

THIS
IS NOT
THE
LIFE

I
ORDERED

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60 Ways to Keep Your Head Above Water When Life Keeps Dragging You Down



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PREFACE:
SLIGHTLY LESS THAN
WORST-CASE SCENARIOS



Whether one is twenty, forty, or sixty; whether one has succeeded, failed, or just muddled along; whether yesterday was full of sun or storm, or one of those dull days with no weather at all, life begins again each morning in the heart of a woman.



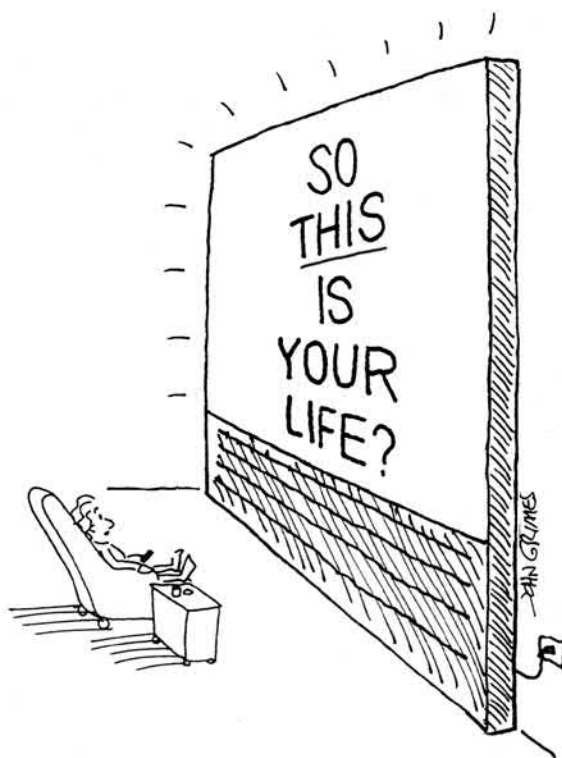
LEIGH MITCHELSL HODGES, POET (1876–1954)

We are simply four women whom destiny threw together. Collectively, we have experienced the extreme joys and deep sorrows that life offers up—from mundane moments to the dramatic and surreal. We have a history of six marriages, one divorce, ten children, four stepchildren, six dogs, two miscarriages, two cats, twelve koi fish, a failed adoption, widowhood, two parakeets, and foster-parenthood. We have built companies, lost companies, and sold companies. One of us was shot and left for dead on the tarmac in South America, and three of us have lived through the deaths of spouses.

We've raised babies and teenagers and are still alive to talk about it. We've had our hearts broken by affairs and mended through our friendships. We've known celebrity

and loneliness, along with self-doubt and near financial ruin. We've been caregivers to those who faced terminal illnesses and supporters of those who lost loved ones.

We grew up in less-than-wealthy families, where living paycheck to paycheck was the norm. We've known more wealth than our parents could ever have imagined, and we've lost more money than they ever made! Forced to be creative, we have raised families on bare budgets and at times have been the sole breadwinners when our spouses were unemployed, seriously ill, or dying. In our careers, we've often been the only women at the table. We have taken risks that bet the company, bet the election, and—in some cases—bet the house!



(A COLLECTION OF MISFORTUNATE EVENTS)

When Bad Things Happen to Smart Women

A reporter once jokingly referred to our collection of misfortunate events as the female version of the book of Job, almost expecting that a hoard of locusts would descend on us at any moment! Yet, we do not view our lives with sadness or remorse. We see them as gifts, filled with events that have helped us develop a razor-sharp sense of what counts and what simply doesn't. Time and again, we have learned to reinvent ourselves. The process of reinvention, we now know, is best managed with humor, friendship, optimism, and a long-lasting high-beam flashlight to see the light at the end of every tunnel.

Among us, there is one commonality: loss. We've experienced the heartbreaking loss of lives, along with the loss of a marriage, a child, of innocence, and of money, stability, and hope. Loss causes formidable transitions that touch every woman at some point. But loss should never be faced alone and so we created a monthly meeting around our kitchen tables to share our lives and to support and encourage one another. These kitchen-table conversations were always therapeutic, and inspiring. Our conversations gave us hope and inner strength. We knew that together, as friends, we would never walk alone.

Kitchen-Table Friends

Word spread about our kitchen-table conversations. We were asked to speak at conferences and to women's groups. We titled our talk "Survive and Thrive: Ten Turbo-Charged Tips for Women in Transition" and guessed that maybe thirty people might show up for the conversation.

Over 400 women came to our first session, forcing the fire marshals to lock the doors! We told our stories that day. Women lined up to talk with us. They shared their own personal versions of "survive-and-thrive" lives. Weeks later, we were encouraged to write a book. More conference organizers asked us to speak. We used the idea of writing a book as an excuse to continue our monthly meetings, yet wrote not a single word.

In fact, we continued to meet for over a decade before we put one word onto paper for that imaginary book we told everyone we were writing! We talked about losing businesses, losing husbands, and wanting to lose husbands. We talked about building careers, building families, and building on our fragile networking skills. We talked about finding our self-esteem, finding our paths, even finding new mates. We talked about challenges, taking risks, and taking a chance on love again. We talked candidly about near financial ruin, actual financial ruin, and avoiding financial ruin. We talked about our children, our co-workers, our colleagues, and our sex lives. We left no topic unexplored.

We encouraged one another through the numerous transitions we were experiencing. We even gave ourselves a name—Women in Transition, WIT for short—noting that we would truly need our collective wit to navigate through these tricky times. In time, our meetings took the form of what we envisioned as a quilting circle in the Wild West. Yet the fabric we wove at our meetings was the fabric of our lives.



We learned many lessons in our decades-long friendship. We learned that we had been fooled. We had convinced ourselves that, if we could manage our schedules, break through the glass ceiling, spend quality time with our families, bring home the bacon (and fry it up in a pan) while bouncing children on our hips and creating warm and loving relationships with our husbands, in-laws, and colleagues, somehow, some way, we would be rewarded with the problem-free lives that had eluded us. We were wrong.

Surviving and Thriving

From kitchen conversations to the thousands of conversations we've had with women all over the world, we learned that the problem-free life we sought was worse than just an illusion. It was a life-depleting myth to which too many have fallen victim. A woman's life is about much more than success, having it all, or the elusive balance we all seek (and may find). It is about more than seeking perfection or conquering the world (although you may). It is about more than gritting your teeth and making it through (no matter how). It is about surviving and thriving.

For us, surviving and thriving meant reinventing and rebuilding, and realizing that success is never final and failure is never fatal. It meant putting our best foot forward and walking into a future we had designed. All too often, the tiny voice inside us revealed that, although we might look like pillars of success on the outside, our teenagers were out of control, our jobs could end tomorrow, and our spouses, colleagues, and bosses were often untruthful, selfish, unfaithful, had died, or were just plain stupid.

Surviving and thriving meant taking what life offered up while searching for the opportunities, the joy, and the compassion in less-than-pleasant and always less-than-perfect circumstances. Together, we would navigate through some tricky times.

So, How's Your Life?

Our collective lives have been filled with more transitions than we thought possible. Transitions are an important part of the fabric of every woman's life. They affect us individually, but also have a ripple effect on our families. Transitions can build our characters and turn us into wise women, or they can leave us feeling depressed and alone. Successful transitions can make us strong—ready to extend a helpful hand to other women—or they can make us fearful of what lies ahead.



We offer this book as a road map of sorts for life's transitions. It contains the many lessons we've learned on how to ride the tidal waves of change that often engulf women. We've boiled those lessons down into sixty imperatives for surviving the vicissitudes of life and thriving

despite them. Along the way, we have been honored to meet many magnificent and brave women whose stories of challenge, resilience, and triumph we include as examples of hope for all of us. This book is a literary kitchen table, where we invite you to pull up a chair and join us so you don't have to go through life alone. We hope this inspiring circle of women gives you hope, insight, and inspiration to deal with your own challenges and changes.

Education is not enough if it's not accompanied by action. With that in mind, each section in our book ends with suggested action plans and tools to help you implement them. We call this section the WIT Kit, and we hope you find these insights valuable. More important, we hope you'll be motivated to adapt them and apply them in your own lives, where they can produce real-world results.

We know you're busy. We know you're probably running from the minute you wake until bedtime. But we also know that taking time to follow up on the recommendations found in the WIT Kit can make the difference between merely surviving what life throws at you and thriving *despite* what life throws at you.

Some of the actions described in the WIT Kit take only a few minutes. Some involve more time and planning. All of them can help. If you feel as if life is dragging you down, these actions can help you keep your head above water. They can help you create a higher quality of life for yourself and your loved ones—now, not someday.

Deborah Collins Stephens
Michealene Cristini Risley
Jackie Speier
Jan Yanehiro
San Francisco, California, July 2018

FOREWARD BY RITA MORENO

There are fifteen people in the world who have won an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar, and a Tony. Rita Moreno is one of them. Former President Barack Obama referred to Rita, the only Latina to win the awards, as a trailblazer with the courage to break through barriers and forge new paths. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor said: “When I was younger, I idolized Rita Moreno. I still do.”

Rita is a role model for millennials and an icon of inspiration for all generations. Today, at eighty-six, with retirement not in her DNA, Rita has a hit television show—*One Day At a Time*—and even more awards: a Kennedy Center honor, honors from the ACLU and Ellis Island for her work in civil rights, along with cover stories in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Glamour*, and the *Today* show. Her path to fame and success has not been an easy one, however. Rita has lived most every lesson in this book and come out the other side stronger, wiser, and more accomplished. Here, in her own words, is how she describes the journey.

Just Deal with It

When I first read *This Is Not the Life I Ordered*, I told the publisher that it was a must-read for all women and the

men who love them. In the stories and lessons, I saw many parallels with my own life. When Jan asked me to write the Foreword, I immediately said yes. These four women epitomize how I and many women cope: We just deal with it. In my book, *Rita Moreno—A Memoir*, I begin with that advice: Just deal with it. I spent a good part of my life looking for an identity that was safe. I didn't want to be this "Latina girl." I didn't want to be this "sextot."

I had no role models, so I chose one: Elizabeth Taylor. In retrospect, we all know that is simply not possible; it's not feasible. It doesn't work. What happens as a result is that you live a very muddled life with respect to identity. You lose something extremely valuable and important—self-respect. This struggle was very painful. I always tell women today to be themselves and let the chips fall where they may.

You Don't Die from Not Being Liked

I was always the darling, please-like-me kid. It's the immigrant syndrome; it comes from being Puerto Rican, from being on the outside. For me and for so many women, we are told in subtle and not so subtle ways: "Don't make waves; don't make noise." My mother was very conscious of that. I was brought up trying to please the world. I wanted the world to like me. The greatest lesson I ever learned is that you don't die from not being liked. Yet there is always the little voice or dark presence that stays with you forever. She's the one who, still to this day, says things like: "Ha-ha, I told you that you couldn't do it." In me, she still exists and I have a feeling that creature exists in a lot of women. They just don't think of her as an entity, but I do. I call this voice my Rosarita. I just send her to her room all the time. It's impossible to get rid of her, but I've learned not to let her run my life.

Perseverancia

I had won the Oscar and a Golden Globe for *West Side Story*. I fully believed that, after that, I was going to get a lot of work and that everything was going to be just rosy.

The opposite happened. I couldn't get a job to save my life. I couldn't believe it. It just absolutely broke my heart. Today at eighty-six, I look back on those events as recompense for all the hard years in a profession that challenged my sense of dignity and self-worth at every turn. I am reminded that, in this third act of my life, the falling down and getting up is very much a part of the American Dream.

This Is Not the Life I Ordered is filled to the brim with stories of falling down and getting back up. What I say to my *gente* [people] is to hang on, and to remember who you are. Be proud of who you are, and keep talking. And keep complaining. And just don't ever—ever—give up. I call this not giving up *perseverancia* and it means perseverance. There is nothing more powerful than a woman who embodies perseverance. The lessons in this book and the women who wrote them exhibit *perseverancia* in all that they do. The wonderful thing about *perseverancia* is that it is open to all of us, no matter our background or socio-economic status.

My good friend, the brilliant author Amy Tan, said that *This Is Not the Life I Ordered* gives women the inspiration to survive the worst luck and circumstances and to climb into a new life with unexpected happiness. That is what I wish for every woman—the ability to survive and thrive.

Rita Moreno

CHAPTER ONE

MANAGING
MISFORTUNE

*If one woman sees another woman
as successful, that woman will
never fail, never feel alone.*

**FLORENCE SCOVEL SHINN,
WRITER (1871–1940)**



1

CONVENE A GATHERING OF KITCHEN-TABLE FRIENDS.

You are the storyteller of your own life and you can create the legend or not.

ISABEL ALLENDE, CHILEAN-AMERICAN WRITER (1942–)

Find One Safe Place to Tell Your Story

The first and most important way to keep your head above water when life threatens to drag you down is to create a safe place where your stories can be heard—a gathering of kitchen-table friends. Gathering around a kitchen table and telling our own stories was empowering. While we didn't know it at the time, we were “bearing witness” to one another by talking about our experiences in a trusted environment. Psychologists tell us that “bearing witness” is a vital ingredient in the healing process.

We looked forward to our gatherings because we knew that they provided the one place in our lives where we would be heard—a place and time where women would listen without judgment. We have no doubt that being able to tell our stories saved our sanity and, in some cases, saved our lives. We believe that every woman needs to create for herself a safe place where her story can be heard. We know from our own experience that staying connected with each other has made all the difference in our ability to cope with the challenges we've faced.

Think you don't have time for your women friends? We encourage you to think again. If you're thinking that you don't feel up to doing this right now, that's precisely why you ought to do this. If your energy is low, it's because you're trying to do everything by yourself. You're running on empty, and you need to fill up your emotional tank with support and input from women who care about you. Your own kitchen-table group will feed your soul. You can get



started today by following these seven simple steps to create a wonderful network of women friends.

Seven Steps for Forming a Kitchen-Table Group

1. **Reach out:** No matter how bad your life may be right now, plan a get-together with women you admire. They do not need to be famous, rich, or fabulously accomplished. You do not need to know them well, although they do need to be women you respect and who share similar values and priorities—women with integrity who will be willing to listen, give encouragement, and be honest. Many women feel just as isolated as you do. Now is the perfect time to get to know that mom who shares car-pool duties with you. What about the woman at work with whom you have only a nodding acquaintance but have always felt a spark of connection? Perhaps there's someone on a fundraising committee you've admired, someone who can always be counted on to do what she says she's going to do.
2. **Choose a location:** Pick a meeting place that has comfortable surroundings and that gives you privacy. It can be the corner of a local coffee shop, or the living room of your home. The kitchen tables in our different homes have worked well for us all these years.
3. **Set a first meeting:** You don't have to do anything fancy. Just pick up the phone, send an e-mail, or ask in person. Tell the women up front that you know they're busy, that the purpose of this meeting is to create a support network that meets regularly where women can talk out what's going on in their lives in a confidential setting. Participants are welcome to talk about their jobs (or lack of a job), their families, their health, and their finances—whatever is on their minds and in their hearts. Give your group a name and commit to meeting regularly (every other week, or at least monthly). In our own group, we

meet monthly but sometimes convene more often when one of our members is in the midst of a crisis.

4. **Set ground rules:** The first few meetings of your kitchen-table group can probably benefit from some sort of structure. In our group meetings, we always begin with some illuminating questions:

- So, how's your life?
- How can we help?
- Who do we know who can help?
- What are you happy about right now in your life?
- What is there to laugh about?
- When we leave here today, what three things are we committing to each other that we will do for ourselves?

5. **Stay positive:** Do not allow your group to turn into a “pity party.” Pity parties rob you of your spirit and do nothing to empower you. The purpose of this gathering is not simply to complain, and stop there. Go ahead and get what's bothering you, worrying you, or hurting you off your chest, and then ask for advice. Brainstorm possible solutions and strategies for the issues you're facing.

6. **Use the WIT Kit:** The suggestions found at the end of each section in this book can provide a focus for your meetings. We purposely created the WIT Kit to give you tools that you can work with as a group in your own kitchen-table meetings. Discuss the topics and questions among yourselves.

7. **Share your experiences:** Visit our website, www.NotthelifeIordered.com, and let us know your stories.

Our kitchen-table group met for over ten years and, during that time, we told many stories, solved many problems, and mended many broken hearts. We begin by introducing you to the defining moments that brought us together as lifelong friends.

2 TRANSCEND MISFORTUNATE EVENTS.

Although there may be tragedy in your life, there's always a possibility to triumph. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from. The ability to triumph begins with you. Always.

OPRAH WINFREY, TV HOST (1954–)

Jungle Encounter

“Nightmares. They still invade my sleep forty years later. The nightmares remind me that life is a precious resource to be used up, enjoyed, lived. I am Jackie Speier, and my nightmares take me back to a fateful November day in 1978. I was twenty-eight and getting ready to purchase my first home. I was legislative counsel to a U. S. congressman and I had it all! I also had a strong premonition that the trip I was arranging to South America could be one from which I might not return. ‘Silly thoughts,’ my friend Katy assured me. ‘After all, you will be traveling with the press corps and a U. S. congressman. What could possibly happen?’

“Holed up in a congressional office for hours at a time, I was reading State Department briefings on a religious community created by the Reverend Jim Jones. We were investigating numerous allegations from relatives that their family members were being held against their will in a jungle hideaway known as the People’s Temple. As we reviewed taped interviews with defectors, I had an ominous feeling—a feeling I could not put out of my mind. One

former member had told us that people were being forced to act out suicides in an exercise Jones called the White Night.

“Congressman Leo Ryan, my boss, had heard enough. He decided to see firsthand the plight of U. S. citizens in Guyana. But even after the CIA and the State Department had cleared the trip for safety, I still had doubts.

“We flew into Guyana’s capital, Georgetown, changed planes, and continued on to Port Kaituma—a remote airstrip deep in the South American jungle. A convoy of several trucks drove us to the Jonestown encampment. We entered a clearing in the jungle, where I saw an outdoor amphitheater surrounded by small cabins. You couldn’t help but be impressed by the settlement. In less than two years, a community had been carved out of dense jungle. During our first and only night at the People’s Temple, the members entertained us with music and singing. I remember looking into the eyes of Jim Jones—and I saw madness there. He was no longer the charismatic leader who had lured more than 900 people to a remote jungle commune; he was a man possessed.

“The congressman and I randomly selected people to interview to determine whether they were being held against their will. Many of the individuals were young—eighteen or nineteen years old—while others were senior citizens. One by one, each confirmed that they loved living in the People’s Temple. It was almost as if they had been coached to answer our questions. As the night drew to a close, NBC news correspondent Don Harris walked off alone to smoke a cigarette. In the darkness, two people approached him and put notes into his hand. Harris gave the notes to me, and I held in my hands evidence of what I had sensed all along: These people were indeed being held against their will in this South American compound.

“Morning broke, and I interviewed the two people who had given Harris the notes saying they wanted to leave. Word of the opportunity to leave had gotten out, and more people started coming forward saying that they also wanted to leave. Then suddenly, a couple of men with guns appeared.

Chaos ensued as more people approached us wanting to leave. Jim Jones started ranting and screaming. Larry Layton, one of Jones' closest assistants, said: 'Don't get the wrong idea. We are all very happy here. You see the beauty of this special place.' One hour later, Larry Layton had become one of the defectors, asking to escape the jungle compound."

3 WHEN LEFT ON THE TARMAC, START WALKING.

The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be only the beginning.

**IVY BAKER PRIEST, FORMER U. S. SECRETARY
OF THE TREASURY (1905–1975)**

Three Minutes from Death

"People began screaming and crying, some parents engaging in a tug-of-war over their children—one wanting to go; the other wanting to stay. So many people had decided to escape the People's Temple that the consulate had to order another plane.

"We left for the airstrip. Dressed in an oversized yellow poncho, Larry Layton, Jones' assistant, seemed overly eager to board the cargo plane. I distrusted him and asked that he be searched before boarding. A journalist patted him down, but did not find the gun Layton had hidden under his poncho. Thinking back, I now realize how helpless we were—a congressman, congressional aides, journalists, and cameramen; not one among us a police officer or military escort. We had nothing to protect us other than the imagined shield of the invulnerability of a U. S. congressman and members of the U. S. press corps.

"Suddenly, we heard a scream. Seconds later, I heard an unfamiliar noise. I saw people running into the bushes and realized that the noise was gunfire. I dropped to the ground

and curled up around a wheel of the plane, pretending to be dead. I heard footsteps. I felt my body twitch as someone pumped bullets into me at point-blank range. I was shot five times.

“The gunmen continued to walk around the tarmac, shooting innocent people. Soon it was quiet. I opened my eyes and looked down at my body. A bone was sticking out of my arm, and blood was everywhere. I remember thinking: My God, I am twenty-eight years old and I am about to die. I yelled out for Congressman Ryan, calling his name several times. There was no answer.

“The plane’s engine was still revving, and I thought that if I could just get to the cargo hatch, I could escape this place. I crawled toward the opening, dragging my body as close as I could to the baggage compartment. A reporter from the *Washington Post* picked me up and put me into the cargo hold. I remember asking him if he could give me something to stop my bleeding, and he gave me his shirt. I was losing so much blood that the shirt was soaked in seconds.

“The plane was filled with bullet holes, and we soon realized that it would never make it out of this hell on earth. Someone pulled me out of the plane and placed me back on the airstrip. Accidentally, they laid my head upon an anthill and ants started crawling all over me. Lying next to me was a reporter’s tape recorder. I taped a last message to my parents and brother, telling them that I loved them.

“Supposedly, the Guyanese Army was going to secure the airstrip and rescue us, so I held on tightly to the belief that the army would come. It grew dark, and we continued to wait. Although I was in excruciating pain, I clung to life.

“In the middle of the night, word reached those on the tarmac that there had been a mass suicide at the People’s Temple. At one o’clock the next day, twenty hours after the shootings, the Guyanese Air Force arrived. Their arrival coincided with a message to the world that more than 900 people, including a U. S. congressman and members of his

delegation, were dead. The headlines called it the worst mass suicide in history. To this day, I still refer to the events at Jonestown as a mass murder.

“The Guyanese Air Force transported the survivors to a waiting U. S. Air Force Medivac plane. Etched in my mind is the memory of how I felt at that very moment, as if someone had wrapped me in the American flag. I was so grateful.

“Loaded with survivors, the Air Force plane set off for the United States. As we taxied down the runway, I recall glancing down at my body. It seemed so surreal, as if the mangled lump of flesh belonged to someone other than me. Months later, I was told that the medical technician who tended to me during the flight said that I was three minutes from death.”

One Step Forward, One Day at a Time

“When we finally arrived at Andrews Air Force Base, where I was immediately taken into surgery, I had developed gangrene, and surgeons debated whether to amputate my leg. After four hours of surgery, the nurse wheeled me out of the surgical ward, and there stood my mother, who had traveled from San Francisco to be with me. They told her that they needed to transfer me to the Baltimore Shock/Trauma Center to attempt to stem the spread of gangrene. I begged my mother and the doctors to transfer me by ambulance, fearing I would die on another plane flight.

“The shock/trauma center was lit with incredibly bright lights. Numerous IVs were hooked up to me. I remember asking the nurse how many calories there were in all the stuff that was flowing into my body.”

“Three thousand,” she replied.

“I said: ‘Oh, my God, I am going to get so fat!’ Interesting, isn’t it, how we can lose perspective in the middle of trauma?”

“After yet another surgery, I was returned to my hospital room. The surgeons had repaired my body, but my hair was still matted with dried blood, Guyanese dirt, and dead ants. In an act of love I will never forget, my brother tenderly washed my hair.

“The doctors remained very concerned about the gangrene in my wounds. In a last-ditch effort, they began a series of hyperbaric treatments that required me to be placed into a chamber that resembled an iron lung filled with anti-bacterial microbes and oxygen. Each time they removed me from the chamber, I vomited violently. Unfortunately, they had to repeat this process several times.

“Confident that they had beaten the gangrene, they transferred me back to Arlington Hospital, where I was placed under twenty-four-hour protection, with U. S. Marshalls posted outside my door. Threats had been made against my life by individuals associated with the People’s Temple. They blamed the congressional investigation for the mass deaths in Guyana and wanted to retaliate.

“The surgeons performed skin grafts on my legs. The gunshots had blown apart my right arm, and a steel dowel was inserted to hold together what remained. The radial nerve in my arm was damaged, and I could not use my fingers or lift my arm. The first time they tried to get me on my feet to walk, I fainted. After being hospitalized for nearly two months and enduring ten surgeries, I was finally discharged and flew back to San Francisco.

“The days ahead were a flurry of interviews about the Jonestown massacre. I was not allowed to stay in my home because of the death threats, so I lived with a friend. I still carried two bullets in my body that doctors had deemed too risky to remove. I never appeared in public without layers of clothes to cover what I had begun to believe was my hideous, disfigured body. In the following years, I would endure months of physical therapy to regain the use of my arm.

“I was twenty-eight, a single woman who could hardly feed herself and whose body was maimed and scarred. One day, I realized that if I was going to get over this—if I was ever going to move forward—I had to figure out a way not to wallow in self-pity.

“The exact moment I came to terms with what had happened in Guyana occurred years later, on a crowded beach in Hawaii. The disfigured body I walked in was mine. The joy I felt at just being alive had become greater than my insecurities. I had come to realize that a person’s body was irrelevant and physical beauty was a shallow concern. I was disabled, but I did not believe that a disability of any kind prevented me from living a full and wonderful life. If anything, my disfigurement had opened my eyes to the bias often harbored toward those who are different.

“I put on a bathing suit that day and walked across the Hawaiian beach as people stared at the scars of my gunshot wounds. I just kept walking. And I learned with every step that, as difficult as it may be, you just have to take the next step. You just have to force yourself to do it. In the jungle on that November day, it was not my turn to die. But certainly now was my time to live.”

Life Gives No Guarantees

“I survived the massacre in Guyana and went on to marry an emergency-room physician. I was also elected to serve in the California legislature. We had our first child and life was turning out to be just as I had dreamed. We tried for more children, but after two miscarriages, a failed adoption, and fertility treatments, Steve and I decided to give up on our dream of another child. I launched a statewide campaign to become California’s Secretary of State. Miraculously, three months later, I found myself pregnant in what doctors termed a high-risk pregnancy. I promptly withdrew from the campaign to focus on the health of our unborn child.

“On a rainy January day, three months into my pregnancy, I was en route to Sacramento when my secretary tracked me down to tell me that Steve had been in a car accident. I immediately phoned the emergency room and talked with the attending physician. I could tell by his voice that my husband’s injuries were severe and I was an hour away. As I rushed back to the hospital, I feared the worst.

“Once I arrived, it seemed like hours before they would let me see Steve. When I finally got to see him in the ICU, he had a shunt in his head and was on a respirator. His body was warm, but the machines indicated he had no brain function. I kissed him. I held him. I told him I loved him, even though I knew he couldn’t hear me. I couldn’t believe that yet another nightmare was unfolding in front of me.

“I later learned that an uninsured driver with faulty brakes had careened through a stop sign, broadsiding Steve’s car. His carelessness killed a talented, caring, vital man. I was now a pregnant widow with a young son.

“The loss of my husband was traumatic. I no longer even wanted to get out of bed. Yet, I really had no choice. I was the sole supporter of two children, one yet unborn. Steve had no life insurance, so his death was both an emotional and a financial disaster. I had to sell everything, including my home. I spent the next eight years as a single mother raising two children.

“Today, many years later, I am fortunate to live with great joy and happiness. I am married to a wonderful man, Barry Dennis, whom I met on a blind date. He was a confirmed bachelor, yet, five months later, we were engaged! My children are now happy, well-adjusted, and healthy adults.

“I want women to remember that, when life leaves them alone on the tarmac—whether it be the devastating loss of a loved one, the shattering of a lifelong dream, the loss of a job, or events that turn the world upside down—they can always learn to walk again. I am living proof that women can reinvent and rebuild their lives, no matter what hardships they have faced.”



4

WHEN LIFE IS NOT WHAT YOU ORDERED, BEGIN AGAIN.

*One of the hardest things you will ever have to do, my dear,
is to grieve the loss of a person who is still alive.*

ANONYMOUS

Death and Divorce

“It’s been twenty-three years since my husband, John Zimmerman, died of Stage 4 glioblastoma, the most aggressive type of brain cancer,” says Jan Yanehiro.

“He was forty-six; I was forty-seven. We had been married for twenty-two years. Our children were twelve, ten, and six years old when we lost him. I’m pleased to say that the children grew up to be fabulous adults and I am still working (and loving it) at seventy.

“And for the record, yes, I think about John—often. I miss him especially when I realize how many special moments he missed in our children’s lives—driver’s licenses, prom dates, acting in school plays, attending swim meets and Lacrosse games, summer jobs, high school graduations, college graduations, post-college jobs, and our daughter’s wedding. Tears spring to my eyes in unexpected moments—moments like right now as I write this.

“Two and a half years after John died, I remarried. The marriage lasted ten years and ended in divorce. Someone once asked me which was harder, to lose a husband to death or divorce? Without hesitation, I answered: Divorce! Okay, maybe without the exclamation point, but divorce was harder.

“Death is final. There’s nothing you can do about it. John didn’t want to die. He felt sure he was going to beat brain cancer. He didn’t. Divorce is hurtful, scathing, and full of betrayal. That betrayal cuts so deep that, even ten years later, I am only beginning to feel that the wounds are less deep. I think that means that I’m healing. One curious person asked



me why I had gotten a divorce. My answer was simple: He cheated on me.

“If I sound so firm, so sure, so clear as I write about this now, I wasn’t then. It took me years (and years) to process the divorce. I am still embarrassed to say I *am* divorced! I find it hard even to admit *who filed* for divorce. He did. I feel like such a wimp that I didn’t do it first.

“It’s been eleven years since I moved out of our home—a move I made against everyone’s best advice, including my divorce attorney. My ex-husband filed for divorce and moved into the guesthouse. Each day, each night, each week, I was a mess and my self-esteem hit rock bottom. Jackie told me I was acting like an emotionally abused wife. Of course, I denied it. Me? No, not me. I had a career in television; I had three children and three stepchildren. I was on a corporate board. Abused?

“The short answer is yes, I was. To be clear, there was no physical abuse. But emotional abuse? Yes. When I got an email from my ex, I felt nauseous and was scared even to open it. I could feel my heart pounding when I did. What does he want now? What is his new demand? Arbitration? Settlement? How did I fail this marriage? When your self-esteem slips to below zero, it’s amazing what a simple email can do to you.

“It’s been nine years since my divorce became final. It took me two years to get the divorce, and it cost me \$250,000. (I didn’t have that kind of money, so I borrowed it.) And I wasn’t even asking for alimony. We had signed a post-nuptial agreement about a year before the divorce because he claimed he wanted to protect his company. Foolishly, I signed. During the divorce, his attorney brought up that business was bad for the company and my ex was actually contemplating asking me for alimony!

“A year ago, I paid off all the borrowed money for my divorce to attorneys, mediators, accountants, and real estate appraisers. In the end, I just wanted to be done! Done with all the hurt, uncertainty, and anger. A good family friend,

Larry Howell, gave me great advice: ‘If you want it to be done, you make it be done.’

“Did I leave money on the table? Probably. Do I feel everything was fair? No. What did I get? I got half of the value of the home I had invested in. But I reached the point where I could say to myself: I feel pretty darn good! Finally. On most days, I feel like the happiest single woman in all of San Francisco! I turned seventy years wiser. I can’t say seventy years old, because I don’t *feel* old. I mean, not old like we thought we would be . . . wrinkled, gray, bent over, wobbly, babbling souls. Sure, I have wrinkles and I am gray. However, my hairdresser makes sure I return to my ‘natural born’ color every five weeks!

“I feel I am just hitting my stride! Gosh, it feels good to say it and to *feel* it as well. My three children are all grown up. And I’m mighty proud to be their mother. On the morning John died, I made two promises. I promised John that I would make sure our children grew up happy, got an education, and *lived* their lives. And I promised myself that my children would *not* use the death of their father as an excuse for anything in their lives.

“My first-born, Jaclyn Mariko Zimmerman, is thirty-six, living and thriving in Berlin, Germany. Jaclyn is one of the bravest women I know. She lives fearlessly in a foreign land and creates her own job opportunities. Full speed ahead for my first-born!

Jenna Reiko Zimmerman is thirty-four years old. After ten years in New York City producing shows for the Food Network—she worked on seven Emmy-nominated shows and was herself nominated for an Emmy as one of the producers of *Guy’s Big Bites*—she moved back to San Francisco. On her second day there, she met a young man named John Robinson whom I adore and who fits in perfectly as another member of our ‘J-crew.’ (My late husband John and I gave all our children names that start with the letter J.)

“My son, JB (John Blake) Zimmerman, is thirty and living the life of a bachelor in Santa Monica, California. He

graduated from the University of Arizona and always knew he wanted a career in television and movie production. Like his dad (who was a CPA), he loves movies. The two of them watched movies together in the den from the time JB was about two. JB is working for several production companies that are defining what Millennials and Centennials want to see—short-form, online, and 24/7.

“The silver lining to my divorce is my two stepchildren, Meredith and Christopher Eves. I may be divorced from their father, but I choose not to be divorced from them. Meredith is married to a most wonderful person, Conor Flynn. They have two adorable children, Kieran and Gigi, and live in Connecticut. Chris is working in Los Angeles, making his mark on music videos.”

Moving On

“A lot of people assumed that, since I worked in radio and television for more than twenty-five years, I would be set financially. Oh, how I wish that were true. Yes, I made a good living, but life interfered. I need to work to make sure that I can take care of myself in retirement. I loathe thinking that I might have to rely upon my children.

“I am a firm believer that you must tell the universe what you need. In 2008, I needed a job. The job goddess heard my plea, as a great job landed in my lap. The President of the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, Dr. Elisa Stephens, called me with an opportunity to start a brand new department—a School of Communications and Media Technologies.

“In two months (and with a lot of help), we built a studio, hired faculty, and designed a four-year degree program as well as a Master’s program. It’s truly amazing how students can make you feel young and inspire you to re-invent yourself. As the founding director of the department, I’m having a blast! Of course, I’ve had to learn a new language that includes words like ‘curriculum,’ ‘syllabus,’ and ‘rubrics.’ I’ve made mistakes—bad hires, accepting student excuses

too easily, cramming way too much information into one semester. But here's the good news: You *can* transfer your skills from one career to another. I'm a trained reporter; I'm always asking questions. And now, I'm asking questions of my students. What happened to that assignment? Why not take a risk? What is it that you really want to accomplish?"

Am I Dating ... or Not?

"Not.

"At this point, if I have a free night, I'd rather spend it at home watching an episode of *This Is Us* rather than sitting across from a man in a restaurant and having to stroke yet another male ego! As my friend, Mary Les Casto (Founder of Casto Travel—a global company) says: 'There's no man good enough for me. I'm good enough for me.' Here! Here!

"Did I mention that I redesigned my ring after my divorce? I decided that I deserved every karat of that diamond ring from my second husband, and I really wanted to wear it every day. But I didn't want the ring to be the same as when he gave it to me—too many unpleasant memories and bad karma too! I redesigned it and wear it on my right finger rather proudly every day.

"I may be alone, but I'm not lonely. Life is full. And I purposefully keep it that way. I continue to serve on the boards of Kristi Yamaguchi's Always Dream Foundation and the San Francisco-Osaka Sister City Association. I just went to Osaka to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the two cities' partnership. I also completed six years of service as chair of the Representation Project, whose mission is gender equality, and six years of service on the U. S.-Japan Council. And after ten and a half years, I stepped down from the corporate board of the Bank of Marin.

"Last year, Deborah asked me to come to Indianapolis for her Indiana Conference for Women to interview Oscar-winning actress and author Diane Keaton. Interview *Annie Hall*? Yes, count me in! In reading Keaton's books, I learned that she is self-conscious about her thinning hair, that she

refuses to get a face lift, and that she adopted her children when she was fifty and fifty-five. She told us on stage she is soon to be seventy-two. Bravo, Diane!

“At a recent dinner party, I was seated next to LeRoy Morishita, President of the California State University, East Bay, who told me there are no Asian-Americans on the Board of Trustees for the California State University system. I was appalled. I graduated from California State University, Fresno, so I have a particular interest. Hmmmm, I thought, I should toss my name into the pot as a potential Trustee. Women, we can’t be shy; we must find a way to have a seat at the table. Stay tuned! I feel as if I’m just getting started!”

5 LEARN THE SECRETS OF THE BLUE-HAIRED LADY.

I was so far from the seat of power, but my naïveté worked to my advantage. When I was told that the studio passed on my first pilot, I thought that was a good thing—you know, like “passed” in college.

**LINDA BLOODWORTH-THOMASON,
TV PRODUCER AND WRITER (1947–)**

Blue Hair on Fridays

“I wondered if he noticed her blue hair? He showed no reaction to the fact that the elderly woman sitting across from him in his opulent banker’s office had just about the bluest hair he had ever seen. I am Deborah Stephens and that blue-haired lady was my grandmother .

“Her blue hair, combined with a matter-of-fact demeanor, penetrating eyes, and down-home hospitality, left no doubt that he, Mr. Banker, was just a minor obstacle standing between her and what she wanted—a loan. It never occurred to her that there were reasons she might not succeed: her

lack of collateral (her home wasn't in her name), no credit rating, and the fact that, in those days (a mere thirty-some years ago), a woman could not even have a credit card in her own name. Nonetheless, I knew Mr. Banker was no match for the blue-haired lady.

"Her silver mop of hair was always tinted blue on Fridays—a tint, a curl, and a comb-out every Friday morning, no matter what. The whole process left her feeling beautiful, powerful, and bold. And so I came to love the blue hair almost as much as I loved her. I also grew up believing that all confident women of a certain age tinted their hair blue!

"That day was a defining moment for me. Yes, my grandmother received the loan—a college student loan, for me. Her negotiation skills could blow the doors open in any corporate boardroom. Yet she was uneducated and poor. Her wealth was comprised of deep religious beliefs and unconditional kindness. She also possessed the tenacity of a bulldog, as she never let the word 'no' stand in her way.

"What my grandmother lacked in cash, she made up for in an abundance of dreams. She had an unrelenting belief in me, greater than any belief I held about myself. No matter the circumstances or challenges, she was determined that I would go places in life that she and my mother had only dreamed about. Every woman should have a blue-haired lady like my grandmother in her life. She is the woman who thinks you are terrific even when you don't feel terrific—the woman who always believes that anything is possible, no matter the odds.

"Thanks to her, I attended college, landed an exciting corporate job, and made more money in a year than my mother had made in ten. Years later, I co-founded a management consulting firm, wrote six books, and gave speeches all over the world. Consulting with leaders (including a U. S. President), I had the opportunity to work with some of America's most powerful people in a world that had been closed to my grandmother. Yet she was my inspiration."

Obstacles and Possibilities

“Obstacles and possibilities often meld together to form defining moments in life, sometimes appearing just when we think we have life figured out. Unfortunately, smartly compartmentalized lives can be turned upside down in a matter of moments. One such moment involved my husband, Mike. After playing a round of golf, he experienced waves of pain that made him unable to walk as muscles spasmed throughout his body. After six months and numerous trips to the University of California-San Francisco Medical Center, doctors began to unravel the illness that was ravaging his body, which, by that time, had destroyed over half his lung capacity. His diagnosis began with the term “pulmonary fibrosis, caused by dermatomyositis and polymyositis”—words I could neither pronounce nor understand. We were told that he had five to six years to live. Our children were ages six and ten. The doctors suggested a lung transplant.

“Writing on Memorial Day, a time when we honor those who have served and died in wars, I realize that my husband was a veteran of a very different kind of war—a war on a rare disease. It is twelve years since his diagnosis and three and a half years since his death. Mike outlived his doctors’ prognosis by so many years that he was among the longest living patients ever treated for pulmonary fibrosis. When he died, Jackie remembered this warrior by having the American flag flown at half staff on the nation’s capital in his honor.

“Mike and I and our children spent over half our lives fighting this terrible disease while trying to live a normal life. There were times of fear and sadness and many times of happiness. There were battles with insurance companies over experimental drugs, prior authorizations, and responsible parties. There were hospitalizations and ambulance rides in the middle of the night. There was a move from our home in San Francisco to a small Midwestern town—a move that brought us closer to Mike’s family and acknowledged the reality that the lung transplant list in that region was shorter.

Many women have stories like mine. The difference? I am blessed with friends like Jackie, Jan, and Michealene, and I am supported by the wisdom of other women that helped prepare me for a future I didn't want.

"Moving to a small community in the Midwest at the age of fifty meant leaving behind my home, friends I loved, and a support system that I had always relied upon. I carried a piece of paper in my purse for courage that read: What would the blue-haired lady do? While I didn't know a single woman in my new state, however, I knew the importance of women's friendships in my life. So I tried to figure out how to meet as many women as I could in the shortest period of time. My solution was to create a women's conference similar to the one Jackie had started in California. Today, that conference is in its eighth year and has grown to be the largest event of its kind for women in the Midwest.

"Billie Dragoo, now my closest friend in my new home, joined me in getting the conference off the ground. After meeting her for coffee one morning, I knew she was the kind of person every woman should have in her corner. She opened up doors for me, introduced me to others, and was encouraging and kind.

"I tackled my husband's illness, our move, and our family's transition as my most important project. I followed the steps and the advice given in this book almost as a textbook case. Yet as Mike's disease progressed, I never once thought about what my life would be like after his death. Planning for a future without him never registered in my thoughts."

Light Travels Through Broken Places

"A strong voice inside spoke to me on many sleepless nights. It said that my obligation was to help my husband die with dignity. Gail Sheehy, author of the iconic book *Passages*, had traveled a similar journey with her husband and she introduced me to hospice and palliative care when she spoke at my conference. I'll always be grateful for her caring advice.

I set up a meeting with Mike's doctor and broached the subject of hospice. He agreed and gently told Mike that he needed to get his affairs in order.

"Mike, still determined to fight his illness, struggled to accept his reality. 'After you have fought so hard for so many years and battled the odds, it is difficult to turn off the fight,' he said. As primary caregiver, I spent most of my time at home, which now resembled a hospital. I was extremely grateful that I was able to care for Mike, but I quickly learned how lonely and scary caregiving can be.

"I was still working—I had to work, as we had enormous medical bills. We were extremely lucky to have escaped bankruptcy. In fact, over 60 percent of families dealing with a terminal illness go broke and far too many women lose their homes and any sense of security when a spouse dies. The whole process is akin to landing a 747 in the midst of a war zone.

"I quickly learned how to compartmentalize, going to the upstairs bedroom to conduct conference calls for my work while knowing that one floor below, my husband lay in a bed dying. Trying to be 'normal' while living in the most abnormal and heart-breaking of circumstances was excruciating. Michealene described perfectly how I felt—like an old thermos bottle encasing shattered glass. The thermos looked perfectly normal on the outside, but when it moved, you could hear the tinkle of the shattered pieces. That was me.

"My friend, Billie, introduced me to Dr. B., a psychiatrist who met with me weekly to help us through Mike's nine-month hospice journey. More coach than psychiatrist, Dr. B. overflowed with life wisdom. He gave me assignments each week, all crafted to help us through difficult moments. One in particular made an amazing difference. He asked me what I thought of when I heard circus music. I responded: Happy, cheerful, smiling kids, lighthearted. He instructed me to download as much circus music onto my computer as possible and to start playing it at home. What sounded crazy at the time turned out to be nothing short of remarkable.

“Sheryl believed that people die in much the same way they have lived. Her words were true for Mike, as he refused to see death as a possibility. This admirable quality served him well in the fight against his disease. Yet now, facing death, that trait caused chaos, along with physical and emotional pain that seeped into all our lives. We undertook the task of encouraging Mike to surrender to his illness. Our children, Aaron and Lily, took on roles no children should ever have to fill. They sat with their dad, the hospice team, and the priest, and asked him to quit fighting. They gave him permission to die. Several weeks later, Mike’s last words to me were: ‘You are so beautiful. I love you. Let’s go home.’”

Endings

Three months after the death of her husband, Deborah’s mother was hospitalized, diagnosed with congestive heart failure, and placed in a nursing home. Several weeks later, her sister-in-law was diagnosed with leukemia and undertook a stem-cell transplant and more rounds of chemotherapy than she believed any person could survive. “My husband had died; my sister-in-law had died; and my mother was close to dying. My mind and body—but above all, my soul—were depleted.

“I recall Jackie and Jan describing grief as being on the beach while waves come crashing down upon you with little warning. Death changes everything. Well-meaning friends, even your own family members, want you to be ‘okay’ as fast as is humanly possible. Each time they look into your eyes, you bring home to them the reality of endings and it’s often uncomfortable. Endings impact our children no matter how hard we try to protect them. I am blessed. My children are remarkably kind, healthy, and well-adjusted adults. Due to their life experiences, they carry a wisdom and resilience that most their ages do not. Aaron is a global product manager for a medical-device company. Lily is an account executive for a medical-device company and Mairi is a nurse. My children, my co-authors, a few close friends,

and an extraordinary hospice team have helped me in countless ways.

“It is true what Ram Dass states: ‘We are all just walking each other home.’”

6 WHEN YOU ARE STANDING AT THE EDGE OF THE POOL, JUMP IN.

I read and walked for miles at night along the beach, writing bad verse and searching endlessly for someone wonderful who would step out of the darkness and change my life. It never crossed my mind that person could be me.

ANNA QUINDLEN, WRITER (1953–)

Hide-and-Seek

“As a child, and into adulthood, I learned to hide my light from others so that no one would hurt me. Perhaps it came from being sexually abused and learning that people can take very special parts of you without your permission. As a result, I developed a fear that someone would take that very special part of me and destroy it. I am Michealene Christini Risley and I became an expert at hide-and-seeK.

“I hid my talents because I did not want people to notice and hurt me or take away those gifts. I worked my way through life, getting close to all of the things that I dreamed of—but never having them. In my career, I took jobs that circled around my dreams. I stared longingly from the sidelines, hoping for what seemed so far out of reach. The experience was like having your swimsuit on at the edge of the pool, but never having the courage to jump in. I secretly hoped that someone would grab my hand and help me into the water.

What I needed most was for someone to tell me that it was okay to want those things—it was okay to dream and be—and that I wasn't a child anymore. My fantasy was always that this person would nurture my talents, while protecting me. My own inner voices were hard to conquer. How dare I hope for things in my life? How dare I dream so large? Friends and family looked at my career and marveled at how happy and successful I was. I was the only one who knew the truth—that I was still standing at the edge of the pool waiting to jump in.

“I gave birth to our first child the same day that my father had a brain tumor removed. Life and death seem always to be intertwined. I didn't know if Dad would make it out of surgery alive, but I had to try to find a way to celebrate the gift of a healthy baby boy. These moments were bittersweet.

“Weeks later, I traveled to visit my father in the hospital and he got to see his eleventh grandson. I studied his face as it lit up with joy at his first glimpse of my son. But as I spent time with him in the ICU, it dawned on me that my dad's life would end soon.

“I stood at the foot of the hospital bed as he turned to me and called out a name—Mary Jane, the name of my childhood friend. I froze, as I had spent years rehearsing this conversation. I had always wanted to confront my father, but somehow I came to believe growing up that, if you told your parents bad things, it would cause their death. It was a difficult belief to hold inside a family full of secrets. Could this possibly be the right moment? Not now, not when he was dying. Yet, *he* was trying to talk about it. I wanted to run for the nearest exit.

“Standing in the ICU, I felt transported back in time. There was the puke-green tile that framed the mirror on the kitchen wall. I could hear the crackle of the olive oil heating up in the frying pan. Terror engulfed me as I approached my mother, who stood with her hands deep in the sudsy sink and her back to me. She whirled around as I said: ‘Mom, Mary Jane says Dad put his hand down her pants.’”

A Family Full of Secrets

“My mother exploded with all the rage of an erupting volcano. How could I ever think that my father would do something like that? How could I think that? What was wrong with me? But if Mom could not believe what Dad had done to Mary Jane, how could she ever believe what he had done to me? I felt numb.

“The memories of those moments in the kitchen seared into my mind as I stood at the foot of my father’s deathbed. Did I have the courage? Did he have the strength? Was this fair for me to do this now, or ever? Here was my chance, and I had become that young girl again, waiting for someone to take my hand, unable to string two coherent words together. The opportunity passed.

“We took time to say good-bye. Even though Dad was in a coma, the nurses told us he would be able to hear until the end. When it was my turn, I curled up on the bed next to him and whispered: ‘Dad, we both made mistakes, and I am sorry for that. I forgive you.’ I felt the tension leave his body.

“In stark clarity during that moment, I realized that I was no longer that abused child. My choice to hide myself, into adulthood, made me into an abuser—of myself. Through my father’s death and becoming a mother, I realized that those events that had happened in the past no longer defined who I was or how much I deserved in life. Enough. In that moment, I broke free of the past and fully jumped into my life without fear.

“When our book was published, it caused great anguish in my family. My mother cried, two brothers stopped speaking to me, and one died from a heart attack during that period. An uncle was convinced I had lied to sell books. It was painful. Yet, my sisters always supported me. They never wavered.

“The publication of our book cleared a path for my mother and I to talk through the events of my childhood, and the wedge between us disintegrated. When she asked why I hadn’t told her, her words melted away my resentment

at not being heard and our relationship deepened until her death. She was a beautiful, loving mother and friend with an impish sense of humor.

Where in the World Is Zimbabwe?

“Challenges did not end for me. I had emergency spinal surgery and was adjusting to being a mom to three young, active boys, hoping that my life would slow down. Then I met Paola Gianturco.

“Paola traveled as a photojournalist and had published six books documenting women’s lives all over the world. We often met for coffee or dinner, where she shared her amazing stories about young girls—and in particular, girls from Africa. One of these stories was about Betty Makoni and the Girl Child Network in Zimbabwe. There was a myth propagated in Africa that, if AIDS-infected men raped virgins, it would rid them of the deadly virus. Betty worked to rescue these girls and help them to rebuild their lives. Paola suggested that I visit Zimbabwe to film their stories.

“When we went to hear Betty Makoni speak in San Francisco, I brought along some copies of my first film, which focused on child sexual abuse in America. The film had won awards, was screened at the Cannes Film Festival, and had been aired on PBS. Betty accepted my gift as if those films were the most precious of things. She understood. Her commitment to these kids fed my soul, and I left that breakfast promising to visit Zimbabwe and to tell the story of the Girl Child Network.

“I hurried home to my computer and typed in the search string ‘Where in the world is Zimbabwe?’ After gleaning as much information as I could, my assistant, Lauren Carara, and I prepared to make our way across the world to Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Although I had traveled extensively, nothing prepared me for the devastation we saw there. Robert Mugabe, the nation’s dictator, had seized and forcibly redistributed most of the country’s commercial farms to political allies, most of whom had no idea how to farm. People were restless and suffering under severe water

and food shortages. Unemployment was at 80 percent and life expectancy had decreased significantly.

“When we were stopped by the Central Intelligence Organization on our first day, I recalled my husband’s parting words: ‘Would you feel the trip to have been worth it if you didn’t come back?’ I didn’t take him too seriously at the time, as I thought he was exaggerating the dangers. It dawned on me on that day, however, that he might have been right.

“Although I had worked all my professional life with poverty, I had never gone hungry. But everywhere I looked in Africa, hunger smacked me awake. One day, while with Betty in the Girl Child Village, an elderly grandmother arrived with a young boy and girl. The three of them had walked for days searching for food. While we washed for dinner, I heard bits and pieces of their story and knew that they were starving. The children were placed on the grass to my left and sat waiting. The administrator explained to me that custom in Zimbabwe requires that elders be served first, then adults, and finally children. The children sat looking at the food on our plates. I quickly lost my appetite and still today am haunted by those images and the children’s hunger.

“One morning, while staying at Betty’s house, I was craving an American breakfast and I asked Johannes, our bodyguard, to take us to eat. When we arrived back at the compound, the guard who usually sat at the gate was gone. Johannes leaned back and said to us: ‘Something is wrong; stay in the car.’ We had spent the last week with this man and felt as if we had come to know him. His face said it all. Something was terribly, terribly wrong.

“The gate flew open and fifteen very large African men quickly surrounded the car. Johannes came running out from among them and jumped into the driver’s seat. He drove frantically through the gate and pulled to the side of the house. We exited the car and were immediately surrounded by a group of Zimbabweans who were shouting and brandishing guns. I was scared. One of the leaders

started peppering me with questions about our camera and asked if I was an agent for the CIA.

“It was chaos as they took us into the house and searched our suitcases. We were transported to a Zimbabwean prison that was renowned for torture where we spent three harrowing days in an overcrowded building without food or water and with no protection from anyone. I witnessed someone forced to have sex, and saw a young man tortured. The gaping holes in the ceiling forced us to dodge feces and urine from those imprisoned above us. We bribed our way into another cell—a five-foot-by-eight-foot room that housed eight women. It had no windows, just a wooden door, and contained nothing but a small bench.

“On the bench lay a young woman who kept coughing up blood. Another woman had been badly beaten by her husband. Most of the women had been incarcerated for ‘border jumping’ in an effort to get food for their children. They told of risking rape and crocodiles to feed their families—of getting thrown into prison and released, and then starting all over again. About halfway through their stories, I began to weep. The woman who seemed to be the leader of the group asked why I was crying. I replied: ‘I cry for you and your lives.’ She looked at me with a blank expression, with no apparent comprehension of how little they had, and said: ‘It is okay; it is our lives. We will be okay.’ But I knew they wouldn’t be, and that there was nothing they could do to help themselves. The worst part for them was thinking of their children alone, without adult assistance.

“I felt incredibly guilty about getting Lauren involved in my work, and I kept thinking about my husband and the boys. I had come to work on issues for women and children, never realizing that I might leave my own children without a mother. I felt overwhelming despair and was inconsolable. How could I risk my boys not having their mother to raise them? I went from thinking that I was building awareness about an awful practice in Zimbabwe to feeling incredible shame for my choices. How could I have been so selfish?”



“When he learned of our predicament, my husband hired a human rights lawyer. The U. S. embassy intervened and a man I had met on Facebook called his friend at the CIA. Their combined efforts led to our release and deportation.

“My imprisonment impacted my family. When Lauren and I left for Zimbabwe, Christopher was eleven, Austin was nine, and Dillon was four. When we finally arrived home and could tell the kids what had happened, I found that they reacted in different ways. Christopher, always practical, said: ‘Mom I hear that you can’t go back to Africa anymore.’ Austin was just glad to have me back. But, the impact on Dillon would not become apparent until a few years later.

“My life changed after Africa. The experience opened my eyes to images I can never un-see and memories I can never un-remember. I continue to be blessed by a happy marriage and our three boys are rapidly growing into young men. I am proof that we can face our demons, endure hardships, and go on to create great lives.”

7

LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN.

Sometimes when I need a miracle, I look into my children’s eyes and realize I’ve already created miracles.

ANN LANDERS, AMERICAN AUTHOR

Minus One at the Dinner Table

As we each worked to create environments filled with joy even in the worst of circumstances, we tried to protect our children. Unfortunately, death and grief and loss have a way of affecting every aspect of a child’s life. Conversations around the dinner table are minus one. There are soccer practices, ballgames and recitals, parent-teacher conferences, graduations, and marriages where what’s missing is felt by all involved. Children carry around fears that they often hold inside and don’t share. We, as mothers, carry around



guilt that we haven't done enough to help them through the dark times.

When we began meeting around the kitchen table, all our children were quite young. Today, most of them are adults. We are so very happy to tell you that the kids are all right! Since each of them has traveled with us on this journey, we thought that the “wisdom coming from the mouth of our babes” might be helpful to others as well. So we asked them several questions about their experiences. What follows are reflections and advice from some (not all) of them.

If It's Worth Doing, It's Worth Overdoing

Jan's daughter Jenna was ten when her dad died. She is now thirty-three. Jenna worked in New York for ten years producing shows for the Food Network. She is married, lives in Los Angeles, and has her own production company. She also writes *The Pickle* (readthepickle.com), a website about food—what and when to eat, where to buy, and how to enjoy and share. Please do subscribe; it's free!

Jenna thinks the biggest challenge she experienced when her dad died was learning how to understand his death. She tells how a well-meaning therapist told her she wouldn't understand it until she got older. “Adults, do not say things like this to children,” says Jenna. “It comes across as patronizing and only made me want to prove the therapist wrong. At ten, of course, I didn't understand the full scope of how losing my dad would affect me. But then, do any of us at any age fully understand it when a tragedy rocks our world?

“Wanting to prove the therapist wrong resulted in me avoiding talking about my father's death, and my feelings surrounding it. I put on a brave face and acted strong, as if I had my grief under control and didn't need any help or special treatment. But grieving, I learned over the years, cannot be controlled, cannot be suppressed, and cannot be rushed. We all deal with tragedy in our own way, and that usually does evolve over time. But grieve we must. It has

helped me immensely to lean on family, friends, and trained professionals. I learned that, while painful and clumsy at first, opening up and sharing my feelings was the only way I could heal.

“It was difficult for me, my siblings, and our mom to face the future without Daddy. Who would dance with me at the sixth-grade father-daughter Cotillion? I’d looked forward to that dance for two years, ever since he took my older sister. What would Father’s Day look like? What would we do on Thanksgiving without my dad entertaining friends and family with his famous annual feast?

“Who would walk me down the aisle at my wedding?”

“A father’s role in his daughter’s wedding is traditionally significant, even to a young girl. Within the year after my dad died, I remember my mom saying to me that her brother, my Uncle Derick, could walk me down the aisle when the day came. I can’t remember why it came up—if I asked, or if my mom offered—but I’ve never forgotten that conversation. I’ve always been close to my Uncle Derick, but when my husband, John, proposed, there was no question in my mind: My mom would be the one to walk me down the aisle. When I married the man of my dreams, that is exactly what happened.”

The wedding was everything Jenna could have wanted—great food, great music, dancing, and, of course, her nearest and dearest in attendance. John and his family processed in, followed by her siblings. Then she entered, arm-in-arm with Jan. “We walked to *Here Comes the Sun*, from the Beatles’ vinyl album that I inherited from my dad’s record collection. We were ten steps down the aisle when I looked over and saw my mom eyes welling up with tears. I held her a little bit tighter, feeling her joy and pride. I didn’t sense sadness in her and, as I think about it now, I didn’t feel sadness either.

“You might expect that I would have felt great sadness that my dad wasn’t with me on this special day. But I had made sure that he *would* be there. When I arrived at the altar, there he was, dressed in a sweet Eighties tux,

beaming at me from a crisp white picture frame positioned on a front-row seat. It was important to me to have a photo of my dad there for two reasons,” Jenna recalls fondly, “to honor him before our wedding guests (many of whom had known and loved him), and to make sure that I saw his bright smile as I looked out on all the other guests’ faces. I’ll never forget the sense of joy and support radiating from our loved ones during the ceremony, and I’m so glad I got to bring my dad into that memory.”

Jenna called on him again during what is traditionally the father-daughter dance, boogying with her mom to Tina Turner’s *Simply the Best*, which a colleague of her father’s had emotionally—and brilliantly—performed at his memorial service. “I was 98 percent positive that song would bring my mom to tears (I had kept it as a surprise). To my own surprise, however, her eyes stayed dry. I think both of us were just *happy*—happy I had found a wonderful partner, happy to be celebrating love, and happy to be surrounded by our friends and family, including my dad.

“They say time heals all wounds,” Jenna reflects. “I wouldn’t say time has made me whole again—I still miss my dad. I wish he had gotten to know my husband and our future children. I wish I could have heard what he would have told me moments before walking me down the aisle—but time has given me perspective. If I could talk to my Dad today I, of course, would tell him that I love him. I would also thank him for teaching me how to live.”

As Jenna matures into her thirties, she tells us, she still benefits from life advice from her mom—sometimes solicited, sometimes not. It’s perhaps a universal impulse for parents to want to download a lifetime of lessons to their children. “I’m willing to bet,” Jenna claims, “that at forty-six, my father departed this world feeling as if he hadn’t had enough time to teach my siblings and me all the lessons he’d learned over his too-short, but richly lived lifetime.” While she admits missing the opportunity to ask her father for advice, she nonetheless carries with her his overall approach to life—one that guides her every day.

“My dad’s life motto, which we put on his gravestone, was: If it’s worth doing, it’s worth overdoing! He didn’t just go fishing; he planned epic deep-sea fishing journeys. He didn’t just go hiking; he took multi-week treks through jungles stalking giant gorillas, photographing them, and returning to display his images like trophies in huge frames throughout our home. He didn’t just take his five- and seven-year-old daughters camping; he took them on a white-water rafting trip with his adult friends.

“My dad loved people, his family, traveling, learning about different cultures, and—oh, yes—he loved laughing. He saw life as one big adventure, embracing it full on. Living with that kind of zest, that kind of presence in the moment, remains a great example that I try to follow in my own life, and that I’ve similarly seen my siblings embrace. I now find strength in what I know—that my friends and family love me, that my dad loved me, and that he wanted me to live a rich and happy life. So I let friends and family step in where my dad can’t, knowing he is cheering me on from his front-row seat.”

Sorry to Hear That

Jan’s son JB, now thirty, was six when his dad died just ten days shy of his seventh birthday. A month after graduation from the University of Arizona, he moved to “Lala Land.” He now lives in Santa Monica, California. It’s where he knew he would be happy, as he loves everything about the production of movies and short-form shows. He is also hosting on *After Buzz TV*. JB says: “I was perhaps too young to grasp the impact the loss of my dad would have on my life, but I was also too old to ignore it. Ultimately, I think that losing my father at such a young age may have made it easier to accept the reality of the loss in my own mind. I never questioned his passing; I questioned everyone else.

“Growing up, the toughest part for me was speaking about it. I couldn’t share my story with others. Not because it was hard or hurtful—although, of course, it was those things—but the pain was in the background. For me,

admitting it aloud felt almost like telling someone about a weakness. It was awkward, discouraging, and depressing. I never tried to hide my story, but it was uncomfortable, as it brought about such a somber switch in every situation. The very mention of Dad's death opened the same deluge of sorrow and pity from everyone around me. It sounds weird to complain about, but, as a child being surrounded by sadness at a time when even throwing rocks is fun, it felt like something to avoid."

JB never blamed anyone for offering him words of comfort, he recalls. "I think people innately want to offer sympathy, which is a great thing. I just never let those assurances do their duty. I never let them help. I got hung up on the phrase people say to you: Sorry to hear that. I was perplexed and questioned why strangers would be sorry when they did nothing to cause harm. My mind accepted my dad's passing. It was just that my heart did not. It was only recently, in the back half of my twenties, that I tried to look beyond the word 'sorry' itself and hear the support underneath. What everyone was really saying was: That sucks. And they are not wrong. I only wish I had been able to translate that earlier."

JB's advice is simple: Don't feel *different*. "You are not," he claims. "And that's a good thing. While your own tragedy may have affected you in a certain way, everyone deals with death. Everyone deals with difficulty. You are not *different* from other people because of your suffering. You are *special*. Special because you're alive. Special because you survived it. Special because you experienced something that terrifies everyone on earth and you came out the other side. Special because now you can share that with the world.

"No doubt the horrific experience will influence you. You went through an extraordinarily devastating event. It has to impact you, but it doesn't have to define you. You can define it. You can use it to grow.

"People will try to give you empathy. Embrace it. Embrace them. People will try to underestimate you. Let them. Then achieve beyond their expectations. You can

only become better if you try to be. So try. Fail. Try again. Repeat until you're happy. Life rains on everyone; don't wait outside in the cold. Find warmth. Find happiness. Find love. Find laughter. Find everything you want in this world today, not tomorrow.

“Also, smile—people like that.”

JB has always believed the spirit of his dad lives within him. “So I feel as if he already knows everything about me. I often keep him in my thoughts, surfacing his presence in my consciousness at times when I think he'd be proud. At other times, I turn to him when I am making drastic decisions—his acumen for financial responsibility making appearances more recently—and as a silent sounding board.”

Although JB doesn't think there's much he needs to tell his dad, he admits that there's an infinite number of things he wants to ask him. “I'd ask him *everything*. I know who my dad was. I've met him. I've heard the flattering, funny, and fantastic stories about him from everyone that knew him throughout his life (including his parents). I remember his love of poker, fishing, and, of course, his bright red Acura NSX. But who would he be to me now?

“Now that I've grown up, what treasure trove of truths would he reveal to me alone as an adult. What stories did he save? What jokes? What wild, crazy, secret shenanigans from his past would he reveal now that I'm old enough to hear them? If I could understand him as a friend as well as a father, what would he admit he wants to learn? What did he regret? What scared the shit out of him? What rushed through his mind the moment he met my mom?

“I'd ask him what only he could tell me. I'd ask him what only he knew. I'd get to know the man he'd only be with me. I'd listen. I'd learn. I'd laugh. A lot.”

Not Gone—Just on a Long Vacation

Jan's eldest daughter, Jaclyn, is now thirty-six. She was twelve when her dad died. She has worked for U. S. Senator Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) in Washington, DC, and for an international bank in London. She has owned a wine shop

and is now a sommelier for an upscale restaurant in her adopted city of Berlin, Germany.

Jaclyn recalls that losing her dad at twelve was very hard. In fact, she found it very difficult to comprehend his passing at the time. “I constantly felt as if he were on vacation—that he would return at any moment to give me a giant bear hug. At the time, I knew I had to step up, be more helpful, and be more dependable; I was proud of myself that I was able to be so mature.

“I think the toughest part was years later, in college, when I truly noticed the magnitude of losing my dad so early. I was trying to find myself and figure out my interests, strengths, weaknesses, and goals for life. I realized how valuable it would have been to sit down with him and ask for his advice, his support, his accounting wisdom, and his strategic guidance on how I could become a successful businesswoman.”

The loss of a parent or loved one is painful, difficult, and heartbreaking. Surrounding yourself with family, friends, and loved ones is essential for the grieving process, for surviving your loss, and for figuring out how life moves on. “You are not defined by your loss,” Jaclyn maintains, “and you are not alone. Sometimes you will want to talk about it and sometimes you won’t—both options are normal. My best advice is to remember to be thankful. Be thankful for the people in your life who love you. Be thankful for the good times you had with your loved one, and remember those times. Often. The importance of that person in your life stays with you, in your heart, forever.

“If I were able, I would tell my dad thank you and I love you. Thank you for teaching me to enjoy life to the absolute fullest. I adopted your big laugh, your love of life and adventure, and your penchant for risk-taking. Thank you for being there to support me every step of the way.”

Why Don't We Have a Daddy?

Jackie's daughter Stephanie Sierra is twenty-three and is a broadcast journalist in Colorado. Jackie was three months

pregnant with Stephanie when her father, Steve Sierra, was killed in a horrific car crash. She was named in honor of the father she never knew.

Stephanie says: “Growing up as a young kid in my family was an adventure. From princess-sparkly birthday parties to running around at Chucky Cheese, life with mom, Jackson, and myself was perfect. I didn’t know it could be any better.”

By the time she reached the age of five, however, embarking on her first day at kindergarten, she started to realize that not all families came in groups of three. “After school,” she recalls, “I saw fathers waiting to pick up their daughters and mothers doing the same. School lunch hour was filled with stories of my classmates planning play dates and discussing what group would be performing at the school talent show. It didn’t dawn on me until the ripe old age of six that most of my friends had a man in the house they called ‘Dad.’ At that age, I was too young to understand what had happened to my father, so I simply didn’t know to ask about it.

“It didn’t faze me as a young child. I was the happiest ‘little munchkin,’ as my mom called me. I was old enough to realize that my mom worked hard. Jackson and I had Christine, our live-in nanny. Christine did a lot for us, but I will never forget anxiously waiting for mom to come home every night. Looking back on it now, she was incredibly dedicated, putting up with a rigorous schedule of driving four-plus hours everyday just so she could be home with Jackson and me every night.”

Stephanie remembers having the closest relationship a mother and daughter could have—then and now. “She was my best friend then and my best friend now,” she claims. “And I will never forget the ‘talk.’ It’s hard to remember a lot of things that happened over ten years ago, but I will never forget the day I asked Mom: ‘Why don’t we have a daddy? All my friends do.’ I asked this as an inquisitive seven-year-old, but later would have bitten my tongue rather than bring that up, because mom’s infamous dating era began a year later!

“I hated it. I wanted her all to myself. I was selfish in that way. Given how close we were, I didn’t like that she was going on what seemed like random dates with men I’d never met before. My brother Jackson and I joked about some of them we didn’t like. One we nicknamed Psycho Doc because every time they went on a running date, one of us would answer the door to find him just running on the doorstep!”

Shortly after that, Jackie went on a date with a man named Barry Dennis. And Barry lasted a lot longer than the others. “Barry was very nice,” Stephanie remembers. “Down to earth, a fisherman, and he made us the most delicious pork chops. I always loved seeing Mom so happy after spending time with him. And then before I knew it—there was a wedding!”

“I quickly learned how blessed Jackson and I were to have such a dedicated, loyal, and loving man in our lives. Barry later adopted us as his own children, making him our dad. And there we were—a happy family of four.”

Choose Your Own Path

Jackie’s son, Jackson Sierra, is twenty-nine. He was five years old when his father was killed in that horrible car crash. After he graduated from Stanford, he began work as a software engineer in Silicon Valley. Jackson describes the difficulty he had differentiating his own feelings as a child from the recollections of others who had lost a parent. As a young child, he admits, he understandably failed to understand the gravity of the moment and just continued on with his daily routine, only finding out much later the moment he had let pass by. “Such was my experience,” he recalls, “a few fleeting memories with my dad and life almost beginning thereafter.”

The experience subtly nudged Jackson toward independence, however, making him an individual with the confidence to take on most challenges, yet quite reserved in asking for help from family and friends. “Perhaps having a dad around during those formative years might have given

me different perspectives and experiences that would have balanced my fierce individualism. But while I may have missed the advice I never had from my father, I had a strong, loving mother who more than made up the difference.

“There’s a notion today that a young child will follow in a fallen parent’s footsteps—by trying out for the same sports team, or attending the same alma mater, or pursuing the same career,” says Jackson. “But we’re also fortunate to live in a society that allows us to choose our own paths, to be ourselves, without being saddled with the burden of expectations. That’s not to say that you shouldn’t strive for the same goals as your parents. You can, but charting your own course is just as acceptable.”

Jackson notes that a great testament to someone’s life is how fondly and frequently they’re remembered by those who were close to them. “Certainly we’d all be happy to know that we’re viewed in a positive light when brought up in conversation. But what separates my dad from others,” he remarks, “is how his existence, his being, and the way he enriched people’s lives is something that those who knew him can talk about and lose track of time. The stories go on and on. And before you know it, the restaurant is empty, or the early-evening dinner party has extended into the next day. People love stories in part because they arouse their feelings. And my dad was one of the best in eliciting feelings from just about anyone.”

Always Rise

Lily Stephens is Deborah’s daughter. She is twenty-six, and was twenty-two when her dad died. She works in the medical-device industry in Colorado. Her dad became ill when Lily was in elementary school and died during her last year of college. Through all the health emergencies and hospitalizations, Lily knew that her family was different, but she remembers that her dad had a very convincing way of making everything seem normal. She never believed that her father would die— and that’s the way the family lived. She describes her dad as “the comeback king” and remembers

a particular song he used to play really loudly, encouraging her brother and herself to sing it with him: “I get knocked down; I get up again. I get knocked down, but nothing’s going to keep me down.”

“That is how my dad lived,” Lily recalls. “Even though he was told that he was dying, he refused to wallow in it or allow me or anyone to be distraught. He spent every day, every minute, doing something, taking some sort of action. And he usually had a smile on his face. I often wondered how he could still smile, still joke with me, still laugh. That he was able to do so during the last months of his life gives me great inspiration. I was fortunate in that my dad spent a lot of time with me. I remember watching my favorite television program (*Say Yes to the Dress*) with him. One day, I was so sad that I asked him who would walk me down the aisle. He responded: ‘Honey, I think you are way too far in the future. You need to have a boyfriend before you think about getting married!’”

During her last year in college, Lily trained for eight months for a collegiate bike race. “I really had never worked harder at anything,” she reports. “A month before the race, I was diagnosed with mononucleosis and ordered to strict bed rest. The doctor told me that the bike race was not something I could participate in. I was devastated. My dad kept telling me not to give up, but to get healthy. Unbeknownst to my mom, we plotted a way for me to ride in the race. Two weeks before, the doctor cleared me medically, but advised against me riding. My dad, after speaking with the doctor on the health risks, surmised that the risks were small enough that I should just go for it! He believed that, sometimes in life, you just have to take a calculated risk. I finished second in the race and experienced an exhilarating sense of accomplishment. I think my dad knew that this was a life lesson he wanted to imprint on me before he died.”

On the day that Lily’s dad died, an ambulance was called to take him to the hospice facility, as they could not get his pain under control at home. “He refused to be transported from our house on a stretcher,” she recalls. “He put on his

hat, told my mom to get him a change of clothes and, before we knew it, he was walking out of the house on his own without a walker or any other support. I think he did it so we would remember him in that way—always getting back up in life and continuing to move forward.”

Lily’s advice to others who may be going through similar issues is to take advantage of as much help and as many resources as possible—and to do it as early as possible. “I didn’t do that right away,” she admits. “But about six months after my dad’s death, the loss really brought me to my knees. I was so sad and miserable. My mom and brother and the hospice grief counselor helped me through the rough spots. I learned to talk about my feelings and to understand that they were normal. I also thought a great deal about the lessons Dad had left me with. I chose to think of them when grief visited and it helped a lot.


“Today, I would tell my dad that I am so thankful for the impact he had on my life. I got a double dose of tenacity, persistence, and optimism from that gene pool. He will always be with me. I love you, Dad, and I thank you.”

I’ll Be There


Michealene’s kids are still too young to contribute their voices. Her oldest son, Christopher, is at Northeastern in Boston. Austin just finished his first year at Michigan State. And Dillon just finished his first year of high school. “There’s so much of my life that they don’t understand or know about yet,” she says. “But when they are ready, I will be there to explain.”

WIT KIT TOOLS FOR MANAGING MISFORTUNE

1. Find a journal and label it My WIT Kit. Now grab a favorite pen, open to the first page, and write down three things you want to experience or accomplish in your lifetime. You may be thinking that, right now, you just want to get through the day. We understand. But this



is your place to dream, your opportunity to think big. In your WIT Kit journal, you have the freedom to look ahead instead of being bogged down in the present. Please don't censor yourself. You can be as frivolous or as idealistic as you like.

2. What one thing can you do this week to make progress on one of those three dreams? If you want to go back to college, pick up the phone and ask your local college to mail you registration requirements and a course catalog. If you want to travel to Europe, go online and check out available deals. If you want to ride horses, visit a local stable and ask about their lessons or trail rides. Just take some active steps! No matter how overwhelmed you are right now, doing one thing to make progress on those three dreams will help move you out of any depressing mood. Once a week, review your three dreams and the actions you have taken. Report in to your kitchen-table group.
 3. Get into the habit of writing in your WIT Kit journal every day, even if you only scribble a few lines. It's easiest to make it a habit if you choose a time of day to write—perhaps while sipping your morning tea or for ten minutes before bed. Believe us—this investment will pay off for you in many ways. Your WIT Kit journal is a place to express yourself so that you don't bottle up emotions. You will be able to note progress and have a visible record of where you are now and where you were a short while ago.
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