



Create Your Own
REALITY
The Ancient Wisdom

by **Sharyn Ayn**

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Create Your Own REALITY - **The Ancient Wisdom**

Quotable Quotes for
Create Your Own REALITY - The Ancient Wisdom

... amazing to me how many people blindly listen to doctors and expect them to have the answers. The mentality we have in this country of "take a pill" to cure whatever you have is what's lead us to be one of the least healthy nations in the world (we're now down to 35th worldwide!) Unfortunately our doctors have been taught how to treat sick people and NOT how to keep and/ or make people healthy.

Debra Costner
Editor, East Bay Women News

I loved the individual stories in the book. You told them so passionately. You have great references, i.e., chiropractors, psychics, rune tiles, etc. I am sure many readers will relate to your experiences, so I think it's a good read overall.

Cheryl Frost
www.thewordnerd.com

Sharyn Ayn's wonderful book Create Your Own Reality offers a multitude of solutions and suggestions that will enable you to change your life.

Whether you are looking for a renewed purpose or want support with a personal challenge, Sharyn's book will support you on your journey.

Ann Roulac
Business and Life Strategist and author of Power, Passion & Purpose:
7 Steps to Energizing Your Life.

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It's amazing to see what you can do if you just want to, and how you can create the life you want! Sharyn Ayn, in this book is letting you into her heart and her life while creating the space for you to explore your own. Sharyn is one of the most generous people I have ever known and sharing her wisdom with us is another wonderful way of her to give. Read, Learn and change your life!

Relli Siegel
www.rellisiegel.com

This book is awesome, I can't put it down. It is great. I'm learning so much about you and your experiences and opening to the spirituality source energy that is all ours.

Melissa Sawn
www.freenanosample.com/mswann

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This book is dedicated to my brother Tony

You will always be in my heart.

The chapter has ended, the journey just begun.

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Acknowledgment

I have mentioned a great number of individuals throughout this book because I humbly acknowledge that I have been blessed through the relationships that I have had.

Beginning with my many teachers, an insightful priest, my first mentor, Lamar Johnson and the many guides and angels that have made it their responsibility to offer me their knowledge, assistance and guiding love. I thank them for their support and heartfelt kindness. Without these people, I am sure that I would have stumbled more readily than what was evident.

Writing this book has been a six-year goal. While writing other works, I wanted to share my insights every time I met someone who was struggling with his or her life. My biggest source of inspiration has been my brother Tony. I have watched him time and time again overcome the many obstacles that life has presented him, and he always had the most amazing attitude. I am grateful for his inspiration to look at life from an objective point of view and with a sense of humor.

For every person who has come into my life, this book has been inspired by you and for you.

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Foreword

My mother was standing in her rose garden admiring the beautiful first blooms of the season. I was four and when she heard the screen door open she turned in an instant of rage. She had put me down for a nap and always cherished her time alone.

She yelled, "Get back in that bed! Why can't you leave me alone?"

Holding my head, I tearfully replied, "My head hurts."

Angrier yet she spat "Get back to bed! You would never have been born if your father hadn't wanted a boy!"

Her remarks from that point on always centered on one theme "Everyone in the family had to give up something because you were born." Sometimes when there wasn't enough money for groceries, it was food. When her family was coming to visit, it was the lack of decent furniture. There was always a reason she believed I caused her anguish.

What do you think my reaction was? Can you imagine that I cried or got angry? Do you think that at four I could have ignored her?

I retreated into my own solitary world. I tried to become invisible. I refused to speak to anyone for nearly a year. Most of my elementary school years are a mystery to me. I have very few memories, and most of those I recall are not very pleasant.

I used to empty the clothes out of the bottom drawer of the closet so I could climb into it and hide from everyone. I would spend hours in that drawer and avoid contact with the rest of the family. Then, after we moved from that house that had the perfect hide-away drawers, I hid on the big red fuzzy over stuffed couch by curling up in a small ball and stacking pillows all around me.

The summer after my freshmen year, a generous benefactor paid my way to go to an all girls' retreat at Occidental in northern California.

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That year the Beach Boys' big hit was *Wendy*. It's odd that a song about a girl leaving her boyfriend for another would be a major positive catalyst for me, but it was. A young priest not only brought the album and played it for us but also had us break up into groups and sing the song together.

Whatever magic was woven into the song, Occidental and that weekend, it would turn out to be the turning point of my young life. When I returned home, I remember feeling like I was walking ten feet off the ground. My family's usual arguments no longer had any negative effect on me.

That fall as I entered the beginning of my high school years, I discovered my parents didn't object to me attending events at church or at school as long as I was home in time to help with dinner. So, I joined every activity I could, and I volunteered for everything else. The busier I became, the faster the time flew by.

I barely got by in school up until my sophomore year. I had several learning disorders, although in the '60s no one was acutely aware of diagnosing them. Much later I learned that I had ADD and dyslexia, and I hadn't had my eyes checked until I was 17. I then discovered I was nearsighted and had a stigmatism that made words blur together, which explained why I read so slowly.

I also stuttered. My English teacher, Mrs. Dee Lemos, kept me after school my sophomore year and had me read Shakespeare out loud while holding my tongue. By the end of that school year, the stutter had disappeared. But then it became apparent that I had a Southern drawl. When asked about my family, I caught myself slurring, "My daddy's from Texas," in a most authentic Texas accent, even though I traveled to my father's home state for the first time later that year.

Learning to stop stuttering and eliminating my Southern drawl served as my largest accomplishments that year, because they helped me not sound so drastically different from everyone else. In case you've never known this, kids can be cruel and they constantly teased me as long as I sounded different.

For the first time in my life, I had hopes. I hoped to go to college, but I would never get there with my current "C" grade average. So, I approached my teachers and asked what I could do to improve my grade point average. One of the true blessings of growing up in a very small town lies in the fact that the teachers have the time to work with students individually. My history teacher, Mr. Robert Meuschke, told me to create

a paper about someone notorious. I choose Abraham Lincoln. My science teacher, Mr. Al Kiefer told me to make a hand-drawn color report on atoms. My math teacher, Mr. Larkin had me explain Algebra problems to students who didn't understand them, since for some odd reason I enjoyed and excelled at math. My music teacher, Mr. Robert Davidson, encouraged me to enter the statewide performance music contest. I won first place as a solo bass clarinetist. My home economics teacher, Mrs. Margaret McKennon, had me enter a sewing contest, and I won first place on the first round. The second stage of the contest required me to bring the dress back after it was washed. The material was so cheap that it stretched in some places and shrunk in others. I lost the final contest, but I still received a good grade for my sewing ability.

Little by little, my self-esteem began catching up to the level where it should have been. In my junior year, I ran for student council and won. I was elected to the cheerleader's squad, became the assistant editor of the school newspaper and, even as shy as I was, I joined the drama club.

Three years later, I graduated high school with a 3.8 grade point average and a scholarship to go to Chico State University. The scholarship included a job that helped me pay for my education. Part of the scholarship included a job at the university. I had two choices, the biology lab or the print shop. Fortunately, the print shop was my first choice, and I was extremely pleased when Lamar Johnson accepted my application. He was one of the greatest influences on my early years. I would even return five years later and work with him again. Because of his uncanny kindness, he only had to ask and any of his employees would work as long as was needed to accomplish the task at hand.

My father told me that my parents wouldn't help financially with my college education, because girls only went to college to find a husband. After all, it was the late '60s and women's rights were still a few miles down the road. So, when I left home, I worked full time and took 18 units of courses. I managed to develop mononucleosis and hypoglycemia. I was overworked and exhausted. I also fell in love with the first boy who said he loved me. To be fair, I was blindly in love with him. I say blindly, because if I had my eyes open I'm fairly sure I would have had to know that the marriage was doomed from the beginning.

Yet, later in life, I would realize that everything I experienced had a purpose. After a very painful divorce at age 23, I began to chase every healing process or concept that might help me understand why I felt like

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a victim. I studied astrology to try and understand people's behavior and personalities. I went to as many psychics as I could find looking for answers to why I had experienced so many traumatic experiences.

I discovered past life regressions through hypnotherapy and had several practitioners that taught me how to minimize my emotional response to events, because I learned each event was a tool to teach me what I needed to know to become more balanced.

In 1977, I moved to the Bay Area, a gold mine of amazing talent in behavioral concepts. I met my second husband, Fred, the next year and remained married until 1985. During that time, I did not participate in any healing concepts or practices, even though I was still intrigued with them. My husband was dead set against anything that couldn't be explained by logic, and, yet, he did believe in Catholicism. I felt very frustrated, but I really wanted to make our marriage work.

I continued my study of healing and behavioral processes, even though some of what I pursued went against my husband's beliefs. One of my clients, Arlene Dalton, introduced me to JP Van Hulle and the book *Michael Speaks*. This book was channeled by Chelsea Yarborough Young and contains overleaves (personality identifiers) explaining behaviors that mystify many of us. Imagine being able to accept everyone's behavior, no matter what they do or don't do. That's what this book helps you accomplish.

Despite what I learned, I found myself unable to remain married to Fred. After my divorce, I decided to take a trip to France - - by myself if I had to. As it turned out, my friend, Brooke Havener, decided at the last minute to come along, too. While in Annecy France, I had a déjà vu experience and told Brooke that I knew of a restaurant where the dogs were allowed to sit at the dining tables and eat with their owners. I had never been to the city or to the restaurant before, nor had I talked with anyone who had, but I was very sure that we would find the restaurant. We actually found it and discovered that my "insight" was correct.

While in France, I took a fall while skiing. That night I had a dream. After I arrived back home Arlene explained the dream was to release past Karma. I didn't have a chance to tell her about the dream before she told me. These events helped me begin gathering some very interesting evidence that more exists in this world than the tangible.

I then met several people who became significant to me for different reasons. My friend Shirley Ruiz gave me *The Book of Runes* by Ralph

Blum as a special thank you gift. Blum was the first to bring runes, which are used for divination, into the United States. Runes are used by placing your hand in the bag with the tablets while thinking of an issue for which you might need resolution, extracting a rune and reading from the book of explanations an interpretation of a lesson that might encompass concepts of understanding, patience, love, forgiving, and so on.

I met Richard Unger, a hand analyst specialist, and was impressed with the information that he knew about me just by looking at my palm. I've always wanted to share new information with as many people as I could, so I had a hand reading circle so others could discover the value of what secrets lay in the lines of their hands. After all, I reasoned, if I found this information interesting, certainly others would, too.

Additionally, I pursued meditation techniques, attended sessions with several hypnotherapists, and read a multitude of books on psychic powers, telepathy, out-of-body experiences, and anything else that surfaced and seemed of interest. I was awakened and hungry for as much knowledge as I could discover.

In 1991, an associate, Mary Hardeman-Schultz gave me a gift of a numerology session and a face reading. I was told that I would write a book, which at that time was as far away from my conscious abilities as flying to the moon. She used the numerology chart results to explain why I experienced so many difficult situations during my life.

That same year, I met a chiropractor, Dr. David Olkkola, as well. He had learned a process called the Anti-Sabotage Technique. Of all the things I had discovered up to that point, this process gave me the best results in overcoming the idiosyncrasies born from being controlled too much as a child, surviving a dysfunctional family life and the everyday challenges life presents. Dr. David helped me overcome so many behaviors that now I find it difficult to imagine that I was at one time painfully out of sync with myself.

I was introduced to Ennegrams, which helped me understand the complexities of various personality traits and why I reacted one way and others would react differently to the same information.

I was completely in awe of the Cards of Destiny, a process researched by Robert Camp. The Cards explain the issues with which we are faced each year; by knowing what we face, we are better prepared to take a step back from them when they appear and better prepared to appreciate the lessons they present rather than resisting them.

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More teachers and wise souls touched my life, influenced my thinking and sent me down a variety of healing paths. John Doyle, who studied with the Buddhist Monks for more than 14 years and has a master's in psychology, was one of these. He developed a process that allows him to empathically match the feelings/emotions of his clients. Imagine knowing that you're sad, frustrated, afraid, angry, or any other negative emotion, but not understanding why. John is able to align with the feeling and extract from his clients the reason behind the emotion by giving them the knowledge of what holds them back from a resolution.

Then there was Larry Byram. After 12 years of studying the behavior of couples, Larry discovered that people are attracted to others who have a similar trait to the parent with whom they did not develop a good relationship in childhood. He teaches people how to recognize these traits so they don't have to attach themselves to a partner just to fulfill the lack of relationship they had with their parents.

In 1994, I was at a craft fair with 500 other attendees when Ted Jones came to find me, because a mutual business associate recommended he do so. Within 3 years his energetic work corrected the effects of the muscular dystrophy I experienced. Ted became one of the greatest miracle workers I have ever known. He is an angel residing on this earth with the rest of us mere mortals and has literally saved more than 200 people I have known personally from chronic and terminal health challenges.

Pat Evans exposed me to one of the concept of recognizing verbally-abusive relationships which coincides with my core beliefs on how people will lash out at those closest to them out of frustration. Those who are verbally abusive have to learn how to communicate in a manner that doesn't inflict pain on those to whom they are closest.

If you read between the lines, you might realize that I was desperate to find solutions to all of the things that held me back from finding the peace of mind I sought. I found it impossible to continue my life in a state of mediocrity.

Those findings are why I wanted to write this book – the same book the numerologist so long ago told me I would write. What I want more than anything from this book is to make you realize that you do not have to settle for a life you are not happy with and that a method exists to correct or eliminate whatever holds you back. It is up to you, and only you, to discover what process will yield you the results you desire.

No matter what you have experienced, it is perfect. Once you

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realize that and stop resisting what is going on in your life, you'll be amazed at how easy your life lessons are. It's only in the resistance to the lessons that creates difficulty and stress.

Please enjoy your journey and let me hear about your life altering transitions.

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Introduction

I am a loving, caring woman who has learned how to take adversarial situations in my life and turn each one of them into a major catalyst for personal growth.

Throughout of my life, I tried to make sense of the challenges with which I have been faced. I never knew anyone besides myself who had experienced as many traumatic situations so consistently throughout their life. In my search for healing, I dug in my heels and bared my soul to each practitioner I found, hoping that one might possess the magic bullet that would help me shed the emotional pain I carried. I felt like I always was working on myself. I never was satisfied with who I was as long as I felt any stress, anxiety or anger, which I believed held me back from having a happy and fulfilled life.

It is frustrating to look around and witness the difficulty everyone experiences. People never seem to have enough money, time or fun. It appears that everyone is chasing what they don't have, but they rarely find what they're looking for.

According to a study performed by the IRS in 1995, less than one in eight people do something they enjoy to earn their income. This is completely opposite of what should be acceptable.

The American Heart Association says more heart attacks happen on Monday morning than the other six-and-a-half days of the week combined. Given the fact that so many people start their week by going to a job they dislike, it's not surprising that they are drastically stressed about doing so and put their lives in jeopardy rather than go through the effort of finding a heartfelt career.

I am one of the lucky ones. Despite major health issues, or, more likely, because of the health issues, I was forced to discover a unique bus-

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iness. In either case, I couldn't have designed a business more perfect for my personality and basic need to be of service to others. Since 1991, I have been helping entrepreneurs get better connected in their business community by introducing them to others who are working with their potential clients but for a different purpose. We create leads for each other and make sure that each person knows who they need to know and where they need to be.

My work and speaking allows me to empower others to live their lives on purpose and with more joy and to learn to appreciate their lessons in life. I enjoy educating entrepreneurs about the awareness that we "make up" stress. It's not real. We create it in our imagination, which means we can just as easily stop stressing by imagining something less stressful.

I provide so many who are seeking to live their life now, in this moment, with the permission to do so. I help them see that they do not need to wait until their children are grown, retire or have enough money to live their ideal life.

There are no excuses or any reasons great enough to put living an ideal life off one more day. Life may well be a journey, but unless you leave your house and go out and explore, you'll never end up in the place where you might find yourself being the most fulfilled, satisfied and at peace. The journey begins anew each day.

Make your list of things you've always wanted to do, and make them as grand as you can possibly imagine. Climb Mt. Everest, drive the Daytona Raceway, cruise down the Nile, visit the Seven Wonders of the World, and by all means, find someone you can love unconditionally and by whom you can be loved and cherished in the same way.

Do not allow your life to be any less than the joyful experience it is meant to be. Everyone, without any exception, deserves to be happy. No matter how long it might take you, no matter how difficult it might appear, the rewards are worth the effort to follow through until you achieve your ultimate goals.

My belief is that more often than not our biggest challenges in life are actually our biggest

Chapter 1

“To be or not to be, that is the question.”

- William S Shakespeare (baptized 1564 –1616)

Resistance

In 1980, I was invited to go to a Christmas party with Fred, who was then my fiancé. I immediately told him that he should go to the party alone. When he asked me why I didn't want to go, I shrugged indifferently and told him that I didn't have anything to wear.

This was early in September, and Fred came home two weeks later with three beautiful dresses from iMagnum. He told me to pick one, and he'd return the others. Of course, he never did return the others. A couple of weeks later, I told him I still couldn't go to the party, because my hair was not in style, never suspecting that he would find a solution to this dilemma as well.

Early in October, he asked me to join him for lunch downtown, but when I got there, he had made an appointment for me to get my hair cut and styled and to have my first manicure and pedicure. I have to admit, he was truly an amazing fiancé.

Towards the end of October, I came up with an excuse that I thought he wouldn't be able to resolve. I told him I had nothing to say to people who frequented a country club. The next weekend he came home with a 12-inch-tall stack of magazines. He was always writing articles for national magazines, so I asked him for which one he was going to write. He told me to wait a minute, because he had more things to bring in to the house.

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When he came back inside, he had several bottles of wine. As he put them down on the counter, he explained that the magazines were for me, and I was to spend the whole weekend reading, and then I would have something to say when I went to the country club.

The day of the party I threw a temper tantrum that would have rivaled the most impressive three-year-old's antics. He patiently told me to take the entire day to get ready, but under no circumstances would I miss the party. He even told me that if I resisted he would carry me in over his shoulder.

Finally, I told to him the only way I could imagine attending was if we were the first ones to arrive. So, he called and told the hosts we had to arrive a half hour before the event was scheduled to begin.

When we got to the club, they were still putting the finishing touches on the decorations. We made our way into the kitchen, where they had set up the bar. I stood in the exact spot where Fred left me, and periodically he would come in, remove my empty glass from my hand, refill it and talk with me for awhile before excusing himself.

I managed to talk with several people and found that it was easier than I imagined. Nearly five hours later he came to check on me. I asked if we could leave. He agreed, commenting that I had I had managed fairly well. He returned shortly with my coat and escorted me out the door. As soon as we were outside I informed him I needed to get to a rest room immediately. He laughed and said we could go back inside and use their rest room, but I pleaded with him that we find somewhere else with a bathroom close by.

I tell you this story to illustrate the fact that at that time in my life I was so miserably shy that I would rather stay home than be around people I didn't know. For some reason I could manage meeting people easily enough for business purposes, but socially I found the experience overwhelmingly painful.

I resisted putting myself out among others at all costs. I avoided exposure to all social environments. Imagine not being capable of attending a party until I was 27. I believed that I didn't care about attending social affairs. I convinced myself I was better off staying at home.

What Fred did for me was priceless. It was an amazing gift and one that has brought me tremendous joy over the years. Because of that one night standing in that kitchen, even now from across a room I can spot someone who isn't comfortable in an environment. I always take it

upon myself to reach out to them and to introduce them to others. If I can make them the least bit more comfortable and distract them from their stress, then I feel a great sense of satisfaction.

There have been many instances in my life when someone has intervened and helped me through a difficult situation. I often acknowledge how special this has been. After such kindness was shown to me so frequently it made me realize, that many share the same type of experiences. After I turned 40, I took it for granted that the right person would show up if I would force myself to be patient about it. Patience was, and remains, the most difficult lesson I've have ever had to endure.

I looked toward many resources to develop a greater understanding as to why I seemed to attract so many difficult challenges in my life. I found that quotes from well-known people were filled with great insights. Their wisdom created threads from the past to the future. Their words had significant impact on me, and I would often use quotes to make specific points while I was speaking or engaged in group events.

Then, about 10 years ago while I was researching quotes for a Speaker's Journal, it occurred to me that, as in the past, our society is still searching for the same answers we have always looked for throughout time. We are still struggling with family relationships, financial security, health issues, spiritual conflicts, and even the differences between ethnicities.

How is it possible that within the 2,500 years of educated civilizations we have not found answers or discovered methods that bring peace of mind or create a more astute society? How can we still be stuck on our never-ending search for harmony, peaceful existence and the pursuit of happiness? With the masters pursuing these qualities since Socrates' time, does it not appear somewhat ridiculous that we have yet to discover the meaning of life?

Do you remember the movie *City Slickers* and its continuing reference to the "one true meaning of life"? Curly dies before he reveals the one true meaning of life and, therefore, forces Billy Crystal and his pals to interpret their own meaning of life. Of course, the meaning they discern cannot be challenged, because the wise master - - Curly - - is not available to tell them if they have arrived at the correct conclusion or not.

Does that mean that the true meaning of life is subjective? More than likely, you will find others who will readily identify with you in your one true meaning of life. Yet, for every 10 people questioned, I'm sure

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you will be able to find no less than 10 other potential definitions or theories that explain the purpose of living in this third dimension.

Your purpose defines your true meaning of life.

Have you contemplated the meaning of your life? Why are you here? What does your life stand for? What is your legacy? When you are no longer of this world, what will others have to say about the footprint you have left behind? Are you to be remembered for your good works? Your art? Your kind nature? The way in which you inspired others?

There have been many books authored during the past 20 years designed to inspire you to discover your true path in life. You can only fail by not beginning to try at all. During the journey of discovery you'll find many resources available to help you become successful.

An unlimited number of avenues will guide you and provide you with the tools and means to create what you want in life. It is not acceptable for you to slide by simply existing; the only acceptable path lies in attempting to create the life for yourself and your family that allows you to spend time with your loved ones and be an inspiration to others.

Be who you are meant to be, or live your life suppressed by the supposition that life is actually intended for you to spend it an abject existence. This represents a real challenge for you to face each and every day from this point forward.

Too few ever find their nirvana. However, when you can wake up each morning and know that each day you live is 100 percent on purpose, and then you are living your true meaning of life on earth. That's nirvana.

Is that even possible to achieve? Well, maybe you can accomplish it at best six out of seven days with one day off for good behavior — or for bad behavior, whichever makes your life more on purpose the other six days of the week. Either way it's okay, since no judgment is allowed on this earthly plane.

You see, it is not just the experience of appearing to be “walking the talk” or living as a spiritual person, which I define as one who lives his or her life as though someone was watching even when they know no one is watching. In other words, I'm talking about becoming someone who lives his or her life every day in a manner that could succumb to the strictest of all scrutiny.

What does that mean to you? Again, remember the answer is subjective. No wrong answer exists unless you are living your life as though it doesn't matter what you do with each and every day. You might think

living your life on purpose, living each day so you fulfill what you believe is the one true meaning of life is too much of a burden. After all, almost everyone else you know probably lives life as though they had no particular reason to come to this magnificent dimension.

And that is the point of this book. If you are willing to spend your life “sleep walking” through each day, you will never find fulfillment. You will wake up from your stupor somewhere along the way and realize that you have a very short time left on this earth and begin to question why you were here.

Wouldn't you rather spend your life awake and with your eyes wide open? Wouldn't you prefer to choose for every day of your life to have purpose and to make sense to you? Wouldn't you want to spend the last hours of your life reflecting on all of the phenomenal places, people and events that you experienced and then leave this earth knowing that you truly did live life to the largest capacity possible?

How do you go about orchestrating your life in such a manner? The quest is age old and yet more simple than anyone cares to admit. It isn't a matter adopting Gandhi's or Mother Theresa's exemplary self-sacrificing life style. It doesn't require that you spend days and weeks and months fasting, praying or in deep meditation. All that is required is that you spend each and every day aware of your words to others as well as your self-talk. You must be conscious of your actions and reactions to everyone and in every situation, and you should adopt a conscious plan as to what you want your life to represent.

The real challenge lies in not contradicting yourself at any time. You can no longer embrace your fondest wish in one breath and then declare your disappointment in what you lack in the next. You must, without fail, believe in yourself with every breath of every moment of every day. Be consistent.

This path is not for the faint of heart, the mild and meek, nor those who intend to “try” at life. There is no such thing as try, there is only do or die! You are either in this life to make a difference or to do nothing more than be a notch up from a paperweight.

It is your choice.

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Chapter 2

“Only the wisest and stupidest of men never change.”

- Confucius (551 B.C.- 479 B.C.)

Change

Thankfully, after my sophomore year, I didn't stutter in most situations and even learned to enjoy talking with people that I didn't know very well.

I have been fortunate to have had so many amazing mentors in my life. They have guided and inspired me in more ways than I can recount. Additionally, they always have provided me with the inspiration I needed at the precise moment in which I needed it most.

One mentor, Ed Thorpe, impacted me more than almost any other. I met him in 1990 through the local chamber of commerce. I don't believe he actually meant to mentor me, but he was the one who encouraged me to get out into the business community and speak about the travel agency I owned at the time. He was convinced that it was the easiest way to promote my business. Yet, I was terrified that I would be judged for my lack of speaking skills or the content of my presentation. On a deeper level, I most feared that I might start stuttering again in the middle of a speech like I had done in my youth.

After one year of Ed encouraging me without any cooperation on my part, he told me that he would pick me up and take me to a local Lion's club meeting. After arriving and just before they announced their speaker for the day, he leaned in close and said, “By the way, you're their speaker!”

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The thought of speaking in front of any group was painful emotionally and even physically to me. Therefore, my stomach immediately clenched into a knot and the years of self-doubt crept back into my mind with no effort at all.

I was mortified. Even worse, I was terrified. I only had the fear of disappointing Ed to bolster my courage. I have no idea what I said, but I got up in front of that audience and managed to talk for 20 minutes about something to do with being in business in the local community.

Ed was so amazing and thereafter he picked me up once a month and took me to a different service club. After about a year of this amazing guidance, a young woman came up to me and said that she had heard me speak at her service club six months previously. She went on to tell me that what I had said saved her business. She came to tell me how much she appreciated my words about being involved in the business community and how to make it effective for any business.

That was in 1992; and today I speak to audiences, big or small, in the business community, in various religious communities, on cruises, and even for speakers' organizations, which are the toughest audiences of all. I find nothing more empowering than being able to help someone by sharing the knowledge and experiences I have gained. Yet, if I hadn't been open to the guidance of my mentor, Ed, I never would be where I am today. As hard as it was, learning and embracing new skills has made my life extremely rewarding.

Change represents the one thing the majority of us resist in our lives. It is, in fact, what most companies struggle with most often. A study done by Inc. Magazine and National Business Incubator Association (NBIA) revealed that 80 percent of new businesses fail within the first five years. Further investigation revealed that 80 percent of those businesses failed not due to a lack of funds, as many suspect, but, in fact, because they refused to change.

If we can't manage to change our businesses when we know the results will mean a loss of our livelihood, then how can anyone expect us to change in their personal lives? No matter how unhappy we are with our life, relationships, jobs, income, weight, health, friendships, education, or appearance, it is, frankly, much easier to desperately cling to known factors than to approach a new or innovative means of performance.

In actuality, if we hadn't changed, we would all still be acting like we did when we were children. Change is unavoidable and should be

embraced as an adventure. The process of change only feels painful because of the resistance with which we approach the process.

Beginning with the first step we took, our first words we spoke and the first day of school we attended, our lives have been filled with the inevitability that we must consistently change until we reach the end of our lives.

Can you imagine what your life would be like today if you never left the safety of your parents' home? For those of you who have moved away from your home town, think of all the adventures of learning about a new town or the thrill of finding a great new restaurant that still makes you get excited about going there after many years. And think of the pleasant secure feeling you get when you turn down your street or road, because you have connected the look of your tree lined street, the names of the streets and the neighborhood with your pleasant memories.

For those who moved so frequently that you never felt like you had a home town, think of all the memories you've accumulated from each location. You have so many rich and wonderful stories to relay to others who never were blessed with the opportunity to move about the country or around the world.

Change is simply exchanging the known with the unknown. Yet most people find it terrifying.

I embraced nearly every job I ever had with a sense of wonder and a level of curiosity about learning everything that I could as rapidly as I could. I worked at each job less than three years with one exception. Once I learned all I felt possible, another more challenging position appeared, and I leaped at the new opportunity.

The one job I kept for nearly nine years was filled with challenges, and this position introduced me to the sales arena. I am most grateful for the knowledge gained by this experience, because it has had the most positive impact on my life compared to any other position I ever held.

I know I should have left that particular company after five years, but I was bound and determined to hang in there and build my retirement funds. After all, my father worked at the same nursing career for more than 40 years and at the very same hospital for more than 25 years. That's what was expected. My favorite uncle, John, was proud of having been employed by only two companies for his entire career. These two men influenced me immensely.

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That said, I like that I've worked for about 20 companies during my professional career - 20 years in the printing industry and more than 25 years in sales with about a five year overlap.

I also have enjoyed living in many places in California and Hawaii. I have lived in Mendocino, Chico, San Diego, Long Beach, Eureka, back to Chico, and Honolulu. Then, when I stopped to have lunch with a college roommate in Lafayette, just east of San Francisco, the two of us decided on the spur of the moment to take an apartment together that was located behind the restaurant. I have been living in the Bay Area in northern California for 30 years now.

The people I have met are amazing and the stories that I've heard and shared are precious memories. I'm nearly the only one in my family who has remained independent, and most of them can't begin to understand why I have an adventurous nature.

What have you given up or missed out on in your life by avoiding change? Have there been opportunities that would have altered the path of your life? What influenced your decision when you chose not to change? Can you say you have no regrets?

I have few regrets; the biggest has always been that I wasn't able to have children. It is the one thing that I would have changed if it were possible. Yet, because I wasn't able to have children, I have worked with several organizations that help children, and I have a goal to create a school for kids at risk. This idea would probably not have occurred to me if I had had children of my own.

Talk about change! How is it that we have more and more dysfunctional families and more and more children homeless in this country than ever before? We are touted to be one of the wealthiest nations in the world, yet have more children dying of malnutrition before their second birthdays than all but 22 countries in the world. One out of every eight children under the age of 12 in the U.S. goes to bed hungry every night. The infant mortality rate is linked to inadequate nutrition among pregnant women. The U.S. ranks 23rd among nations in infant mortality. African-American infants die at nearly twice the rate of white infants. (library.thinkquest.org/C002291/high/present/stats.htm).

The more we change our behavior, the more we become aware of how we can positively impact the world we live in. Several years ago, I was attending a course in Los Angeles and the event organizer asked the audience how we might best help those who are poor.

His answer: “Never become one of them!”

The better you do in your life, the more you can help others. That help can stem from donations of money, food or clothing, being mentored or by showing up in others lives as my mentors have done for me.

Have you ever noticed that when you’re feeling particularly disgruntled about your life that there is always someone nearby who always has more to contend with than you? I believe it is so important to keep up a constant awareness of our own good fortune and to live in gratitude.

By now, more than half of the world has read or heard of the movie *The Secret*. There is nothing new in this concept; it’s the basic *Law of Attraction*. I found a book in my library that was written in 1935, *The Secret Door of Success* by Florence Scovel Shinn. The information contained within its pages differs very little from its successor. Yet, what I find particularly endearing about *The Secret* is that the movie and book made millions of people previously unaware of their ability to control their negativity aware of their ability to focus on the positive things in their lives.

What would your life have been like if you never had a negative thought? Seriously would it be possible for you to always think positively about everyone and everything if you had been trained to do so early on in your life?

I’ve already mentioned a few of my situations: the stuttering, the Southern drawl, not being able to have children, and there are so many situations in my life that could have stopped me in my tracks. But somehow, some guiding force allowed each instance to lead me to a better life.

I’ve often pondered the differences between those who embrace their challenges and those who throw in the towel, or sadly, hide behind alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism. In many situations, they have inherited their reaction to stress. Those who have a family history of diabetes or alcoholism are more prone to respond to stress by drinking excessively and often are more likely to develop adult onset of diabetes.

In many cases, when I have presented to groups and mention this fact, someone invariably will come up later to tell me that they are relieved to know why they have responded in this way. It somehow encourages them to change their family’s patterns.

What will it take for you to make the necessary changes in your life? Will you hit rock bottom or lose everything you have before you let go of a life that doesn’t serve you?

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The first step to creating change requires that you recognize what you are not happy with in your life. Possibly, you want your relationships with your family, your health, financial picture and spiritual development to be better.

If you're like me, I spent most of my life avoiding conflict. In that vein, I avoided my family completely for about 10 years. My nephews are the ones who opened up the family communications channels about five years ago.

First, it was just too hard to be around a mother who admittedly never wanted me, and then I finally became honest enough to admit that to myself. Once I did, I became adamant about not subjecting myself to the repeated abuses she would dole out. After my father passed away in 1991, I realized that I no longer had any reason to put up with hurtful behavior not only from my mother but from my sister as well. So, I choose to omit all painful relationships even if they were family.

Honestly, I do wish my family was more functional, but the truth is, they are not. I know after her mother passed my mother was tortured by her father when she was 15, but that is not an excuse for her lack of parenting skills. Understanding why she behaves the way she does and then intentionally subjecting myself to her assaults knowing what the results will be, represent two totally different worlds. I can understand from a distance and not have to feel repeatedly like the walking wounded.

I chose to change their ability to reach out and strike me down! It's very simple. I can't expect them to change, so I changed. It's like knowing logically that every time you open the closet door and everything tumbles down on you, you should avoid opening the closet door unless you have the organizational skills to fix the mess in the closet.

In my opinion and practice in life, I don't invite people in who don't treat me well. If you can't play nice, then go home. If you won't go home, I'll play on some other playground. If I don't allow people in my life that exhibit cruel behavior, then why should I allow my family an opportunity to inflict emotional pain on me?

My father's sister lives in San Antonio and is actually my God-mother. She always has treated me with the kind of caring and respect with which I suspected families are meant to treat each other. I thoroughly enjoy our visits and she made a perfect hostess when I'm there.

I previously mentioned my Uncle John, an all time favorite relative of mine. He was my mother's younger sister's husband. They got

divorced about the time I was 14. He had a friend who was a disc jockey at KFRC in the mid-'60s when the format was rock and roll. Uncle John would bring us copies of all of the latest hits, play catch with us and sit and actually talk with us. I remember he was always in a good mood.

Later, when I moved to the Bay Area, I was able to visit him frequently, and he was such a character. I'm sure he had his times, but I never witnessed a foul mood or anything that closely resembled anything that made me uncomfortable.

Between those two relatives, I realized that some people did know how to treat family. They were my beacons, and I was attracted to them and what they represented. The quality of their personalities and the caring they offered me still makes me get teary eyed.

Uncle John told me when I was about 40 that he had asked my parents if he could take me to live with him. The only reason they seemed to refuse the offer was that they were afraid of what people would think of them for letting me leave their home.

Regardless of my childhood instability, somehow I made it work for me. I endured each setback and as an adult I gained strength from surviving each onset from my family until I became strong enough to declare my independence.

I have no emotional threads tying me to the way I was treated or even disappointment about the family in which I grew up. If your family does not provide you the love and respect that you deserve and you are pained by the exposure of their ways, understand that you can choose whether you subject yourself to their irresponsible behavior even one more time.

I first married a man who was very much like my father, but I wasn't able to recognize the similarities until many years later. When we first were married, he was the sweetest boy. Then he went to Viet Nam and came back an angry man who was suspicious and frustrated with the emotions he couldn't manage to articulate nor shed. He began to take out his anger on me, first verbally, then physically.

Since I was raised as a Catholic, divorce was not an immediate option. My thoughts turned to how I could love him more, learn to understand what he had been through and develop more patience despite what I could only envision as the biggest nightmare imaginable.

About five years after we were married, I went home to my parents wearing the signs of all the abuse. I told my father that I couldn't

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bear the burden any longer, and he told me that since I had chosen to marry my husband, it was up to me to learn to live with the repercussions. While I was there I went to visit the priest and explained my situation. The priest's reaction was astounding!

“Get out! Get out before you can't! No one is meant to live life under those terms!” he angrily raged.

I did leave the marriage and my father refused to make me welcome at their home for more than five years.

Hanging on to a relationship when you are in harm's way makes no sense, and, please, hear me: If you are in an abusive relationship, as that wonderful priest told me, “Get out now!” Nothing can justify staying in that type of relationship.

I believe we are put on this earth to learn lessons. Maybe one of those lessons requires us to learn to stand up for ourselves and to be heard. Too many people can't imagine being brave enough to be accountable for their own lives. Those with children must be accountable for their children's lives. I believe that when there are children involved in abusive situations, they learn the saddest lessons: They are not worth protecting. They don't deserve respect. They have less value than the parent who is abusive, and no safe place exists. These represent just a few of their many other heartbreaking projections.

In the early 1990s, I met a man from Marin (just north of San Francisco). He was speaking at a wonderful organization, Friendly Favors, which was founded by Sergio Lub. He told us that Stanford University had followed 2,000 children from the time they were two years old. The study revealed that 98 percent of children, regardless of their ethnic or economic backgrounds, are born with a genius capacity. This capacity diminishes by 25 percent every five years until these children reached the age of 21, at which time only 2 percent are left with that genius capacity intact. Their environment, parents, teachers, friends and typical exposure to life robs them of their genius.

What happened to your genius? Was it your parents, siblings, teachers, economic factors, or gender that robbed you of your perfection?

Adults have a tendency to put up with relationships that are not effective. We dig in our heels, and complain about our unfortunate circumstances of having a spouse/partner who doesn't understand us or who treats us in a manner to which we are sure we do not deserve. Or we are not fulfilled because of a lack of communications or intimacy.

I have often heard people complain, yet they are not willing to take a single step to alter their relationship. Once a friend told me that he couldn't afford to get a divorce. He and his wife of more than 25 years lived in separate homes about 10 miles apart. Neither wanted to give up the investments they had accumulated jointly while married. So they spent all those years missing out on the joy of sharing their lives with each other or with anyone else.

This is wrong on so many levels. Imagine the people they dated and the unconscionable nature of approaching someone assuming it is okay to date, be intimate, share life in general but never make a commitment. I do not believe those who are encumbered by previous relationships should allow others into their lives without full disclosure. It is such a simple courtesy to expect.

On the other hand, I constantly hear from others who believe they are the ones who possess the magic formula to change their partners' beliefs, and they, indeed, will inspire them to a divorce resolution and they believe they will end up happily married. Again, this is wrong on so many levels and so sad!

I, undoubtedly, believe it is better to be alone, all by one's self, than to be in a relationship where one is at a disadvantage of any sort. Oh, I know the pat response: "No one is perfect!" Well, you are right, but why subject yourself to anyone else's daily doses of abuse?

Abuse is not always as obvious as broken bones, black and blue marks, verbal attacks, emotional hostage strategies, or financial deprivation. Abuse can be as subtle as not being able to ask questions about your partner's whereabouts or the money they spend or who they were on the phone with or even not feeling as though you are cherished.

Yes, you and every person on this earth deserve to feel cherished, each and every day.

So begin the analysis of your life and then create a plan, whether that plan includes starting with counseling or packing your bags and declaring your independence. Take care of yourself, because if you don't, no one else will. Your strength comes from within, from deep inside. We are all born with this strength, and often life provides us with the perfect catalyst to excavate the capacity to stand up for ourselves.

Are you happy with your job or your business? Do you get up every morning excited about the possibilities of the day? If not, let's explore some possible changes. Are you making more than enough money

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to put ample funds away for the inevitable emergency and your leisure years? If you are like 97 percent of the people in the richest country in the world, you will retire dead or dead broke by the time you are 65. (<http://www.bestezines.com/?&id=3654>)

For the first time in this country's history, a negative one percent of our population has any savings whatsoever. That's because we have developed the habit of living off of our credit cards. We pay for gas, groceries and everyday incidentals with our credit cards that have unfortunate interest rates attached to the expense.

We have lived through generations of cavernous gaps between the haves and the have not! My parents were always struggling to make ends meet. My father worked three jobs the entire time I lived at home.

He was a surgery nurse from 5 a.m. until 3 p.m. He would drive around to secondhand stores and purchase bicycles that they weren't able to sell. He would sand them down and paint them. He'd then sell them for \$20-25. On Friday evening he would take a farmer's produce truck and drive down to San Francisco to pick up the produce that all the coastal grocery stores weren't able to procure. He would get home around 11 o'clock in the evening on Saturdays. He was always exhausted, but he never missed an opportunity to take care of his family.

Oddly, we weren't much different economically than most of the other families in Mendocino. Almost everyone I knew rarely had extra money to splurge on anything. As luck would have it, about 20 years before my father retired, he fought to bring the union to the hospital and his salary escalated from \$500 a month to \$35,000 a year. That left my parents in a favorable position to retire in 1985.

That isn't usually the case with the previously mentioned 97 percent of people in the in the United States. We are currently boasting 300,000,000 in population and by the year 2012 one-third of our population will be of an age to retire. Of the one-hundred million that will be able to retire, only three percent will have the means to live comfortably at the same economic standards to which they have been accustomed.

About five years ago I went to Santa Cruz with my friend Ginger. She met with her nephew and his wife who was from the Philippines. Her sister had arrived in the U.S. three years prior with an ineffective nursing degree and \$20. Her aunt and uncle agreed that she could stay with them temporarily while she got her life in order. In three years time she got her California nursing accreditation, bought a house and converted it to an

eight-bed ambulatory care facility and a second home for herself.

She brought her sister and brothers the next year. She was in the process of buying her third home for a care facility. Her monthly net income was \$35,000.

I've met many people from other countries who have managed to amass amazing wealth in short periods of time. My questions are: When we are brought up in such a wealthy country are we blind to the possibilities? What are the 97 percent of those who retire dead or dead broke overlooking? What are you overlooking?

When I was speaking on a Jamaican cruise in 2004, I overheard passengers comment on a cocktail waitress. They said they assumed she was depressed. I waited up one evening and asked if she would spend a few minutes with me after her shift. She was from Romania. At home her best income potential was \$100 a month. She and seven others family members lived in a two room house. None of them could make more than \$100 a month. They did quite well by comparison to those in similar situations with fewer people in their families.

Their home, as she described it to me that evening, consisted of one main room where they spent their waking hours and cooked their meals over an open fire pit. The second room was where they barely had enough room to sleep side-by-side.

When I asked her why she seemed so sad, after much urging she told me she thought she would have been able to send more money home than she had so far. She felt like she was letting her family down.

When we got down to the details she revealed that her monthly pay was about \$200 of which she sent \$100 home each month. (Eliminating the expense of her being at her family's home, they were slightly ahead, but not by much). When I asked her how many people were in her cabin, she said three others. When I asked about her meals, she agreed that she ate much better than she was able to in Romania, that the food was much fresher and that she had a wider variety of food available.

She worked 12 hour shifts and seven 10-day tours to earn a 10-day leave. While on leave, she shared a one-bedroom apartment with three others who paid their share of the monthly costs with 36 others who had their leave on different weeks.

All-in-all it was a drastic improvement from the life she knew in Romania. Yet, she was falling short of her expectations.

I asked her to get a library card on her next leave and to peruse

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the library to investigate areas that interested her. Then, I asked her to study everything she could find on that subject. When she felt knowledgeable, I wanted her to approach someone in that field and ask if they would take her on as an intern on her 10-day leave so she could get some working experience in the field.

About six months later she sent me a beautiful note telling me that she had just been hired full-time as a veterinarian's assistant. Her starting pay was \$12 an hour and after one month she had saved enough money to bring her younger sister over from Romania. She wanted her sister to establish her residency so she could attend the Junior college in Miami the next fall.

She went from having \$100 a month to share expenses with 39 people on a one-bedroom apartment to earning nearly \$2,000 a month within six months, because she was willing to do the work.

This was the same cruise that led to one of my favorite stories. I'm not one to take tours that require me to be trapped on a bus with 50 others and being at the whim of the bus driver or tour organizer. I enjoy experiencing how local people live and learning what they do in their daily lives.

I ventured off the ship in Jamaica. Before I crossed under the archway of the entrance to town, a young man approached me and asked if I would be interested in a tour. I told him I would, only if he would take me where I chose to go. He agreed and told me his fee would be \$20. That was truly the best deal of the cruise!

We walked around neighborhoods, met with local artists, talked about local life in Jamaica and had a wonderful time wandering the backstreets of his town. As we were walking, he told me his story. His mother remarried after his father had passed. Unfortunately, her second husband drank too much and became physically abusive. The first time this young man stood between his mother and her husband, he found himself put out of the home his father had built and was forced to live on the streets to fend for himself at 13 years of age.

He managed to get a job as a janitor at the high school and made just enough money for a tiny \$125-a-month studio apartment. When he was 15, he was fortunate enough to get an additional job on the tug boat that guided the cruise ships into the harbor. When I met him, he was 19, and he had been able to save \$2,500. His goal was to have \$10,000 in the bank so he would be able to attend college in Miami. From the stories he

heard and the people that he met, he knew he would be in a better position to take care of himself and eventually his younger siblings if he moved to the U.S.

When you have nothing, anything is a bonus. When you have a job that falls short from feeding your soul, you are treading water. You can't get to the shore; you can only imagine what it's like to stand on the desired beach. I heard from that young man after he ended up in Miami, and I hope he achieved his goals.

You can have a job that you don't enjoy while you're going to school, supporting someone else who is going to school or until you find an opportunity to jump into your ideal line of work.

Boldly, I suggest that once you have discovered what you are passionate about for a career, immediately begin to take the steps to start your own business. In my experience, those who work for themselves have more freedom, work less and earn more than those who have a job. Indeed, the research from *The Millionaire Woman Next Door* by Thomas J. Stanley, indicates that the average self-employed business owner has a net worth equal to ten times those who are employed. (Side note: this is a must read.)

Ask yourself these questions:

If I were to look back 20 years from now, would I be satisfied with my life as it is right now?

If I had more than enough money, would I continue to do what I do currently and be in the same relationships?

If I could afford the best advice available that would help me make these decisions, would I continue on the same path that I'm currently pursuing today?

Too often we get caught in a rut. We don't give ourselves permission to change what we are doing even though we know what we are doing isn't working for us.

Most of us who grew up in dysfunctional homes developed addictive behaviors. Some went to the obvious drug or alcohol addiction when others developed relationships in which they repeat the same patterns over and over without discovering why. It's extremely frustrating. In my case I would keep questioning why I would get involved with a man who would abandon me or leave the relationship in such a way that I was left feeling less important or inadequate.

Too often the addictive behavior simply represents a gesture or

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mechanism to fill the void. Whatever is missing cannot be filled by being busy or occupied. I realize that I spent too much of my life forcing myself to have enough activities so that I couldn't slow down and think about the real issues. But I didn't know how to change the behavior even when I became frustrated with the outcomes those behaviors achieved.

We are rarely equipped with the knowledge or tools for self-help. That's one of the reasons self-help books are so popular. Often we do want to change, but just because we read a book doesn't mean that we know how to change. I could read a book on building a space shuttle, but I truly doubt that I could actually build it and if I did, would it fly?

It's important to be around others who are willing to change their lives for the better. It's an odd phenomenon in families: They don't want you to change. They are comfortable with the way you are, and if you changed it would require an adjustment on their part. Just be aware that their true intention does not lie in wanting to hold you back but in avoiding their discomfort in pursuing changes for themselves.

In my opinion, there are no failures in life, only lessons. We can ignore the lessons, but I promise you, the need to learn them will only become more pronounced over time. Finally, you won't be able to ignore the lessons any longer. At some point they will overwhelm you, and you will have no choice but to face them.

Even though I knew I should have left the Fortune 500 Company I worked for in 1982, I stayed until I went through many illnesses and became part of a downsizing effort in 1985. If I had left on my own terms, I would have experienced a different outcome all together.

I believe most people don't realize they are able to alter the course of their lives by the choices they do or do not make. Maybe those that do, realize their options don't choose for fear that they might make the wrong choice. Making a decision today does not mean it is set in stone for the rest of your life. You are allowed to make adjustments as often as you choose.

After all, the first space shuttle that went to the moon had to alter their course more than 1,032 times even with the assets of the NASA teams and resources. So why shouldn't we alter our courses 1,000 times or so to get to the spot where we are meant to land?

Chapter 3

“History is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon.”

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

History

I am so proud of my family heritage. I couldn't have asked for a more inspirational history than what my ancestors bequeathed to me.

When I was 15, my father took us on our first family vacation. It was my older sister's last summer at home and there seemed little likelihood of us finding another opportunity to travel together again. That gave us good reason to venture out to San Antonio, Texas, where my father was raised.

We began our adventure the first week in August. We all piled into our 1957 grey Plymouth, which did not have air conditioning. My father's idea was to drive at night while it was cooler. He would then sleep during the day at a motel; we would all sleep in the car at night. I, however, did not sleep. I remember being terrified that he would fall asleep at the wheel, so I took it upon myself to keep him awake by talking to him all night long.

After two nights of keeping vigil, on the second day we arrived in El Paso, Texas, where my father's mother's sister lived at Fort Bliss with her husband, a career Army man. The next day Aunt Julia took us to the Fort Bliss museum, and the first picture we saw was of my great grandfather, Benito Salas. At the age of 14, he had enlisted in the Army as a musician. His picture hung in a glass case along with his three-foot-tall bugle and a bejeweled treasure chest that contained his original Army orders rolled up like a scroll. I found this marvelous, to say the least. I felt

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both awed by my relationship to this man and quite puzzled by the fact that my father had never mentioned this obviously-famous relative.

I also realized for the first time that my family had not only lived near the Alamo Mission in San Antonio, where the battle and the siege of the Alamo took place in February and March 1836, but were actually there when the revolutionists reclaimed it that same year. The importance of this fact to me personally didn't become clear until many years later, but let me explain here why this family history became pertinent to my life.

I mentioned earlier that my father brought the nurses union to the hospital where he worked around 1970, thus enabling the nurses to earn \$35,000 a year instead of \$6,000. He always fought for the underdog. He could not bear inequitable situations. The apple falls close to the tree for sure in this particular instance. I, myself, championed children's causes repeatedly. My great grandparents took in as many as twelve to fourteen homeless children on top of already having nine children of their own.

When you look at your family history, amazing clues are revealed to you about your behavior. At times it seems impossible to explain why you might have chosen the path that you have, but often your ancestors hold the clues to your decisions.

Are you like my father, a champion? Are you like my mother's family, so consumed with survival that they rarely recognized the choices presented to them along the way? Or are you perhaps somewhere in between the two?

Your story, what you tell others about yourself, will guide you through your life. Your story can be one of conquering life's challenges, as mine has been, or it can be one of succumbing to those very same challenges. You might realize at this point that in most situations you typically avoid all conflict. However, conflict provides an opportunity to change directions. It's possible to be satisfied with your life and choices yet to feel unfulfilled. You can make one change immediately; you can change how you live your life. This could provide you with a brand new perspective on your role in life.

Often we tell others – and ourselves – the story we think of as our own instead of talking about the lesson our life, and the story of our life, has taught us. Usually, we do so because the true lesson has yet to be discovered. When we discover that lesson, it becomes our story.

When I look back at my childhood, a time when I was virtually deprived of love, encouragement, emotional comfort or a sense of belonging, I see that I could have chosen a destructive path that you have, but often your ancestors hold the clues to your decisions.

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When I look back at my childhood, a time when I was virtually deprived of love, encouragement, emotional comfort or a sense of belonging, I see that I could have chosen a destructive path. Instead, I felt a deep desire to overcome the odds. I desperately wanted to discover what it would take to become happy and loved and, later in life, to live in peace and harmony.

I have a low tolerance for drama, whether in my friends' lives or in my own. By this I mean emotional upheaval that is unfounded. A lot of people use drama to be the center of others' attention. I prefer to have my day-to-day life consist of choices I make consciously. I have found that enough drama goes on around me, so I look for ways to avoid exposure to dramatic situations. That's not to say I don't embrace new experiences, exciting opportunities and exposure to adventures. I just choose not to live in chaos.

Granted, when my friends or family have an issue – dramatic or otherwise, if there is anything I can do I'm usually the first one to offer my help. But I avoid the emotional, knee-jerk response that might corre-

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spond to the event. When someone is physically or emotionally in pain, I look for solutions and rapidly move past the distress. I prefer to make verbal lists of the choices and the possible scenarios that might lead to a specific result. I have found that taking action is preferable to standing still, much more so than remaining in drama.

Being enveloped by difficult emotional challenges goes beyond feeling extremely uncomfortable. I choose to move through such challenges as rapidly as I can manage. I know I can always shift my direction if I'm not moving toward the outcome I prefer.

Looking back at family history, my brother Tony tried to get me to admit I had gained some positive traits from my mother. I heard him telling me about these attributes and even agreed, but it didn't change my attitude toward my mother. I had too much invested in my years of holding my parents hostage for the many emotional upheavals in my life.

Tony and I were having dinner together one evening when he said, "You're just like mom."

"I am not!" I adamantly declared.

"Would you enjoy cooking as much as you do if it weren't for her not cooking very well?"

My mother's idea of cooking was to boil or broil and typically to over cook the taste out of everything. She had no imagination for cooking, because her mother never taught her daughters to cook. After I left home, I became extremely interested in a variety of cuisines and learned to prepare them as a silent rebellious act of resentment.

"No," I said.

"How about your appreciation for plants?" he went on, ignoring my response.

"Okay, so she liked plants." She could actually tell us the scientific name for most of the plants on our property in Mendocino. She had a green thumb, too.

"How is your memory?" He continued. He was relentless. He would never give me a break when it came to my personal behavior. I love it now, but his behavior irritated me at the time. The irritation I felt, however, provided an indication that the point he was making had a great deal importance.

"That's enough!" I insisted. He had made an unarguable point. Most of my habits and traits had a direct correlation to my mother's traits and influences.

I couldn't argue that my mother's near photographic memory was passed on to me, and I thoroughly appreciate the skill and the benefits of an unusually good memory. It has come in handy throughout my life.

Are there specific characteristics you have taken for granted that you gained from your parents? Have you even thought about their many subtle or obvious traits that have had a major influence on you throughout your life?

I've spent so much of my time studying personal behavior, personality traits, astrology, and enneagrams (refer to Chapter 21 for more details), because I've been extremely curious about what makes us tick. Why do we do what we do? Why do we react one way and our siblings react in another completely opposite way? I find such reactions especially puzzling when they are not gender related.

I've had psychologists and physicist tell me these differences in behavior have more to do with DNA than anything else, but I still believe our environment has as much to do with it as DNA. For instance, if you have two supportive, encouraging and loving parents I believe you are less likely to approach life in a state of fear. I had an unsupportive, discouraging and often unloving mother who filled her children with fearful thoughts about almost everything.

It's great to teach children not to talk with strangers, cross the street without looking and observe curfews, since obvious wisdom exists in these lessons. But when I was 22, I couldn't get on an airplane without a monumental amount of trepidation. My sister still has to generously ply herself with alcohol before she is able to board a flight. We were taught to be afraid of strangers, places we had never been and in general, everything unknown.

I started working at a Fortune 500 firm in 1977, and my first position with them was to install computerized typesetting equipment. During my first few months on the job, I was asked to pick up a training assignment in Alamogordo, New Mexico. I first flew to El Paso, Texas, where I had to make a connecting flight to a smaller town.

Twelve of us boarded a twelve-seat, twin-engine commuter plane, and I was fortunate enough to sit next to a commercial pilot. It was early in November, and the mountain pass we had to fly over was experiencing typical fall weather — thunderstorms and lightning. Our plane would drop 200 feet in a literal heartbeat. The wonderful pilot held my hand and talked to me soothingly throughout the entire flight.

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When we finally landed, I was a wreck. He had to guide me out of the plane and kindly help me into the terminal. Once safely inside, he said, “Honey, the only way to get over your fear of flying is to learn to fly a plane yourself.”

When I got back home I went to our small airport in Concord and signed up for flying lessons. It took me a year, but I did get my license and flew more than 200 hours. I learned to love flying and the amazing powerful feeling of controlling that hunk of metal.

I have many interesting stories about flying and have met the most dynamic people who also have become pilots because of their previous fearful flying experiences. Some of the places to which I flew were extraordinary, and I never would have had thought of going to them if it hadn't been for learning to fly and getting over my fear of flying.

Until 1977, I told a simple story about flying: I'd rather drive than fly. It certainly was true, but not because I enjoyed driving from places like San Diego to Mendocino. It simply was easier than facing my fear of flying.

Our lives consist of a series of stories, some created with the help of our families, friends, spheres of influence, and some created on our own. If you examine your past, you'll find several stories that no longer serve you. You can simply stop telling these stories, because they no longer describe something true about you or telling them perpetuates a truth you'd like to dispel or change.

It's possible that some of the experiences upon which you have based your stories – your personal history – were designed to guide you to where you are today. Looking at those experiences can be helpful, but dwelling on them sometimes can deter our progress. Years ago Frank Cannon, a coach from San Diego said, “It's okay to glance at your past, just don't stare!”

I'm afraid I've spent a great deal of my life staring at my past. I've tried to reason with my history, family and illogical incidents that I've experienced. I've made tremendous progress, which would not have happened if I hadn't been so tenacious. I had no idea why I wasn't capable of just letting go of what happened to me. No matter how many times people would tell me, “Just forget it!” When I couldn't go to a party or get on an airplane without feeling extreme emotional trepidation, I couldn't pretend the things that happened in my life didn't have an influence on.

I wanted to alter my reactions or not react until I could analyze

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what the appropriate reaction should be. I wanted desperately to find genuine long-term peace of mind. I wasn't willing to give up until I understood all of my idiosyncrasies and found solutions that satisfied me.

I'm still learning, but the lessons that come in the form of life experiences come much further apart and seem far less traumatic. And the historical influences rarely feel detriment to my well-being but more often provide me with comfort and guidance.

By delving deeply into understanding life lessons, I have developed an uncanny ability to comprehend others' behavior. At least once a week I am able to help someone become aware of a behavior that might appear rude but actually stems from their natural defense mechanism. The behavior might represent a survival tactic that simply has gotten this person through challenges in the past. When someone else's reaction makes us uncomfortable, more often than not their behavior or words result from a natural desire to cope or to protect themselves, and we shouldn't take what they say or do personally.

If you are uncomfortable in a situation, you'll typically find a way to avoid it. I didn't attend parties to avoid feeling judged, inadequate or the fear of meeting new people, but my actions had nothing to do with the people at the parties or the party itself. No attending represented my coping mechanism. If I stayed home, I'd never have to face the unknown – or the known negative feelings.

Please do not allow your past to dictate your future. You have every right to experience all the wonderful adventures life has to offer. Never allow anyone or anything to keep you from living beyond your history or your previous stories.

Make a list of all the things you've always found interesting and the places you've always wanted to visit. Then make a plan to get out there and enjoy yourself.

They say the true definition of history is "his story." You can make your history whatever you choose. So, choose to make it count.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

George Santayana, Spanish philosopher

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Sharyn Ayn

Sharyn has worked with many clients who have struggled to find their place in the world and through her direct approach, the results led to more purpose in their lives.

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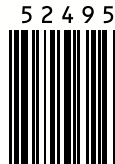
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