time to unpack? When do you actually start the new job?”

“I gave myself a two-week break for the move, and I still want to take that seminar I signed up for.”

“Ooooh, Tony Robbins, the late night infomercial king. Thought you were too cynical for that stuff.”

“Hey now, I know he looks kind a cheesy, but a friend of mine swears by him. Might be fun, you never know.”

“Where would you like these?” one of the movers interrupted, plopping a stack of papers down on the kitchen table.

“You can leave it right there, thanks.”

“Sounds like you’re very busy.” Connie said.

“Sorry, they’re still unloading. I’ll be lucky to find anything in time for the flight.”

“I’ll let you go then, love you, and you better stay in touch.”

“I always have the electronic leash. You know the number.”

“Even with unpacking left to do, the slow pace of the southern summer relaxed me.

I had booked an early morning flight, looking forward to the seminar. Now, a feeling of dread hit me while boarding the plane. I slumped down into the cramped coach seat, pressing my forehead against the window. I felt ill; my stomach churned and my head hurt. Most of all, I felt immensely grouchy.

“Are you OK, Miss?” The flight attendant asked.

“Yes, thank you.” I forced out a smile. No is really what I wanted to say. I don’t feel well at all. And look at this, I’m breaking out. What is wrong with me?

People were still filing in, slowly crowding into the middle aisle as they shuffled to the back of the plane.

Everywhere I looked made me feel worse. In every person I found a flaw. An ongoing dialog of rude commentaries ran through my mind. The

seat felt uncomfortable and my body ached. I fidgeted with the seatbelt restlessly.

Why do I suddenly feel so terrible, after looking forward to this for weeks? What am I afraid of? I closed my eyes and let my mind ramble on.

*If this man Tony Robbins is right, hell, if I am right, then everything I have ever been told is truly wrong.* The very things I fought against so desperately, all that I had striven to prove wrong to myself were now on the brink of extinction. Somehow the thought of such massive acknowledgement disturbed me. In my life, allies of this nature have been in short supply.

As awful as all those past beliefs were, they still held some strange comfort for me. Now these feelings struggled within me, bringing massive pain. My mind kept churning. *What if he is a fake? The last thing I'm going to waste my time on is some soapbox junkie who professes to know everything. I'd never fall for that. This guy better be for real.* If anything, I had become a hard sell these days. *If I feel this bad, I must be on the right track...*

The truth of this made me smile. Every time I came to the edge of a great leap, something that could propel me ahead like nothing else, I seized up inside. That "gremlin," as I called it, ego to others, lambasted my senses with doubt and fear. An internal scream rang through me. This is how I knew when something interesting beckoned.

I wished my little gremlin could just go along for the ride, finally confident that I know what I am doing.

The airport and hotel were rather commonplace and I hastened to sign in at the ticket counter. The V.I.P seat I had purchased required a long wait in the "V.I.P. lounge" before the auditorium was ready. Finally we were let in. A large stage sat at the center of the room, a semi-circle of chairs facing it. Our section sat close to the stage; the general admission further back. A cameraman panned the crowd, projecting images on three big screens.



I pushed forward to one of the front rows. Tony's "Firewalker Brigade" greeted us as we entered, decked out in "firewalker" T-shirts and red bandanas. The music pumped in. I looked around with a cynical, appraising eye. Humph. These crewmembers seemed altogether too chipper for my state of mind. I greeted their enthusiasm with a stony demeanor.

I felt tiny in the huge auditorium. A collection of crewmembers came running out onto center stage and began to dance to the music. Some of the crowd joined in, but I stayed seated. Every kind of person imaginable seemed present. A couple next to me sat engrossed by the screens above stage. I glanced up, following their gaze and, to my horror, looked into my own eyes. Framed by a skeptical face, they stared back at me, at least 15 feet high.

"Oh my God, I look so pissed off," I said aloud.

The face scowled down at me, clouded with a painful frown. Brows furrowed, suspicion generated from my eyes in visible streams. I looked as if I could have drawn up inside of myself and disappeared altogether.

At the appropriate moment Tony Robbins emerged on stage. He looked every bit as impressively tall in person, the effect heightened by the fact that he stood above us on stage. At about what I guessed to be six foot six inches, and very broad shouldered, he appeared a giant of a man. He exuded energy. Clean cut and well dressed, he made quite an impact on the crowd, acknowledging their welcome with a bright and genuine smile.

I relaxed a little. As the evening progressed and he pressed the crowd for involvement, my guarded nature began to take leave. About halfway through the first evening he had the whole audience, two thousand people in all, eating out of his hand.

Tony bounded about the stage with dramatic abandon, no trace of self-consciousness. To illustrate points, he thumped his fist to his chest. Every time he did this I saw fire in his eyes. The energy he emitted

spread a spark through the auditorium. I imagined it as waves of color, pouring outward, flowing from the stage into the audience.

**Everyone jumped and yelled, singing to the music. Swept away with the mood, I soon joined in. He claimed no special power, no greater wisdom, just that people had more potential to unleash than imaginable.**

Halfway through the night he led us outside to view the bonfires that produced the coals for the Fire walk. The fires projected up on the stage screens, burning down hour by hour.

“No one here has to walk on fire, but I believe that by the end of the evening all of you will want to. And if you want to, you will.”

I had heard about fire walking and always wondered if it could actually be done. Even after reading scientifically verified accounts, my mind held doubts. Until now, the thought of defying physics, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are what you think, had seemed nothing more than a flight of imagination.

We all walked through the exits to a large open area in the back of the building. Dusk had fallen, stars appeared in the inky sky, and smoke rose up through the air from the huge piles of burning wood. Heat poured off into the crowd. The comforting smell of wood smoke hit me as I drew closer. Tony stood on a small outdoor stage surrounded by speakers, addressing the crowd.

“Now,” he urged in a slow, steady tempo, “draw upon your best memories of fire from childhood. Try to think of the great warmth and good feelings generated.”

This exercise came easily to me. Many a night I had escaped to the warm embrace of the late night bonfires in the woods of Maine, imagining another life. I could almost taste the baked potatoes I used to roast in the coals. Music rose with the flames. I looked up to see the crowd

moving back inside to the amphitheater. Reluctantly I pulled myself away and followed.

When we returned to our seats Tony began a guided meditation.

The lights dimmed and his voice pressed on, gentle yet strong, pacing with the soft music filling the room. Everyone took a place, lying down where they could, eyes closed.

“Now imagine you are floating down a river, the sky is blue, the air warm, everything is calm and peaceful. This is your tranquil place, nothing bothers you here...”

I relaxed, and my thoughts took me quite easily to that place. Very real in the darkness of the auditorium, the visualization beguiled into existence something from nothing.

I felt myself drifting, the soft creak of a small rowboat beneath me, moving gently with the current. I lay looking up at the sky from its floor. I smelled the stain of the old wood and felt the rough oars resting in the bottom of the boat next to me. My hand trailed over the edge, dipping into the cool water, lazily drawing little patterns of energy in curls behind the boat: soft white clouds drifted through the blue sky.

Tony’s voice continued, drawing my attention to the shore. I marveled at the gentle strength and power of suggestion, and at myself. I owned the power to create this internal world at will. Today he guided it, but it was my own creation. “Now you are on the seashore, your boat has docked, you are walking...”

The sun-warmed sand felt soft beneath my feet. The sound of waves splashed gently on the shore and I caught the scent of wild flowers. Small purple pea blossoms bobbed in the breeze, their delicate tendrils reaching up to grasp at the air. I heard seagulls and sandpipers, and felt the breeze on my cheeks as I looked out over the vast river. A sense of peace engulfed me.

Every so often, I took a peek at the stage, opening my eyes in the darkness, seeing his outline above, the strength of his features. He sat motionless on the tall chair in the center of the stage, speaking into a

headset mike, his face, still but intense, lit up with a purpose. Every so often he closed his eyes, or paused to look out over this sea of people, living energy.

I thought how amazing it must be to evoke calm in the midst of two thousand people. A sense of admiration filled me and I imagined I stood on the stage, looking out at the multitude. All remained in their own inner world, guided to the shores of their own private sanctuary.

As the lights came up, I felt we had rested just for a moment.

“It has been 45 minutes; but you feel as rested as if you have slept for three hours.”

Lights flooded the auditorium. The music picked up and the energy in the room spread like a wave; everyone seemed imbued with a purpose, a sparkle in the eye and a flush in the cheek.

Within five minutes, the stage flooded with dancing crewmembers, encouraging the crowd to move to the rhythm.

Tony called on everyone to heighten their energy, to bring themselves to an unstoppable state of mind. Orchestrated flawlessly, the energy crested and at that moment I felt a conscious shift around me. A feeling of unimaginable confidence took hold, inspiring a fearless outlook. The possibilities, so easily seen by a child’s mind, were accessible once more to the adults we had become. He called upon the quelled potential of everyone present.

A phrase came back to me in that moment: “Awaken the sleepers...”

Once more everyone flooded outside to the back of the building. “Simply the Best” by Tina Turner pumped in the background, as trails of people danced and walked through the exits. The fires beckoned.

And so I did what I thought impossible, defying the laws of physics on a whim. I tread fearlessly across the searing coals, proving to myself that all limits are a lie.

And this is only the beginning...

*Lyca Shan*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

There is a new kind of wisdom that has grown within me over the years, a feeling of acceptance and confidence in myself that eluded me most of my early life.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

I can feel physical aches and pains that before I simply ignored, for instance my back is complaining about all the crazy stunts I pulled in my early years now!

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

That I would make it, to believe in myself and know that I was not crazy or stupid (which I was often told as a child) and that I was capable of choosing my own path. Also, that I was worthy of love, as every child is.



## **MARIAN MASSIE**

**Marian Massie CL.H.** is uniquely qualified as a life success coach. She is the founder and CEO of Advanced Perceptions Inc. As a clinical Hypnotherapist and success coach, Marian has helped Fortune 500 executives, entrepreneurs, lawyers, physicians and individuals achieve greater personal and professional success by helping them eliminate subconscious barriers. Marian has also authored the groundbreaking book, *You Are Soul*. Finally, after much personal effort and self-discovery, Marian found the tools she needed to turn her life around and achieve happiness and success both personally and professionally. Marian has been included in, *Who's Who of Executive Women*, *Who's Who in Georgia* and appears frequently on radio and TV.

"My personal mission is to help empower each individual to achieve more conscious control over their lives."

For more information about here seminars, book and coaching visit her website <http://www.marianmassie.com>, or contact her at [marian@marianmassie.com](mailto:marian@marianmassie.com).

## ***TRUE RESPONSIBILITY***

The reason people live unconsciously is because on some level they don't want to take responsibility for ALL of their lives. Most people are not happy or content. They feel empty, without purpose, and do not know why. Yet they don't want to explore the greater depths of life or their own being to search and find the answers. Oh, most of us are willing to take care of the day-to-day responsibilities, and most of us do the best possible job. We see to it the bills are paid and the house is clean and we go to work on time. We get caught up in daily routine. We forget, or we just don't realize, that responsibility on Earth is more than taking care of the human body and making it through the day. As a human being, your true purpose is to become aware of all aspects of yourself and live consciously with this awareness. Your life is actually a spiritual experience. The more you live your life unaware of this, the less benefit you get from this lifetime. True responsibility is living this awareness on every level of your being — your mind, body, emotions, and Spirit! With this kind of awareness comes an indestructible knowing. You can stay centered in joy, love, and purpose no matter what life dishes up.

## **Choosing How to Live**

This life of yours is a lesson in awareness and self-love of the highest order. Your schoolroom is Mother Earth, and the classes are your daily life. Whether you are a housewife, an executive, a rocket scientist, or a prisoner, you have picked that role to help you learn your lessons and evolve as your true self: Soul. The life role you have chosen teaches you something you need to learn. Though each life is so very different, all are perfect. You get exactly what you need to grow to your highest potential. What you get may not be what you consciously want, but your higher self (Soul) knows what experiences you need to attain your highest potential.

Through your experiences you can grow and achieve awareness and union with God, if you choose to see the higher lessons contained within daily life.

How does this relate to responsibility? As a human being, you are given free will. Each moment, you can choose to live life with responsibility toward your higher good or to live and act as a victim. Victims live life from the belief (conscious or unconscious) that circumstances are out of their control. Victims think they have no power.

Life is a series of lessons to help you grow in love, freedom, and awareness. When you live from your higher nature you choose to learn from your lessons or problems. Victims do not. I also want to point out that when you choose to be on the road to a higher awareness in your life, a teaching may be correct for you for a minute, a day, or a lifetime. You will know when a teaching is correct for you because if it is it creates value in your life. It uplifts your life. It brings you closer to “being” love. A correct teaching will help you become more independent and self-reliant. You will know if a teaching is right for you when it helps you become more balanced, happy, and aware of your true self as Soul. As your consciousness grows and changes, what helped you before might not be right for you now; for example, the study habits you used in the second grade may no longer work for you when you go to college. As you develop inner wisdom and self-discernment, you will know what is valuable for your life in the present moment.

You must control your own life. Only you can know what is necessary for your next step in growth. If at times you are unsure, you will gain wisdom only by doing for yourself. Nobody can live your life for you. No one can tell you what is inside your heart or what you need next for your growth as an individual or as truest self — Soul.



## **My Story**

Now let me tell you how I came to believe in this way of thinking and how these beliefs have affected my own life. I come from an upper middle-class family. My father owned his own business and I am the youngest of eight (yes, count 'em, eight) children. Needless to say, my parents were Catholics and we were all raised strictly Catholic.

Please understand, I am NOT preaching for or against any belief or faith. I firmly believe whatever path or religion you are practicing is perfect for you now. It is also perfect for you now if you are not currently practicing any formal religion. If you choose to relinquish a certain belief, that doesn't make your former belief bad or wrong, it just makes it not right for you now. In my personal road to growth and awareness I have practiced and tried different religions and beliefs. These have been good for me and my awareness at the time I held them. And when I lived my life with no formal religion and just observed life, that too, was perfect and invaluable. All my experiences helped me grow. Life is your teacher. All of life's answers are within yourself. Every experience is your teacher, when you let the teaching into your consciousness.

## **Early Childhood**

I grew up in what is now called a dysfunctional home, though at the time none of us knew a name for it. I always thought something was strange and off-kilter in the way my family related, because no one in my family talked about feelings. I always felt incredibly alone.

My world and my family's world evolved around my mother's constant illnesses. From my first remembrances of her until her death when I was twenty-three, I never saw her well or happy. She had breast cancer when I was just five. At that time, the treatment for breast cancer was extremely brutal. Her chest was totally scarred from the operations and she had no breasts or nipples. She also had to have intense radiation

treatments. The radiation left her skin red and raw and her energy totally drained. The amounts of radiation she received would never be given now. Throughout my childhood, my mother was in and out of hospitals almost every year. She had one kidney removed, her thyroid removed, a hysterectomy, and all her teeth taken out. Needless to say, she was always in pain. Because of the intense pain from the cancer, her doctors prescribed morphine, and she became addicted. I remember one night — I think it was around dinnertime — when she started to go into convulsions. I was very young and truly petrified by what I witnessed. My mother started gagging on her own tongue and she was unaware of what was happening to her. Everyone was racing around trying to help, and I was sent to my room. I remember my sister Judith telling me to pray for her. I thought my mother was going to die, but she didn't. This was just another “normal” occurrence in our household. This kind of drama was always being played out in our house.

That event would be traumatic for any child, but no one in our house talked to me about my mother's illness. We never discussed the traumas or problems our family experienced. When I look back on my childhood, the thing I remember the most was being terribly lonely. I felt lonely because there was no one for me to talk over my thoughts with and no one to listen to me. I had no emotional connection to anyone. I especially felt the loss of not being listened to, because I was the “baby” of the family, and who listens to the youngest child? Ironic, isn't it? I come from a family of eight children, ten people including the adults, and I felt lonely all the time. This lack of communication is very normal for dysfunctional families.

## **Dysfunctional Families**

People in dysfunctional families are taught directly and indirectly not to communicate deep feelings and to lock those feelings away and not

let them surface. You are taught to bury your head in the sand, to deny your reality because reality is too scary. So it becomes easy to deny the truth of your pain. What is truly crazy or unbalanced in a dysfunctional home life is thought to be “normal.” As John Bradshaw teaches so well in his book *Home Coming*, you are taught consciously or unconsciously to view yourself as a mistake or unworthy. When adults come from dysfunctional backgrounds, they haven’t gotten the message from their upbringing that they were loved unconditionally. They did not get the proper nurturing so that they, in turn, could learn to love themselves. Little children need love and a healthy self-esteem mirrored back to them from their environment, which includes parents and other members of the family, in order to feel love and self-worth.

Children in dysfunctional homes have been brought up to nurture their parents and deny their own feelings. This lack of positive, healthy mirroring creates shame and feelings of worthlessness. These feelings stay inside the little child who then becomes the wounded adult, until these feelings are faced and processed healthily. (Some ways to help yourself process your feelings healthily are explained later in greater detail.)

The majority of us, if not all of us, come from some kind of a dysfunctional home. A dysfunctional home can be a household of little or no emotional involvement, sexual abuse, heavy criticism, drug and/or alcohol abuse, physical and/or emotional abandonment, or tremendous sickness, as in my family. What characterizes a dysfunctional home is any kind of environment that creates in a person a conscious or unconscious feeling of self-hate, worthlessness, or guilt, just for being. The dysfunctional person sees himself or herself as “less than” and different than other people. You may feel like you don’t belong anywhere or you may feel like a mistake.

Unknowingly I grew up hating myself and feeling totally worthless. I felt isolated and different from other people. Unconsciously, I was terribly angry toward my mother for not nurturing me, and I felt tremendous guilt for being so angry toward her. It was a perpetuating cycle of self-hate. I

never realized any of these feelings consciously until I was in my mid-twenties.

Most of the clients I see come from dysfunctional homes. And most of the people coming from these situations don't understand their feelings or why they make the choices they make. What happens is that all the negative unconscious beliefs created from their childhood effect their daily lives now. They are constantly carrying in their hearts all the hurt and neglect from their upbringing.

## **My Mom and Dad**

During my upbringing, my mother not only was sick all the time, but she was also addicted to Valium and alcohol. I remember times I'd come home from school and she'd be upstairs and I'd be downstairs and I'd hear a "thud." The thud was her falling to the floor; the Valium and alcohol had caused her to lose her balance.

My mother couldn't emotionally be there for me or anyone else in my family. I know she loved me and she was a good person, but this didn't change the realities of our family life and what was missing in my upbringing as a child. As a child my emotional self never got the love or nurturing I so dearly needed to grow to be a fully functioning, healthy adult.

My brother Michael and I were most affected by her incapacitation because we were the last of the children living at home. When I was in elementary school, my other brothers and sisters were out of the house and my father was absorbed in his business. When he'd come home at night, usually very late, he would retreat, read his business magazines, or go to bed. I don't ever remember him asking me what I did in school that day or if I had any problems. I never remember him listening or relating to me on the emotional level I needed.

Everyone outside the family loved him. To them he was a real outgoing guy, always very positive and enthusiastic. He was definitely

enthusiastic, the opposite of my mother. My mother was negative, unhappy and physically weak. My father looked twenty years younger than his actual age. He was very healthy and strong, and always tried to be positive. As positive as he appeared, he never showed his heart to me. Though I loved my father, I could never communicate deeply with him and I never felt him try to connect to me as a person. I could not imagine going to him when I was a child, crying and hurt, and him being there for me with tenderness or warmth and making my hurt all better. We got the message in our family that we had to be strong and perfect. Our emotions, if not happy or positive, were a sign of weakness.

My father's attitude of being extremely positive and my mother's focus of the negative were both examples of dysfunctional behavior. My father's dysfunctional behavior was harder to spot, because he hid his real feelings beneath his positive veneer. Both my parents denied their full spectrum of feelings. Consequentially, my parents' behavior traits were passed down to some degree to and my siblings and me.

I chose to emulate my father's behavior because, outwardly, he looked like a survivor. All I saw in my mother's life was pain, misery, and death. The choice, albeit unconscious, was easy for me: life or death. I chose what I perceived was life. In choosing my father's way of dealing with life, I stuffed all anger, sadness, and loneliness deep inside myself. I would allow myself only to be strong and show strength. And the only way I could communicate to others was on a superficial level. I wore the perpetual "happy face" for society, but I was dying inside!

In my home I was designated the caretaker, and I was excellent at my job. From the time I was around nine or ten years old, I took care of our big house. I did the cleaning, the laundry, the grocery shopping, and the cooking, and I took care of my mom.

My mother was not a total invalid, but she was very depressed and physically worn down from all her operations. What she did most of the time was sit and watch television and smoke cigarette after cigarette. Or she would read for hours and smoke cigarette after cigarette. She was a

champion worrier! If there was nothing to worry about she'd invent something. When she was younger, before I was born, she was quite athletic. I was told she often went hunting and hiking with my father. She loved to swim and was an excellent diver, and she taught most of us how to dive. In her younger days, she had a zest for life and communication. My mom was even a member of a club called the Jabberwocky Club, because she and my aunts loved to talk so much. But I never saw that side of her. I never saw her well. I hardly ever saw her laugh.

I got to be an expert at denying my feelings. As I was growing up, my pet cats gave me comfort and a feeling of intimacy, that I missed from my mother and family. Through playing with the cats and taking care of them, I learned a lot about love and affection. They were my friends. I think my connection to them saved me emotionally.

## **How I Channeled My Beliefs**

Nobody talked about anything or discussed feelings. Everything was always "fine." Through all this confusion I was stuffing my feelings more and more, and the need to gain some semblance of control in my life became more paramount. I became bulimic at age thirteen and stayed that way for fourteen years. It just happened. I still don't know how, but it did. I do believe it was a way my unconscious mind helped me survive and control my feelings. It was a way for me to process my unconscious self-hate and anger. On a scale of one to ten, if ten was the worst bulimic you could be, I was probably an eight or nine. By the time I was fifteen, I was throwing up four or five times a day. Back then no one knew of or talked about this disorder, so I thought I was absolutely crazy. But I told no one, and I felt powerless to stop. It was a powerful addiction, not unlike drugs. I remember thinking I would have rather been a prostitute than do this disgusting thing each day. (Being a prostitute in a good Catholic family, to

me, was about the worst thing you could be. That's how bad I felt about being me.) I had no control over bulimia, and I felt completely worthless.

When I was fourteen, I started drinking heavily and I would get totally drunk on weekends. I would fast all day, and then at night I would chug three cans of beer, enough to get me thoroughly drunk. I started to smoke cigarettes and marijuana at fifteen.

I also tried to kill myself twice, once consciously and once unconsciously. Repressing all my feelings was taking its toll! My two incidences of attempted suicide occurred at fifteen. At that time my mother was really dependent on me. She had no one else with whom to relate, and she used me to vent all her frustrations. Unconsciously, she was using me to nurture her emotionally. She'd be yelling at me all the time. I had heavy responsibilities, but my parents didn't balance my responsibilities with social activities. I had to argue and fight for any normal teen fun. I was really made to feel guilty for wanting to spend time to enjoy life and have fun or friends.

For a time, my father must have seen what all this tension was doing to me, because he let me live at a girlfriend's house for about a month while I recuperated from mononucleosis. During my stay, I saw what a normal family life was like. The people who let me stay with them were great. They talked to their kids and related to their lives. I got to feel what it was like to be loved openly and completely.

They had seven kids living in a little house with one bathroom. I felt more peace and relating going on there than I ever did at my house. I never wanted to go back home. One night my girlfriend and I got drunk. It was a very cold winter night in upstate New York. All my feelings that had been hidden in my heart started to surface, and most were feelings of hopelessness.

That night I felt so bad about my life that I started banging my head against the wall of their family room after drinking a copious amount of alcohol. Her parents were gone, and I was definitely out of control. I then tried to run outside and freeze myself, remembering something my mother

told me when I was little. She told me people die in the snow because it is easy to fall asleep and freeze to death before they wake up. I thought that sounded like a painless way to go. I knew, being so drunk, I could fall asleep without too much effort. But my friend was fortunately able to stop me and calm me down.

## **Depths of Despair**

My self-deprecating behavior was not new; I had been thinking about suicide on and off for several years. On previous occasions, I would take out the butcher knives and look at them and wonder how it would feel to stab myself or cut my wrists. I was also leaving lots of little doodles on paper about death and killing myself. One day my brother Robert saw some of these, and he brought them to my mother's attention. But she never talked to me about those cries for help, and I continued to think of killing myself.

Another time I almost died was when my boyfriend invited me to his junior prom. I was a sophomore in high school at the time, and going to the junior prom was a big deal. Well, we went to the dance and had dinner, double-dating with another couple. The other boy was in college, and he invited us to his dorm to drink after dinner. Of course I said yes, and off we went. I always chugged my drinks very quickly, so I could get roaring drunk. I drank about a quart of whiskey sours and a bottle of champagne, and in no time I was unconscious — for at least six hours. They called in a medic at one point because I had stopped breathing. My date had to carry me out of the dorm. As he was carrying me, I was screaming at the top of my lungs, "Help me, help me." Because I was unconscious, I didn't remember a thing.

When they dropped me off at my house at five in the morning, I still couldn't see straight. My mother never noticed or even commented on



my torn and vomit-stained dress. I literally crawled up the stairs to my bed. Nothing was ever said about that incident. My cry for help went unnoticed!

But something snapped in me shortly after that night, and I knew I wanted to live. I also knew if I stayed at home I wouldn't survive, so I ran away. I had thought about running away from home since I was eight, and I constantly talked about it to my girlfriend. Then one weekend, I packed some clothes in a paper bag and I took the bus to my oldest brother's house in the city.

Being the ever-responsible person I was, I called my parents and told them where I was. While I was talking to them and trying to explain why I had to leave, the phone was on my knee and I was shaking so much from fear and nerves that the phone almost crashed to the floor, but all I felt was numbness. A short time later, my brother gave me two weeks to find another place to live. He never explained why he kicked me out to find a place of my own. I had just turned sixteen!

## **My Awakening**

I was totally on my own. My parents didn't give me money or emotional support. My brothers and sisters were wrapped up in their own dysfunctional stuff and weren't available to support me in any way either. I was absolutely, totally alone. It was the loneliest time of my life! I felt abandoned by the whole world, but I still wanted to live and find happiness.

What saved me was the realization I was responsible for my life. I started finding answers to my life and life in general. I had always been a deep-thinking child, even as far back as the second grade.

I realized somehow that I had created these awful experiences in my life. Reading books about self-help and self-awareness helped me clarify how and why I had experienced what I had. Spiritually contemplating life gave me inner strength to help dig myself out of the cesspool I was in. I really felt life came down to two choices: To kill myself

directly or indirectly, which meant living my life as a victim, or to be in charge of my life and become happy. I chose to take charge.

## **Understanding Free Will**

I learned we are born into circumstances that help us grow; present-life circumstances are results of past actions, which are perfect tools for us to use for self-discovery and growth. When I read these books, the teachings resonated with something in my own being and I just knew what they were saying was true. Knowing this consciously gave me hope and the tools to radically change my life for the better.

You always have free will to live your life the way you want, whether you are aware of this fact or not. Only when you live your daily life from the consciousness of total responsibility do freedom and love fully emerge in your life and heart.

I think the hardest thing for anyone to accept is the understanding that we created all the circumstances in our lives, whether we are happy or unhappy about them. When I understood this truth — when I really got that truth—it changed my life forever. I was ecstatic, because I realized if I had created all the misery in my life, then I have the power to change it. I finally had hope. I knew I was no longer at the mercy of circumstances. I have the power to control my life!

Most people lose hope and joy because they feel powerless to change anything in their lives. When you live life with the realization that you can consciously be the master of your life, you can then take your life where you want it to go. The key to any change on this planet is incorporating truths into daily life and living those beliefs, not just having an intellectual understanding of them. Intellectual understanding is NOT the same as action.

Simply realizing that in each moment I create my future with all my present actions brought me through some of the worst times in my life. I came out of those times stronger, happier, and wiser. In the darkest of times I knew my actions made a difference in my life. I kept making my actions positive and value-creating. I knew in my heart, even if I couldn't immediately see the results I wanted, that results were being created on some level in my life. And eventually the results would manifest on the physical level.

Some people have to be in the dumper before they allow themselves to see a truth or live a truth. That was the case in my life. If I hadn't had the pain and struggles in my earlier life, I don't think I would have pursued the deeper truths of life and God.

No matter where you are in your life or what is happening, it is up to you to take responsibility for the outcome of your life experience. It's what you do NOW that counts. This is truly living life responsibly. Find out for yourself how your actions can change your life.

Truth is not someone telling you something is this way or that way. Truth needs to be experienced, and it's up to you to experience it. And for that to happen, you have to be responsible and put these or other teachings that resonate truth for you into action. Responsibility is a partner with action. For you to create the life you want, absolutely know you can change anything you want in your life. You have created all that is in your life now. You can now be a conscious director of your life and create it any way you dream is possible! Responsibility from this perspective is freedom to be your best possible you!

*Marian Massie*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I feel stronger and more focused than ever!

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

Just that I have learned to laugh more often!

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Learn to create a sense of community now and invest in land!



## **JOHANNA SIEGMANN**

Johanna Siegmann has written in a wide variety of formats. She was a regular contributor to her college paper; began her professional career as an advertising copywriter; has written numerous short stories and poems, full-length plays and scenes; screenplays, and a TV pilot, which she recently produced. Her first book, *The Tao of Tango*, was recently translated into Spanish. She is currently at work on her first novel.

In addition to writing, Johanna has over 20 years in the entertainment industry. As a performer, she has appeared in over 30 plays (Mexico, New York, Los Angeles), as well as numerous minor roles on television and film, and has directed over 17 plays.

She describes herself as terminally curious with numerous hobbies, which include singing, photography, hiking, painting, traveling, and of course, the Argentine Tango. She continues to worship at the Altar of the Bandoneon on a weekly basis.



## ***THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE***

“I wish...”

These words almost always precede the desire for some sort of change. For things to be different. More often than not, for things to be better. Whether economically, emotionally, spiritually, we often find ourselves stuck in a situation that is no longer satisfying or fulfilling. We often wish for better jobs, a more loving mate, a deeper relationship with oneself, a windfall of money to solve our problems.

Everyone has or has had a wish list at some time in their lives. And while many wishes are grand and fanciful (wishing we could fly, wanting someone who has passed away to come back), the only wishes that have a reasonable expectation of coming true are those for personal change. But change, regardless of how deeply we desire it, is never easy. Even when change is good, it is difficult because it makes everything, well, different. Even good things take getting used to. And if we do not adapt our old selves to our new circumstances, our new circumstances will eventually revert to our old selves.

Unfortunately, when we express our desire for change as a wish, it usually means that we wish someone would come along and make the change happen for us. By wishing for change we place the possibility of it outside ourselves and effectively transfer the power to change to an external, unspecific source. Under these circumstances, the odds of the desired change ever coming to pass are reduced to practically zero.

For me, despite a lifelong effort to achieve change it did not come until I began to dance Tango.

Tango. The very word is evocative of so many contradictory and often exaggerated descriptions. It is commonly thought of as “passionate”, “sexual”, and “exotic”. It is “difficult”, “exasperating”, and ultimately “transformational”. The word alone stirs up emotions and yearnings in even the uninitiated. And in the initiated, well...

My very first tango partner spoke what may be the wisest words regarding tango: “*Tango trastorna a la gente*”. As with tango, there is no perfect word to describe “*trastorna*”, which means “to disturb”, “to bother”, “turn upside down”, and “drive crazy”. However, “Tango turns people upside down”, while not quite the same thing, adequately manages to convey his sentiments. What is it about tango that defies description? And why does it prompt almost everyone who experiences it to even try?

I was *trastornada* by tango the very first time I was held in a tango embrace. In that instant I had a true epiphany about life – the clouds parted, the sun beamed down upon me, the angels sang, and my heart almost leapt out of my chest. Dramatic? Yes. Unique? Hardly. Ask almost any *tanguero/a* about their experiences and you will find they are fantastically similar. My particular experience prompted me to write a book, *The Tao of Tango*.

However, the much ballyhooed “sexual” aspect of tango is one I find highly misleading. I believe tango seems “sexual” to those who do not dance it because the closeness of the bodies and the intertwining of legs would be downright indecent anywhere other than at a *milonga*. Of course, there are some people for whom it is always about sex. But although the sensuality of tango cannot be denied, an enormous amount of respect and sexual restraint between partners is required to create a safe place for the magic to happen. In other words, what happens on the dance floor is not about sex, but about intimacy. About letting down our guard, putting aside fears, apprehensions, doubts, complexes, and pretensions, and inviting total strangers to savor our hidden tenderness. Without judgment. Without expectations other than, hopefully, another three minutes of this heavenly communion. I believe that many people who seek this communion, but have not discovered Tango, satisfy that hunger through sex, only to find that they end up hungrier.

And this, I believe, is the crux of tango. The delicate, throbbing, alluring, yearning, satisfying, transformational quality of the dance. Absolute intimacy without physical compromise. From the moment



a couple agrees to dance together, the outside world disappears. New rules are formed, boundaries defined and respected. Absolutely. There is perfect understanding, trust, surrender, care. In those three perfect, musical moments, we are all beautiful, embraced, accepted, worshiped. We experience something pure and holy. It is the epitome of intimacy; it is perfect. And we achieve it without having to diminish ourselves in any way, without the feelings of self-sacrifice or lessening that casual sexual encounters often produce. What *is* required of us is our presence, full and unrestrained, and that we are capable. Not brilliant. Not gifted. But simply capable, in a way that shows respect for the arduous process of learning tango. Who would have thought that the answer to our lonely prayers, the blessed sense of belonging, the beaming light of joy and fulfillment would come from a dance whose heritage lies in the brothels of a foreign city?

In this miniscule world of perfect intimacy, beauty is relative. I recall the comments of a sales lady where I bought my very first pair of tango shoes years ago. Upon learning I was a *tanguera*, she related her experience when the cast from *Tango Argentino* came into her store. These are dancers? she thought. How dare they call themselves dancers – they're fat. They're old. They're ugly. Then she went to see the show. Whatever physical weaknesses she had perceived at the store, were transformed into that beautiful melding of souls, processed through the bodies, expressed through the legs. Transformational. Tango erases years. Pounds. Height, or lack thereof. You don't have to be beautiful to dance tango, but tango makes you beautiful.

Be forewarned: tango is not for the faint of heart. Nor is it a quick fix, or a passing fancy. Once in her arms, you will find everything you've done previously, uninteresting. Learning tango is a steep, but amply rewarding climb. Tango is a jealous mistress who requires your total commitment. She demands that you be humble, and patient. She expects you to be persistent. And more than anything, she hates being rushed. She offers in return, an opening of your heart, a connecting of the mind, body

and soul – a sensation unlike anything other than the haunting wail of the *bandoneon* on a warm, dark night. It is the sweetest suffering you will ever experience. With or without it, you are lost. And you are found.

Because it deals with such intimate – and thus holy – issues, it is not possible to have a dispassionate conversation about tango. Even the most recent devotees find themselves caught up in passionate vociferations about something they barely comprehend, issues that are rarely, if ever, applied to any other dance. Is Salsa scrutinized for its “authenticity”? Does Waltz or Foxtrot engender complete wardrobe changes? Has Polka evolved into a lifestyle? Or Cha-Cha or Rumba or any other dance has been referred to as “transformational?” No, no, no and no! And the reason, I believe, is this unique inner/outer duality/quality of Tango that simply does not exist in any other partner dance.

When arguments of style and authenticity bubble up – usually any and everywhere two or more *tangueros* converge – it is over the outer expressions of these inner feelings. In much the same way, conversations regarding sex, religion, or politics are rarely dispassionate, because words are an imperfect method of describing anything of a spiritual or emotional nature. It is because of all these things that I liken Tango to life itself. And for all the same reasons, learning, growing, deepening, adapting, and ultimately changing ourselves is a long, arduous process. It requires the same sort of surrender and openness that are needed to become a great Tango partner.

From the very first Tango class I ever took, the word “authentic” has been bandied about mercilessly, and in my mind, has become a meaningless yardstick by which to measure any aspect of Tango. Other than as Tango’s birthplace (although some would argue that Paris put Tango on the world map), Tango itself is a living expression, ever evolving and transforming itself, even as it transforms those bewitched by its embrace.

I personally believe there are only two ways of describing Tango: inner and outer. These terms apply as much to style as to one’s attitude

and goals regarding not only Tango, but life itself. These terms are not meant to be qualitative: one is not better than the other; they are simply opposites. And each approach has both its strengths as well as its weaknesses. The goal – at least for me – is to have a balance. And to achieve this balance, one must develop awareness, which is the entire purpose of my book, *The Tao of Tango*.

Inner Tango is that characterized by the close embrace, attention to detail, and absolute awareness of one's partner. It focuses on emotion, and connection. It is danced solely and completely for and with the partner. Steps can be simple or fancy, but are done with only the partner in mind. Most social dancing falls into this category.

Outer Tango is exhibitionist, with large, dramatic, and complicated steps – whether it be in a fancy show on stage or a simple exhibition at a *milonga*. It focuses on expression and externalization.

At their extremes, both inner and outer tango lack an awareness of the world at large, an inability to adapt the inner or outer style to the conditions of where one is dancing. Inner dancers block the line of dance. Outer dancers injure those around them.

To be a good dancer requires a balance of both inner and outer dance skills.

In life, this inner and outer description of how we interact with the world is just as applicable. Technological advances have certainly made many things easier, but are also transforming how we communicate. The cell phone has produced an entire generation of people who are not present anywhere – either the people they are with, or those they are talking to. The internet has also made it easier to reach out and touch others, but has removed the accountability of meeting face to face. Intimacy – and all its ramifications, including honesty – suffers. So while the ways in which we can communicate with each other have multiplied and improved, they have not necessarily improved our ability to communicate.

For me, however, the type of communication that appears to have suffered the most is that which we have with ourselves. In our personal lives, it is often the outer Tango which most strongly influences our choices, even when they go against our ever softer and harder to hear inner voices. In the US especially – and increasingly elsewhere as they emulate us – we are concerned more with the outer, and how others will perceive it, than with the inner, our personal content. Again, neither the inner nor the outer in and of themselves are “bad”. But an imbalance is unhealthy, whether it be in Tango or in life.

After over a decade in the Tango community, I am still constantly amazed by the parallels between it and life at large. Many of the concerns and issues plaguing it are the very same we complain about in our daily lives: inconsideration, rudeness, self-absorption, etc. How these issues manifest in their respective spheres are slightly different, but all boil down to one very simple truth: lack of awareness.

I believe it is this lack of awareness which is at the root of every issue we find distressing in our lives, wherever we may live them out. Thousands of tangueros pour out their concerns on blogs, chat rooms, and forums dedicated to Tango, and by far, the predominant topic is dancers that refuse to conform to the conditions of the dance floor. The result is either painful physical encounters by careless, flailing limbs, or logjams from partners lost in a stationary embrace. Thousands of opinions and words are devoted to blaming these problems on “styles” and other matters of protocol that in reality are only the symptoms of the true problem, which is a lack of awareness about everything from one’s own limitations, to lack of awareness of the music, the partner, the conditions of the dance floor, the other people on the dance floor, and so on.

In life, we feel this lack of awareness everywhere we go: lollygagging shoppers totally unaware of the rushing mobs trying to get past them; drivers looking for an address while stopping traffic; almost anyone on a cell phone, assaulting us with shouted details of personal conversations best held behind closed doors. Whether on the dance floor or in life, we

are increasingly in contact with people who are decreasingly aware of the world that surrounds them.

While the public expressions of unawareness are certainly frustrating, inconvenient, and on occasion painful, they do not compare with the damage this unawareness has for the individual. Ranging from just plain rudeness to complete oblivion about one's own wellbeing, personal unawareness accounts for the deterioration in communication and social skills, health, and happiness. However, the admonition that we should all be more conscious, while well meaning, is rather pointless. We are all on a different path, and at different levels of awareness and conscious development, and for some, the very concept of awareness is inconceivable. Some of us live crisis to crisis, moment to moment, with a world view that does not extend beyond our own immediate personal needs. The irony is that those we feel most need to develop their awareness are the very ones who are least likely to think they need any awakening.

So, what are we to do? Many different philosophies remind us that the only person we can change is ourselves. And thus, we ourselves are the one we must focus on. To do otherwise is to expect orange juice from squeezing a tomato. It is not possible. For the inconsiderate boob who simply does not realize (or care) that their actions are unwarranted, unwanted, and/or injurious to others, there is no problem. So speaking to them – although an excellent first step – is usually fruitless and frustrating. It is not that they are intentionally stubborn or cruel or obstinate. They simply are unable to consider the possibility. It's as if you were told you were someone else. It is inconceivable.

While I cherish my own personal path, I must admit that I am rather envious of the level of awareness of the "inconsiderates". Consider a world where everything you do is marvelous. Think of the self-confidence such a mental stance would impart! Imagine how simple the world would be if there was never any concern for error, nor any worry about inadequacy! On the other hand, they are marvelous in their own little world,

with the rest of the universe constantly having to adjust and avoid in order to co-exist in peace. They are the runaway steamroller everyone must scurry out of the way to avoid, the jutting rock around which the river must flow. For these people, there is very little hope for personal growth. They have likely been that way from childhood and will probably finish their days the same way. There is no need to change, since they have never encountered a problem they could identify as of their own doing.

But for those who do want to change, who are haunted by feelings and thoughts about other possibilities and realities, there are many paths to choose to begin the inward journey. Regardless of whether it is an eastern philosophy, an exercise regime, or tango, every successful journey must begin by developing and strengthening awareness. But what exactly is “awareness”? And what precisely do we have to become aware of?

The answer is “everything”. The depth and scope of true awareness is infinite, and thus, the pursuit of it is a lifelong one. On the most basic level, it means being aware of yourself, your inner workings, your choices, and the consequences of them. At much higher levels, awareness extends outwards towards the rest of the universe, to the minutest details. Tango dancers often rhapsodize about the perfect dance, a sublime state in which they can actually feel the beating of their partner’s heart. Now *that’s* awareness! And while that state is certainly desirable, a broader, higher awareness would include everyone around you, sensing their nearness, acquiescing to the global rhythm of the moment on that floor rather than imposing the one from your own, private little universe.

Thus, in becoming aware, we must start with ourselves. Then we must become aware of others – how our presence and actions affects those around us. And we must take responsibility for that which we create. Finally, once we are personally aware, and socially aware, we can begin working on becoming spiritually aware. Of course, this latter awareness begins to change the minute we begin working on ourselves.

The ability to view both the inner and outer self from a neutral place of non-judgment is the goal of every consciously evolving

human. Very often, however, we find ourselves stuck on one or the other side of the fence and are unable and/or unwilling to even explore the possible merits of the other side.

This is where the exploration of “inner” and “outer” Tango comes in. There is great merit in both (inner) traditional and (outer) new Tango. Adherents from either side generally have nothing but disparaging views of the other with regards to everything from the way each dresses, to the type of music and steps. But I personally enjoy something of both; traditional for its inner qualities of closeness, connection, and introspection, new or “*nuevo*” Tango for its outer qualities of exuberance and creativity. Together they offer greater and more abundant opportunities for self-discovery and expression. By dancing a bit of each, and incorporating a bit of either into my own dancing, I am contributing on a very personal level to the evolution of this dance.

Tango is, in and of itself, a wonderful exercise which many describe as spiritual, allowing them to explore and strengthen our connection to both our inner and outer selves. However, this exploration requires that we make a conscious choice about it. For most people, Tango remains a deeply gratifying and fulfilling experience which needs no further explanation, and the effort to connect those feelings to consciousness is never made. The journey for some people is simply about the embrace. So it is in life, which also offers many opportunities to explore and strengthen these universal dualities, and every path, regardless of its depth or breadth, has merit and value.

The wish for change to happen without our having to personally be responsible is universal. However, all growth requires change for which we must be responsible, and for whose outcome we must accept responsibility. And all change requires that we are open to different and opposite points of view. I believe that this is the most difficult moment of change; to open our minds to the possibility of being wrong. Often, we have become so engrained in one direction that we cannot even

contemplate the possibility of an alternative view. We physically cannot think outside that “box”.

Although all change begins in the mind, it will eventually require a physical action: to lose weight, we must move, to learn we must study. Even the action of changing our mind is physical – microscopic perhaps, but nonetheless physical.

This action of changing the mind can be strengthened by performing exercises. Even when I am not in the ultimate classroom of a Tango embrace, I am able to perform small, subtle, yet effective exercises designed to strengthen my mind’s physical and intellectual flexibility. They can be done in public or in private, and since they are internal, will be imperceptible to anyone else. These exercises are designed to increase your mental flexibility.

1. Place each hand upon your thighs. Take turns focusing on the feelings first from your hands, then from your thighs. Try to isolate the sensation of your hands upon your thighs, then of your thighs against your hands. In other words, try to feel your palms through your thighs, then your thighs through your palms. Try feeling your left side first, then your right side. Then both.
2. A variation of this exercise requires that one of your hands be hotter (by placing it around a coffee mug) or colder (holding a glass of iced water) than the other. Bring the hands together (palm to palm, or one over the other), then take mental turns perceiving first the hot or cold hand through the other hand, then the neutral hand through the hot or cold one. You may also place the hot/cold hand on any other body part (arm, thigh, face), and do this exercise successfully. You will be feeling your warm face through your palm, and your hot/cold palm through your cheek, or thigh or arm.
3. This exercise is best done when alone, and is a popular form of meditation which projects energy into our body parts. Sitting in a quiet room with your eyes closed, focus all your attention on your left hand, starting with the finger tips and working your way slowly to the palm and the entire hand. Once it feels “thick” and warm, include the wrist, and slowly work your way up the arm to the



elbow, and ending at the shoulder. Do this with your right hand and arm, followed by your right foot and leg, and finally your left foot and leg. Your entire body should feel energized. Before you finish, take a moment to shift your attention between each body part, hand to foot to hand to foot, visualizing yourself being in each of those body parts.

Change is thus within reach; it begins by embarking on a path of discovery towards self-awareness, of acceptance of personal responsibility for all of our choices, of flexibility of mind to be gracious when we encounter those whose views differ from ours, and to realize that we all have the same right to be on the dance floor of life.

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

Not having to apologize for who I am! I really like myself, and realize that you can't please everyone. And I'm finally ok with that!

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

Gravity. It's incompatible with body parts. Thank God for Miracle Bras and Spanx!

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

I have always been a "pleaser", and when I was younger, would often make personal decisions based on what I thought other people wanted, in effect, not pleasing anyone. I wasted a lot of time and I think I missed a lot of opportunities. As much as it sometimes feels like it does, the world does not revolve around us. Relax, follow your passion.



## ***DENICE ANN EVANS***

***Denice Ann Evans***-- freelance writer, published author, writing coach and mother of two-- is the CEO of Catalyst Coaching & Associates, LLC. She is a Professional Life Coach, trained by Coaches Training Institute, and a graduate of Emory University in Creative Writing & English, where she received her degree summa cum laude. Denice is the originator and facilitator of Goddesses On The Go personal empowerment workshops. She has appeared on Kathleen Kiley's Dream Show and been interviewed on WSB 98.5 radio with host Suzi Marsh of "Choosing Life: Addictions, Mental Health, and Recovery." Currently she is working on a screenplay, while coaching undergraduates through the Women's Center at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

## **GODDESS PSYCHOLOGY: A CALL FOR INNER-BALANCE**

"Once a woman claims ownership of her own inner authority, she awakens her subtler senses and makes a quantum leap into grace, the highest octave of the feminine."

*-Mary Elizabeth Marlowe, Handbook for the Emerging Woman*

There is a Goddess, or perhaps Goddesses, inside of you waiting to be called forth. Every one of us has the ability to tap into their internal strength and access the true power of their divine feminine energy. The ancient Greeks knew all about this energy. In those days, Goddesses were venerated for their spiritually vital forces. Not only were they consorts to the gods, but they were worshiped and feared for their powerful influences upon human behavior, natural phenomena, and changes in psychological processes.

Aphrodite, now so devalued by society, was once considered an oracle of wisdom and truth. Men and women sought her counsel during troubling times. The fact that she was also skilled in the arts of love and beauty only made her a more desirable Goddess with whom to "consort." Since that time and in all recorded history, we have seen the Goddess downgraded from her original position of glory. Centuries ago fear-based patriarchal standards were set by male dominated religions and with those standards came the fall of The Goddess. However, in the last few decades and especially since the onset of the feminist movement, hope has been restored to our planet. There now exists an era of women who own their grand Goddess energy and are not afraid to use it.

A few of years ago, I accidentally connected with my Goddess Energy. I was recently divorced and feeling rather aimless and uncertain of my future (don't we all at some point?). Then, I picked up a life-changing book for \$.25 at a local library book sale. The book was *The Goddess Within*, by Jennifer and Roger Woolger. Inside was a detailed personality

quiz based on the attributes of the six main Greek Goddesses: Aphrodite, Artemis, Athena, Demeter, Hera, and Persephone. As I was totaling up my quiz scores, the Goddess Persephone presented herself to me as my ruling Goddess, the one with attributes closest to my own. I read her detailed profile and felt like I was reading the map to my soul.

Persephone is the Goddess of the underworld, meaning “subconscious.” She is able to float between the conscious and subconscious. She is very metaphysically inclined, yet she is sensitively aware of what is occurring in every conscious moment. This ability allows Persephone to see through people immediately, but with that also comes her desire to be a people-pleaser. She is also the “eternal girl,” ever youthful, compliant, and passive. I could definitely identify with all of these traits. I was Persephone in all her mystic, metaphysical glory--and in all her not so glorious ways as well.

I came to find out that every Goddess has a correlating emotional wound that offsets her magnificence. I had to admit that recently, I had been embodying more of the wounded traits of Persephone, like, low self-worth and lack of commitment. It is not my intention to give her a bad rap. She is a very powerful Goddess in her own right, but she is known more as an immature, passive, little-girl goddess, rather than a strong-minded go-getter. Hera, Athena, and Artemis are the Goddesses known for their strength, independence and achievements. All qualities that I hoped to aspire to.

These three Warrior-Goddesses are all primarily interested in their status in society, their careers, and their autonomy. Hera, Queen of Heaven, represents marriage and partnerships. She is very involved in wanting power and status. This is not to the exclusion of emotional ties or love interests, but she considers her position as “Queen” when she enters into a partnership in business or with a man. The popular comedic phrase, “She who must be obeyed,” most likely originated from someone’s encounter with a Hera woman.

Athena is the Goddess of Wisdom. She is logical, self-assured, achievement oriented. She is a woman who has always put her career first, who identifies herself through her job. An Athena woman is most likely to be the president of IBM or become president of the United States for that matter. She is ruled by logic, but this makes her a very fair and judicious person. Athena does value relationships and marriage, but it will be with a person who has a similar standard of living and accepts her as the independent woman she is.

Artemis is the most independent and interdependent Goddess of them all. She is the Goddess of the Wild. She is very athletic, being a master archer, and extremely adventurous. In Greek mythology, Artemis lived in the woods and could rival any man with the prowess of her bow and arrow. She is known for her autonomy, meaning she was completely balanced in her male and female energies. She was at home within herself and her natural surroundings. The need for a union with man was not necessarily present. This does not mean she didn't eventually enter into a love relationship. She does, however, it is only with a man who can out run her and whose aim with a bow and arrow is better than hers.

After learning about these empowered Goddesses, it became clear to me that I needed to access some of their attributes. At that time of my life, Aphrodite was my second Goddess in command and Demeter was third. Aphrodite is known for skills in relationships. She is also known as the alchemical goddess. She is magnetic, creative and possessed the gift of persuasive speech. I had been known to hold my own when it came to "the gift of gab." Of course, there was the obvious attributes of the Goddess of Love, Passion, and Beauty that appealed to me as well. I was particularly intrigued by the "golden fleece" surrounding her, which carried transformative powers. It was rumored that any person who encountered Aphrodite's golden aura was forever changed.

Demeter, the Mother of all Goddesses was and continues to be a Goddess that has influenced my life greatly. Demeter's main concerns are caring for children and bearing children. She is a nurturing, care giving,

devoted woman-goddess. She is the quintessential earth mother; Gaia incarnate. Demeter's primary joy in life is to bear and raise children. She is ruled by her deep compassion and love, rather than her independence. My three ruling Goddesses, Persephone, Aphrodite, and Demeter had many wonderful attributes that I identified with, but I needed to strengthen my inner-self with the independent, self-assured, success oriented attributes of Athena, Hera, and Artemis.

Discovering the Goddesses within me was a moment of authentic empowerment. I could not recall a previous time in my life when I had felt so confident and self-assured. I continued studying other reputable books on Goddess Psychology, but my focus was learning how my ruling Goddesses expressed their powers in my life. As I read the intricate psychological profiles of each of the Goddesses, I began to see myself through "Goddess eyes." It was then that I made a vow to incorporate the strengths of my ancient Greek sisters into my life.

I quickly realized that as women we could absolutely embrace all the attributes that have historically been associated with men. Yet we could use them in a decidedly female way. I realized that we had our own power; a feminine power, within us that has been underutilized and unappreciated by the masculine hierarchy of our society. In that moment, I knew I would one day share my insights with other women. I needed to let women know that they were not stuck. That they did have choices. That they had the power within themselves to change any situation no matter what the obstacles. With the inherent strengths of the Goddesses, women could learn to view themselves as powerful conductors for change.

What a revelation in such a puritanical patriarchal society (translation: an uptight, prudish, society dominated by the limited resources of the male ego). Certainly, male egos, with their pioneering spirit of "doing" and linear thinking have had their place in this world. Our country was founded with this adventurous force of energy. The sheer physicality and persevering mentality of men has done much to advance our society

and earned their place of honor. However, our world has shifted its planetary needs.

The outmoded theory that we have to fight for our survival is simply not true today.

In our mainstream society, we no longer have to hunt, gather, defend, or battle for our right to live. It is only within the divine masculine, which incorporates a loving heart balanced with an integrity-oriented ego, that men will truly serve the higher evolutionary purposes of humanity. We have outgrown the “flight” or “fight” tendencies of our reptilian brains. In short, we have evolved. The time has come in our evolution to herald in the strong, loving, nurturing, peaceful, family and community oriented values of the Divine Feminine.

Goddess psychology seeks to bring out the Divine Feminine in each woman by associating her with the attributes of the Goddesses. The Divine Feminine is essentially, love in action. However, the feminine energy of The Divine is also a warrior. She is a softer, more nourishing being, of course, with an amazing passion for transformation. And not just personal transformation, but transformation on a global level.

## **The Integrated Goddess**

My Goddess journey started the day I took that life-changing quiz, but it took a year or so of practicing and developing my new independent skills before I got up the courage to start sharing my accumulated knowledge with the public. I put together a fun, interactive workshop and entitled it Goddesses On The Go. The focus of the workshop was to raise awareness about Goddess psychology and give women the opportunity to see their true place of value in this world. I had the women in my workshop take the same quiz. We all had fun discussing results and learning more about our ruling Goddesses. Using the personality profiles of the ancient Greek Goddesses provided a means for women to understand

themselves, their relationships, and what motivates, frustrates, and satisfies them.

After presenting my first few workshops, I began to see that finding the Goddess within you was not enough for creating inner-balance. The real call for balance in this world comes through integrating the Divine Feminine with the Divine Masculine. When this occurs, these integrated energies emanate exponentially to heal the collective conscious. In turn, this raises the spiritual vibration of the planet. In the Osho Zen philosophies, the combining force of our male and female energies is called the Unio Mystica, or the fusion of opposites. "We are the union of eagle and swan: male and female, fire and water, life and death. Integration is the symbol of self-creation, new life, and mystical union; otherwise known as alchemy."

So how do we honor the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine to achieve the Unio Mystica within each of us? Basically, women need to connect with their healthy male and men need to connect with their healthy female. Most men have denied acknowledging a feminine side for centuries. Women are aware of their masculine side, but have misinterpreted it to mean, "act like a man."

To access the male/ female energies within us is not to become like the opposite sex, but to embrace those qualities that can balance our true character. Within each of us is the seed of the other. Women need to water the seed and grow their masculine energy. Men need to first notice that they carry a seed of feminine energy that is healthy and desirable and then allow it to grow within them.

## **Acknowledging the Divine Feminine**

Both women and men need to embrace the divine feminine within. For women, we need to honor our intuitive nature, our loving souls, and our beautiful bodies. We need to get to know what are deepest desires are



and then we need to hold fast to our values and belief systems. Setting healthy boundaries as to who, what, when, and where we allow certain situations and people into our life is very important. A true Goddess knows herself and operates from the integrity of her soul. She will not allow anything or anyone to disrupt that inner-balance and makes life decisions based on her internal knowing. A true Goddess knows how to ask for what she needs, wants, and deserves while remaining grounded in her femininity.

For men the idea of connecting with their inner-female has been threatening, because it involves emotions, that indefinable “feeling” state that baffles most men. If men only knew that for a little effort in getting to know their inner-female it would bring them many rewards. Because within the merger of male and female comes clarity, peace, and calm. The integration allows one to speak more freely from one’s heart. Matters of the heart, however, have traditionally been a source of major confusion and fear for most men. It is one of the areas of human development that they have not been able to control or define with their logic-based left brain.

Accessing a male’s inner-female does not mean he has to cry, talk in-depth about his feelings, or give birth to a child! It simply means that he agrees to allow his ego to rest long enough to pay due respect to the loving, nurturing, intuitive side of his being. The side that somehow knows and trusts what the right thing to do is. Being in tune with his feminine side, means that even if he doesn’t understand the apparently murky waters of emotions, he learns to trust the wisdom that resides in them. It is the acceptance and allowing that is most difficult for men. Honoring their feminine side means, “honoring” it, not living solely from it.

## **Embracing the Divine Masculine**

The force of the Divine Masculine within men and women is the force of absolute clarity, absolute law, absolute strength, and absolute

peace. Most men are not accustomed to accessing their inner-divinity, but essentially, they can learn to use it the same way a woman learns to use her divine masculine energy. When a woman is integrated in this way, she is clear about what she wants in life and chooses to operate from her inner-strength and wisdom in getting it. She has a healthy ego that supports her self-worth and she never feels threatened by anyone or anything. She knows she is valuable simply because she is alive.

It doesn't matter whether a woman's goals are to become the head of a corporation, a yoga teacher, a truck driver, a supportive friend, or a devoted mother. The truth is that women can accomplish any goal in life they want and still remain grounded in their femininity. In addition, for men, they can remain grounded in their masculinity, while still accessing the divine feminine when necessary.

When a woman embraces her Divine Masculine, she understands that she has the ability to be decisive, direct, and linear in her goal setting objectives. She can exhibit strong minded, energetic opinions about what she is doing and how she is going to do it. At the same time, she can balance that male energy and reconnect with her female energy by taking an hour out of her workday to counsel and comfort a friend in need. She can decide that she will only work half days on Fridays because she needs that extra time to tend to her garden and play with her children. Or she can just skip a day of work all together and enjoy an afternoon movie by herself.

You will recognize a female who has integrated her Divine Masculine because she will be the one attracting success, people, and love to her. People are entranced by her golden aura like the unmistakable allure of Aphrodite. There is something magical and intoxicating about a woman so balanced and assured of her place in the universe. She is truly a living Goddess.

The modern Goddess is an emblem of wisdom, creativity, and individual evolution. Her divine nurturing energy is alive, ever changing, and the perfect counterpoint to the energy of the divine male. With it, we

satisfy the need for strong female role models and expressions of female prowess to help us tap into our own feminine energy. I urge all women to recapture the potent energy embodied by their own divinity and to experience first-hand a greater personal fulfillment by discovering the Goddess within.

*Denice Ann Evans*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I love the strong sense of knowing myself in all my most glorious and inglorious ways!

**What do you dislike (hate) most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

With age and experience comes more awareness. I like being more aware, but I do not like being SO aware. With awareness come a certain responsibility to live within reality and one's idealism comes into question more often. When I was in my twenties I was still very idealistic and I believed that my life would turn out a certain "perfect" way. Now having lived almost a half a decade and experienced many ups and downs, I am not as idealistic as I once was, but I am VERY realistic.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Just say, "NO." Say NO to all situations in your life that you feel uncomfortable with. Say NO to the boyfriend who doesn't value your integrity. Say NO to the girlfriend who doesn't honor herself or her body. Say NO to the boss at work who talks down to you. Say NO to anyone who tries to undermine your self-worth. Say NO to accepting opinions about you that are not aligned with your greatest inner-potential in life. Say NO to your own inner-critic when it tells you are not good enough, smart enough, or beautiful enough.

Say YES to loving yourself first.



## **PAULA GREGOROWICZ**

***Paula Gregorowicz***, owner of The Paula G. Company(tm) is passionate about working with women business owners and professionals to design a successful life that works without the burnout and compromise. She knows firsthand the power of coaching having experienced personal breakthroughs as a coaching client and a participant in transformational workshops led by bestselling author and coach, Debbie Ford.

Paula's philosophy is rooted in the notion that being authentic and living fully are the keys to achieving success on your own terms and living your best life.

She is a graduate of the Ford Institute for Integrative Coaching and the Advanced Coaching Program at Coach University. She is an active member of the Philadelphia Area Coaches Alliance (PACA), a chapter of the International Coach Federation.

Prior to becoming a coach, Paula spent over 15 years working for Fortune 500 and Global Corporations in varying professional roles — information technology, project management, and finance to name a few. She knows first-hand the challenges women face being authentic and at ease in a business environment.

Life is far from being all about work and Paula's myriad of interests and hobbies are a testament to that! Paula lives outside Philadelphia, PA with her wonderful partner of over 13 years and their 2 cats. Passionate about photography, she recently graduated from the notable New York Institute of Photography. Favorite hobbies include playing guitar, bicycling, hiking, kayaking, reading, movies, and wine tasting. For more information about her check her websites <http://www.thepaulagcompany.com>; <http://www.coaching4lesbians.com>; You can reach her also at [paula@thepaulagcompany.com](mailto:paula@thepaulagcompany.com)



## ***A JOURNEY TO ME***

Perhaps my greatest lesson from living on this planet for over 36 years can be summed up in this quote:

**“Always be a first-rate version  
of yourself; instead of a second-rate version  
of somebody else.” - Judy Garland**

Growing up I excelled at a number of things, particularly school. However, I never quite felt like I fit in. So, I spent a lot of time comparing myself to others and looking to them to define me. The problem with this approach is that it is inauthentic and sets you up for failure from the start. So whether it was high school, college, or being a professional in the workforce, I still didn't feel like I had found my niche and trying to conform was taking its toll.

After much ado I realized the problem with looking toward others for acceptance, approval, and answers to how I should live my life was that everyone has an opinion and opinions are a dime a dozen. Not to mention, what's right for one person might be the total opposite of what is right for me and my journey. It is a setup for failure and one that I spent many years addicted to.

If this approach is fraught with problems, what was the appeal of looking to others? The appeal was not having to take responsibility and truly look within (where it can be scary) to find what's right for me. Many people spend years (myself included) believing in and waiting for someone to save them. Here's the good and bad news – no one is coming to save you! Once I learned this, life got a lot more empowering.

So how did I get to the position of taking an empowering stance and living in a way that is unique and authentic to me, regardless of others'

opinions? I took a long, circular road over the course of many years. Let me give you a little sense of how it played out for me.

As I said earlier, I never really fit in growing up. I may have been a smart and mature kid, but I was basically a tomboy who certainly didn't fit with the girls and didn't quite mesh with the boys. As an only child, that meant getting creative by amusing myself and spending a great deal of time with grown-ups. For some reason I found it more interesting to have an intellectual conversation with adults than idle chit chat, gossip, and general boring conversation with most of my peers. I may have learned a lot, but it didn't do a great deal for my confidence in terms of defining my unique place within my age group, unless you consider my feelings of being a loser and an outcast.

Flash forward to college. Ah, a new beginning! The naïve beliefs of a new high school graduate believing that "this will be different" because now we'll be with much more mature and interesting "college students". Yeah right! It never dawned on me until years later that essentially this stage (and many other stages yet to come) really just involved the same general characters with names changed and circumstances different. Have you ever noticed how you seem to run into the same types of people over and over in your life? They just have different names and faces. I know now that it is part of growing and learning life lessons about me so I can ultimately attract higher caliber people into my life over time.

If you find yourself attracting the same type of person or circumstance in your life and it is a negative one (say, a dysfunctional mate or insane boss), that only means there is something you have yet to learn about yourself and your behavior so you can get over this particular speed bump and move onto better things for your life.

Let me just say that I learned a lot about repeating negative patterns and attracting unhealthy people in my life. What I did know by the end of my four years of higher education, however, is that the choices that never felt right to me (such as the field of study I chose and trying to attract



boyfriends) started to really become a tremendous source of internal conflict. Here I was doing everything I thought I “should” be doing and that others advised me I “should” be doing, yet I was miserable and once again mis-fit. However, this is the tip of the iceberg where I started to learn, ever so slightly, to make choices based on my gut.

First big choice – turning down great jobs everyone said I “should” take and taking a job that felt more suitable to me. While I may ultimately have been incorrect with the whole “suitable to me” part of the equation, what I do know is that it was the right choice for me at that time in my life.

The next big shock to my system was discovering that I was a lesbian. Aha, so that’s why the whole boyfriend thing never did quite work for me! What is significant about this is that it was the first time I chose a path that was right for me in spite of what my family, friends, and the rest of the world might think. Was there trepidation? Yes. Were there difficult times? Yes. Did I experience a whirlwind of internal conflict and homophobia? Yes. But what I know for sure 14 years later is that people evolve, relationships evolve, and there is no other “right” choice than the one that is in your heart and soul.

In these past 14 years I have been blessed with a most wonderful partnership that fills my life with love and laughter and makes my house a home. I have seen both our parents grow from denial, resistance, and blame to a close-knit unit of unconditional love and acceptance. Proof that the seemingly impossible is possible.

I have found life to be akin to a parallel universe. Perhaps I make some steps forward in relationships yet find myself floundering in the area of career. Or, I have a spiritual breakthrough but find myself in debt. All the different aspects of our lives create this larger whole (picture the image of a wheel) and we basically spend our lives working to make each part fulfilling and in balance. To really live fully is, in my opinion, what it is all about. And, in order to do that, this wheel must be tended to like a garden. A little focus spent here on my primary relationship, a little fertilizer here in health and well-being, and some reaping the harvest in the areas of

finances. The cycle goes from beginning to beginning each day, week, and year as I mold and shape what amounts to my experience, my life.

Ah, but I didn't get this wise simply by coming out as a lesbian and living out my days in the ripe learning ground of a dead end corporate job. While I was opening up and experiencing new things and discovering what it meant to listen to and trust my intuition, the core of my dissatisfaction remained. Here's why: I still never fully embraced ME and let's face it – wherever I go, there I am. It is like trying to run away from my shadow on a sunny day. It can't be done.

Enter stage left -- the most impact full discovery of my life – being introduced to the work of bestselling author Debbie Ford. Her work explores the shadow side that we all have and invites us to embrace the totality of who we are. She brings this groundbreaking work to people through her books, radio show, training programs, and weekend workshops.

For me, it was like taking a step off of a cliff. It involved being brutally honest with me for the first time about what was in my heart. What I've found from doing this work is that our minds are usually busy rationalizing, thinking, scheming, and blaming. The mind bypasses the key to unlocking our most important clues into what is right for us; that key is our feelings.

In my journey of over three years where I was a participant in her workshops, teleclasses, and coaching training program, I built a bridge from a life where I truly didn't like and honor myself (and, at times, even loathed who I was) to a space where I stand tall and love the person I am. I've even learned how to love myself on bad days and in the tough times.

From this new perspective, I have since thrown away a huge portion of my inner "should manual" and have forged a new way of being in my life. One in which I know much more love, joy, and grace while experiencing the full range of emotions and experiences that life throws at me. I have finally learned how to enjoy the journey. And, some days it can

be a struggle, but that is because personal growth is a lifelong journey not a destination.

The most important life lessons I have learned from my journey that I would like to share with you are:

## **Be Yourself and Invest in Yourself**

You are the most important asset you have. If you don't honor your own uniqueness and invest in your own well-being and growth, who will? Since no one is coming to save you, you get to call the shots. Make them authentic ones.

## **“Who” You Are Outweighs “What” you Do**

The person you are on the inside and how you show up in the world around you will always be more important than the things you do. Spend some time each day in silence and just BE. It is the key to unlock the pathway between your head and your heart so you can hear the wisdom your feelings, intuition, and the universe have for you.

## **Get Support**

Surround yourself with the support you need and accept only nourishing relationships into your life. Cut the ties with people who don't support your highest good. Find a community that works for you and spend time there. Hire a coach. Join a group of like-minded people on the path of personal growth.

## **Be Willing to Experiment**

Nobody has the answers. Imagine that! All those people we've been looking to for answers, guidance, opinions, and validations really don't know any more than we do. They, too, are making it all up as they go along. As a result, strive to live your life like a great artist and experiment. There is no right or wrong answer, just experiences. The more you're willing to dance with possibilities the fuller and more fun your life will be. In the words of one of my favorite spiritual mentors, "Remember that the way you think it is, may not be the way it is at all."

## **Live Fully and Love Well**

The funny thing about life is that no one gets out alive. And, no one gets to the end of their life wanting to spend more time at the office or completing obligatory to-do lists. Live each day as if death might knock on your door tomorrow (because there is no real way of knowing if it will). In this way you can be assured that you've lived and loved as fully as possible without regrets.

## **Dare to be the best YOU, you can be!**

*Paula Gregorowicz*

### **What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I love the wisdom I have gained from the years I have lived. While there are a few things I would love to do again or do over, I would never trade all I've been through and who I've become to be that young child again.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

The fear of getting older and wondering if I will have enough years in my life to have all the experiences I want to have. Although when I catch myself thinking that I laugh about it because no one, at any age, knows how long they truly have to experience life on this earth. It is all an illusion and our crazy ways of making sense of the world and that in itself is amusing.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Listen to your heart and follow your passions. The best is yet to be.



## **SVETLA BANKOVA**

**Svetla Bankova** is a psychotherapist and Life Coach who collaborates with self-motivated, results-oriented professionals who want to create a thriving business, career, and life with a zing. She is a strategizer, idea generator, and catalyst for turning creative concepts into reality. Clients blossom as she helps them visualize the big picture and develop a Smart Action Plan to reach their destination. They quickly learn where to focus their efforts, how to woo their ideal target market, and how to get better results in less time. Svetla provides clients with the support to “go for it” even when they’re shaking in their boots, and she helps them find balance between work, play, and life. As a result they experience more enthusiasm, joy, and success than they ever dreamed possible.

Svetla Bankova was born in the Eastern European country of Bulgaria and presently flies and lives between Atlanta and Sofia, Bulgaria. She holds a MBA degree from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia, Bulgaria, Bachelor’s Degree in Counseling Psychology from West Deusche Akademie, Switzerland, Master’s Degree in Psychology from American Public University and is a Certified Coach

through Coach Training Alliance, USA, accredited by International Coach Federation. Outside her work, Svetla is passionate about a few things only: friends, books, Argentinean tango, and photography.

For more information about e-coaching and tele-coaching in the USA and Europe, check her websites at <http://bodymindfocus.com> and <http://gravesdiseasesecure.com>.





## **THE SOUL TRIAL**

***Now I believe that every life is given for a purpose. It's the most rewarding journey; however, I still don't know my spiritual destination, but the physical is clear to all of us. What I know is that we live, we learn important lesson, and we pass them on to others.***

What I want to pass is my Soul Trial, the verdict, and the consequences.

Once upon a time there was a crime: How did I let it happen?

It was just 2 years ago, but it feel like was yesterday.

I was exhausted and tired all the time. I lost sleep and I was having a horrible heartbeat. Those were the moments I thought I'm dying and my heart will come out of my mouth. I lost a lot of weight and became like a skeleton, but I thought it's because I'm too energetic. I would wake up ten times per night with muscle cramps. My period suddenly disappeared and my left eye started swelling—later I learn that this is called “protruded eyes”. I am not saying that I was very beautiful before, but I definitely never looked as a Quasimodo. My 7-year-old daughter was scared of me. She was also craving for my attention, my time, and I didn't have any left at the end of my long day. At that time I definitely considered her more as another obligation, than as a priority. Is that familiar? It wasn't easy to be a single mother 24/7, no weekends off, no evenings off, no personal life, no money for babysitters. I wondered what in the world the other single moms do.

The world was crashing down as a cartoon box during an earthquake. Not only my body, but my house started to break down as well. The conflicts with my two roommates escalated. I had no time, energy, or space. I disappeared. I did not see a way out. There was no

way out! I was in a trap. I was really terrified, something was happening to my body and my soul and it was out of my control!

Finally I was diagnosed. It sounded more like a verdict than a diagnosis. The condition is called by doctors the “mystery disease”—Hyperthyroid or Grave’s disease—the one you cannot theoretically die of, but you are practically dying every single day.

*Rapid heartbeat, palpitations, extreme tiredness, inability to sleep, nervousness and irritability, inability to tolerate heat, shakiness and muscle weakness, trembling in the hands, menstrual problems or absence of periods, shortness of breath – feeling your heart pounding in your chest or throat, protruded eyes...A disease in which the immune system attacks body’s own tissues- or “autoimmune” system, in this case it attacks the thyroid gland, causing overproduction of the hormone thyroxin.*

**What in the world have I done that my body will eat and attack its own cells?**

## **The Prosecution:**

I wanted to cope with everything. I wanted to prove myself! I was a full-time employee in Corporate America, full-time single mom, and full-time volunteer at the new Bulgarian American Society of Atlanta (BASA). I was a full-time head of a household and also 'managing' my two roommates, who were supposed to be my girlfriends as well, but were more like extra children than anything else. If I had to go back and describe myself with one word, it would be “Full-time Servant”. No personal relationships; there was no time for that either.

At that time I tried to prove, even to myself, that no matter where you come from or what your mother language is, you can be successful!

I clearly hated my job, but it was paying the bills. Instead of paying attention to my daughter and myself, I was spending hours volunteering for

BASA. Everything was upside down. I didn't realize how I lost myself completely in all those full-time jobs. There was no me. Everybody's needs were ahead of mine and I had thousands of reasons why my life at that point should be the way it was. All the wrong reasons, I figured out later.

## **The Defense:**

When you come to a new country your purpose is to survive physically and mentally. Being an immigrant woman on top of that, was something that always, somewhere, deeply was hitting my self-esteem. In my eyes I felt that I never had the same start as the people born here, that I never speak enough 'good' English to compete with them and be equal, that I always had to walk an extra mile and make the extra effort just because I wasn't born here. This doesn't matter now, but it did back then.

I did manage to pay the bills, of course, and for the job I hated I was even rewarded with the 'Best Employee Reward', in the top 1% nationwide for production achievements. It was the highest award given to a person in my field.

That same year, after organizing the First Bulgarian Film Festival in Atlanta, I was rewarded also for my contribution as a volunteer in creating BASA, the place I thought I could belong and feel safe.

When BASA became a reality, my ego was satisfied. A Bulgarian legacy had been created in Atlanta! Almost 5,000 Bulgarians in Atlanta area had their own organization. How naïve I was. As I am writing this chapter, BASA practically no longer exists, due to lack of enough devoted people, and lack of ideas and motivation.

## **The Dilemma**

Did I have an idea as to what should I do? No, of course not! I freaked out. I was physically worsening over and over with every single

heartbeat I had. Yet, I was tired of this decline. Help me—my family and friends who care about me are 10,000 miles away.

I knew I had to change something. No more! I did not want surgery; this was not an option for me. With this decision I automatically placed myself in the 2% that will eventually recover from that disease without surgery, and as my doctor said, I barely had a chance. It took me sometime to realize how serious everything was. I knew I had to stop and change. But, what do I change?

## **The Decision:**

It was a very tough decision. I decided to take 4 months unpaid leave of absence, which, to be honest, scared the hell out of me. Who will pay my bills? How will I pay my bills, the mortgage? How will I manage my house? How will I survive physically after dying physically the last few months?

I decided to go to my native country, Bulgaria, and spend time there with my family. Things started to arrange by themselves, somehow. I believe that when you are making the right decisions, things will become easy; you'll meet the right people at the right time to help you.

This year, for the very first time I cried when I was leaving Atlanta. Usually it works vice-versa, i.e., we cry when we leave our native country because we have friends and family there. I was leaving my home in Atlanta this time.

The 'vacation' itself did not cure my disease. I believe the changes that followed that get-a-way were the cure, a result of that so-called 'vacation'. Needless to say it was a big relief. My phone wasn't ringing non-stop. I did not work a job I hated. I was with my family, my friends, and people who loved me.

## The Jury:

*So what happened after the crime?* I quit my job as a volunteer at the BASA. I had to say “no” to almost 5,000 people. Nothing mattered more than my health. I wanted my face back, I wanted my sleep, and I wanted to be a woman again. I was tired being unhappy.

I quit my job in Corporate America, as well, and I’ll never go back. Just the thought that may happen again terrifies me to death. I decided that I should work at something that I like, It was my psychology, that I abandoned a few years ago, just because I didn’t believe I could make it! After 2 degrees and 11 years of studying I enrolled myself to study again, in a coaching school.

*“Now?”* I’m a career counselor and personal coach and I am using my talents helping people in their career and life, to find themselves and be happier.

*“Do you love what you do?”* Oh, yes, you can bet! Now I work at what I truly and unconditionally love.

*“Did you overcome the disease?”*

Yes, I think I did, even though I’m still taking my pills every day two years later. I have my face and my eye back again. I can sleep. I’m less worried. I’m less anxious. I’m very cautious about what I’m doing and how I’m doing it.

*“What else changed?”*

I break relationships that are not working and I open space for new relationships that are valuable.

*“What do you do for fun now?”*

Tango! I dance tango! As much as I can and any available minute I have. Just because I love it!

*“What other consequences can I share?”*

I know how to stop and stay still. I know when to act. I create my own playgrounds, like the book you are reading now. I'm centered and balanced more than I ever was. I am still changing; this will never stop. I'm more grateful for what I have and for the people I have in my life. I don't consider myself anymore a second quality person just because I wasn't born here. I found that people value me for who I am. I have a group of friends (Americans!) that I love, appreciate, and feel safe with them. I allow myself breaks. I allow myself not to be perfect and to make mistakes.

### **The Verdict:**

***GUILTY, OR NOLO CONTENDERE<sup>1</sup>, OR NOT GUILTY, OR NOT  
GUILTY BY REASON OF INSANITY***

### **The Jury Would Say:**

***NOT GUILTY BY REASON OF INSANITY.***

## **The Lesson, the Charges and the Consequences**

- Love your disease. It's the way in which your body is reminding itself. It's where you find the truth.
- If you are not happy, no one around you will be.
- You need to learn how to quit relationships that are not healthy for you, no matter what.
- If you feel bad, or if you have any pain whatsoever, that means something is wrong. Don't question your feelings about people,

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<sup>1</sup> A plea made by the defendant in a criminal action that is substantially but not technically an admission of guilt and subjects the defendant to punishment but permits denial of the alleged facts in other proceedings.

situations, or circumstances. You feel what you feel. Your body is telling the truth

- Your ego and your soul are two different things, but the soul is always more important! Never ever betray it!
- Sometimes you have to make really tough decisions, but, something good will come out of them- sooner or later.
- You can be brave not only in your actions, but also in your non-actions.
- “Stop acting” and just listen to what’s going on, sometimes it is better than “being proactive”.
- If you don’t see a way out, stop, please, and give yourself a good amount of time. Calm your mind and look at your soul. The answers to your questions are there. There is always, always, a way out, and in most of the cases it is under your nose!
- Find what you like to do and do more of that. Sooner, or later, you’ll find a way to make money out of it.
- Getting enough sleep, no matter how, can change the way you view the world. It’s the first 'must do'.
- No matter what others tell you or want from you, the most important thing is what you want.

*Svetla Bankova*

### **What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

The new understanding that dreams are not only dreams, but they could also be a reality and it’s up to you to turn them into real things. The bravery is to try new things, to incorporate them in life, and to leave things that are not working any more.

### **What do you hate most about midlife, but can laugh about anyway?**

First, the fact that I have to watch what and how much I eat. Second, the clothes I am wearing today, because not everything fits as it did when I was younger. But that's just a piece of cake, compared to other things I have to deal with today.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

It's all good. There are no wrong decisions, just different paths to take. Trust your intuition and don't take yourself so seriously. Have more fun! What and how you think sooner or later will become your reality, so watch out what you think.





## **STEPHANIE C. HARPER**

**Stephanie C. Harper**, PHR, CCP, CHRM is an internationally respected subject matter expert in the career services field with a kingdom agenda. Founder of Careers and Coffee®, a faith-based employment ministry, she has made teaching biblically-centered career strategies her life's work. A human distribution center for organizations and individuals seeking HR Consulting, Career Coaching and goal setting, Stephanie is undoubtedly a powerhouse of giftedness touching the lives of millions through radio, magazines, newspapers, online portals, conferences, business groups and worship centers. Her ministry of Careers and Christ is powerful, practical and profound.

Stephanie is a 16-year human resource professional and the employment expert for the *Reggie Gay Gospel Show*. Her expertise has been sought by United Way, Association of Job Search Trainers, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Labor and the Association of Clergy Executives and Administrative Assistants to name a few. Her editorials are featured on *AOL Black Voices*, *Christian Business Today Magazine*, *Greater Diversity* and *StreamingFaith.com*, the world's largest faith-based

internet portal. Stephanie has had the distinguished pleasure to present at conferences with Beverly Robinson (Assistant to Bishop T.D. Jakes), Don Cathy (Chic-fil-a), Elder Debra B. Morton (wife of Bishop Paul S. Morton) and Bishop Eddie L. Long.

Monitored for brain damage until the age of three, Stephanie is a graduate of MTI Western Business College, Columbia Southern University and has received certifications as a Professional in Human Resources (PHR), Certified Compensation Professional (CCP) and Certified Human Resource Manager (CHRM). She resides in Atlanta, Georgia and is a board member for Youth United International and Everyone's Chance.

Stephanie's gift of the pen was discovered by her 10<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher who encouraged Stephanie to pursue a career writing greeting cards for Hallmark. Co-Author of the *Life Manual for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Woman*. Stephanie's books include *Why Should I Hire You?*, *Expressions (poetry)*, *Do Business 'til He Comes*, a three-set career tool (book, journal and workbook) entitled *A Kingdom Built Career*, which has garnered endorsements by her pastor Bishop Gary Hawkins, Sr., Bishop George G. Bloomer and a foreword by her father in the faith, the world renowned Bishop Noel Jones.

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## ***TRAINING FOR REIGNING***

Years ago someone gave me a bookmark and it changed my life. The bookmark simply shared the meaning of my name - "*Crowned One*" or "*Crowned in Victory*". This bookmark became a defining moment that spoke into my life indicating I possessed royal status. I looked up the word crown in the Webster's dictionary - CROWN: A reward of victory or mark of honor; To invest with regal dignity and power; To bring to a successful conclusion

I thought about images I had seen in my lifetime that were associated with a crown. Most of those images were of royal dignitaries who were not elected, but born into royalty. The crown has always been seen as a symbol of power and authority so at that point; I decided to live up to my name. Understanding the great responsibility of having a name I could live up to was an internal fear I carried for many years. Finally, I decided to embrace the fact that my name was not given to me by accident. I was born with a name with the intent that I would have a successful conclusion. Wow! What a new mindset. This was new mindset that became the benchmark to push me into my destiny. Finally, I conceded I would become the "crowned one" as well as be "crowned in victory".

After accepting that my path to victory started with my name, I thought long and hard about how a simple name could direct the path one should take. However, this was a decision that required many moments of reflection and introspection. Not so much in the aspect of deciding to wear the crown, but the true challenge of deciding *which crown* to wear was formed by both struggle and success. To figure out which crown I should wear, I had to go through a training camp called LIFE. In camp I learned many training tips that would enable me to wear my crown with dignity and pride.

## **Training Tip #1: Embrace Who I Am**

Overcoming the odds must have been in my blood. Nothing could stop me from my date with destiny. The doctors told my mother she could not have any more children and then I was born - - outside on the stairs of our home. Due to the circumstances surrounding my birth, I was monitored for brain damage until the age of three. Growing up I experienced many trials that most can only imagine. Many of the trials came from being different, intelligent and bold. What I did not understand was why the trials came for things that seemed to come so naturally. Being different meant I usually went against the norm, being coined stubborn. Being intelligent meant I sometimes challenged authority, being coined a defiant. Being bold meant I always spoke my mind being coined uncooperative. Later I learned I was none of the coined terms, I just wanted to set my own standards - possibly before my time.

The crown of imagination was the crown that got me through. I imagined that I could have a better life, so made it happen. The road to finding my passion and path caused me to write: poems, lyrics, short stories and to date - five books. Imagination took me places I never dreamed I could reach. What was I training for? The only thing that mattered: Reigning to embrace who I am.

## **Training Tip #2: Creating My Own Playground**

Independence was calling my name. At the age of 16, I left home because I did not like living in a man's world with a different set of rules "just because I was a girl". I grew up with five older brothers and no sisters. To this day I have not figured out how a king can teach women to be a queen or why I had to succumb to such rules other than thinking it was some sort of line of protection. What was I being protected from? The world I wanted to know. I did not want to play sports; I wanted to write. I did

not want to catch tadpoles; I wanted to sing and dance. I did not want to be around boys all the time; I wanted to understand sisterhood. Independence required an early leap from the nest. It was not easy, but it was necessary.

The crown of independence was worth every struggle. Finding out what I was made of and how much I could accomplish was worth every tear, trail and temptation. What was I training for? The only thing that mattered: Reigning to create my own playground.

### **Training Tip #3: Be creative as only women can.**

A different day equals a different design. What exactly am I referring to? Chicken. Creativity always adds variety and spice. What does this have to do with chicken you ask? Before I could learn to be resourceful to the world, I must first be resourceful in the home. For the 21st century woman, the \_expression of her creativity can be cultivated with a simple meal. If chicken is the only choice of meat this week, creativity turns modest means into magnificent meals. For example:

Day One - the chicken is fried.

Day Two - The chicken is boiled for potpies, homemade of course.

Day Three - The chicken is coated and baked for Parmesan.

Day Four - the chicken is tossed with a salad.

Day Five - the chicken becomes soup.

When I run out of ideas, I have to simply go back to the basics and rely on the process of elimination. Throw out what does not work and work what I have at my disposal. The point is I had to figure out a different way of doing things with the limited resources. I could have chosen to get discouraged with the fact that the only meat available was chicken, but instead I chose to find out how my chicken would be best utilized.

The crown of creativity is worth every long-winded thought. Thoughts became actions. Actions became reality. Reality became destiny. I could not change the cards I was dealt so I had to figure out to play a winning hand. What was I training for? The only thing that mattered: Reigning to be creative as only women can.

## **Training Tip #4: Balancing career and life**

If men are promoted on potential and women are promoted on performance, then my job is twice as hard. The irony of this training tip starts with my firm belief that anyone who is unhappy in his or her career is ultimately unhappy in his or her life. As a Human Resource Professional, I have witnessed many people turn their lives upside down due to a wrong career move and equally turn their career upside down due to a poor life choice. The balancing act between career and life must exist so that both bring a sense of reward. I too had to learn to balance many areas of my life, which included: spirituality, entertainment, career, romance and plain ole me time.

Even without the responsibility of caring for family, I made very little time for me. Here I was rising at 3:30 am to get to the radio station by 4:45 am, leaving from the station and heading to the office for a full day of work. I also worked with clients during the day and facilitated evening and weekend conferences - all while writing books, articles, blogs, teaching a dance and sign language class, and attempting to have a social life. Doing great things in the community - - for the community; helping everyone except for me. I found myself so busy and exhausted that I had little time to take care of one thing that I was truly responsible for - my temple. Part of my training would include learning the word no. To some it's such a small word, but I learned it packed so much power. Last minute request: the answer is no. Unreasonable request: the answer is no. Giving and never getting anything in return: the answer is no. Making sure others are taken

care of before I am taken care of: the answer is no. Soon those around me understood when she says no, she really means it. Saying no helped me to put things into proper perspective and realized I can only give my best when I am at my best. To be my best I had to ensure that my career and my life were balanced.

The crown of balance is worth every sacrifice. Having balance gave me the opportunity to be the creator of my work life; shaping it instead of reacting to it. What was I training for? The only thing that mattered: Reigning to balance both my life and career.

## **Training Tip #5: Creating a safe place**

At the age of 28, I packed up and moved 3,000 miles across country in pursuit of my dreams. I wanted to create a business assisting job seekers with resume preparation and career planning. I had a plan of action. I figured if the economy couldn't keep me safe from downsizing, layoffs and even being fired (yes I have fired before and it was the best thing that ever happened to me). I was responsible for my actions even if it means I had to create a place of safety. Getting to this safe place was not an easy walk in the park. It took years of struggle before getting to what others view as success. The exposure was critical to becoming who I set out to be. If no one knew what I was trying to do they could not support my efforts? I did not have money to advertise so I had to figure out how to get the word out about services I could offer. After all, I had the knowledge, skill and experience, but it didn't serve a purpose without an audience that needed what I had to offer. I decided that I would create opportunities to share my voice in print.

Conquering this training tip meant that I had to gain exposure by giving away my prized possession - my expertise. I had to write career articles and facilitate workshops for free (in the beginning). I had to lose friends who still can't understand why I could not provide career services

for free. I even had to pay my own way to the conference that changed my career and created a new platform for me. In the end I found that safety has a huge price tag attached to it. After paying all my dues, some days still don't seem safe. I learned in this time that what I had gone through to get to this point, was part of the process and I had to endure it. If I had never experienced these things I would still be dependent on others to create the place of safety I was after.

The crown of safety was worth every step as I took the Expert to Entrepreneur walk. My safety was found in people who were at a higher level than me in every area of life. Those people became flowing rivers of knowledge and challenged me to become GREAT! What was I training for? The only thing that mattered: Reigning to create a safe place.

## **Training Tip #6: Enjoying the role**

As I look back over my life, I find that I have more congrats than regrets. In retrospect, I have been the rule breaker since birth. I also learned the rules were made to be broken. Along the way I learned that love is blind; a tattoo is not a fad, it sticks with you for life; some things are just not explainable; sometimes suffering is part of the success process; and the gifts that God gave to me were not just for me. They are gifts that I have to share with others and give away.

There were times when I felt like giving up, but wisdom taught me quitters never win. There were times I felt like searching for another path, but wisdom taught me to stay on the path that is guaranteed to get me to my destination. There were times when I felt like taking a detour, but wisdom taught me the detour has many unfamiliar roads and I may get lost. There were times when I felt I cannot do this anymore, but wisdom taught me if I do not do it - it may never get done.

The crown of wisdom has helped me to enjoy my role in life as an author, career expert and entrepreneur. I enjoy my role because I began



with an end in mind. Training is a requirement for reigning and life trains in many ways. But then I remember, I was named and trained to Reign. What was I training for? The only thing that mattered: Reigning while enjoying my role.

In closing, contributing to this life manual would not possible without the experience of struggle before success. Along the way my mission was guarded by a vision. My vision was to live up to my name. Living up to my name required me to be different, intelligent and bold. There was a price to pay for being me. Never let my crown become tarnished. What I learned with every lesson in life is success is personal and I am the one who defines my success...after all, I am the crowned one - now trained to reign.

*Stephanie C. Harper*

### **What do I love most about being in the middle of my life?**

What I love most is being a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman living out my God-ordained destiny. I love the fond memories of how I arrived to this place in life, but I never forget the obstacles, choices and difficulties I endured to get here. I am amazed that God is using me to help others. I'm a willing vessel and it makes life worth living.

### **What do I hate most about being in the middle of my life, but can laugh about anyway?**

Mostly, that after the age of 30 stuff starts to spread. I am grateful for every new day because it means I still have some work to complete.

**If I could go back and speak to my younger self the piece of wisdom I would share.**

Success is personal and I define it. People who are closest to you love you, but they do not always know what is best for you. Take their advice but apply what fits and discard what does not. Most importantly danger comes when you are out of the will of God.



## JACINTA HIN

**Jacinta Hin** is a Dutch woman based in Tokyo, Japan and is a Career & Life Transition coach supporting expatriates and internationally minded Japanese women. With her unique spirit, experience and wisdom, she is able to guide her clients through their difficult, challenging or crisis moments. She works alongside them in their exciting transitional journeys to become more powerful within and aware of their authentic selves. Jacinta believes that we all have the power within to make changes to transform our careers and lives to be fulfilling, balanced and deeply happy.

Her strength is in helping her clients discover new perspectives of possibility, move to embracing their transitions, and designing and realizing changes aligned with who they truly are and what they truly want from their lives. Clients say they see Jacinta as “Someone to offer wonderful clarity and foresight. To calmly highlight the options you didn’t know you had to give you the chance to live your life at its maximum potential for happiness and fulfillment”.

She is creative in her thinking, direct, and insightful, in her style and a naturally excellent listener. She coaches in a relaxed, flexible and enthusiastic manner that makes it easy for her clients to open up, become more aware and be inspired and encouraged to put new insights into action and get results.

Jacinta was born in Amsterdam, The Netherlands and has been living in Tokyo since 1989. She has a Master's degree in Japanese Studies from Leiden University, The Netherlands, and is a certified coach through the ICF accredited International Coach Academy (ICA). She brings a strong background of 15 professional years in business, career management and cross-cultural experience to her coaching clients.

She is a member of the International Coach Federation, the Tokyo Coaches of the Round Table and Foreign Executive Women in Japan. For more information, please visit her website at: [www.embrace-transition.com](http://www.embrace-transition.com) or contact her via email: [jacinta.hin@embrace-transition.com](mailto:jacinta.hin@embrace-transition.com).

## ***THE GRASSHOPPER IN THE PINBALL MACHINE***

I tried to find Him on the Christian cross, but He was not there; I went to the Temple of the Hindus and to the old pagodas, but I could not find a trace of Him anywhere.

I searched on the mountains and in the valleys but neither in the heights nor in the depths was I able to find Him. I went to the Ka'bah in Mecca, but He was not there either.

I questioned the scholars and philosophers but He was beyond their understanding.

I then looked into my heart and it was there where He dwelled that I saw Him; He was nowhere else to be found.

Rumi, 1207 – 1273

My yoga teacher Meagan has been keeping this beautiful poem of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian mystic poet Rumi with her for many years. She always brings it into class and leaves it on a small desk near the studio entrance for us to read. Over the years, this little poem has traveled with her to many places. It made me think about my own journey and how, just like in the poem, I found what I was looking for when I finally looked into my own heart.

Fifteen years ago, just before my 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, I left my hometown of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and moved to Tokyo. It was not my intention to start a new life overseas. I was merely looking for adventure, challenge, new people and new cultures. I left when many of my friends were looking to settle down in their careers and relationships. I forgot that I was of the same age and cultural upbringing, and probably in my heart

wanted those same things. Without really being aware of what it meant, I settled into an adventurous and challenging career, and a relationship with a person of a new culture.

From the day I set foot on Japanese soil, a cross-cultural pinball machine life started that lasted many more years than I could have imagined when I set sail. Tokyo is a crazy place, a whirlpool of contrasting activities and many different worlds crossing paths in an unstructured way. The city, one of the most cramped places on this planet, does not rest—it is either on top of its game or severely depressed. There is always a buzz. It is truly a city with mood swings and we, the inhabitants, just swing along. For many of us foreigners, our time here is an adult Disneyland experience, at once real and surreal.

I loved it when I came. Compared to my charming but sleepy birth city, Tokyo was alive and kicking, screaming for my participation. After all these years, I still love the place and all it has given me. And that includes years of living in cultural confusion, always traveling between different worlds.

I was home everywhere and nowhere. I was a “guest believer” who was forever hopping between locations and communities. I was very good at putting on new hats depending where I was, and I lived my life based on the principle of adapting. I behaved according to what I thought was the cultural make-up of my environment. My behavior earned me a feeling of temporary belonging. This was not a belonging out of desperation. It was mostly a pleasant belonging: there was learning, fascination, acceptance, curiosity, attention. There was freedom. I could always leave and I could always return.

But it was not always only pleasant. There were plenty of uncomfortable feelings, but I chose to close my eyes to many of them. Sadness often lingered—after visiting my family in Amsterdam, in my constant restlessness, and in the painful and exhausting awareness of either fitting in or standing out.

Don't get me wrong—my life in those hopping days was good. I had amazing experiences and met remarkable people. I learned not only from Japanese culture, but also American, Italian, British, Indian, Philippine and others. I have been privileged in my work and blessed by friendships with people from all over the world.

At some point, however, the uncomfortable feelings became harder to ignore. The restlessness became more and more a driver for my behavior. One day, while still employed as a company manager, I was in a teleconference with global management representing different continents and business cultures. We were trying to come to an agreement on a particular issue and I remember putting down the phone and asking myself, "How much bridge can a person be?" In all of my jobs I had performed bridging roles, merging Japanese culture and Western culture, mediating between employees and employers. This particular job was the ultimate bridge position, and after that teleconference I sat in both awe and frustration. I was no longer merely playing the role of a bridge. I had, it seemed, been reduced to the role of go-between. What had happened to the real me?

Something else came to me in the midst of these realizations—a desire to truly belong. I realized the desire had always been there, hidden from my consciousness. Only in my most down state did I recognize it; I saw a glimpse of another side of myself that made me want to see more. My curiosity was aroused, and for the second time in my life I set out on a journey.

For a moment it was tempting to just pack my bags and return to Amsterdam. After all where else could I really belong? I certainly felt urgency for real change. But something stopped me. Something about the burn-my-bridges scenario just didn't feel right. My intuition told me to physically stay where I was and to go on another kind of trip, one for which I did not need to buy any tickets, say goodbye to one person and hello to another. The journey I chose to go on was a journey inwards, into the very depths of me.

I made up my mind, quit my job and departed.

Just as I did on my first journey, I went in search of adventure, challenge and new experiences. But this time the adventure would be in finding my own inner treasures; the challenge would lie in facing my own fears and discovering my own truths; and the experiences would be in the richness of what I found, the choices I came to make and results I got.

An inner journey is all about letting go and replacing. As I traded my business suits for sweatpants, the first thing was to let go of was my old self-image. I had lived for 15 years with an image of myself as a business woman. I had dedicated my career to being a leader and a manager. My goal was always to be a key person in the companies I worked for, to manage and mentor people and, ultimately, have my own firm. I dreamed of being surrounded by my own employees, who I adored and who would adore me back. Parting with this idealized woman brought me grief, but also tremendous relief. We had been trapped in a relationship that was not bringing either of us anywhere we wanted to be.

The scariest thing I had to do on my journey was to abandon the struggle to improve my weaknesses and to learn to embrace my strengths. I realized that in our work lives we focus so much on improvement. We obsess over our shortcomings without realizing how energy-draining and futile this really is. I saw how all those years I had fought against my qualities because I did not find them sophisticated or polished enough and had tried to adopt other ones that were not mine but seemed fancier.

The hardest part of the journey was the sense of defeat I experienced, the sense that I was giving up and giving in. After several months I slowly moved away from this perspective and started to like the “new” me. Of course there was nothing new about me—it was the real me I started to like. I started to like the idea that I could be at my best when working alone rather than leading a team. I started to warm up to the idea that I would be great in a helping profession rather than a performing profession. For each part of the old me that I was letting go, I found amazing replacements.



The inner journey has a distinctive pattern. From the grief of parting with the old, we move on to relief for no longer being something that doesn't fit, and from there we discover a vast space in which we find and create the new. We become a lighter version of ourselves. We get these amazing "aha!" moments of excitement and exhilaration when we hit on something special. We reach a state in which we are constantly excited, energetic and jubilant. People around us begin to comment on how good we look. Change is palpable.

Ultimately, my journey gave me what I had desired—a place of permanent belonging. And, much to my surprise, it had nothing to do with location, environment or culture. I found it right where it had always been, inside of me.

The feeling of not really belonging and being without a home is fairly common among people living overseas. Some of us leave for better pastures because we feel we don't belong where we were born, others become homeless while being away from their birth place, and often it is a bit of both. We settle for a while in a new lifestyle, and with time we lose the connection with what we left behind. We don't succeed in making a complete connection with where we are. We get stuck in limbo land and don't make it back; neither are we able to go forward. We feel we somehow gave up our rights to the place we once called home, and we never really gained rights to the adopted home. On our "home" visits we feel out of place, but back in the new home we become homesick for the old home. We forever walk in circles. We long for connection and belonging and wait for it to happen in our external world. But what it really shows us is that we need to create something new.

What we forget is the journey that brought us where we are and the desire behind that journey. We forget to go back to that moment when we got on that first plane. We forget to reflect on the deeper meaning of that moment and the reasons behind being on that plane. We think we somehow ended up here in a new place for reasons beyond our control. We forget that the journey was a choice grounded in focused desire.

But when we do go back and ask ourselves what it was that made us leave, we realize that we left to discover new things, not to end up somewhere not knowing what happened. And when we reverse the focus of discovery from the external world into the internal, the journey becomes a journey of self-discovery.

This is what made me realize I had to go on my internal journey before deciding on any external journeys. The desire behind my move to Japan was a powerful desire to create something new. The reason I was tempted to move back to Amsterdam was nothing more than a desire for distraction, an urge to return to somewhere safe. There was no powerful, positive desire to create something new in Amsterdam.

Looking at life as a journey is a powerful perspective to take for us globetrotters. From this perspective, we can see the parallel between the external and internal journeys. They are like yin and yang, and everything in between is the connection. We can see how all of our experiences in our external journeys are not moving us away but towards where we came from and who we are, because where we came from and who we are is always ourselves.

We flow from our external journey into our internal journey through a transitional and often chaotic period of extreme external living, disorientation and confusion. In his book, "The Way of Transition," William Bridges described this state of chaos as "...a fertile state, a creative state, a state of pure energy and great potential". I have come to believe that herein lies the key to successful internal travel. While the external journey was one of discovery and absorption, new impressions, ideas and experiences, the internal journey is one of discovery and creation, creation of an authentic version of yourself and creation of something new. And in that creation we shed confusion and disorientation and we reconnect.

The internal journey is not only preceded by a transitional period, it is a transition in itself. As William Bridges describes it, "Transition may not be simply a step toward an outlook that is more appropriate to the life-phase we are actually in. It can also be a step toward our own more

authentic presence in the world. That would mean that we come out of transition knowing ourselves better and being more willing to express who we really are, whenever we choose to do so. It would also mean that we are more often willing to trust that who-we-really-are is all right – is valid and a person capable of dealing with the world.”

The purpose of transition is thus to become grounded in who we really are. This grounding prepares us for whatever comes next. Without this internal work, any move is bound to be an empty one. We risk becoming eternal refugees, nomads in our own countries.

Any choices we consequently make from this grounded state, this inner place of belonging, about our next steps in the external world flow out of this place. We can choose to stay where we are, move back to our home countries or to another country. We can choose to stay in our current career or transfer our experiences and skills to a new one. We can choose to embrace all of our experiences as valuable and be grateful for how they prepared us for our next step. After living for so long surviving and adapting, rediscovering my agency, my ability to make choices, was an amazing experience.

The point is not that we don't have to make changes in our external realities when we hit rock bottom. But if we allow ourselves to do our internal search first, we can make authentic, meaningful changes. A friend said it beautifully the other day, “I cannot have all I want, but I can choose all I want”. Whatever we do, we will do so as strong, firmly grounded beings, not as lost souls trying to cut our losses. We can return to our birth countries. But the journey back to where we came from will become a journey to where we came from. There is no backwards, only forwards. We will arrive in glory with our chins up, knowing who we are, what we want and how to get it.

Mountain pose, my yoga teacher explains to us, is the mother pose of yoga, the pose that is in all poses. Always go back to mountain pose, she teaches us. “Look for your mountain,” she reminds us when we are struggling to get our downward dogs, bridges and shoulder stands

right. Like life itself, the mountain pose is extremely complex. When I don't get it right I don't feel connected. But when I am in perfect mountain pose, my body feels simultaneously grounded and lifted, safe and exalted. My whole body is engaged. And this is how I came out of my inner journey—firmly grounded, lifted, whole and light as a feather.

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I love most about being in the middle of my life that I am at a place I created around who I really am and from where I dare to be bold. I feel I have moved from living in the external reality to living from my internal reality. And from here, which is where I am now, I can start creating a bigger version of me. I feel live as it is supposed to be, is just beginning.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

I hate most about midlife that I am physically getting older. I would love to have the body of my twenties and the mind and soul of where I am now. But the good news is I care less now how I look than I did in my twenties. So I guess it all balances out nicely!

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

If I could go back and speak to a younger version of myself I would tell her that she is perfect as she is and she only needs to allow herself to experience herself as such. But I would not want her to change anything, as I, the older version, could not be who I am today without her being exactly as she is.



## VIRGINIA ZAHARIEVA

**Virginia Zaharieva** is the author of three books of poetry: *The Stone That Didn't Listen to the River*, *The Hen with the Sewn-up Eye* and *Quadrille Late in the Afternoon*. Critics view her writing as one of the most striking examples of *écriture féminine*. Her poetry is expressive, temperamental, and unpredictable – much like the author herself. Virginia finds it hard to stick to one single field: She writes, captures sounds, and explores the depths of the psyche.

She is Editor-in-chief of *P.S.*, the first magazine in Bulgaria dedicated to gender studies.

Virginia created the audio disk 'Sounds of Bulgarian Nature'; the idea of vulnerability as the only 'passageway' to love gave rise to her performance 'Vulnerability: Five Movements' and a documentary of the same title. Virginia also writes a column on the psychoanalysis of space in the *Brava Casa* magazine.

Usually, Virginia Zaharieva goes after pleasure. Sometimes, though, she bumps into it by chance.

She has a combined degree in Bulgarian literature and psychology from the 'St. Kliment Ohridski' University of Sofia, Bulgaria. Virginia Zaharieva specialized in analytical psychotherapy in Switzerland, with

Professor Waldo Bernasconi and works in the fields of individual, family, and group therapy.

Virginia founded the 'Yellow House – a place to return to oneself' spiritual center for meditation and body-oriented therapy.

She likes to swim, plays tennis, go wind-surfing, and snow-boarding. She has an 18-year-old son. She adores Baron Munchausen, especially his ability to get out of the water by pulling himself up by the roots of his hair. When she doesn't know what to do she likes to make strange teas, peel vegetables, cook, draw, or dance. Visit her website at: <http://www.zvergi.com/> or contact via email: [virginia.zaharieva@gmail.com](mailto:virginia.zaharieva@gmail.com)

## ***IT'S ALL RIGHT TO BE ALONE OR 'BE THE LIGHT FOR YOUR OWN SELF'***

Alone! – a word which first makes your stomach go into a ball, and then makes your mind race: How am I going to live without him/her? How will I manage financially? Who will I snuggle up to? Can I survive without a steady sexual partner? Who will I share things with? Who will see me? Who will I give to? These are only some of the usual questions that assault us like angry wasps. The order may be different, but their meaning is essentially always the same. It's hard to accept the end of a relationship, hard to accept parting with someone. Some more, some less – but we're always dependent on those through whom we channel our needs.

It has been proven that those who love each other, who work at achieving physical and spiritual equilibrium and find their place in the wider world, cope better with the hardships of life.

Osho had said somewhere that true love happens, not when we try to satisfy our needs through our dependence on another, but by our developing the wealth of our own personality, and our maturity; in other words, by giving ourselves love and attention. Only then would love overflow and would there be so much of it, it would attract others to us. Perhaps it is best, when talking about love, to use the language of the wise old Jedi master, Yoda.

Our culture seems to contribute a lot to the fact that we tend to find the premise for happiness outside ourselves, more specifically, in the idea of a sublime relationship with an extraordinary personality whose existence in our life would solve all our problems and meet our need for closeness and intimacy, would, indeed, fulfill our hope never to be lonely, always to have someone to share both our joys and our pain with. This idea lies at the root of many folk tales, songs, and myths. It stems from our yearning after the harmony when we existed in our mother's womb, when we really were One with our mothers. This two-in-oneness goes on until we reach the age of three. For some it lasts a lifetime, but others try to copy this

model and apply it to other relationships so that they live with another like two completely dependent on each other invalids. Unfortunately, together they are even more alone because they soon discover that their desires are not always the same, as it used to be with Mom at the beginning.

I would add here that mature love in fact begins with the establishment of distance, precisely when we separate the One and stand on our own, as two separate individuals; when we accept the other together with their 'No'; when it's not a matter of subtraction, when one-plus-one makes not one but two – two entities exchanging closeness, intimacy, attention – all of which are synonyms of love.

I do not aim here to say anything new about love. Rather, my aim is to expand the notion of Aloneness, since, if we understand it only as a case of being abandoned it would invariably be viewed as loneliness.

It has been said in many religions that we come into the world alone, and we leave the world alone. Here is where the opposite of aloneness lies – in togetherness, intimacy, and connectedness. According to all spiritual leaders, one of the ways to make these two opposites meet is through prayer, or meditation. These may be performed communally, but, in essence, they are intensely personal moments when we are alone and focused on the divine. Thus, prayer and meditation are in fact ways of apportioning the sense of aloneness, separateness, self-perception, and at the same time they allow us to be part of the higher order of this world. If we could only get into the habit of achieving this every day!

The fact is, we are together not because we love each other, or because we are beautiful, but because we cannot be alone. We do not know how to be alone.

Many, when there is the absence of another, sink into depression, feeling rejected, isolated. Sadness becomes their constant companion. This is especially true if one has become fixated on one particular person, expecting that person to give them the world!!!

For myself, all I can say is that when, due to travels abroad, I have to part for a few months from my beloved, I put my libido in an envelope



and mail it to myself so it can travel for three months, and I begin to work hard and try to reduce the backlog of old 'things to do' – that's how I numb the pain of separation. Work and heroic achievements! Until you drop! No fun! That – later. When he comes back.... Later, of course, we've both changed and we can't make it up to each other for not having lived properly. I realize that my workaholism is simply another form of self-hatred.

Recently, however, I've started learning to live in a more harmonious way, that is, not to punish myself for being alone, to have fun, to seek out others, to spend more time with my family, or out in nature. I spend more time with myself, rather than trying to avoid myself because of my inability to exist alone; I try to enter into all kinds of relationships with the world within me, and the world without. I've found out that I could perhaps live like this even if he didn't come back. It's a thought that frightens me, yet I've realized that if I could exist so completely on my own, I could bring that joy into our relationship itself. And, as often happens in our synchronicity, he has discovered the same.

Years ago a psychiatrist friend of mine – an otherwise tactful person – once told me: 'For women, the only chance to be completely true to themselves is while they're flying from one man's arms into another's.' It made me furious. Why should this apply to women only and why shouldn't we be our true selves when we are with our men?

Now I'm beginning to think I know what he meant. If we substitute 'flight' with 'aloneness', then I'd be inclined to agree with him. In that sense he'd be right, that a woman can understand herself most fully when she is alone. He was profoundly wrong, however, if he meant to suggest she was unable to achieve any measure of self-awareness, wholeness, and maturity within a relationship, or if he was trying to confine her to 'oneness' only, and not only that, but to imply it was up to her (!) to form another 'oneness' with someone else. Harmony in a couple exists through the satisfying of one's needs of self-assertion, of touching, of food, of sex. In and of itself, however, being part of a couple guarantees nothing: one can

be unspeakably happy or unspeakably lonely as part of a couple. This is where I believe the problem stems from – turning the love relationship into some sort of cult, the idea that profound closeness can only exist within a passionate romantic relationship with that special person we choose over all others. It is not difficult to understand this because the joy of finding your 'other half' is so great, it becomes a central event in one's life, but such 'fetishizing' of that relationship may be very limiting and may keep us from other potential sources of closeness. It can also cause a lot of suffering if there's the desire to possess, or if that special person is simply not there. Whatever the reasons might be for our aloneness, society invariably looks upon us with sympathy, as though we had an illness.

Many women prefer being unhappy in their relationships to being alone. One possibility is that they stay in a sexual relationship in which they give a whole lot more than they receive. In such cases it's probably better to do without any sex at all because if things aren't right sexually, this is very likely an indication of problems in the satisfying of many other needs as well.

A woman is expected culturally to take care of others. She spends her life complying with external conditions in which she has been put by her loved ones. But if she is confused and fraught, if her relationship brings her no pleasure, there would be no point in wasting any more energy in arguments and demands, or in trying to give more, and yet more, because this would be living a lie – giving when there's no more left to give. It would be better to take the risk of remaining alone with herself so that she can draw on the eternal sources of strength: the beauty of the world and her own internal center. It is there we need to look for the grain of wisdom, for the self-love and creativity from which spirituality stems.

In that sense, it's okay to be alone even for a whole year. Just imagine what it would be like if we decided to focus all the energy we waste on pointless battles on ourselves instead! While we are alone we can explore the shape of our own space. If we're not certain about it, how could we expect others to respect it? If we're constantly going out of

ourselves, or else are curled up into a tight little ball, what could we possibly know about the shape of our life? Let alone about its content.

Very often, after having spent some time alone, we discover that we can actually solve many of our problems, instead of waiting for the help of others. We may discover we're attracted by our partner all over again. Alternatively, we may decide to break up with him completely, having discovered we don't miss him.

When it is a matter of conscious choice, aloneness is a healing process, a process of directing our energy towards our own stability, of listening to and hearing our main tonality. Only when it is purified and sounds crystal-clear can we hope it could summon the person we need. Otherwise we're destined to repeat endlessly our neurotic choices – the same every time, and followed by the question 'Why do I always fall for the wrong person? Stop, listen to yourself, and make your own choice. The decisive factor is joy: if you have that in a relationship, savor it because it is a really wonderful physical and mental state. If, however, you are confused and unhappy, at a distance from what you cherish most in yourself, if there is no joy, perhaps the time has come to reconsider. Perhaps it's not the Other's fault, but you are simply unable, or have lost the ability, to enjoy your own self.

The mission of every woman, of her heart and mind, is to develop her own sense of balance, and to find that intimate relationship which will allow her to share and exchange the wealth she has been blessed with.

If we live a life of celibacy, but constantly think about sex, aloneness will turn into a nightmare, into loneliness. Then it is very difficult to cope with. In order to inhabit your aloneness, you have to find more time for yourself, to meet yourself, to get to know yourself, to accept yourself the way you are, and come to love who you are.

Monks, who vow to lead a life of aloneness and chastity, do so not so much because sex is considered sinful but because of the hope that by transforming sexual energy into a spiritual quest one can reach higher

truths. Those who truly believe also truly love, but theirs is a universal love of Being which makes aloneness impossible.

Western civilization, on the one hand, 'fetishizes' passionate romantic relationships – as more or less another conquest of our ego. On the other hand, it tries to make us fiercely independent, but all we have to do is look around, and we'll see that everything that surrounds us is the accomplishment of hundreds of other people. In other words, independence is an illusion. I am therefore inclined to accept the idea of universal love, of maintaining closeness with as many people as possible, with nature, and the miracle of life. I'm inclined to accept the notion of sympathy because it opens me up to others and does away with my fear of them. I believe that each of us has access to universal love and *this* is what we have in common.

It is pointless to punish ourselves for not being in a relationship at a particular moment in time by sinking into sadness and dejection, and thus excluding ourselves from the vast sources of care and love which the world could give us. If only we opened ourselves to it.

If we expand our notion of closeness it wouldn't matter so much whether we live with someone as a couple or live alone.

The important thing, as Buddha's last words was: "Be the light for your own selves!"

*Virginia Zaharieva*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I like the fact that I have a healthy body and well nurtured spirit.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

My fear of life, but now I know it well and I do not allow it to lead me out of the way of self realization. I tell it, "Hey, you have no other

chance but to take off or to walk with me, in my direction, because I don't give up".

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

You are absolutely incredible. You have to boldly move ahead, because the love and the wisdom of creation speak through you, and others need to hear your voice.



## **GOLDEN RULES FOR LIVING**



***If you open it, close it.***

***If you turn it on, turn it off.***

***If you unlock it, lock it up.***

***If you break it, admit it.***

***If you can't fix it, call in someone who can.***

***If you borrow it, return it.***

***If you value it, take care of it.***

***If you make a mess, clean it up.***

***If you move it, put it back.***

***If it belongs to someone else, and if you want to use it, get permission.***

***If you don't know how to operate, leave it alone (or learn it)***

***If it's none of your business, don't ask questions.***

***If it ain't broke, don't fix it.***

***If it will brighten someone's day – say it.***

***If it will tarnish someone's reputation, keep it to yourself.***

***Author Unknown***







## **TRACY MILLER**

**Tracy Miller** is a certified Feng Shui consultant based in Atlanta, Georgia. She holds a diploma from the Feng Shui Institute of America, studying under Feng shui master and author Nancilee Wydra. She is currently a member of the Feng Shui Institute International. Born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ms. Miller is an adopted-native of Atlanta. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from the University of Georgia and has studied Cultural Anthropology at the graduate level at Emory University.

Gazelle Feng Shui has served hundreds of residential clients in Georgia, Tennessee, North/South Carolina and Florida. Gazelle also performs Feng shui evaluations for commercial clients including restaurants, retail shops, offices, and industrial operations. Ms. Miller is adept at interpreting this Eastern environmental art into a practice that has meaning for Westerners. She is also a popular lecturer on the topic of Feng Shui and has taught seminars for the Sherwin Williams Company, the American Institute of Architects, International Facilities Management Institute Atlanta, GA the Midsouth Business Roundtable and the Rotary Club among others.

Tracy Miller and Gazelle Feng Shui have appeared in the following publications / programs: WQXI radio, "Trading Treasures" interview,

Atlanta Home Improvement, Atlanta Business Chronicle, Atlanta Homes and Lifestyles and Business to Business Magazine and many others.

“Through Feng Shui people gain a significant environmental advantage in attaining both personal and professional success”, she says. “By tapping into the power inherent in our everyday environment, we can move closer and more quickly to our goals, improve business and personal relationships, and increase prosperity.”

Mrs. Miller is also a professional affiliate of Feng Shui Institute of America and Feng Shui Institute International. Find more about her and her services at <http://www.gazellefengshui.com> or contact her at [tracymiller@gazellefengshui.com](mailto:tracymiller@gazellefengshui.com).

## ***THE JOURNEY IS THERE FOR YOU TO TAKE***

It wasn't until my early 40s that I realized that the only true journey a person really takes is the inner one. Having traveled extensively through my 20s and 30s, I thought that I had gathered so much worldly experience. I'd been to Europe, Australia, South America, Greece, and across the United States. And although those kinds of trips do expose you to things you've never seen before, they pale in comparison to the things you will see when you begin to explore the unknown territory that is found within yourself.

What I ultimately realized is that in "The Real World", we don't chase our lives. Instead we bring them forth from within; we call our gifts to the outside from our *inner* knowing. Everything we need is right inside us if we are only willing to take the time to look into our own storehouse of treasures.

We need to know what we're naturally good at and have the opportunity to develop those gifts into something that can be used in service to others. I had tried my hand at several careers that were recommended to me along the way to adulthood: journalism, secretary, dental hygienist, concert manager, and aspiring anthropologist were among them. It wasn't until I accidentally found a book on Feng Shui that I began what would be a long journey to that place of inner knowing.

Getting to know oneself takes time. In my case it took 46 years of missteps, mistakes, and perhaps worst of all --self-doubt. Often we have to go through painful experiences to understand what our limits are, to know where our boundaries are, to feel what happens when we take advantage of situations from which we should have walked away, and to know what it feels like when we're taken advantage of. Learning to appreciate things that might have been overlooked in our rush to "greatness" is a critical part of the process. My belief is that greatness is not something that is achieved; rather it is *realized*. As we move through our daily rounds doing

the things that come naturally to us and become truly interested in the world around us, greatness happens. Greatness isn't always applauded by the public. You might go for years being great and never knowing it. It doesn't make it any less true that you *are* great.

The Feng Shui journey led me to understand more about energy patterns, how energy is called forth from our inner selves. From this journey came the seemingly impossible circumstance of finally owning my own home, of being happy in my career, of realizing that Argentine tango is the thing that drives my passion and of meeting a man whom I love completely and absolutely, a man whom I would never have recognized had I not known exactly who I was and what made me happy.

Finding our inner compass is our first work in life. What gifts do we have? How do we develop those gifts to make ourselves useful to others? When we know the answers to these questions, the world opens to us and encourages us to become fulfilled and happy. Our preferences are made clear. We are able to make what Deepak Chopra calls "spontaneous right decisions". We don't *wonder* about what we want, because now *we know*. We feel content with what we have. We discover that in order to bring forth something in our lives all we have to do is:

- A) really want it; and:
- B) ask the universe to help us attain it.

## **The Universe As The Fulfiller Of Dreams, The Wal-Mart Of The Soul**

A good first step to changing things if we're stuck is to remove the clutter of activities, people, ideas, and things that don't serve us. Do you have "friends" that always see the worst in you, drag you down, make your life more difficult? Say "Goodbye" to them. Is your house filled with momentos of the past that have made you unhappy or remind you of times

that were not the best? Clear them out. Are you thinking things that used to be true, but perhaps no longer are? Have you forgotten to change your mind about these things? People change all the time. Make sure that what you think lines up with your current set of values and goals, and not what *used* to be.

A "wish box" is something that I think everyone needs. Mine is a small wooden box that was handcrafted in South America. On the lid is an image of women working in a field, harvesting. Just as in their pictured work they are bring forth something new, so then the box holds my wishes for those things that I want to bring forth new into my own life. Whenever I realize that I really want to manifest something in my life, I put it in my wish box. Then every day I open the box, take out my wishes and read them. I ask the universe to bring me those things or to show me the way to them. Then I don't worry about them anymore. Invariably, situations will appear in my life that take me to the things I want. It's amazing really. The whole Buddhist notion that one should "do less and accomplish more" has become clear to me. When we are living according to our true lights, life becomes almost effortless. Obstacles disappear before us, clarity and order are part of daily living and stop becoming the exception to the rule.

Next, create a "sacred space" for yourself. If you have your own living quarters this is easy. Your whole house is your sacred space-you might have a room for reading/meditation and a favorite chair. If you're sharing your space with others (as I did for seven years after my divorce), you can still create an altar (or a quiet spot in a little used room) to have a place at which to sit and focus on what you want. Simply close the door and ask for the time to yourself. Use your sacred spot every morning or evening to focus on your wishes.

# The Personal Journal: Writing Your Way To A New Life

A third tool that I have found most helpful in accessing critical information and finding new paths is a writing journal. I began to journal three pages a day after having read Julia Cameron's "The Artist's Way" many years ago. What initially seemed to be a simple and boring regurgitation of my activities and thoughts for the day ultimately became a detailed map of my inner self.

The key is this: simply notice what you keep writing about. I wrote about my own marriage for five years before I realized that I was truly unhappy in that relationship. I learned that I always felt joyful when I was doing something with music or dance. Dogs delight me as does the color red, mashed potatoes with gravy and fried chicken, anything French, and riding on a motorcycle or being on a speedboat. I found that expressing myself through writing became very easy when I stopped censoring what I wrote. Sometimes I would swear and curse on the page. Other times I wrote funny poems-and never knew I could. I cried on the page when I lost a friend or a beloved pet. My life became visible to me because I could read about it. Sometimes, when we're going through an experience, we're not aware of our feelings or thoughts because we're so wrapped up in them. Writing helps get these things out where we can see them. From that place, we can acknowledge them and act on (i.e., change) them if we choose to.

One of the best gifts I ever received was a book called "Simple Abundance" by Sarah Ban Breathnach. It was a daily meditation book that I read religiously every day for a year and then for many years to follow. It discussed the way women could approach the world through their own authentic eyes. It talked about how they could enjoy simple pleasures of the every day, like cooking, a morning ritual at the desk at work, or noticing when the trees start to bud in spring. I had never done these things before.

I was always thinking about what job I was supposed to have, what man would be right for me, what thing I needed to chase next to make my life "good". That was a complete waste of time. I was failing to notice what was around me every day that I already loved and made me feel whole.

It's funny how I completely ignored the fact that I always enjoyed dancing, singing, and playing the piano. At the age of 5 I had been making up dances and teaching them to the neighborhood kids so we could "put on a show." I would lose track of time while goofing around at the piano and I had loved to sing to 60s rock and roll. Yet I was told that this type of life was "just fun" and didn't have anything to do with "real work". It was made clear to me that my real role in life was to get married and have children. Of course, this happened to turn out to be about as possible for someone like me as juggling ashes underwater.

## **"Information Management", Or "What You Learn And What You Can Do With It".**

After I stopped looking outside for my answers, I stopped trying to decide whether I should have plastic surgery, or a better house or a cooler car in order to be happy. I didn't need to be a celebrated actress, nor a NASA scientist nor Entrepreneur of the Year to be wonderful. I *was already* wonderful. I found that I had only needed an opportunity to express my gifts in ways that were meaningful to me in order to connect with this beautiful energy. Tango lessons suddenly crept into my life and wouldn't let go. I found time every day to play the piano and work on a Chopin waltz or a nocturne whose melody stayed in my head from the radio. I spent time with my dogs, and would go out for ice cream when the mood struck. The surprising thing was that as I became more myself, the more I attracted situations that made me even happier. "Do less, accomplish more".

## **Some More Strategies For Making The Inner Journey**

Every once in awhile go to a library or a bookstore and just browse through the aisles-especially the aisles where you never go. See what's there. Have your interests changed? I started a lifelong romance with aromatherapy by doing just such a thing.

Try something new by taking a class that "just looks interesting." You don't have to know how it's going to turn out. In fact, it's better if you don't. Even if you've never done something before and always wondered about it and you're 55 years old...well, what else are you doing anyway?

Take a chance on yourself. Live simply and authentically. Admit you don't do math and get a friend to help you with your taxes. You may be surprised that you need far fewer material things than you realized. Once you connect with the beautiful energy that is you, your life will take on a different dimension. You will be able to feel it.

### **Seize The Privilege, Sing The Song**

Joseph Campbell said "The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are." This is a privilege that none of us should have to pass up.

Or, to paraphrase Henry David Thoreau, most men and women lead lives of quiet desperation, and go to the grave with the song still in them.

The most important thing that you will learn from your own inner journey is *how to sing that song*.

*Tracy Miller*



**What do I love most about being in the middle of life?**

I've become very comfortable with myself. When one has been through much life experience, one gathers invaluable information about their strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes. Decisions become so much easier when you know who you are and what you want. I've learned to listen to my intuition with great respect for what it says.

**What do I hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

Realizing that had I continued on the path I wanted to go down even as a child, I would have been so much further along than I am now. Yet, as they say, it's better late than never.

**If I could go back and speak to my younger self, what wisdom would I share?**

You know who you are. Don't ever let other people tell you what you like or what would be good for you. You already know.



## ***KARRIE KING***

***Karrie King*** established Joyful Spaces consulting services to fulfill her dream of helping women create lives they love from the inside out. Her personal experience of creating prosperity and loving relationships through intentional living are currently the main focus of her seminars, articles and products. She successfully launched her, "Discover the Wealth Within" program to help thousands of women create the prosperity they have always desired. Karrie received master's certification from the Black Sect Tantric Buddhist Feng Shui school in San Francisco, California and integrates the ancient practice into everyday living for herself and clients. She lives with her husband and their two children in Santa Cruz, California.

## ***DISCOVERING THE WEALTH WITHIN***

If I told you that all the answers that will guide you to living wealthy are contained within, would you want to learn more? Are you curious to learn about how your path to wealth is not only created by you, but controlled by you as well, even when outside influences seemingly take over, or throw a twist in your plans? I was frustrated when I first heard this! I was frustrated because that meant I could no longer blame anyone else for my circumstances. I needed to take responsibility for where I was in my life and that meant I also had to make changes in myself. After all, if I wasn't where I wanted to be, then I needed to change in order for my life to, right? I thought this change would be a long and painful process. Well, this is one time I can say how thrilled I was to discover I was wrong. My discovery of the wealth within is a wonderful journey. I haven't created a get rich quick plan and have not overcome huge obstacles to be living the life of my dreams, yet, but I am observing my life change drastically and I am having more fun than I've ever had in my life as I advance toward my dreams each day.

Would you love to have as much fun on your journey to living your dreams as you would at arriving at your goal? The answer is simple. Begin living and practicing the "Universal Law of Attraction". The simplest description of this law is that our very own thoughts, beliefs and actions create the life we live by attracting situations, people, places and things that match what we are focusing on. I've heard it described succinctly as, "Where your attention goes, energy flows, and results show."

It works like this. Our thoughts create feelings and our feelings create actions. We know we can think of something and suddenly feel terrible, or we can change our thoughts to something that results in us feeling joyful and lighthearted. Our feelings create an energetic vibration within us. Good feelings create high vibrations and bad feelings create low vibrations. Our vibrations, as a result of our feelings, attract situations,

people, places and things that match our vibration. This is the “Law of Attraction” at work.

I’m focusing this chapter on money because that has been an area of both hardship and success in my life most recently. I had both a feeling of shame and of pride with how I lived with money. I related my success in my corporate job to the money I was making. I considered my salary a good one and it helped my family live with stability and consistency. But I felt shameful I was making good money and felt broke. I wasn’t taking long vacations with my family. I wasn’t happily creating my life’s vision. So I thought the only way to live my dream life was to make more money and to make more money I needed to either work more or learn to invest any excess money we made. Holding off on spending excess money to play and take vacations was certainly a good trade in for the possibility of making much more money to really play, right? I actually started looking to others to help me make those decisions, to get confirmation that I was taking the right steps, I was in the right job and that I could be happy doing what I was doing.

Where did I go wrong? First, in focusing my attention and my actions on money. Second, focusing my attention on what I didn’t have, such as the vacations, the money, and time to play. Third, and my most powerful lesson learned, was looking outside of myself for answers.

Let’s relate my actions to the law of attraction to better understand why I was in the situation of not moving forward in my life. Focusing my attention on money created feelings of resentment. I resented the power money had in my life and also believed that I didn’t know enough about it to be truly successful. My thoughts and actions around money created very low, negative vibrations in me. Putting my attention on what I didn’t have also created very low vibrations in me. I was used to thinking in this way, though, and didn’t realize how much of a habit it was. I believed that thinking about what I didn’t have would keep me moving toward my goals. How ridiculous! Living life that way is like running a race where the finish line is constantly moved to remind you that you are running a race!

And looking outside of myself for answers caused me to feel powerless, thinking I needed to learn someone else's way and that would take time and I didn't feel I had a lot of time. My energy vibrated really low in this area. I was actually creating a cycle of self-defeat where I was vibrating at a really low level and attracting the same circumstances to my life again and again which made me feel as if I were going in circles.

Initially I thought that since the law of attraction matches life situations with our energetic vibration, my life would improve if I thought more positively about money and my situation. I created affirmations to remind me of the good thoughts I wanted to have around money. But, significant change didn't come about until I started to feel, from the inside out, differently about money and what was possible for me. So I dug a little deeper to find out how to really begin feeling different from the inside out.

Most of us live life on "auto-response". Imagine your mind as a computer that has stored a long list of messages and beliefs that relate to various life experiences you have had. But, our computer also stores beliefs from experiences others have had as well. Over time, the origin of the items on our list becomes blurred and we accept everything as our truth. We actually accept other's experiences and their beliefs as our own. This is especially true with our parents or loved ones. Many beliefs on our list dates back to messages we received when we were children. Over time, we add to our list messages and beliefs received from friends, society and media, such as TV, radio and newspapers. A circumstance presents itself in our life and we use our "auto-responder" – accessing old beliefs to respond to new circumstances. This is where I really began to understand the power of beliefs and the power I had to access the law of attraction. I thought old situations were presenting themselves again and again when in reality, new situations were presenting themselves but I was responding by automatically accessing old beliefs, so the result was the same old one I had gotten before.

I love this simple statement that described my situation perfectly, “If you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting what you have always gotten.”

We all have beliefs or statements of truth that create our world. It doesn't matter what your background, your history, your story, your education, your heartbreak, or your challenges. By changing your core beliefs you begin experiencing new feelings that result in new actions that result in you experiencing the wealth you desire in life, or whatever you desire in your life. Period.

You simply need to make new choices and stop believing that what is happening with your finances is the result of what other people are doing. It is not the government, the economy, your boss, your family, your color, your career choice, your gender, or any other belief you live out that is holding you back. Imagine you are a puppet who acts out a life. The strings attached to your limbs are your feelings. The wooden support that moves the strings are your beliefs. The person manipulating the wooden support, though, is you and not someone else. You are the entire puppet production. Only you! That news may be empowering and frightening at the same time.

Resistance is an “auto-response” and you may be feeling some now. I really wanted to blame so many other people and things as I truly believed they were the cause of my challenges. If you are experiencing some resistance, really get into it, identify with it. Own it. Ask yourself how it is serving you now. If you really want to receive more money in your life, or be financially independent and free, how long will resistance serve you? I challenge you to shift your energy from resisting and affirming that this could not be possible into observing how your current thoughts and feelings really will bring about certain situations and actions. I encourage you to try this new information out. Start an experiment. Become the observer. What could you lose by trying to think and feel differently? You will begin to master this awareness and can shift your attention to attracting situations that bring you the wealth you desire in life.

By choosing to be aware, you will begin to look at the beliefs you hold about money that affect your ability to receive more of it in your life. This is a constant process as you will continue to change and grow and your beliefs need to do the same. You need to take a look at the beliefs that serve you now, not the ones from when you were 10, or even 20 or 30 years old. What serves you now? Right now. Right this minute.

Get a sheet of paper and make a list of the beliefs you hold about money. Don't think too much about what you are writing and if it makes sense, just let it come out. Some examples of fairly common beliefs I see again and again:

*You need money to make money.*

*Rich people are greedy.*

*Money doesn't buy happiness.*

*Being wealthy and being spiritual don't mix.*

*I can't make more money than my parents.*

*My friends won't love me the same if I'm wealthy.*

*Hard work pays off.*

Come up with your own list. This will serve as a reference for you to better understand your current financial situation. These beliefs are at the core of your thoughts, feelings and actions. Even if you don't consciously think them, you are holding them as truth in everything you do around money.

Leave this list for now and move to the next step.

On another sheet of paper, write short statements that first come to mind when you read the following in regard to money,

**“I know I DON'T want...”**

An example of one of mine is, “...to work hard for money.”

Did you find that it is pretty easy to identify what you DON'T want? You may have needed another sheet of paper so you could write a longer list! Most people are pretty clear on what they don't want. In fact, most people focus on what they don't want most of the time and don't realize it! Or, like me, I thought it was normal to always think about what I didn't want to keep me moving toward my goal! Based on the law of attraction, what situations do you suppose are most likely to be presented to you again and again if you are focusing on what you don't want?

We have been trained to see it and then believe it. We see through the eyes of our experiences and we develop a belief filter in which to gauge those experiences. Our experiences may have us believe that having money causes pain, if we saw our parents fighting about money. We may believe that rich people are greedy or corrupt, especially if you have ever watched reality TV shows that support people working against one and other to win large sums of money, or you read the newspaper about executives of large corporations making unlawful decisions to generate more income.

The experiences are real. The feelings you have as a result of those situations are real. But, the way in which you process your feelings through your belief filter that results in action is a choice you make. You can conclude that what you experienced is your truth from now on, or was just your truth with that experience, even if for a moment. This is key to breaking patterns and habits that will keep you stuck in a cycle of desiring instead of having. Remember the whole puppet analogy? Who is moving the strings (feelings) and creating the movement (action)? You are. Who is creating the filter (beliefs)? You are. You can choose to keep filtering your experiences in ways that have not served you (and they have not served you if you are not experiencing the wealth you desire) or you can choose to tune your belief filter to align with you now, with your current needs and desires.

A powerful way to begin tuning your belief filter to meet your changing needs is to fully experience the feelings and emotions related to



specific events, and then release the feelings and emotions to arrive at a clear state of mind. Then, take action as needed in that clear state of mind. I learned a simple method of releasing when working with a life coach that I have found to be one of the simplest and most effective of the many I have used. I also use meditation and yoga as ways to continually come to a clear state of mind. Find a method that works for you and incorporate it into your life.

Let's do another exercise to change your "don't want" statements so those don't remain in your consciousness. But rather than just change them to "wants", I suggest choosing different language as wanting still implies a sense of lack. Convert your "don't want" list to new statements that result in a completely different and positive feeling to you.

Examples of words you may use instead of "I want":

**"I choose to have....", "I now have....", "I intend to....", "I decide to...."**

You no longer need to be aware of what you don't want, so instead focus your attention on these new statements and revisit the list often, or rewrite new statements again and again.

Remember the three things I did that kept me feeling stuck?

One was that I focused solely on money. I needed to shift from "how" I was going to accomplish things to what it was I wanted to accomplish. What was my intention? What was my vision? Once I shifted my attention away from money, I actually experienced significant shifts in my money situation! I was simply moving from a low vibration state to a high vibration state. My vision made me feel outstanding, so I began to attract situations that supported that vision. Create your very own vision. The key is not to think about what you are doing, but how you are feeling. Get into that future self, go to that dream home or your dream job. Feel what it is like to be there. What is your day like from start to finish? Who is in your life, or your job, or your home? How do you interact

with them? Get to that space and really feel what it feels like to be there. I suggest recording your thoughts on a voice recorder as they come to you because you can do so without thinking. Then listen to your recording again and again. Write it. Then read it. Begin to feel this vision every day.

The second thing I did that kept me stuck was to focus on what I didn't have. Well, you know what you don't want, so toss that list. It's real clear and believe me, if you forget something on that list, it will never matter. Instead, focus on what you DO want or choose. Read your new list of statements again and again, or write them often. The key is to break out of the "auto-response" process and access current beliefs, thoughts and feelings that align with current situations and your vision. You are replacing old responses with new ones.

The third thing I did was to look outside of myself for solutions. I wanted to hear from others that I was in the right job, that I had what it took to reach my goals, that I was doing the right thing. My reality was that I had my attention in all the wrong areas so no matter what was said to me, I was vibrating at a low level. So I began shifting my attention to my own vibrations, my own feelings and became a master observer. I began to practice allowing wonderful feelings to consume me. I thought of my vision often and even began to live as my future self. I created daily practices around this that have changed my life. It does take practice, but the practice is fun. There is nothing hard about it. I have not had to re-live painful memories to shift core beliefs. I just need to observe and be aware of the situations, the people and the things, that come my way. I have allowed myself to become flexible and take new paths and new directions that I would have missed before. I take action with confidence and trust. I say "no" without guilt. I have a strong vision for myself yet I am a more effective mother and wife. I can move through challenging feelings more quickly and arrive at a clear state where I feel as if my whole being is shining. It is a practice and I am enjoying every minute of it.

You can begin shifting your beliefs, feelings and actions now. Right now, as you finish this chapter, you can make a change. You

can start with using your new statements in a daily practice. Start a new journal that will be filled with your new statements, multiple versions of your vision, new scripts for a “day in the life of” you. Write down new beliefs and how those serve you now. You may even have a sudden desire to do something you have never done before. Whatever it is, follow the queues that come your way. Be attentive to what is made available to you. The law of attraction is at work all of the time and if you ask, something will be delivered!

It is my sincere intention that you discover the wealth within and open your heart to the abundance of love, wealth, and joy that are available to you right now.

*Karrie King*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I love most that I am more attentive to how I feel in my life, in my relationships and even in my body, whereas I used to accept what other people thought about me as my truth.

**What do you dislike most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

The one thing I dislike most is that I cannot create the path for my children and make them follow it. They will always create and follow their own path. Even as my life has become easier, I cannot impress upon them to follow my lead. I can only share of my experiences and myself and love them for who they are.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

I would say trust yourself and your feelings and follow your instincts. Know that those are your guide in life and you will always make the best choices for yourself if you do.



## **CATHY TIGGES**

Cathy Tigges, CTACC, Certified coach and President of Tigges & Associates, Inc., a practice management and coaching firm. Cathy specializes in coaching women over 30, conducts meditation workshops that help women create what they want. She provides DiSC® profiling to individuals and businesses. Her goal is to help women over 30 achieve their dreams, goals and visions by the discovery of their inner strength and hidden brilliance. You may find more about Cathy Tigges at her websites [www.soulhealingtechnique.com](http://www.soulhealingtechnique.com) or <http://talktotheotherside.com/>.

## ***HOW TO BEGIN CREATING WHAT YOU WANT FOR YOURSELF!***

You have the power within you to achieve your goals, desires and wildest dreams! No matter what it is you want, you can have it. How do you get what you want? Ask for it, expect it, believe in yourself, and the Creator.

I can see some of you shaking your heads thinking, yeah right, believe in myself and just ask for it? But I can tell you from my experience, *this simply works*. I have learned that for people who truly see their own brilliance and worth, this positive attitude about themselves allows them to attract and create what they want and need. They believe they deserve the best for themselves, they expect it and *they get it*. If you think I am crazy, take a number and get in line behind me 16 years ago.

I am one of those whose first half of life was one of lacking in love, money and joy. As a child, because I lived in a broken family that lacked much of the emotional and material essentials that children should have, and as a young adult, because I hadn't come to terms with my childhood and hadn't accepted the fact that I truly deserved the best life has to offer. In my twenties and early thirties, I worked very hard and performed well in my career, but continually lacked love, money and joy.

Fortunately for me, there was a part deep inside me that longed for more. One day in 1989, I got out of bed and grabbed me by the shoulders and shook the heck out of me and yelled "Do something about your life"!! I knew I wasn't living life fully, but didn't know how to go about getting the life I wanted.

From that day forward, I began to meet people who would change my life. I didn't realize that by acknowledging that I wanted to improve my life and really meaning it, that I would attract the type of experiences and people who would lead me to ultimate success. I had a friend who

introduced me to the concept of “Universal Principle” and other alternative ways of viewing living on this planet. I began to re-perceive myself, other people and the entire world. The most significant thing that happened to me is that I began to see myself as worthy. Realizing one’s self-worth doesn’t happen overnight for most of us and is an on-going battle for many.

Two years after the day of my revelation, I created a job that tripled my income; developed a great social and spiritual life and met the man who would become my husband. I married for the first time at age 42 to a wonderful guy, who by the way, is nine years younger, very handsome, makes a great living and can cook and dance !! As I write this in 2005, my life is fuller, richer, better than ever. I have found the secret to creating what I want and my goal is to share this with thousands of other women.

So, how does one go about creating the life they want? The first step in creating what you want for yourself is to love yourself and believe in your own value. I realize this is easier said than done. We have a tape in our head that was initially created in childhood or early adulthood when we were hurt, not properly cared for or protected, embarrassed, or even abused. This ‘tape’ that we created is embedded in our subconscious.

As adults, it is up to us to recover from our past hurts, even those inflicted upon us as children. We must realize that we are fully accountable for every aspect of our lives, so that we may empower ourselves to create the changes and things we desire.

Our subconscious continually impedes our progress as it is still driving our lives based on that old tape in our heads. I believe that “it” (our subconscious) directs us and “it” doesn’t know any better. We must re-train “it”. I challenge you to constantly correct that inner voice that says nasty things about you. The more you catch yourself and replace your negative self-dialog with loving positive thoughts about yourself, your subconscious will begin to reprogram itself and will lead you to good, loving and

wonderful things and people. It doesn't matter if you think it's silly or you don't believe it. Trust me, this works. Just try it.

Record yourself saying great things about you and play it in your car, on your computer or as you are working around the house. For example "I am lovable" "I deserve abundance of all the good things life has to offer" "I attract men who are perfect for me" "I attract the right people at the right time", etc. Whatever you need to say that replaces what you used to say about yourself. Play this tape as often and as much as possible. Play it while you go to sleep. Play it over and over and over again.

After you start listening to your new tape, I invite you to think about what you may be tolerating and ask yourself, "Why am I tolerating this"? It is unlikely you will come up with a good answer, as we usually tolerate because we think we must help others, feel obligated to others and accept less because that's what we've been doing for most of our lives. Make a list of anything you are tolerating and determine if and how you can change it or stop it. Many of us tolerate because we are afraid to say no, or we don't love ourselves enough. Tolerating is another form of withholding self-love. Don't do that! If you need to establish healthy boundaries for yourself, please don't hesitate to do so. It is a positive and loving thing to do for you and those around you. The healthier and happier you are the healthier and happier all those around you will be.

I often ask my clients to determine what they don't want in order for them to be very clear on what they do want. I suggest making a list of things you don't want, and then turn those statements into a list of positive statements. For example, if you write "I don't want a lot of telephone calls" change it to "I get very few telephone calls and the few calls I do get are loving and positive". By changing your list of "undesirables" into positive statements, you create a shift in the energy around you and the things you do not want to invite. Thought is energy, so be careful what you think. Energy is also contagious – put out positive as much as possible and I promise you will get more positive back.

After you've determined what you don't want and turned the "don't want" statements into positives, create a new list of "Wants". Start with one to five things you would like to create for yourself. List what you truly want. You can ask for love, money, a particular job, etc. Be specific when you can. For example, "I would like to make \$5,000.00 per month and don't want to work more than 40 hours a week" or "I want to retire in a house by the Ocean".

Now, take your list and re-word it as though you already have what you want. For example, "I would like to make \$5,000.00 per month" becomes "I make at least \$5,000.00 per month, working 40 hours per week" or "I want to retire in a house by the Ocean" becomes "I will retire in a house by the Ocean". I tell clients to add at the end of each statement, "I invite" or "I am open to more of what I already have". This brings you more of what you want. Write your complete re-worded list of wants and find a quiet place where you will have no interruptions. Put on some soothing music, or simply sit in quiet. Close your eyes- take deep breaths and allow yourself to become relaxed.

Present your list to the creator and be grateful for all you have and all that is coming your way.

I walk my clients through many steps that enable them to get what they want. The steps include meditations, affirmations and cell memory exercises that accelerate the rate of progress my clients experience in achieving and reaching their goals. These steps can't be covered in a few pages, but you can begin the process by getting to your core, believing, loving and placing value in yourself. By trying what I have suggested in this chapter, you can be on your way to creating what you want for yourself.

Creating the life you want is already within YOU. *Decide this very moment that you are worthy enough to create the very best for yourself.* I encourage you to begin re-training your subconscious and self-perception today. Why wait?



**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

That I have learned to be grateful for my past, which has allowed me to create a more fulfilling today! At this stage in my life, I can see my own brilliance much easier.

**What do you hate the most about midlife, but you can laugh about it anyway?**

Gravity!

**If you could go back and speak to my younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

I would teach my younger self that I truly am a lovable, valuable and worthy child of God. I would not wait to learn this in my thirties.



## **BARBARA WASIELEWSKI**

(Wash-Your-Left-Ski)

Motivational Speaker, Coach and Facilitator Barbara has worked closely with people for over 30 years as a nurse, career counselor and business woman.

As a speaker, she is a natural and talented story teller with the ability to engage and sustain the attention of everyone present. Her energized delivery is full of insights, humor and personal stories. This sought after speaker will have you laughing, crying, and at times, leave you speechless. She speaks not only to the hearts and minds of people, but to their souls.

As a coach for women, she helps her clients stay motivated and focused on being happy while using their passions to fulfill their purpose and make their dreams come true. She is a bottom line oriented business woman who has over 20 years of experience owning and/or operating successful business ventures. Most recently she founded “Women in Transition, Together”, an organization dedicated to empowering women to

be happy and to fulfill their destiny through structure, support, motivation and education.

In addition, Barbara conducts a workshop entitled “Get out of your Soap Opera and into Your Dreams”. This six session workshop, conducted via e-mail, helps women rediscover who they are and what they were meant to do. She believes we are here for a reason and in order to find true meaning in our life we must find and pursue our purpose.



## ***DO IT NOW!***

Have you ever had a person, or a group of people impact your life in such a way that you are forever changed? For me it was the good people of Sun City, Arizona.

I was in my late twenties and going through a really rough period in my life. My husband asked for a divorce and then moved out the next day. I had stayed with him during the hardest and most trying periods of his life, which included alcoholism, recovery and major surgery; then he just walks out. He moved in with the “other” woman. I was devastated, depressed and yet determined to understand. Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this? Is this what life is all about? Will I ever be happy again?

I am an avid reader and when I want to learn something or am searching for answers, I turn to books. One day I read that while young people can possess a lot of knowledge, only through experience can we acquire wisdom. I did not want to wait to acquire wisdom and thus understand; I wanted answers and I wanted them now! So I thought, why not just find people who had experienced life and thus already possessed wisdom.

After giving the issue some thought, I applied and was accepted as a critical care nurse at Boswell Hospital. Boswell Hospital is in the heart of Sun City, Arizona, which is a retirement community just northwest of Phoenix. I would be working with people who had experienced life for over seventy, eighty, ninety and sometimes one hundred years. It was there that I learned a lesson that changed my life forever.

I was on a mission from my first day. I started a survey, and every day for over a year I would ask my patients the same question, “What is the single most important piece of advice you can give to someone? Not one gave any advice on becoming more successful or making more money. Not one said they should have worked harder, smarter or put in longer hours. In fact, not one person mentioned anything about careers or

jobs or money. Although their responses and stories did vary, the underlying message was always the same. *Life is shorter than you think and one day you will reach the end of your journey. Do not arrive with regrets. Do what you need to do to enjoy your life and make yourself happy and **DO IT NOW!***

Life is a journey and the final destination is the same for all of us yet some of us exist in a world not unlike a traffic jam; we get hemmed in by life circumstances and we forget that life is an adventure to be enjoyed.

When my son Shawn was eleven, we decided to go to Saint Augustine, FL for spring break. We lived in Atlanta, Georgia and the quickest route was south on highway I-75. We had gone about one hundred miles of the three hundred mile trip when we heard on the radio that there was a major accident somewhere up ahead. We were told to expect delays of up to two hours. When obstacles arise in our lives we have a choice; we can grin and bear them or we can go in another direction and have some fun along the way. I told Shawn we were getting off at the next exit, handed him a map and said, "Okay navigator it's up to you, find us a way to Florida that does not include highway seventy-five". He smiled and started studying the map. Our route transported us back in time through rural Georgia. We had a great time and frequently we laughed until we cried.

One of the reasons people are not enjoying their lives more is because they are not having enough fun. One of the reasons they are not having enough fun is because they don't have a fun list; a list of all the fun things they want to do before they die.

Author and speaker, Doug Hall, reminds us, "Fun is fundamental. There is no way around it. You absolutely must have fun. Without fun, there is no enthusiasm. Without enthusiasm, there is no energy. Without energy, there are only shades of gray" in our lives.

I started my list during my time at Boswell Hospital; it contained things I wanted to learn including scuba diving, riding a motorcycle, and playing the flute. I listed places I wanted to visit; New York City,

Washington D.C, and of course I wanted to go to Disney World. I wanted to experience hiking the Grand Canyon, backpacking in Yellowstone, cruising the high seas, and going up in a hot air balloon. If you don't have a fun list then you need to make one, and you need to *do it now*.

It is imperative that you write your list down. Don't censure yourself because you don't think you have the time or the money; just write down all the things you think would be fun to do. At first it may seem hard to list more than a few things but as you get going you will be surprised at the things that come to you. Have you always wanted to take a dance class? Write it down. Do you think it would be fun to learn a new hobby? Write it down. Is there a place you would really like to visit? Write it down. What have you secretly wanted to do but have never tried? Write it down.

As you make your list be sure to imagine yourself doing each item. What we focus on we draw to us, but what we focus on with feelings multiplies. In his book, "The Amazing Laws of Cosmic Mind Power" Joseph Murphy writes, "Imagine yourself doing what you love to do, feel yourself in the act, and wonders will happen in your life."

The year after I had made my list, an old friend from back home called. She had won an all-expense paid cruise for two and wanted me to go with her. The trip was in two weeks. I, like most people started to list all the reasons I couldn't go. I had too much to do; I couldn't just drop everything and go. I won't be able to get off work, I'm in the middle of painting the house, who is going to watch my dog. That is definitely what is known as "Stinking Thinking". When an opportunity arises to have fun, we need to instead ask ourselves, "How can I go". "Change your thoughts and you change your world", (Norman Vincent Peale). I remembered my fun list and I remembered the advice I had received and I knew I had to go. I would quit my job. I reasoned it was easier for me to find another job than to find another free cruise (remember I was a nurse in the middle of a nursing shortage). I went to my boss and explained why I was resigning. She said she did not want to lose me, so she gave me the week

off. The cruise was even more thrilling than I had imagined. Make your list and wonders will happen in your life too.

There is no need to read your list daily or post it where you can see it every day. The important thing is to make the list and put your intentions out there. In his book, "The Power of Intention", Dr. Wayne W. Dyer defines intention as energy in the universe, that you are part of, which allows the act of creation to take place.

At times I would forget about my list only to be reminded when I least expected it. One summer while on vacation in FL, I saw a huge sign that said DO IT NOW! Bunji Jump! It was on my list but I was forty years old when I saw that sign. But it was definitely a sign. I could feel the good people of Sun City looking down at me and watching and waiting. I jumped! Remember this is your fun list and you can change it anytime you want. If something on your list no longer seems fun, remove it. Immediately after I jumped, I took sky diving off my list.

You can also add things to your list whenever you want. If you hear of something new, fun and exciting you would like to try, pull out your list and write it down. You may think this is not necessary because you are planning on doing it soon; remember that life has a way of interrupting us. Write it down.

Having a fun list is not like having career goals. Career goals are serious, cause stress and we put time limits on completing them. There is no time limit on your fun list. As long as you are alive you still have time. If your list contains fifty things and you only do thirty-five, you will have had thirty-five pleasurable experiences. Your fun list is about having fun and enjoying life, not about completing a list.

Share your list with your family and friends and encourage them to make their own list. For our thirteenth wedding anniversary my husband, who is deathly afraid of heights, took me up in a hot air balloon. He did it because he knew it was on my list. It did not cure him of his fear of heights but that day he was amazed he felt no fear. (I didn't remind him it was our 13<sup>th</sup>). An ancient Hindu proverb explains, "Help thy brother's boat across,



and lo! Thine own has reached the shore". I helped my son make a list and then helped him fulfill some of his desires including visiting St. Augustine and learning to read a map. We, as a family, have had a lot of fun and a lot of great experiences doing the things on our lists. Together we have created loving memories that we will cherish forever.

Life is about the journey and not about the final destination. Do not limit your focus in life to career and financial goals! Do not defer the things you would enjoy doing to the elusive "Someday". Take the time along the way to enjoy the adventure. Remember the counsel of the wise people of Sun City, Arizona. Life is shorter than you think and one day you will reach your final destination. Plan to arrive with a smile on your face and fond memories in your heart. Make your list. Do It Now!

Right now. Take out a piece of paper, a notebook or a journal and begin to make your list. Go through the alphabet and try to think of one fun thing you would like to do for each letter. Involve your family or friends and make it a game. Check the internet for attractions in your area that you would like to see. You may be amazed at what you will find. Think about what you use to enjoy doing that you would like to do again. List places you would like to visit and things you would like to learn or experience. Imagine how much fun you are going to have doing all of those things. DO IT NOW!!

*Barbara Wasielewski*

### **What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I have learned that only person I am guaranteed to be with for the rest of my life is me. I have also learned to love and accept myself just as I am; I no longer feel the need to prove anything. I am free to take more chances because if they don't work out, I know I will be okay.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

I now have to work harder to keep in shape, yet I know I will never again wear a two piece bathing suit again. Those days are definitely gone along with the days of worrying about it.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Stop worrying about what others think, in fact, stop worrying period. It is a useless emotion. Take more chances, have fun and live in the present



## ROCHELE HC HIRSCH

Determining patterns of organizational performance and developing systems to improve effectiveness have been constant themes in Rochele's life. With a background in physics, industrial and systems engineering, telecommunications, information systems, marketing and sales, and organization effectiveness, Rochele began in 1981 to investigate the patterns of personal effectiveness that make or break success.

What she has discovered and tested in her own *living laboratory* may well change the way individuals understand and use the **power of intention**.

Rochele has 30+ years of experience in the business world, including 15 years as a manager for a major telecommunications corporation, and over 15 years as a business owner and consultant, both in the U.S. and Southeast Asia. She is CEO and founder of CommExpress Int'l, Inc., a diversified consulting and communications company.

She is the author of *Love, the Noun vs. Love, the Verb*, a guidebook for emotions in the workplace, and offers seminars on *Healthy Anger and Principles of Emotional Restrooms*©.

You can check her websites for more information: [www.rochelehirsch.com](http://www.rochelehirsch.com) or [www.ClearInstincts.com](http://www.ClearInstincts.com)



## **HEALTHY ANGER**

The summer after I graduated from college with a degree in Physics, the man I had been dating for 5 months called and said, “You know that date we had for Friday night ... well, I need to cancel it. There’s this other woman I want to go out with.”

I said, “Oh, okay.”

His immediate response was “Damn it – I’ve been trying to get you ANGRY all week, and I can’t do it!!!”

Where WAS my anger?

If you are a woman who is accustomed to flashing off at people, giving them a taste of your wrath, or defending your rights, then hearing such a statement might have you saying “What’s wrong with her? Doesn’t she know how to stand up for herself?”

Other women understand right away the power many of us have in ignoring -- not just controlling -- but absolutely not even feeling certain emotions. Somewhere in us is the hardwired reaction pattern of “Danger – Danger – Don’t go there!”

I followed in my mother’s footsteps about dealing with anger. She was considered an angel, always nice and welcoming, nearly always smiling. My father seemed to be the only one in the family who had “the right” to exude angry-sounding words. In fact, from my early teens I can remember that my position was to try to fix things, make them better, solve the problem, resolve the issue – not just yell at someone and blame them. I saw my father use upset and yelling to get his way. I thought of him as being “angry.” What I was really seeing was his attempt to punish and control to get his way. I didn’t really understand anger.

Right out of graduate school, I married a man who had his own internal permission to use the excuse of anger to yell at me. He was trying to control and punish me into doing things his way. At that point, I still viewed my role as mediator, responsible for calming down the situation.

And indeed, when I said things to defend my position (or myself), it only made it worse.

After 9 years of trying to work out the issues and calm down the outbursts (and the drinking) of my husband – plus handle my corporate career, his PhD program, and our moves, I finally sought out a counselor. I was referred to a former Catholic priest. My husband would not go with me.

Upon hearing some of my experiences, the counselor exclaimed “Why haven’t you taken a baseball bat to him?! Or at least walked out of the house when he is ranting?” This shocked me. But it also started me on the path of understanding that my benchmarks for evaluating an abusive situation were (a) not like everyone else and (b) not particularly loving to myself.

I began my journey, as many women have, to self-awareness and appreciation. We find that this journey includes discovering the expectations we hold – even at a subconscious level. We learn that our actions help reinforce and maintain these expectation patterns of “how life is.”

We find that large segments of our culture often mirror these same patterns of expectation – unquestioned – unexamined – just dictating our lives and our reactions to life.

Several months later, when I told my husband that I had moved out that day and wanted a divorce, and that I was taking a job in another city, he said “No – No – I’ll do anything!”

I said, “Well, we can meet with the counselor.” He said he would. (The counselor had asked me to “leave the door ajar,” providing the opportunity for the 3 of us to talk.) We met each week for the next 6 weeks. Somehow, with the chance to express my issues to him in a safe space – where he seemed to be hearing and responding to my concerns – and just before I moved away for the new job, I actually fell back in love with him and decided to “keep trying.” Thus began months of commuting. Then, he found a job in the same city – actually a better position -- and we

determined to “start again.” We bought a house together, decorated, and settled into a routine.

I found a new counselor – this time a woman who was quite wonderful. However, my husband refused to see her ... because she was a woman! He was intent on keeping the marriage, but not on building the relationship. She helped me work more on personal growth as different from the other counselor’s focus on the process of how we interacted with each.

Despite the year of counseling together and trying to work on our relationship for two more years, my husband continued his emotionally abusive ways. I finally came to know that he had already broken his commitment to our marriage by being so unloving – and refusing to change. With that realization, I felt free to break my commitment and seek a divorce. I had two significant aha’s which helped me move along:

1. I didn’t have to *not love* him to not want to be married to him;
2. I didn’t have to wait until he “understood” (and agreed) – I just had to divorce him.

After the divorce, it felt like I was on a wonderful, joyful business trip. My freedom was delicious.

My journey continued in discovering why and how I react to life. The most significant turning point came when I participated in a 3-week intensive in California, a program called STAR ([www.starfound.org](http://www.starfound.org)). This program was led by an extraordinary pioneer in self-actualization, Barbara Findeisen. Using various methods for accessing information, we journeyed from our point of conception through birth process and up to age 13, taking the events that had occurred in our lives and integrating the emotional content that had never before been owned and expressed. Such emotion gets “stuck” in our psyche and in our bodies, long before our conscious mind gets involved.

This process enabled me to experience multi-dimensional aspects of my being, and it brought me safely back through “survival-critical” points of my early experience. This process took me LIGHT YEARS ahead of traditional talk-therapy. I finally learned how to experience – to feel – to express – and to release levels of emotion and imprinted “truths” that had been pushed deep into my subconscious, but were still affecting my everyday life.

I found my anger.

Now I understand that anger is a natural feeling ... the result of expectations not met or boundaries crossed. Anger is a valuable guide to help us understand part of who we are – as revealed by the expectations and boundaries that we hold. Once we find them, then we can evaluate them for whether they are good-for-us, or not. If they are good, we enforce them. If not – then we have the right to change them.

I found the source of my expectations that had set me up for experiencing abusive behavior as normal, as something that I was supposed to just manage. I began to change. And the change was not just about saying “NO, you don’t do these things to me.” It was a deep knowing that “Of course, I do not deserve such behavior.” Out of that knowing, my reactions to life’s issues changed, I moved away from abuse, and did not attract the same.

Since these initial extreme breakthroughs in self-awareness and healing in 1987, I have continued to unravel my understanding of “how come” things happen in my life. I have been able to find true liberation from my deepest and earliest expectations about “how life is.”

I have applied this information not only to personal relationships, but also to issues arising in the workplace. Everyone knows there is a lot of emotion in the workplace, whether it is acknowledged, ignored, suppressed or used as an excuse to punish and control. Yet, where do we learn about using emotion for health?

Emotions are designed to be moved.



I now advocate the use of Emotional Restrooms©. We have bodily fluids that we must move every day, so we have restrooms. Emotions need the same thing. And just as we don't "spew" all over the living room floor, we also don't deny that we need "to go." We simply need places to do it where it is safe for us and for others.

I beat pillows. I also use the passenger seat in my car (when I'm parked) to vent some emotion, and do hand-screams. Running – with the intention to move the emotion for healing – is a good way to shove it into the pavement, rather than into your body. Crying is a classic way for women to move emotion. However, if we cry in order to **avoid** the feeling of anger, we're moving into submission. Anger can be so empowering!

Learning how we can support our health and safety by owning, expressing and releasing emotions will go a long way toward resolving anxiety, depression, addictive behaviors, accidents and immune system problems.

To support the processing of information that we can get through anger, I've developed an Anger Flowchart©. Once we honor the emotion (by *feeling* it – by *owning* it in a safe way), then we can begin to ask the questions: "So what was the boundary that was crossed? What was my expectation?" "Was it communicated?" "Does communicating it resolve the issue?" "Does the person disagree with my expectation?" "Is it a boundary or expectation that is valuable for me to keep and to manage? – or is it something that is unrealistic for the current situation." "How do I change the expectation to something that is more loving to me?"

Once I was talking with a woman who said "I'm so angry with my ex-husband. He has the children this weekend, and he always keeps them up late on Saturday night!" I responded, "So what? It's Saturday night!"

She said, "But he shouldn't do that!"

I said, "So what? It's Saturday night!" Then I thought to add, "Did you always do what your mother said about going to bed on time?"

She suddenly got it. She was still living with the fear of breaking mother's rules – and was angry that her husband was "getting away" with

what she couldn't. Her anger at him dropped – and so did her stress. Healing the relationship with her mother was the next step!

Other clients have said “If only I had known years ago how much beating pillows would help me!” They find that intensifying and melting off layers of old emotion – with the intention for healing -- is the key to being able to change these old imprinted “truths” and expectations about “how life is.” In doing so, they gain ultimate freedom. They don't get “triggered” into reactions that are not healthy, they feel more energy, and they get more of what they say they want.

Healthy anger is my goal. With healthy anger, I honor the feeling and then search for the hidden information it offers. I turn the energy of the anger to my good, and move into a greater feeling of love for this incredible adventure of life.

*Rochele Hc Hirsch*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

That I have moved beyond the feeling that I have to “do more” to be okay.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

The way my neck is starting to sag!

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Find your anger – and use it for health!



## **PAMELA HARPER**

***Pamela Harper***, RN, CCH, CAC is an internationally renowned speaker on the subject of “Health, Wealth and Life Purpose”, Radio and TV Host. She is a number one best-selling author, media personality, registered nurse, success counselor and hypnotherapist. Pamela is the founder and President of University of Masters.com, a virtual university for the world’s 63 million seekers of quality education and support. More information about her you can find on [www.pamelaharper.com](http://www.pamelaharper.com) or you can contact her at [Pamela@pamelaharper.com](mailto:Pamela@pamelaharper.com)



## ***BE THE WAKEFUL DREAMER***

I have a homemade poster on a wall in my office that reminds both me and my clients to “act as if you are the person you want to be.” The old “fake it until you make it” motto transforms doubt into doing and dreams into decisions.

As a little girl in Nebraska I was frequently scolded for “dreaming my life away”. I stared out the window and gazed longingly into the forever sky. Each cloud became a canvas to mold whatever future I fancied. My dreams were wild and wonderful and they all came true.

I never gave up. Even in the midst of despair and the darkest night, I knew that if I held tight to my visions that I would overcome any obstacles and rise above the loss.

At times all I had was remnants of that childhood fantasy world. My ability to believe in the unseen was what saved me and preserved my willingness to win. It was as if I always knew there was something important I was meant to accomplish and that the world depended upon my steadfast dedication to purpose.

## **I Lost the Dreams for Awhile**

The only time in my adult life that I suffered depression, physical illness and loss of hope was when I misplaced my need to believe in my own daydreams. On the surface I *appeared* successful. I accumulated material stuff. I lived in a grand house, drove a luxury car and owned at least 100 pairs of shoes. I was walking in around in style.

I told myself to stop feeling so bad, after all I had no real reason to complain.

Every day was a struggle, school, children, husband and work. I couldn't find any pleasure and always looked into the future, believing that if I projected happiness into tomorrow I would arrive there someday. All in

all, it was so empty. The stuff became a burden and my heart was heavy. I was drained of life's magic. I went through the motions and lied to myself, my friends and family about the extent of my despair.

## **I Wanted Everything to Be Perfect for Them**

Because my childhood family was often hard pressed to pay the bills, I swore that I would never allow my children to go without the 'necessities' of life. They would always have a refrigerator full of cold milk and I would decorate for holidays and be involved in PTA. I did. It wasn't enough. After 30 years of caring for my children and husband, I was detached from a sense of Self. I forgot THE DREAM.

I wanted so much to be rich, but in reality my spirit was poor. The lights were on and no one was home.

I put even more effort into helping others, as a Psychiatric Nurse, Addiction Counselor and "world savior" I could truly escape myself for hours each day. It all caught up with me. I was a fraud in angel clothing.

## **Awakened Desire**

About ten years ago in the midst of a family crisis I read "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success" by Deepak Chopra and realized for the first time that I was not ever going to be happy living through others. Even though I was convinced for decades that being a successful Mother, Wife, Counselor and Psychiatric Nurse, would always fill me up, quite the opposite occurred and I realized that I was never going to achieve happiness based on someone else's failure or success.

My focus of attention at last was to return to the playful, magical and exceedingly joyful life as a 'Wakeful Dreamer'.

I bought every self-help book ever written, listened to all of the tapes and went to seminars. I soaked up the information like a sponge.

And then I read the books and listened to the tapes again and again. I was immersed in healing. I knew I literally had to reprogram my DNA. To end up as this pitiful protector of the world and all its woes I had to be really sick. The only cure was a complete mental make over. I was convinced that the answer to my salvation was hidden in words of wisdom. I was right.

## **Imagine, Create and Celebrate**

Even though I had a great position in a prestigious hospital, I knew there was still something missing in my career and in the fundamental teachings of Western Medicine. It was problem oriented and all of my patients were labeled “chronic, progressive and fatal.” Oh no, we are all doomed. There must be another way. I traveled to Europe that year and became acquainted with ancient healing practices. I also was exposed to studies that included healing mind, body and soul.

I returned from my awakening in Europe and pursued training in hypnosis. I wanted to help my numerous patients who were suffering with panic attacks, prescribed numerous pharmaceuticals and getting worse.

Oh yes the hypnosis helped them alright, but even more so for me. Months of training and time spent in subconscious states and restful awareness reminded me of that magical creative dreamlike state that motivated and inspired me in decades past.

I began recording audio programs to reinvent myself and heal what ailed me. I am no longer worried, sick or sad. I am most likely the happiest woman you will ever meet. My life flows like a gentle breeze. I am able to manifest miracles through focused attention on anything and everything I wish for.

It's nothing special that I do: Just daily attention to every thought. I concentrate my thinking only on what I want. No thoughts are allowed to wander into limitation or doubt. Any and all current circumstances are the mental projections of yesterday.

Imagine that what you want is already here, feel it and embrace the joy.

I get to have whatever I want. I am the intentionally satisfied "Queen of Visualization".

## **Do Every Day in Your Way**

I was approached a few months ago by a woman who heard me speak at an event the previous year. She told me that one thing in particular that I said changed her life. I freed her from drudgery by giving her verbal permission to "never do anything that you don't want to do". Her husband, who was standing near, shook his head and remarked, "She never does".

Do what you love and love what you do. Sing in the morning and celebrate the accomplishments of each day. Prosper in wealth, health and wellbeing, just because you believe in your own daydreams.

*Pamela Harper*

### **What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I love my life today because I am full of myself. I have no one to please but my Divine Self. As I make my world into the "Happiest Place on Earth", I offer a model for other women and men to follow. Two unhappy people do not equal a happy person. I am responsible for the energy that radiates from my consciousness. I told my husband when our last child turned 19 that I would probably never cook or clean again. After he got



over the shock, he learned to cook and hired a housekeeper. My talents are better spent elsewhere. I am his lover not his maid.

**What do you hate the most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

The aspect of midlife that I most dislike is that I am not able to achieve the physical shape that I once had as easily. I have to eat half as much and exercise twice as much just to come out even. Every cell in my body is swelling in an effort to hold onto estrogen.

That being said, it is time for me to exercise again.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

In a conversation with my younger self I would whisper gently that beyond the days of youthful misadventure is the wisdom of women who have crossed over into the best days of their life. I think I am 58, (never quite sure) and I look forward to creating a new world order with all the vim and vigor of the young woman that I am. Look out world I have another 50 years "To Be the Wakeful Dreamer".



## **BRENDA COBB**

**Brenda Cobb** founded the Living Foods Institute in Atlanta, Georgia in September 1999 just seven months after she was diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer. She refused the surgery and chemotherapy that her doctor recommended because she had seen her own family members and friends diagnosed with the same type of cancers try the traditional treatments and fail. Brenda set out on a journey to explore a natural way of healing and discovered. Brenda began her healing journey in Raw and Living Foods and Detoxification in February 1999 and by September 1999 she was disease free.

What began as the biggest challenge in Brenda's life turned into a wonderful gift to humanity. Since opening the Living Foods Institute Brenda has expanded her Healthy Lifestyle Course to help people heal on every level. She and her staff have trained thousands of people from all over the world with every type of disease from Cancer, Diabetes, Heart Disease, Candida, Arthritis, Allergies, Asthma, AIDS and Lupus to Multiple Sclerosis, Bell's Palsy, Depression, Migraine Headaches, Chronic Fatigue, Fibromyalgia and many more chronic and acute illnesses .

To date she has written 7 books "The Living Foods Lifestyle", "Colon Cleansing For Optimum Health" and "101 Raw and Living Food Recipes", "Get Started Now For Good Health" "The Living Foods Lifestyle

Training Manual”, “Healing Fibroids, Endometriosis, Tumors and Cysts”, “A Plan For Health”, and she has a CD on the benefits of Raw and Living Foods and a Healthy Lifestyle. She has hosted her own radio show, Living Well on WGUN 1010AM in Atlanta, Georgia where she has helped listeners learn about the benefits of good Lifestyle Habits.

She has appeared live on CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX networks as well as many cable stations giving advice on healthy eating and living. She was awarded an Honorary Cultural Doctorate in Therapeutic Philosophy from the World University in September 2003. She was awarded the Phoenix Award by the City of Atlanta and numerous awards from other organizations for her work. For more information, to book Brenda to come to your area or to receive more information about Brenda’s powerful 10-Day Living Foods Lifestyle Course and Educator Certification Training, workshops and seminars please call 800-844-9876 and visit the website at [www.livingfoodsinstitute.com](http://www.livingfoodsinstitute.com)



## ***FROM CANCER TO LIVING FOODS***

On February 13, 1999, my life changed forever. I went to the doctor for a check-up and was shocked to find that not only did I weigh 190 pounds, but that I had a lump in my breast about the size of a quarter and a large cervical tumor. My mother and her sisters had cervical and breast cancers. They chose the mainstream medical route which included surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. My doctor recommended immediate surgery and that I go to another doctor for a second opinion, hospital tests, and blood work.

The first thing I did when I left the doctor's office was go to the health food store and ask for books and information on curing cancer without surgery and drugs. They recommended *How I Cured Cancer Naturally* by Edie Mae. That little book confirmed that surgery and drugs were not for me. When I read Edie Mae's story of healing herself through the use of living foods, I knew immediately that this was the way I wanted to go.

Then came time for my next doctor's appointment. I spent two entire days at the hospital and the doctor's office. After getting all the tests back their consensus was that I definitely must have surgery. They set up a time for my surgery and talked with me about signing the consent forms. By this time my head was spinning. The doctors made me think I had no time to think it over, that I had to act fast. They were alarmed at what they saw, especially considering my family history, and they did their best to alarm me too.

I let the doctor schedule the surgery, but when it came time to sign the consent forms I changed my mind. I decided not to have the surgery, but rather to heal my body the natural way with a healthy lifestyle. They were not supportive of my choice and put pressure on me to go through with the surgery, but I had made up my mind and I stuck to my decision.

I began drinking wheatgrass and lots of fresh juices every day. I ate a lot of organic raw vegetables. From the middle of February until the middle of May I lost twenty pounds, my energy increased, my bleeding stopped (I had been bleeding heavily every day with the cervical tumor), and my breast tumor began to shrink.

Through reading, I learned that in addition to eating the right foods, it was also important to clean out my colon of toxic waste by receiving professional colonics and doing personal enemas and wheatgrass implants at home. I booked an appointment for my first colonic. I was uncomfortable just thinking about it because I didn't know what to expect, but the whole experience was very dignified, and I was amazed at all of the old impacted fecal waste that came out of my body.

Detoxing was rough! Every toxin and poison in my body began to release and I had the "headache from hell" for two full days. I also experienced nausea, exhaustion, sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, aches, pains, facial breakouts, dry, itchy red patches all over my thighs, hips, and butt, and I felt like I had the flu. It was probably the most miserable I had ever been. Besides feeling awful, I had all these emotions surfacing to deal with. I was angry for allowing myself to get in this bad shape. I didn't like the living foods and I wondered how I would be able to do without Thai food, French fries, pizza, chocolate, potato chips, and all those other foods I had become so attached to. How would I ever go to a family holiday gathering again and be able to eat anything there since everything would be cooked? I resented that all this had happened to me. I cried, then I sobbed, then I cried some more. I felt real sorry for myself and then I kicked myself in the butt. I released old feelings that I had suppressed for years. Things came up for me that I didn't even realize had been bothering me. I was changing inside and out, but through all these miserable feelings I stuck with the program.

In two weeks I had lost 23 additional pounds. I was feeling better than I had felt in years because I had released so many of the toxins, but I knew I still had a long way to go.

I came home a totally different woman. I celebrated my fiftieth birthday a couple of days after I returned, and realized that all my goals and dreams for the future had changed. All I could think about was opening a Living Foods Center in Atlanta so I could share this incredible healing information with others

I was completely overwhelmed at the thought of having to learn to prepare foods without cooking. There were so many new things to learn and do. How would I ever learn everything I needed to know? I struggled with making the recipes. I craved cooked food and I cheated by going to a Thai restaurant. I worked every day to continue to do the things that I knew instinctively would help me, and then something miraculous occurred.

As my body became cleaner, free of all the toxic waste that had built up over fifty years, and as I became less deficient by eating enzyme rich, living foods, my tastes began to change. Foods that I once loathed now tasted good. I even began to crave it! I lost all my desire for sugar—no more chocolate bars, cakes, pies, or cookies. I didn't even like the smell of sweets anymore. I noticed that tofu, which I had once loved as my favorite meat substitute, made me tired and bloated and gave me gas. Eating living foods made me feel lighter, more energetic, focused, and calm. Things that had once bothered me now just rolled off my back. Through self-examination I couldn't detect any tumors in my breast or on my cervix. My life had been transformed. I had been lifted up mentally and spiritually by this wonderful new lifestyle.

My mission in life became very clear: I had to open a Living Foods Center in Atlanta and share this incredible knowledge with others so they could heal themselves too, the natural way. I told my son, Richard, about my dream, and he agreed to help me. Together we opened The Temple Of Health And Beauty. It is so rewarding to see people who come into the center sick and begin to heal their bodies and their minds. I know it's radical and different than anything we've ever been taught. It isn't easy to give up the foods that we have become addicted to. But, I believe that without these changes many of us will continue to get sicker and sicker,

and live less than a full and happy life because of health problems that have been brought on by a diet of mostly cooked, dead food.

The good news is that we can change that by changing the way we think, what we do, and what we eat. Nature intended that we get 100% of our nourishment from whole, live fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and grains. This is not a new age diet. This is the original diet that we were intended to thrive on. Now is the time to get back to our roots, to embrace a way of living that promotes total and perfect health. As we heal ourselves, one person at a time, we will then heal our planet.

Every day I thank God for opening up the door to Living Foods for me. I have a whole life ahead of me, a life that I will spend teaching others about this wonderful, natural, healing lifestyle.

*Brenda Cobb*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I feel empowered and like I finally know something about life. I am doing what I love to do and getting great satisfaction out of helping others to heal. It took me all these years to discover my true mission in life and my reason for living. Now that I have I am in a state of bliss!

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

Having to use reading glasses can be annoying and inconvenient, especially when I can't find them. So, I wear them around my neck on a chain now and even though they aren't the greatest looking accessory I can see. I laugh all the time because laughter is the best medicine of all especially when you can laugh at yourself.



**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Take time to nurture yourself, practice good nutrition and don't become obsessed with work. Release the need to be perfect!



## **SYLVIA SULTENFUSS**

Author, National Human Relations Consultant, and Nurse Psychotherapist, Sylvia Sultenfuss spent years creating ***The Joy of Adulthood: A Crash Course in Designing the Life You Want.*** In partnership with Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer and Mark Victor Hansen, she also co-authored ***Wake Up and Live the Life You Love: Finding Your Life's Passion.*** Sylvia, an innovative therapist and communications expert, administers a unique coaching, consulting and training style that offers her clients a simple and clear perspective that allows them to identify the distinctions in their lives, clearing the way for them to create a new path that will alter where they go forever.

Sylvia has been a groundbreaking leader and teacher in nursing, as she is a nationally certified Clinical Specialist in Psychiatric Nursing and has served as nursing faculty at both Case Western Reserve University, (Cleveland, OH), and Emory University, (Atlanta, GA). In 1980, Sylvia established the renowned Buckhead Center for Health, which was the first holistic health care center in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2004, she received the Emory University Nurses' Alumni Award for Distinguished Nursing Achievement. She has been recognized as an Outstanding Young Woman in America and in 2004 was acknowledged in the Heritage Registry of

Who's Who for Business Success in Health Services. Her Alma Mater named Sylvia January, 2006 Alum of the Month and will present her with a leadership award for life time contributions to her profession in June, 2006.

Providing breakthrough workshops to thousands of people internationally, she has created and led workshops in Africa, India, Haiti, Jamaica, the Republic of China, Russia, and the Solomon Islands. You can find out more about her at [www.JoyOfAdulthood.com](http://www.JoyOfAdulthood.com) or reach her at her e-mail [Sylvia@JoyofAdulthood.com](mailto:Sylvia@JoyofAdulthood.com).



## ***SOMEBODY SAID THAT IT COULDN'T BE DONE***

At thirteen years old, a homework assignment included memorizing and reciting a poem by Edgar A. Guest:

Somebody said it couldn't be done,  
But he with a chuckle replied  
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one  
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.

The words seemed to jump off the page as I fervently read the lines. I practiced reciting over and over, surely driving my family crazy. By the time it was my turn to recite the poem in front of the class, the mantra had become mine. My adolescent passion demanded the right to be free. So many times the dominating, stifling voices of my elders had dismissed my creative visions and questions that challenged unreasonable grown-up rules. Now whenever anyone offered an objection, I would say loudly, "Somebody said that it couldn't be done, but she with a chuckle replied, just watch me!"

Even at 62 years old now, the passion of the poem still urges me forward when the logical, rational world puts up barriers and declares that something is not possible before it's even given a chance to be born. All I have to do is hear the words, "that's impossible" or "you'll never be able to" and the powerful phrase that I claimed as an adolescent jumps into action to accept the challenge.

As a 16 year old, when I envisioned my future as a psychologist, the high school counselor slammed the door on my hopes. "That would cost too much money and besides, you are a young woman and will just get married and have babies."

While working as a nursing assistant in the local small town hospital, I found myself excited about working with people from diverse backgrounds with an assortment of needs. It was an exciting challenge to care for them all. Withdrawing from my hope of a PhD education, I excitedly announced my intention to go to college and become a nurse. Again my idea was rejected by the counselor. “You can be a nurse in one year as a licensed practical nurse rather than as a registered nurse and be making money many years before you’d ever finish college.”

This time I held my own and registered for a four-year college program in nursing. In my junior year, I was granted the financial aid to participate in a graduate program in psychiatric nursing and began to fulfill my expanding dream of providing holistic support including the physical, emotional and spiritual. The pressure to fit in and be like the rest of the students was always present. The demand to maintain my own integrity and voice continued as I completed a master’s thesis and received my degree as an advanced practice psychiatric nurse. So maybe the high school counselor was right and I was not to be a psychologist; but a psychiatric nurse counselor, I would be.

So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin  
On his face. If he worried he hid it.  
He started to sing and he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

Once I had a Master’s degree, I thought I would be granted the responsibility and credibility to be heard without being discounted. I prayed to look older and intelligent enough to be trusted by those in authority. The ideas that I thought were sensible, that would make a difference, were perceived as threatening and out of the ordinary. When I presented my request to be a liaison mental health nurse in the psychiatric out-patient department of a major university hospital, the medical director stunned me by responding, “We don’t have any need for a nurse to give medications in

the out-patient setting.” He had no knowledge about my training or competencies and had never heard of a nurse providing psychotherapy. I convinced him to give me a chance and promised that if he did not see a difference after six months, I would resign. It only made sense to me that working with patients as they transitioned from the in-patient units to their homes would support stability and treatment compliance.

Without others realizing what I was doing, I began to find ways to make things happen. With a case load of 100 chronic schizophrenic patients, some with severe character disorders, I engaged many of them in socialization groups rather than individual sessions as had been done for years. We celebrated group members’ birthdays and holidays. Soon the patients came out of their shells and their need for antipsychotic medication decreased. Physicians were struck by the changes in patients that had been heavily medicated for years. Soon I was asked to provide case studies for supervision conferences with the psychiatric residents as they tried to discover what I was doing that was working.

Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;  
At least no one has ever done it";  
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,  
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.

Even though I had a full client load, I missed interacting with the general hospital nursing activities so I volunteered to provide mental health consultation to the general hospital nursing staff. I secretly asked the out-patient department secretary to inform me when the resident doctors received calls for psychiatric evaluations so that I could consult with the nursing staff who had referred the patient. Often, after I met with the nursing staff and evaluated the patient milieu, concerns that had precipitated the calls for help were resolved without medical intervention. My passion for participating in the total care of patients was

fulfilled. What I held as a commonsense and humane approach to health care was finally validated.

After building a reputation for working effectively with nurses and patients in a general hospital setting, I moved with my husband to a new city – without jobs, without knowing anyone. My love of general hospital work led me to open conversations with administrators about creating a full time consulting position. No one had ever considered an in-patient mental health consultant position and I had no history locally that would have promoted their trust in me. By default, I accepted a position as an instructor in a university nursing education program, a role that I had never envisioned for myself.

Shortly after starting my teaching position, a senior faculty member asked me if I was the “psychosocial expert in gynecological cancer.” Quite surprised, I listened as she revealed her conversations with the referring clinical nursing specialist from the hospital I had worked in previously. Within eight months of arriving in a new city, I was contracted by the American Cancer Society to provide state-wide workshops for nurses on the psychosocial aspects of nursing care with people experiencing cancer. The consultation services that I had provided as a volunteer in another city were now laying the foundation for a career identity I could never have anticipated.

As an instructor for nursing students, I focused on the quality of the patient relationship and on critical listening skills that went far beyond the diagnosis and medical intervention. Working with students quickly revealed my strengths and weaknesses. Students challenged my authority, but also allowed me to experiment with principles and practices I had never experienced as a student. While fulfilling my teaching obligations, I volunteered to provide consultation to a patient care unit in the university hospital system where I had worked as a staff nurse the summer before. The nurses would call when they were experiencing a staff conflict or having difficulty with a patient or family situation.



After a successful teaching career of two years, I proposed a full-time position as a mental health consultant within the university hospital to the director of nursing. Even though I had never met her before, she knew of my volunteer work and supported me in designing the first nurse mental health consultant position within the general hospital setting. Two years after proposing the same position to hospital directors that hadn't known me I was engaged in a most exciting opportunity of bringing a holistic and interactive approach to patient care throughout a 3000 bed critical care hospital.

With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,  
Without any doubting or quiddit,  
He started to sing as he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

Making myself available to staff, patients and family members throughout the hospital, I assessed and intervened in the dynamics of patient, family and care milieu. I provided support groups for families whose loved ones were dying. Educational programs for staff and the professional community at-large focused on the interaction between the emotional and physical aspects of nursing care.

Soon the city newspaper did a cover story on the "Death and Dying" program at the hospital and people were calling me from all over the state, asking me to provide educational programs. Bringing a holistic approach to patient care certainly challenged the status quo but it also provided an opening for a healing collaboration between health care staff and patients.

What had seemed for me to be obvious and missing aspects of nursing care were now being touted as important and innovative programs. Supporting people who were going through some of the most difficult times in their lives was an honor. Assisting patients in dying peacefully and having family members feel complete in their passing was a gift. Helping

health care staff acknowledge their own vulnerability while having the opportunity to express their emotions in a safe environment fulfilled a longtime vision.

When the hospital hired a new director of nursing five years later, I was told to cease my interaction with nurses and only interact with patients. I could not imagine being effective in patient care without including the nursing staff. All of my appeals and reports of program effectiveness were rejected, so I chose to leave and join the staff of a local counseling center. I had been referring people to this center and had been invited the year before to place my name on their brochure as part of their marketing strategy. Now I called and asked to become a functioning member of their counseling team.

Within weeks, my schedule was full and my desire to bring a holistic approach to people seeking emotional support was fulfilled. I remember my first client referral, a 28 year old young woman who had been diagnosed as having terminal pancreatic cancer. Within three months she was feeling healthy and vibrant and vacationed with her mother in the Caribbean. The doctors were stunned and wanted to know how this could have happened. Revealing and releasing the emotional patterns that were interfering with her aliveness was an answer that they did not comprehend.

Soon I was invited by two health professionals to design a holistic clinic that included chiropractic care, massage therapy, nutritional guidance and psychological counseling. As a nurse, I was stepping outside the known legal and historic boundaries of the profession. Within months, along with a State Board of Nursing committee, we defined practice protocols that would allow advanced practice psychiatric-mental health nurses the rights and privileges to provide psychotherapy independent of a physician's direct supervision. I could now legally function independently in the health care center I had founded.

After only three months, my two partners walked away from their commitment to the Center and me. I looked up to the heavens and asked for help. How would I be able to finance a five-year lease on a 4000 square

foot office space? I didn't have hidden money that I could use to cover the expenses. I had always worked as a nurse employee with a low salary and my husband was a policeman with as low a salary as mine. I couldn't imagine a way to make it work. My prayer was that if this was my destiny, help from the heavens was necessary. Soon other professionals joined me in advancing their visions, renting offices to provide expanded services and education. Within three months, the space was rented and the financial commitments were being fulfilled.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,  
There are thousands to prophesy failure;  
There are thousands to point out to you, one by one,  
The dangers that wait to assail you.  
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,  
Just take off your coat and go to it;  
Just start to sing as you tackle the thing  
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.

That was 26 years ago, when the Center was the only one of its kind in the city. Since then, over 100 health care professionals have served under the umbrella of the Center. Thousands of people have explored holistic approaches toward their physical and emotional well-being. Over the years, there has been an explosion in holistic health care as people have been educated in possibilities beyond the traditional medical model. My leadership has been acknowledged with numerous awards for innovative approaches to business and health care. Looking back over my experiences, I am amazed and sometimes moved by my commitment to live out my dreams, to speak my voice, and to behave with integrity of soul and spirit. However, I know that during each one of these evolutions of self-design, I was uncomfortable and frightened and the unknown was intensely confronting. I now realize that life will continue to demand that I proceed with my destiny.

As I continue to listen for the whispers that call me forward, trust has become more constant in my life. Asking “what’s next” opens possibilities that challenge the status quo and demand that I expand beyond my current level of comfort. I now have evidence that if I commit to a future vision, resources beyond my current ability to see will be revealed to support me in fulfilling my dreams. Taking action without the guarantee of success is never comfortable, but remaining attached to the past becomes intolerable.

Today, I am closing the health center to move into another phase of my life journey. There is no logical reason to close the center. It is functioning just fine, but a new urging is calling me forth. Looking back, I can see that my journey has been designed in perfect divine order, each step adding dimension and power to my capacity to learn. Every disruption and barrier demanded a new level of creation and trust. The mantra that challenged me to step beyond the expected, the limitations, and the “it can’t be done’s” served me well. The demands that were confronted asked more of me than I could have envisioned. The resources that were afforded me were beyond my imagination.

The process of living my dreams has brought me untold blessings. I have learned to lean on others and to trust that my destiny calls me forth even when I didn’t like the form or when I couldn’t see the plan. I know that I am not alone and am supported by seen and unseen friends. I have discovered that what my adolescent spirit could stubbornly initiate, my adult confidence and competence must now sustain even without evidence for success. I ask myself what’s next and listen for the clues and direction from my soul and spirit. I am sure that there will be many more “it can’t be done’s” ready for me to tackle.

So when people say, “it can’t be done”, just remember that your vision is not theirs; that what is obvious to you may be invisible to another; that you may have a piece of the puzzle that is uniquely yours. To incorporate some of their concerns may be wise; to discount the dream is criminal. What calls you forth is your soul-song. Give voice to your life-

force and give honor to the visions of others. Be courageous in leading your dream to reality, knowing that your commitment will bring forward resources that were unimaginable before you said, "Yes."

*Sylvia Sultenfuss*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

In the middle of my life, I have enough experience from the past that supports me in trusting my insights and natural knowing without always questioning myself just because someone else disagrees with my assessment or goals. Looking forward, even if it is only one day, I can fully express my passions and my soul's destiny. Healing wounds and collecting the gems of my journey places me in a position of calm and balance...like a buoy that bobs and rolls in the middle of the ocean in response to the chaos of storms, the blazing heat of the day's sun, the chill of the black nights, and the unpredictable of life, yet always finds a way to right itself, holding firm to core principles that always bring balance of spirit.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

What I could be laughing at is my droopy "B's"... belly, boobs, and butt. Gravity has pulled my weightier parts even further south over the years. I imagine learning to stand on my head for many hours a day to balance the last 60 years of gravity's power.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Stay true to your course, listen to your heart, trust your gut and be willing to take a stand without other's agreement. The result will be a person who is grounded, calm and confident in her own character.



## **BONNIE ROSS-PARKER**

**Bonnie, a.k.a. “America’s Connection Diva”**, is a multi-dimensional businesswomen/entrepreneur with a background in education, franchise development, publishing, mentorship, network marketing, and community development. She combines vision with a unique set of skills. Formerly the Associate Publisher of *The Gazette Newspaper/Atlanta*, she focuses her energies on supporting women. Bonnie is a graduate of George Washington University, & earned a Certification in Network Marketing at the University of Chicago. Several of her articles on owning one’s own business and entrepreneurship have appeared in publications including: *Wealth Building, Home Business Magazine, Business to Business* and *Entrepreneur’s Business Start-Ups*. In 2002 Bonnie received The Athena Award ~ an honor designed to acknowledge women of leadership in cities throughout the United States.

In September, 2005 she was honored by the Women’s Leadership Exchange, a New York based organization, as an Influential Woman of Georgia and currently serves on their Atlanta Advisory Board. Bonnie is a professional member of the National Speaker’s Association and a featured speaker with the Direct Selling Women’s Alliance. She’s the author of “Walk In My Boots” ~ The Joy of Connecting, and Y.O.U. Set A High

Standard for Being Human. In April 2005 Bonnie, along with her Partner, Dawn Billings, licensed The Joy of Connecting™ gatherings for women. Currently there are 14 locations in the Greater Atlanta Area for professional women to network with one another, as well as several licensees nationwide.

Bonnie lives in Atlanta with her husband, Phil, who is also a professional speaker/author. Bonnie can be reached through her websites: [www.bonnierosparker.com](http://www.bonnierosparker.com) and [www.TheJoyofConnecting.com](http://www.TheJoyofConnecting.com).





## **OUR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Sometimes when I get caught up learning about famous people and their accomplishments, I begin to wonder about the worth of my own contribution to the world. I can affirm my value as a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, sister, friend, community volunteer, and writer. I know that through those efforts, I “make a difference.” However, I wonder what someone has to do to create either “legacy” or “notoriety.”

Legacy refers to “something received from the past,” usually handed down from one generation to another. We refer to people of notoriety as those who are “generally known or talked about.” They receive wide recognition because of their deeds or actions. I love the concept of leaving a legacy. I’m not sure about the idea of being notorious!

As women, we influence our families and communities in so many unselfish ways. Collectively, we possess a strong commitment to social change, health and well-being, and the environment.

Connecting with ourselves and creating who we wish to be is a vital part of the joy of connecting that connects us with others. Each person, each connection, and each time you touch somebody else leaves a legacy to the world. Just as my grandmother influenced her mother, she has left a legacy to me and I am leaving a legacy to my children.

I once heard someone say, “Who you are is the direct result of everything that has ever happened to you, everything you have ever done, and every person you have ever met to this point in your life.” What a powerful statement. The reality is even more powerful.

“Who you are” stems from all the things previously mentioned. It comes from those in past generations who influenced those who have influenced you in your life. The legacies we leave create an immortality that will influence generations to come – long after we are gone and forgotten.

Think of the people who have made an impact on your life. Who are they? Why have they influenced you so greatly? What do you admire about the way they lived their lives? What is your own unique contribution? Life is a journey. Each of our lives is a reflection of the experiences we have, the people we meet, the thoughts we consider and the feelings we embrace.

I think of women who have influenced my life because of the difference they've made. Mother Teresa, Helen Keller, and Anne Frank come to mind. We know the stories of these three women – poverty, severe handicaps, and incredible courage during danger and hardship. All were congruent with their life purpose. By holding true to themselves and being of service to others, they each left an indelible imprint for all eternity. Their legacies have touched people they never could have imagined touching.

While I don't anticipate reaching the stature of any of these amazing women, I do know I'm offering the world what I believe to be true. By my example, I am creating a community through which connection is valued, appreciated, and operative.

Mother Teresa, Helen Keller, and Anne Frank *connected* us to their lives and to their beliefs. They opened the window to improved understanding, to greater concern for fellow travelers, and to faith. They didn't enlighten the world only for themselves. They gave that we might become enlightened, too.

## **What Are You Leaving As Your Legacy?**

Are you aware of the difference you make in the grand scheme of life? To determine your legacy, take time to discover and acknowledge the good in yourself and in others. It is one of the major reasons I enjoy what I do. I see the good possibilities in people and encourage them to go for the brass ring of their dreams.

## Life Is A Journey

Life is meant to be shared. No one chooses to travel life alone. Joy is in the shared journey. It's those opportunities we say "yes" to, the people we meet or invite along the way, and the "ah ha" moments that awaken us to a new way of looking at something familiar. Our journeys continue day to day, as one experience follows another. The journey embraces people who impact us, circumstances and changes we can't control, the choices and decisions we make and the effect of those actions over time. The road is comprised of trial and error, risks and opportunities, pleasure and disappointment.

The word "*our*" lies within the word "*journey*". How we conduct ourselves and the value we place on our relationships determine the quality of our life. Consider the impact you are making. Consider whether you are leaving a legacy that will long outlive you. Are you making the kind of difference others will remember?

## Connect to Care

We are each given the gift of bringing who we are to the world. We can't become for one another what we don't accept for ourselves as truth. I believe my legacy is to enlighten others to recognize that *connection is joy*. What is yours?

Recognizing all that we do is cause for celebration! We can only teach what we value. We can lead only by our own example. We can guide, encourage, and acknowledge. We can love. As each of us contributes who we are to the world, we are both creating and leaving our legacies. The difference we make today and tomorrow sparks its own ripple effect. That effect over time is what we leave behind and for which we are remembered.

Actively participating in each other's journeys and supporting our individual contributions is how we can contribute to each other's success. When we care, we connect. We connect when we care. They are one.

*Bonnie Ross-Parker*

### **What do I love most about being in the middle of my life?**

On the humorous side, the chance to purchase products and services at discount. movie theaters honor "Senior Rates", local supermarkets have identified certain shopping days "Senior Discount Day" and even the ice cream shoppe, Stone Mountain Creamery provides "Senior Cones". Having reached this stage in my life, I welcome any opportunities to save money and relish being over 60 years young! On a more serious note, I love doing what I do and having the flexibility of no responsibilities other than those of MY choosing. I'm not accountable to anyone for anything. I figure, I've earned the right to live life all out with no restrictions!

### **What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

Hard as I try I find it more and more difficult to shed a few pounds and bring back the figure of my youth. Of course, those in my age bracket face the same dilemma! My husband often says, "Getting old is NOT for sissies!" I simply shrug off my limitations with, "Hey, we'll see what you look like when you're MY age!"

You can't pick up any women's magazine today that doesn't flaunt "youth", "anti-aging" and clothing that most middle-aged women couldn't possibly wear. So, I take my age in stride, live with the limitations and feel somewhat smug that I'm doing amazingly well for a woman of MY AGE!

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

#1 STAY IN SHAPE! Exercise more, eat healthier, don't take well-being for granted. I wish I had taken life lighter and not so seriously. Looking back I made more out of issues that meant nothing in the scheme of life. Laugh more, disagree less, be playful and take risks. I wish I had been more flexible and less structured. Today, young adults travel, marry later and explore options. I got married in college, had children soon after graduation and didn't live the "singles life" for very long. Of course, now I have grandchildren so no reason to complain. The reality is, I'd rather have today's wisdom than yesterday's youth. Ideally, BOTH. Realistically, I'll stay right where I am, thank you very much!



## **KATRAMA BROOKS**

Born in Vienna, Austria, KatRama escaped the Nazis with her parents, was brought up in Shanghai, China; La Paz, Bolivia; and Los Angeles; has traveled the world extensively and speaks three languages.

KatRama, (her spiritual name), studied Graphic Design and painting at the Art Center in Los Angeles and L'Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris, and had her own successful Graphic Art Design Studio in Los Angeles for 10 years.

She studied in a Mystery School learning Esoteric Astrology, Esoteric Healing and the healing arts of the movement of energy through touch and sound. As a professor of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism she also has given many lectures on the practice of Buddhism daily life. KatRama is a certified in Past Life Regression Therapy, Metaphysical Counseling, Theta Healing, a Licensed Minister in California & Hawaii and a Reiki Master.

For 5 years, she and her husband created the TV Show "Tides of Change", hosted by KatRama. After the 9/11 attack she was moved to make a one hour TV Show titled "Tides of Change: The Next Step" in which she explains in detail the correlation between the attack and the position of the astrological signs and the planets at that particular day and

time and how it was a signpost in everyone's life around the world and the beginning of a new world order. Her message is always one of inspiration and solution shining light into the dark.

Today she and her husband own Rainbow Weddings & Celebrations, a wedding, coordinating service on Kauai, Hawaii where she performs Traditional, Non-denominational, Hawaiian Style and Alternative wedding ceremonies. She also performs specialized ceremonies such as Buddhist, Jewish and Wiccan.

To find out more about her check her website: <http://www.RainbowWeddings.com> or you can reach her at: [katwoman11@me.com](mailto:katwoman11@me.com)





## ***THE POWER OF YOU***

Ever since I can remember, I felt that I was from some other place, not this planet.

I was born a twin. My sister Susy looks just like me, but we are very different in many fundamental ways. As a professional astrologer this is an intriguing mystery that has led me to the conviction that we are multi-dimensional beings, each one of us destined to travel a unique path.

I've always been curious, daring, rebellious, and a non-believer in anything the so-called "authorities" told me. As a child I felt like my body was too small to house me. I felt like I was big, vast, just yearning to break out of the incarceration of my small body. I wanted to fly, soar, feel free, sing, dance above the earth up into the sky, leave this place called earth. I felt my ancient soul long before I knew what a soul is. Everything that paraded in front of me seemed distorted, not real, often like a bad dream that someday I would awaken from and find myself back home. But alas, I grew older and the world around us saddened and became cruel. I would have to accept and adjust to the overwhelming reality outside my loving family. Depressed and lonely, I buried all my deep feelings and tried to live as a stranger in a human body.

### **The Story**

My mouth suddenly went dry, my lips parched and my heart was pounding so fast I felt it was about to burst out of my chest. I could not believe my eyes, there in our bed, I saw my husband and my best friend in each other's arms. I wanted to scream, but stood there paralyzed, in utter shock, unable to move.

How long I stood there staring in disbelief I don't know, but suddenly the spell broke and I screamed out of control. My husband

jumped up and put his trousers on, my girlfriend slid under the covers hiding in shame.

In those few moments, the pain of feeling rejected, betrayed, deceived, lied to and humiliated left me weak and helplessly depressed. Childhood beliefs of not being good enough, feeling there was something wrong with me crept in and brought old memories to the surface. Inner demons reawakened feelings of self-pity, self-hatred and victimization. I cringed with fear that I might drown in the toxic waste of these unbearable feelings. I wanted to release the flood of emotions haunting me. How could I muster the courage to face my dark side, my deepest emotions, my pain and to trust the outcome would take me to a new way of being. I wanted revenge; I wanted to kill them both. Later I even dreamed about committing the act. It felt good to acknowledge these dark feelings and cry my heart out. I allowed myself to be filled with the feelings that kept me from moving on. Rage, revenge, shame, blame, sadness, unbearable pain, jealousy, these energies cut to the core of my soul.

However, as a Buddhist, it was time to live the principles I'd learned. This was the beginning of a huge transformation as I learned that self-empowerment would come only when I changed my beliefs and my mindset. I had to fight my own demons. My intent was set; I was going to put my Buddhist practices to work. The only way out was through, so I determined to embark on a marathon of chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, determined not to stop until something changed deep inside me. On that unforgettable Friday evening, I chanted for hours and hours asking for insight into my co-creation of this drama. All I wanted was for the pain, the desire for revenge and the hatred to dissolve.

I lost track of time and fused with the sound of the mantra, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, traveling into my past examining how periods of my life had come full circle into the present.

My twin sister and I were only two years old when the Nazis began a brutal occupation of Austria where I was born. My father, a middle class Jewish haberdasher in Vienna, was arrested, but talked his way out of a

prison holding cell where he was destined for the concentration camps. We barely escaped that night in October of 1938 and fled by freighter, penniless, to China. My father found work as a tailor in the slums of Shanghai, our new home. Though we escaped the horrors of the European war, constant air raids by American planes bombing Japanese occupied Shanghai rattled the windows and shook the walls of our rundown building. Death and destruction surrounded us for the following 9 years.

In 1947, when I was 11 years old, World War II was over, but the Communists had gained control of China. We fled once again, this time to La Paz, Bolivia, plagued with revolutions, soldiers in the streets and gunfire in the night. Finally in the early 50's our family was granted the immeasurable gift of immigration to America. We settled down, two teenage girls in Los Angeles, and I finally had time to live a life that wasn't focused on survival or surrounded by fear and violence. Now all the larger issues and questions about life started to make their way to my consciousness:

Who am I?

Why am I here?

What is my life purpose?

Why did all those other Jewish people get killed?

Why were our lives spared?

Is there a God, a higher power, or someone watching over me?

After seeing and experiencing so much hatred, inhumanity, and bloodshed, I seriously doubted the existence of a God. I did, however feel mysterious forces at play. These questions haunted me, as I became very rebellious, breaking the law, defying rules to live by and eventually descending into the world of drugs, alcohol and deep depression. After once getting arrested and spending 8 hours in jail, I was overcome with feelings of hopelessness, despair, confusion, even thinking of suicide--

never suspecting that all this would lead to the gateway of my spirituality and bring me to a place of clarity, inspiration, sanity.

Nearing my 31st birthday, I'd just been through my "Saturn Return", and drugs were taking me down a road that was getting darker and darker every day. In Astrology a "Saturn Return" represents a major cycle of experience coming to an end, a time of major transformation and change. How great the changes that follow are, depends on what one has done with one's life in the past 14 years. It is a time when a person needs to transition from outmoded perceptions and habits to more mature life learning processes. Saturn struck upon me with irresistible force. A few months later I had a terrible skiing accident. Laid up in a cast to my waist, unable to stay in the fast lane running from myself, forced to quit drugs and be still, I began to reflect upon my life searching deeply within for answers.

I began to question many things I had been taught or taken for granted. If society's rules and laws were so good and supposedly effective, (since they rarely seemed to change) why was the world so out of balance, filled with violence, evil doings, the genocide of indigenous peoples and the Jewish race, hunger, poverty, greed, in so many places on the planet? Governments, corporations and jails filled with criminals and war all the time. What kind of society was this that we paid homage to? Wasn't anybody else aware of what was going on? These unanswered quandaries were slowly driving me to feel I may be insane. Yearning for deeper truth, I started to dig into my depression, my perceived hopelessness, to determine what was real and what was an illusion. I struggled, overcome by fears and anxiety as I probed deeper into the blackness of my despair, when I hit bottom, the seeds of my inner knowing slowly began to emerge allowing me to experience a glimpse at another way to view life.

There was a time as a very young child when I felt like I was big . . . vast, yearning to break out of the incarceration of my small body. I wanted to fly and soar, feel free, sing, dance above the earth up into the sky, leave this place called earth. I felt my ancient soul long before I knew what a soul is.

It was during this time of convalescence that a friend talked to me about Buddhism and the power of chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. Open to trying anything that might alleviate my aching heart and confused mind, I began to read the Buddhist teachings. A powerful light began to glow and I knew then that my life was undertaking a drastic change never to be the same again. Chanting and practicing Buddhism felt like a cool soothing waterfall washing over my wounds. My heart opened, a sense of calmness and peace arose as I realized that what I had been searching for all along was not outside myself, but anchored deep within the center of my being. It had always been there waiting for me to remember. This was the beginning a long journey to my own empowerment.

The hypnotic mono-rhythmic chanting gradually brought me back to the present, like waking slowly from a trance. A loud, clear, deep inner voice beckoned to me, asking me to look within and find my part in co-creating this marital drama of betrayal. I continued chanting for hours and hours focusing on my pain, searching for insight. At some point in time, the illusion of my marriage started to unravel. It became crystal clear, something I'd had a sense of for several years, but did not want to admit, the fact that my marriage was more for convenience than for love. Yet, I did not want to give up the illusion that I was in love with this man even though I had never treated him very lovingly, he always came second to my important work. I was the one who often invited my girlfriend (who was quite a bit younger) to spend time at the house when I was out "working for world peace". The lie I was living revealed itself to me in an illuminating flash. I saw the truth of the situation; it shocked me to realize I had unconsciously set up this drama in my life. I knew then, I was as responsible for making this happen as my husband and my girlfriend. We had co-created this event that in a few months would lead to my divorce.

Later during my chanting marathon something extraordinary took place, a mystical experience. My small meditation room, which was lit only by 2 altar candles, suddenly burst into a vast space filled with golden light, pulsating with an energy that felt like soft meteor showers coming down on

me and all around me. The whole house expanded to an infinite size and I expanded beyond any boundaries. In this state of vast beingness I merged into love, forgiveness, understanding, compassion and peace. I don't exactly know how long I remained in this state of total bliss, but when it finally subsided; the sun was rising in the east behind my altar. That day, I felt the beginning of my spiritual awakening, and remembered the awesome feelings I'd had as a very small child of being in this world but not of it.

My life drastically changed after that, into a new journey of remembering to listen to my inner voice, to trust and follow my spirit without hesitation. I joined a Mystery School, studied Esoteric Astrology, Past Life Regression and learned of the intricate ways energy flows. By paying close attention to my body, intuitive powers came through. This led me to study the power of sound, using "tones" (also known as toning or sounding) to direct healing power into blockages in the body, mind, and emotions.

In this brief excerpt, I focused on one of the many crossroads of my life. I have come a long way from feeling lost and confused to a place of knowing myself, trusting myself and realizing that self-empowerment lies deep within each one of us. We just need to find the courage to travel the often-dark path that leads us to that diamond within.

I would like to share some of the gems I was given:

Looking closely at our personal problems and the problems of the world today, we are challenged to change our worldview. Gazing down at our world from outer space, there are no visible demarcations of national boundaries, just a multi-colored beautiful small planet. On earth we've drawn a line in the sand; and created divisions of "us" and "them". An illusion birthed by mankind making it difficult to see the truth in any situation. This has led us to strike out with blame, hatred, rage, revenge, jealousy etc., until we realize we are actually striking out at ourselves. Our demons and our dark side are strong forces that can become our allies if we dare confront them and understand their hunger for recognition.

Every situation is co-created be it good or tragic. Taking responsibility for our lives and action leads us down the road to compassion, understanding and empowerment. This inner journey of transformation is done alone with the power found within, nowhere else.

I've learned to view enemies as teachers and to diagnose addictions and negative feelings as viruses that can be healed. For instance, I named my "control" addiction "The Dominator Virus". The antidote for healing these viruses is a strong dosage of courage, self-examination and the compassion you would have for a best friend in deep pain.

### **In conclusion my gift to you is:**

"Believe in yourself; dare to be yourself"

"You have the option to choose to re-choose"

"Consider the possibility that everything you ever thought was wrong about you

Was really right about you"!

### **Remember**

"The entire Universe re-arranges itself to accommodate your picture of reality"

May your journey take you where your dreams come true!

*KatRama Brooks*

### **What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

I love the compassion I have for others, my self-confidence, the courage to speak my truth and the joy to be able to inspire and encourage others by sharing the wisdom I gained so far in my life.

I also love the fact that I no longer make excuses or procrastinate; instead I take action when I have a challenge to confront. Life is just too short.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

I don't hate anything about midlife, life has actually become easier. I dislike the fact that my body doesn't move with the same speed and flexibility it used to.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

I would say: Do all the things you want to do yet fear and feel resistance towards. Keep a curious and seeking mind.

Fill yourself with the myriad of tastes and flavors life has to offer. Don't complain, live in the moment and always give gratitude to be alive.





## MARY O'MALLEY

**Mary O'Malley** is an author, teacher and a counselor in private practice in Kirkland, Washington, who draws on her own life experience to facilitate healing and awakening in a compassionate and powerful way.

For over 30 years Mary has studied and practiced numerous forms of meditation, bodywork techniques, and holistic modalities for the mind. In this quest, she has studied with teachers from all over the world including Joel Kramer, Patricia Sun, Stephen Levine and Jack Kornfield. Using these resources to integrate and heal her own life, she has developed a variety of concepts and practices for accessing clarity, compassion and inner peace no matter what is happening in one's life.

For over twenty years, Mary has been counseling, leading groups, retreats, classes and speaking all over the country through her organization Awakening. She is the author of *The Gift of Our Compulsions: A Revolutionary Approach to Self-Acceptance and Healing*, published by New World Library, and of *Belonging to Life: The Journey of Awakening*, an invitation into full engagement with whatever is arising in each moment of our lives. Her work has been endorsed by both Dr. Larry Dossey and Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now*.

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## ***THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME***

What would our lives look like if we discovered that everything we deeply long for and everything we truly are is to be discovered right here, right now? And what would it feel like if we learned how to trust our lives – not just the easy and the joyful but also the difficult and the sorrowful. In my healing that has been the case – everything I have experienced has been a part of the tapestry of my life, leading me to the deep healing I now know and live.

A story that I have used in my work speaks clearly of my journey from despair and disconnection to the kind of connection we all long for. It begins with a child standing at the end of a great valley. This child is me and represents the innocence I experienced when I was young. I was awake, but I wasn't aware. As I stand at the end of this great valley, I can see at the other end a regal and mighty Mountain, breathtaking in its beauty. I know someplace deep inside that my life is a journey to the Mountain, a journey to the curiosity and compassion of an awakened mind. Onto my back goes my pack, and I start down the trail into the valley of the mind that believes it is separate from life.

While making the descent in the first few years of my life, I can still see the Mountain and still stay in touch with my connection with life. But the older I get, the deeper I penetrate the valley until the time comes when I can no longer see even glimpses of the snow-capped peak. The trees of everyday life block my view, and I lose sight of the destination. But it is spellbinding down here in the valley of daily life. For awhile I am fascinated, intent on gathering as many objects, dollars and experiences as I can, forgetting that this is not the purpose of my life.

As a young child, my resilience in dealing with all of the challenges of life was still strong, but as I went deeper into the valley, it became more challenging. There were mind-made lions and tigers and bears. The raging river of fear that I had to cross over and over again had hidden along its

banks pools filled with the quicksand of self-judgment. At times I found myself lost in the seemingly endless bogs of desire. My body was full of bruises that came from the hidden drop-offs of disappointment. And during the firestorms of rage that passed through me, consuming all of the available oxygen, I knew the terror of being barely able to breathe.

Eventually I came to know the mind-numbing confusion of losing a sense of direction in the deep forest of the separate self. After one too many times of having to cross the treacherous river, and after forgetting that my life is a journey to the Mountain of my own true nature, something inside of me closed down and I began to view life from the very narrow perspective of struggle, control and fear.

At this point in the journey, I came to a fort built deep in the woods – the fortress of the mind. The illusion of warmth, nourishment and safety was there, but it wasn't the warmth of the heart or the nourishing food of communion with life. I noticed that many people lived here, however, so I assumed it must be the destination of my journey and I stayed for awhile. I was lucky, however, and something spurred me on, pulling me back out into the cold and the wild, back into facing the challenges of my life.

A short while after leaving the fort, without me even noticing it, the valley began a gradual ascent. One day, while treed by a lion, I glimpsed a patch of white through the forest. I had no idea what it was, but a thrill ran through my body. There was renewed determination to continue on, even though I wasn't sure of where I was going, my food supply was low and my energy was drained. Trees begin to thin and I got more glimpses of white. Through the thick fog of the judging, fearing mind came the wonderful idea that maybe, just maybe I hadn't done my journey *wrong* – it wasn't just the random wanderings of a confused mind. Possibly, just possibly, every step brought me to this place of being drawn toward a patch of brilliant white.

Then one day the trail took a turn and there before me, in all of its splendor, was the Mountain. Memories from the first few years of my life when I stood at the end of the valley and then began the journey come

flooding back to me, and I knew my destiny was to climb the Mountain. With renewed vigor, I began my ascent.

The higher I went, the broader the view. It wasn't that the Mountain was a place of ease and bliss. It was full of challenges. But whenever one of my core life lessons threatened to overwhelm me, I secured my ice ax, roped off and turned around. There before me was the panorama of life and I discovered that I was part of a greater process. Everywhere I looked I saw the natural wisdom of life unfolding before me in the dance of the seasons, in the rhythm of the tides and in the heart beat of life that permeates every atom, rock, leaf, cell and even me. In a flash, I moved out of disconnection, discovering myself as a part of this great, rhythmic dance.

In this middle part of my life, I love the view from the mountain. One of its many gifts is the knowing that my life has never been lived in isolation. I look at my hands and see all of my ancestors present right there, back through my own family tree and on to the mighty incubator of the oceans. As I look out across the broad expanse of the Universe, I recognize that my very existence is dependent upon everything that has ever been. With deep gratitude I acknowledge all I have been given along the way. I am showered with the energy of the sun, quenched with precious sweet water, nourished with the very essence of the Earth, loved by the trees, the ground, the wind and the sky, and animated by the breath within the breath of Life. This spacious view sees no separate objects, only the Universe unfolding in a web of interconnected Being. I have come to recognize that everything is sacred—every moment, being and thing—every atom molecule and cell— every breath. I realize that my destiny is to see this, live this, breathe this.

I now see the valley I traversed in my life and understand the absolute perfection of every single experience on my journey—every single one. All of the joy and sorrow were essential and prepared me for the vision of connection and compassion that comes after scaling this mighty peak. My whole perception of my daily life has shifted. Rather than

being a series of random events that need to be controlled and feared, I now see it as the dance of the Universe awakening. I soften and open completely into the living adventure that is my life, knowing that it will include pleasure and pain, loss and gain. The urge to manage it dissolves into my willingness to show up and merge with life as it unfolds out of Mystery. In each moment of willingness, I belong to life.

As I look down from the Mountain of awareness into that valley, I see how many people still live alienated lives, many of them caught in immense suffering, cut off from the greater process, cut off from the knowing that life is *for* them in every single experience. And my heart opens to the deepest of suffering, to the littlest of children and to even the most heinous of criminals and the most despicable of rulers. The tattered threads of human life are being woven back together in the spaciousness of my heart. I now know that I made it to the Mountain not only for my own healing, but also for the healing of all beings. My struggles were the struggles of the whole; the heartaches I have faced and the pain I have met are common threads in the web of delusion that ensnares all beings.

The Mountain had another truth to reveal, as well. When I saw the Mountain from the trail in the valley, I thought the summit was my final destination. But as I climbed, the summit was obscured from view and all I could see was the terrain I was climbing through. The higher up and the more challenging it became, the more I needed to pay close attention to each step. As my attention became totally focused on each step, I suddenly realized that the destination is not the top. The destination is this step – this moment – and that every step is the destination. I now comprehend that I make a difference by showing up for my own life, step by step, owning, belonging to and working with the process life has given me, while recognizing that my life is part of a greater process.

When I descend again into the valley of the mind that believes it is separate from Life, as we all do, I bring the perspective of the Mountain with me wherever I go. I can willingly go back to the valley because now I have the ability to live surrounded by the narrowness of the illusion of

separation and not be seduced by it. I am able to use my mind to unite rather than divide and to connect rather than disconnect. I now have a deeper understanding of what the journey is about, and the threads of the tapestry of life are being woven together in my heart.

As my body ages, my heart becomes wiser and more open. I can finally say to the little girl standing at the end of the valley, ready to begin her journey to the mountain, "Trust it all. It will be easy and difficult, joyous and sorrowful. But it is all for you. It is all a part of the journey of your awakening and no matter what happens to you, you will never be alone.

*Mary O'Malley*

**What do you love most about being in the middle of your life?**

The view. Life is like climbing up a mountain and the higher you go the more you can see, understand and love.

**What do you hate most about midlife but can laugh about anyway?**

There is nothing I hate about my life. I do have a great sense of humor about this aging body with arms that flap in the wind and thighs that jiggle when I walk but they are evidence that I have lived.

**If you could go back and speak to your younger self what piece of wisdom would you share?**

Trust the process. It will be difficult, scary and very confusing at times but it is a journey that will take you to the heart. Know that I love you just as you are.





## **LIVE A LIFE THAT MATTERS**

*Ready or not, some day it will all come to an end.*

*There will be no more sunrises, no minutes, hours or days.*

*All the things you collected, whether treasured or forgotten, will pass to someone else.*

*Your wealth, fame and temporal power will shrivel to irrelevance.*

*It will not matter what you owned or what you were owed.*

*Your grudges, resentments, frustrations and jealousies will finally disappear.*

*So, too, your hopes, ambitions, plans, and to- do lists will expire.*

*The wins and losses that once seemed so important will fade away.*

*It won't matter where you come from, or what side of the tracks you lived, at the end.*

*It won't matter how often you went to church or how often you prayed so men could see you praying.*

*It won't matter how many e-mails about religion you have forwarded.*

*It won't matter whether you were beautiful or brilliant.*

*Even your gender and skin color will be irrelevant.*

*So what will matter? How will the value of your days be measured?*

*What will matter is not what you bought, but what you built;  
Not what you got, but what you gave.*

*What will matter is not your success, but your significance.*

*What will matter is not what you learned, but what you taught.*

*What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched, empowered or encouraged others to emulate your example.*

***What will matter is not your competence, but your character.***

***What will matter is not how many people you know, but how many will feel a lasting loss when you are gone.***

***What will matter is not your memories, but the memories that live in those who loved you.***

***What will matter is how long you will be remembered, by whom and for what.***

***Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident.***

***It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice.***

***Choose to live a life that matters.***

***Author Unknown***

## *Enjoy Your Life!*



Narcis Noshad

Nancy S. Mure

Lyca Shan

Marian Massie

Denice Ann Evans

Svetla Bankova

Jacinta Hin

Karrie King

Barbara Wasielewski

Pamela Harper

Sylvia Sultenfuss

Bonnie Ross- Parker

KatRama Brooks

Tracy Miller

Johanna Siegmann

Paula Gregorowicz

Stephanie C. Harper

Virginia Zaharieva

Cathy Tigges

Rochele Hc Hirsch

Brenda Cobb

Mary O'Malley