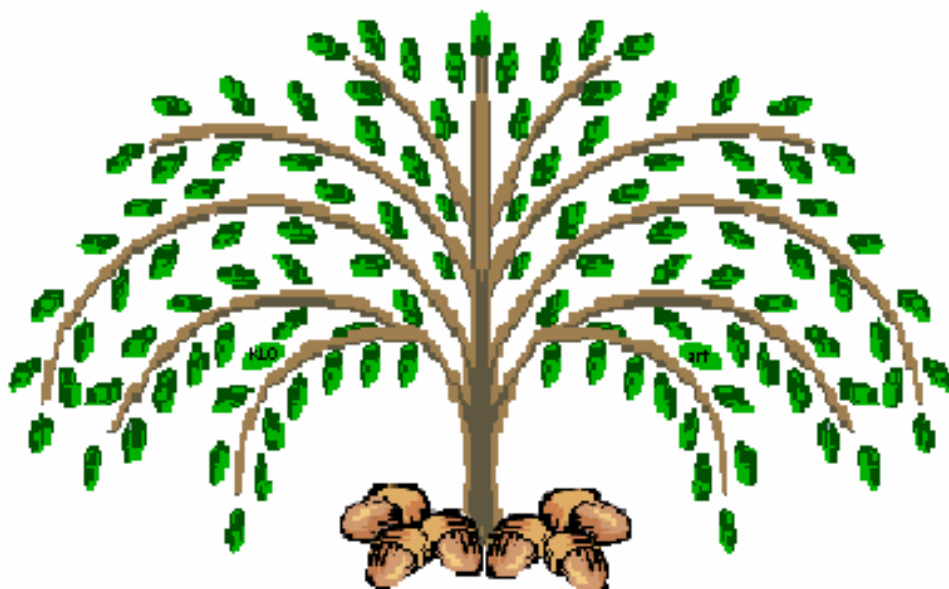


Remember To Remember



**Life Lessons
Too Important To Forget**

*Lizé
Shares Seeds Of Hope*

***Remember
To
Remember***

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Shares Seeds of Hope***

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DEDICATION

To those of you, who like me, make the choice to remain open to learning!

“We must not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we began and to know the place for the first time.”

T. S. Eliot

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“The greatest tragedy in life is what dies inside a person before they are dead.”

Albert Einstein

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Lizé

Lizé has enjoyed varied life experiences as wife, mother, grandmother and friend. Her diverse work life (outside the home) includes assembly line, retail medical sales, field representative and Occupational Therapist. She enjoys singing, song writing, speaking, and reading. Her ongoing search for personal and professional growth led her to become an author so she could SHARE her life lessons with others. She currently owns SHARE Inc., is an Occupational Therapist, and uses her vast personal and professional insight as a Life Skills Consultant. *Remember To Remember: Life Lessons Too Important To Forget!* is the first in a series of insights she wants to share. Look for her next book, coming in 2006, *Remember To Remember: The Rest Of The Story*. Check out her website!

<http://www.SHARELifeSkills.com>

Forthcoming books from Lizé include:

Remember To Remember: The Rest Of The Story
Remember To Remember: Find A Need and Fill It
Remember To Remember: You Do Have CHOICES
Remember To Remember: Pay Now or Pay Later

Lizé believes to “share with others” will make life joyful, no matter what you do in life. SHARE is an acronym sending the message to: Share Hope Awareness Respect Empathy.

“We never lose what we share with others.”

Lizé

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UPDATE

My heartfelt appreciation is extended to Wanda Johnson-Hall, the owner of Goose Creek Publishing. Her input and my research were utilized as SHARE Inc. acquired the ISBN number, barcode, and copyright needed. Then, fear took over my dreams and hope vanished. Churchill said, “Never, never, never, never give up.” So, I picked myself up, learned from my failures and you are sharing in my dream today. Failure is never final!

PROLOGUE

April 7, 2005

WHO AM I?

Will the “Real Me” please stand up!

Just when I think I have come to terms with the above issues, have truly discovered the real me, another part of me surfaces. All those “happily ever after” answers to living life joyfully go down the drain. I am left with the inability to practice what I preach.

While collecting my past writings, expressing my beliefs, my lessons of living on paper, I was on a roll. This book, *Remember To Remember*, was a culmination of a life long dream. Not only was I preparing for my well-deserved retirement, but also was achieving a state of spiritual, emotional and physical fitness long hoped for. I knew where I was going personally and professionally and liked those decisions.

Writing, speaking, and teaching are integral parts of the real me. I believed my challenges, both hills and valleys, could be an inspiration to others. On September 3, 2004, I finished the pre-publication copy of this book. Then, doubts and fears resurfaced in my life.

There remains the struggle to love and trust self, God and others. Sometimes I feel too unique and different. Often I feel like the misfit toy! Then, negative self-talk invades my mind and I fail to talk back. Multiple self-doubts take over my precious moments.

These questions have surfaced since finishing my book. Do I really have something worthwhile to share or is my need to write my lessons in living an ego trip? Why would the opinions of others carry more weight than my own? Is it really possible for me to plant seeds of hope in others? I know, “You can’t live on a mountaintop”, so why do I continue to try? I haven’t always been able to practice what I preach; however, it is my view, that the lessons revealed within are a culmination of the good life.

Hopefully something or someone, within these pages, may inspire you to enhance the joy that can be part of each moment. It is my belief that joy and humor are integral parts of life. We are blessed when we have the capacity for joy and share ourselves with others.

Be True To Yourself!

Lizé

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“We can’t become what we need to be by remaining what we are.”

Oprah

Oh the joy and wonder of books! When I pick up a book, it is with assurance that at least one idea, one seed of hope, will be planted within my mind that can be nurtured and further developed to--help me help myself--on this journey called life.

The awareness of the time and effort required to develop ideas and thoughts into life’s lessons can make me appreciate anyone who takes the time to do so. Whatever our station in life, we need one another. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who have helped me develop in spirit, mind and body, throughout this lifetime. Each and every one of you who crossed my path touched my life in some meaningful way. For instance, over thirty years ago, in one brief moment, a stranger gave me a warm open smile as we passed on the street. She had no way of knowing that I was going through one of the most challenging times of my life; I felt defeated and her accepting smile gave me hope and joy that has been meaningful to me throughout my life.

Even now, as I recall this incident, tears fill my eyes. Just think how often we take for granted those little kindnesses that can mean so much to another. I learned first hand that day how just one person can give another hope. We have the power to touch lives with even the briefest of encounters. I now make it a point to smile and acknowledge others in passing. My smile may lighten another’s load and repay that kindness given to me some thirty years ago. All that I am or hope to be is because of God’s love and numerous individuals who have shared my life. It would be impossible for me to give credit to each and every one and thank them personally. Genetics, environment, religious teaching, family, friends, colleagues, casual acquaintances, past teachers, whether in the classroom or seminars, lectures, books, tapes, along with a diversity of life experiences have influenced my spirit, mind, and body. Many individuals facilitated my growth in challenging me to become the person I am today, while planting seeds of hope for tomorrow. My heartfelt thanks go out to each and every one of you!

I ask for God’s guidance as I step forward to share the seeds of hope received from so many individuals, just like you, throughout my lifetime. You are sure to discover at least one idea, or “ah ha” feeling that can be nurtured and developed to increase joy and satisfaction in your life. You, in turn, can pass it on as you reach out to share yourself with others. Always remain open to learning; truly, we never lose what we share with others!

“When love and skill work together, expect a masterpiece.”

Author Unknown

FOREWORD

“There is nothing new under the sun.”

Book of Ecclesiastes

If you are looking for something “new” in this book, you are sure to be disappointed. Long ago, it was written in the *Book of Ecclesiastes* and remains true to this day, “... there is nothing new under the sun.” Every thought you find in this book has surely been expressed, in one form or another, somewhere and in someplace. Therefore, as I share my seeds of hope, it is well to remember that the real authors of this book are those individuals who have touched my life in so many special ways.

Many people, those who loved me and those who refused to love me, encouraged my search. Then, the skills needed, tools, to deal with the hills and valleys in my life were born. My personal and professional growth was facilitated because of using these tools. That is why I wrote this book called, *Remember To Remember*. Have you ever promised yourself you’d never forget an important life lesson? Has forgetting that lesson caused needless pain to yourself or others? It has for me. I have since discovered that true joy abides in daily life when I--remember to remember--life lessons too important to forget.

You will encounter many sayings and quotes in this book that sustained me and gave me the strength, courage and hope to keep going when the going was tough. One of the most hopeful comes from the *Bible*; if we “...have faith as a grain of mustard seed...” nothing is impossible to us, even moving mountains. A mustard seed is very tiny; however, embracing that small seed of faith has instilled seeds of hope within me to help me move a few mountains in my lifetime.

This book is a “Thank You” to each one of you for the seeds of hope you have planted in my life. In the following pages, you are sure to get a glimpse of how those tiny seeds have grown and been further developed to creatively tell many of my own life lessons. Hopefully, you will also get a hint of what others have shared with you to promote your own growth and joy for living. Within these pages, you are sure to find at least one idea, one seed of hope, that can be further developed to increase the meaning, purpose, and passion in your life. “When the student is ready, the teacher appears.”

**“Nature never repeats herself, and the possibilities of the human soul
will never be found in another.”**

Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Solitude Of Self
1892

INTRODUCTION

“I ain’t much baby but I’m all I got.”

Jeff Lair, Ph.D.

When was the last time you promised yourself you would remember to remember a particular life lesson? How many minutes, days, weeks, months or even years later did you find yourself being stuck in that same old situation again? Why do we get stuck living life and forget to remember those valuable life lessons? What negative consequences play out in our everyday lives because we forget to remember? What can be done to take back our lives and rid ourselves of old destructive tapes that push us to make unwise choices?

These questions I asked have myself many times--telling myself, finally this time, I will remember to remember. I won’t allow myself to make the same old mistakes and relive the pain and regret of the past. Sometimes this is easier said than done!

Many times, I forget to remember how fear can be a destructive force. When fear is the driving force in our lives, it pushes us to settle for basic survival needs instead of taking the risk to grow spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Fear can produce lack of confidence and prevents us from enjoying and sharing our skills and abilities. Yes, fear has often been my enemy--not my friend. Unfounded fears immobilize and thus exercises control over our daily lives. We exist--breath in and out--but real joy in life passes us by.

Just where did all of that fear come from? As a poor-large family, we had survival basics, food and shelter. Children were to be seen but not heard. Sit down, and shut up ” and “Be glad you’ve got a roof over your head and food in your stomach” still echo in my mind. As a child, I only had one pair of shoes; one shoe had a nail in the bottom of the sole. We used a hammer to flatten out the nail, yet it still caused pain when I walked briskly. So, I walked lightly, manipulating my foot so the pain would be less intense. Fear of pain prevented me from placing my feet solidly on the ground. So I tiptoed when I walked---just as I’ve tiptoed through much of my life---trying to avoid emotional pain!

A good deal of my life was spent as a “people pleaser”, trying to fill myself up with other people’s approval. Then, I discovered how pleasing others, at my own expense, promoted an empty feeling inside. No one profits when I erase “the real me”. Acceptance of self cannot be bought. Self-worth does not come from others--it comes from within. True self-worth comes from stepping out--onto firm ground--not tiptoeing through life.

In childhood fear of God and sinfulness of humanity were teachings that took root in my mind. Thankfully, life lessons have taught me that God is unconditional love and He does not play favorites. Love of self and love of God must go hand in hand. When we remember to remember life lessons we, not only, banish negativity and fear from our lives, but also have the power within to create our very special uniqueness to share with others.

“Little *CHOICES* Make The BIG Difference.”

Lizé

SEED ONE

Unfold Your Uniqueness

“We are all in this together by ourselves”

Lily Tomlin

One of my favorites quotes comes from Shakespeare, “To thine own self be true and it must follow as night to day, thou canst’ not be false to any man.” When sharing this quote with others, I add my own postscript, “or woman.” One word or quote when taken apart and explored, like the inquisitive child taking apart a toy, can produce insights that will inevitably impact our lives. Words, like seeds, are planted in our mind throughout our lives. Encouraging words like, “Yes, You can” lift us up and instill hope to journey toward making our dreams a reality. “You can’t do that” are discouraging words that tear at our very souls to make us doubt our unique skills. To thine own self be true flows easily from the lips; yet remind us that being true to ourselves precedes being true to anyone else.

James and Jongeward wrote *Born to Win*, a life-changing book, which planted seeds of hope in me years ago. In the words of e.e. cummings, “To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.” It takes lots of courage and tenacity to be the “real you” in day-to-day life. Yet, being true to yourself is the only way to unfold your uniqueness and develop the skills and talents that only you possess. There is only one you! Never look up to or look down on anyone else. Look, eyeball to eyeball, recognizing how honoring our diversity enhances one another’s lives.

Did you know that no two snowflakes are alike? Yet, they look alike. Those beautiful snowflakes seem the same; yet, when closely inspected, they have many very unique differences. Like snowflakes, we individuals also may appear the same, however, we too are extraordinarily unique and beautiful. Do you embrace your own uniqueness? Are you aware of your special skills and abilities? What dormant skills struggle to break free so you can--help you--help yourself? These questions must be answered if we are to be alive and present in the moment. We can fall into the trap of trying to be like someone else. We are taught early on that we need role models. We do; yet, can we get so misguided in the concept of modeling others that we fail to uncover, unfold, our own special uniqueness?

Certainly, we can share our learning methods, concepts, and techniques for life change. However, each of us must develop our own special unique skills; we need not clone one another. That is an impossible task! It can’t be done. It is destructive to even try. If I try to be like you, I’ll always be second best. If you try to be like me, you’ll always be second best. The good news is this; when we choose to develop and share our own unique talents and abilities--everybody wins. Come with me as we explore countless seeds of hope that will encourage discovering your passion, life purpose and very own uniqueness.

“Act as if it were impossible to fail.”

Dorothea Brande

SEED TWO

Spirit-Mind-Body

“Work harder on yourself than you do on anything else!”

Jim Rohn

To truly discover the real you, your own uniqueness, involves exploring and developing your spirit, mind, and body. They work as a team. How many times in your life have you focused on one aspect of yourself while ignoring the others? It is easy to fall into this trap and then be surprised at the consequences. Have you ever fantasized about what life will be like when? What about thinking when the children grow up, when the bills are paid, when I finish college, when I get another job, when I look like Twiggy and any other number of things, then, I'll be happy. Somewhere along the way this saying passed my way, “Happiness is not a station to arrive at but a manner of traveling.” That is so true.

Isn't it interesting how living in the moment and truly enjoying the journey can produce that elusive condition called happiness? What an important life lesson we can all remember to remember! Many years ago, I became aware of “present moment living” through Wayne Dwyer's book, *Erroneous Zones*. It was such an important concept that I promised myself I'd always live in the moment. Sadly, I forgot to remember this lesson and found myself waiting to be happy when. Life goes on with or without us. How many times have you found yourself living life as if it were a dress rehearsal?

Balance is not a dirty word. So just how can we lead a more balanced life? With so many demands made on our time and talents, what can we do to fit it all in? We are aware of the need to acknowledge and explore our spirit, mind, and body. However, sometimes we can be so task-oriented that we fail to give ourselves time to nurture our spirit, feed our minds, develop our intellect, and give our bodies the respect and care needed to carry us forward. Then, we can be so set on going with the flow that we fail to plan a balanced life.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Jim Rohn who taught me a very valuable life lesson, “Work harder on your self than you do on anything else.” Your self to me, means the whole self--spirit, mind, and body. These last thirty years, this lesson has served me well. Through many successes and failures, I revisited the need to work on myself instead of “them” to meet the daily challenges of life. This philosophy has served me well!

So, just what can we do to nurture our spirit? This is a big question with many seemingly complex answers. More often than not, in the past, focus on the spirit has been limited to equate the love of God or some nebulous feeling we have inside. There is a tendency to negate the role that our humanness, our mind, and body play to affect our spirits. You can't ignore spirit, mind, or body without experiencing the consequences, some of which can be very detrimental to our core personality. The spirit is multifaceted, and there are many ways to nurture our spirit. The spirit can be thought of as our soul, holy spirit, disposition, mood, a life-giving force, ghost, feeling or meaning, mystery, life force, spiritual presence and so much more. Multiple ideas exist regarding the spirit.

My purpose is to convey that life itself involves our spirit in many forms and fashions. You can see the spirit in the sparkle of the eyes or deadness of our very souls, when our eyes have lost their luster. It is evident in our interactions with self and others; it can make or break a relationship and spells success or failure. Our life force guides and controls our mind and our bodies. It is futile attempt to separate the spirit, mind and body!

Because we are all unique, ministering to our spirits may take many forms. One of these simple activities may work for you. A walk in the park, a hike in the woods, sitting outside on the porch swing, listening to the birds, planting flowers, a stroll by the lake, deep breathing, reminiscing, meditation, simple prayers, reading the *Bible* or just an increased awareness of the present moment, are a few simple ways to nourish our spirits.

My former neighbor Kathy may be surprised at the impact she has had on the development of my spirit. She was what I call a “real person” and exhibited a sense of peace and happiness I had not yet experienced. Her spirit was alive and well. When searching for answers, I sought her counsel. She said, quite simply, “Feel the power within your own silence; there you will find your salvation.” Kathy’s spirit and powerful insight colored my life in a very positive way. Thanks to Kathy for a very powerful life lesson!

Who said, “The mind is a terrible thing to waste”? So true, and yet how often in the past have we allowed ourselves to do just that--waste our minds. The *Bible* recounts how “...as a man thinketh so is he...” and I have heard it said, “what we think about, we bring about” many times. We all know that our environment, the people we are around, what we read, watch, and hear, all have a powerful effect on our minds. Yes, even our present and past life experiences, both positive and negative, can invade our minds without us even being aware of it. The awareness of this vital life lesson can impact our entire life!

In my younger years, I didn’t realize that it was normal for us to talk to ourselves from the time we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night. Some of us call this thinking and others call it self-talk. Thoughts can be received like invited guests or become invaders of our minds. Simple self-talk like, “What can I fix for dinner”, “You sure messed up this time”, or “Yes, I can do this” can flow in and out of our minds throughout the day.

Eventually, I came to know how this invasion of the mind was quite normal and will intermittently come to visit us all. It became apparent that what others said to me, had far less impact on the quality of my life, than what I said to myself. Moreover, my past and present interpretations of life events, my own self-talk, had much more impact on the joy and meaning of my daily life, than the event itself. These facts I had learned and even taught in numerous stress management sessions. Yet, after countless books, tapes, and seminars on personal and professional growth, I didn’t have some very important facts.

Sayings and quotes have been an integral part of my personal and professional development. It is like me to jot down important sayings and quotes for recall; these simple messages help me remember to remember. Some years back, on a church bulletin board, I read the saying, “It’s what you learn after you know it all that really counts.” This quote has followed me throughout my lifetime. Hence, one of my greatest gifts is to know-I don’t know. This openness to learning, this life skill, pushes me to look for answers, read, search, and share my lessons of living with others.

One of these searches led me to Dr. Phil's lifestyle change book, *The Ultimate Weight Solution*. His book was the icing on the cake for me in fully understanding and deal with my own self-talk. Two of his seven keys to weight loss freedom, "Right Thinking" and "Healing of Feelings", explored two different types of self-talk. I was well aware of the self-talk in real time, in the here and now. However, I had not fully grasped the meaning and power of "automatic thoughts", (the other self-talk), that also influences our daily actions. When he said, "Your behavior is being controlled by an internal negative attitude that you don't even recognize", and "The good news is that these thoughts, like your real-time self-talk, can be controlled, challenged, and changed". I finally got it!

I became acutely aware of the automatic internal self-talk and its ability to take over my life without me even being aware of it! Moreover, I realized why, over thirty years ago, I was able to give up the habit of smoking. I had been puzzled by the fact that it had been so simple to quit this addictive habit. In recounting to others how I quit smoking, it was amazing to me how that decision came so decisively and quickly. Listen to why!

When I finally realized the effect smoking was having on my life, I really wanted to quit. It took a couple of cigarettes just to get going in the morning. One day, while driving to work and smoking a cigarette, I said to myself, "I really must stop smoking." A little voice inside quickly recounted, "You can't quit smoking." Then, I immediately replied, without hesitation, "Who said I can't?" I put out that cigarette and never ever smoked again. I didn't know why--I just did. Often, I tried to understand why it was so simple to give up such an addictive habit, so I could heal other areas in my life. The why was elusive then; however, now I know why this habit was challenged and conquered that very day.

My self-talk in real time had been, "I really must stop smoking." My internal negative attitude (my self-talk) said, "You can't quit smoking." and guess what? I did exactly what Dr. Phil had said we could do. I talked back. I challenged that self-talk by saying, "Who said I can't?" and never smoked again! Why is this realization so important? Dr. Phil teaches that if you do it once, you can do it again. It puts the power back into the present instead of the past. Don't let negative self-talk guide you. Talk back!

Who among us would let a two hundred pound bully take over our physical selves and beat us up royally, without a fight? I realized that allowing self-defeating thoughts to hang around was like allowing that big bully to invade my space. Criticisms, doubts, fears, failures, and regrets from the past invade our thoughts. We may encounter self-talk such as "You are not smart enough, you think too much, you are too emotional, you don't have the skill" tell us we are defective in some way. The idea of not being good enough, not being ok--warts and all--can influence every moment of our lives, whether we know it or not.

One of the neatest things about Dr. Phil is his ability to lead you, step-by-step, so you can develop a strategy to solve the problem. He says, "By changing the way you think, you can change the way you feel and act." This process begins with awareness. My very favorite quote on awareness is, "Not everything that is faced can be changed; however, nothing can be changed until it is faced." Increased awareness guides us to the tools we need to make life-changing decisions; we are not robots. Embrace positive self-talk and challenge the negative self-talk in order to create the type of life we can share with others.

Sayings and quotes continue to be powerful tools in my life journey. Something as simple as, “Yes I can.” or profound as Winston Churchill’s shortest speech, “Never, Never, Never, Never give up.” still impacts my life choices. Why not take advantage of the countless resources available to nourish and expand your mind? Never ever stop learning!

Increased awareness of our self-talk, both positive and negative, puts us in the drivers seat to determine how we will journey through our lives. How will you travel? Will you travel in a modern, fine-tuned vehicle or in an old Junker that barely gets you there? It is your choice! What messages do you need to confront today? Are negative thoughts keeping you stuck in mediocrity? What must you embrace to create the life you want? By all means, feed your mind. Read, study, and search to expand your reach, and share your insights with others. However, never lose sight of the fact that your self-talk guides you in day-to-day activities. Thoughts move you forward to achieve your goals or can stop you dead in your tracks. You can decide. It’s your choice. This is your life!

In the midst of writing this book, as Paul Harvey would say, I discovered “the rest of the story” on self-talk. At Jim Rohn’s Leadership Seminar, in 2004, many speakers touched on the power of thought that guides our lives. It was brought home, time and again, how the mind, our thoughts, our self-talk contribute to the success and failures in our lives. Yet, it was a young man attending the seminar like myself, named Ramon Sanchez, whose strategy has come to mind, time and again, since that day.

Ramon was carrying two bags full of materials to feed his mind that day, as he left the auditorium. Our paths crossed and he shared some of his life story. Then, I shared my challenge to move beyond negative thoughts and fears to embrace true joy in my life. His strategy was, “Don’t feed the bad dog.”. His concept for dealing with self-talk was a good dog and bad dog view. In essence, starve the bad dog by refusing to feed it with negative self-talk. Ramon revealed openness to learning and was also feeding the good dog on a continuous basis. In very simple ways, we can influence one another’s lives. Ramon took the time to share his own life lessons on self-talk. By sharing his use of the good dog, bad dog philosophy, he gave me another tool that I could use to--help me help myself.

Countless times since my return home, I have refused to feed my negative thoughts by recalling, “Don’t feed that bad dog.” Moreover, I discovered that no matter how successful, rich, famous, pretty, fit, and disciplined we appear, everyone must meet this daily challenge of overcoming negative doubts, fears, and self-talk. We must not forget to remember how we can starve our negative thoughts when we, “Don’t feed the bad dog.”

Our **bodies**, like our automobiles, planes, and trains take us to our destination. It is mode of travel, the vehicle we use to help us maneuver about in our every day lives. The health of our spirit, mind, and body may well determine the quality of our travels in life.

Needless to say many factors, outside of our control, interfere with the health of all three aspects of the self. For years, I have asked why there are such vast differences in the natural gifts we have all been given. I wish I could say here that I had found the answer. I haven’t. However, the way I choose to make some sense of it all is to trust that the big picture, life itself, is like the back of a beautiful tapestry. The knots, twists, and turns on the back of the tapestry do not reveal the beauty of the finished product.

For those of us who believe in God, we can turn our doubts and fears over to him and deal with what is apparent to our limited intelligence. This requires faith, hope, and trust. Life experience has led me to gain new insights and calm my frustrations from unanswered whys. The whys will continue and answers will evolve as we move forward.

These past ten years, I have been privileged to share my skills as an Occupational Therapist. Helping others help themselves with various challenges has been a rewarding and multifaceted learning experience. My close connection with other lives colored my perception about the connection between spirit, mind, and body. It led me to observe wellness as a holistic experience. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all the staff, patients and families who allowed me into their lives. As a therapist, I gained so much more than I could possibly have given. This life experience has enhanced my life.

Some individuals I encountered previously had strong bodies and had been living a healthy, happy lifestyle. Others revealed their unhappiness and unhealthy choices that had led to unresolved stress and a weakened body. Both had been overcome with some type of physical challenge that resulted in the need for treatment. Some had one medical issue to overcome, and others had multiple physical concerns to address. There were individuals whose spirit motivated them to deal with their physical limitations, while others lacked the spirit to even begin the fight. The untreatable memory deficits of some, as well as lack of motivation from others, had an effect on therapy's ability to promote and increase their wellness. It was evident how the spirit and mind impact the body and its ability to heal.

Individuals with, what seemed to be, impossible to overcome physical challenges, were motivated to work very hard. In time, they returned home to enjoy their previous daily activities. Other individuals with illnesses or mental deficits, through no fault of their own, were unable to regain their prior independence level. They became dependent on families and friends or required nursing home placement. Moreover, some of the individuals with minor physical difficulties refused to help themselves and also became dependent on family, friends, or went to a nursing home to be cared for.

I saw first-hand how the spirit and mind can positively or negatively influence an individual's ability to assist in healing their body. Some individuals were content to give total responsibility to others for the care of their bodies. Other individuals allowed the professionals to skillfully assist with their care, while assuming responsibility to do what they could to restore their health. Bare in mind, this is a simplistic, brief view of very complex life situations. These events are recounted here to share how the spirit, mind, and body must work together as a team. The body's health is affected by the quality of our spirit and mind. While it does not reflect the whole picture, the individual's desire and motivation to participate does impact outcomes and quality of life.

We who are blessed with good health do not have the various life challenges experienced by my previous patients. We live in a world that has given us multiple ways to care for our bodies. It can be mind boggling to sort the wheat from the chaff. Various types of multi media exist to promote health and encourage us to stop the cycle of weight gain and loss. A "hard body" is a goal for many, while others try to realistically maintain a fit, healthy body. There are multiple weight-management plans and exercise groups to choose

from. Health food stores, specialty markets and boundless fat free foods are available. Numerous fitness programs have been created for both men and women, at home or at the gym. It is all ours for the taking! The big challenge is to take what?

What are the real facts, and what will fit my lifestyle? Believe me, I've tried it all, and it truly can be--a jungle out there. This is one area where your uniqueness plays a major role in your success. There are different levels of wellness and fitness. One size does not fit all! Living life, movements, self-talk, and food intake all impact our fitness.

A hard body may be an achievable goal for some; yet, for others, this is very unrealistic and spells defeat before you even begin. What worked for me is following the advice of that old song that says, "Don't Fence Me In". I finally realized that in order for me to create the healthy body I desired, I must begin to practice what I preached. It is like me to consistently teach others, "Follow the spirit of the law not the letter of the law."

Yet, I had been using black and white thinking when it came to my physical fitness choices. I was one of those people who had to follow any plan I tried, to the letter of the law, or else felt that I was a failure regardless of the results. Instead of using basic ideas and developing my own specific plan, I tried to fit into another's neat little box. In spite of many successes along the way, I failed to maintain my fitness time and time again.

Don't get me wrong there are weight management systems with good ideas; however, one size does not fit all! That was my big mistake. I shut off my smarts and relied exclusively on the advice of others. You can't give your power away and be content within yourself long-term. It finally dawned on me how abstract thinking, thinking out of the box, can be so very beneficial for lifestyles changes. I had been trying to fit into another person's master plan instead of being eclectic, choosing parts of various plans, adding my own creative ideas to design my own personal healthy lifestyle.

Giving up our perfectionist attitudes, setting realistic goals, and designing our own specific lifestyle can helped us understand the process needed to achieve and maintain our own healthy body. Certainly, look to others for guidance and direction. Hours of thought and skill are required to put ideas out into the universe. However, never let those ideas replace your own good judgment about what fits your needs. Believe in yourself and your ability to modify your own behaviors. Find what works for you, and take action.

Finally, remember how the spirit, mind, and body must be utilized to build the life you deserve and were created for. The challenge remains to make life decisions that embrace our special uniqueness. We must incorporate all aspects of ourselves into those daily life choices. Bend, but don't break. In the past, I was like the willow tree--people and circumstances--controlled my life choices; then, I developed the rigidity and strength of the oak tree. This was limiting, yet, served me well for a time. Now, my intention is to integrate the strength of the oak tree and the flexibility of the willow into my daily life. Living life is a process; remain open to learning. Explore multiple ideas and incorporate your uniqueness and creativity to design your own special lifestyle. You deserve it!

Yes I Can!
Lizé

SEED THREE
Hills and Valleys
“You Can’t Live On A Mountain Top”
John Reed

Were you one of the fortunate individuals who learned early on that the human condition involves both hills and valleys? Perhaps you knew how life itself consists of the bitter and the sweet, negative and positive, darkness and the light. Hopefully, you developed the insight, courage, and skill to enjoy the hills and journey skillfully through your valleys. Not me, for much of my life, I felt defective because I couldn’t make all of those valleys go away. I bought the Cinderella story--hook, line and sinker. Then, I felt inferior because I couldn’t live happily ever after. There was a driving need inside to fix me!

Thankfully, my thirst for knowledge led me to discover the futility of trying to live on a mountaintop. No one does! When I learned, “Pain is inevitable; misery is optional.” it truly changed my life. My acceptance of both the bitter and the sweet tamed my search for the perfect life. This opened my mind and heart to new adventures. When my perception of what life “should be” changed, I changed. Only then could I develop the strength and skills needed to live life fully. Let me share parts of my journey as I discovered this life lesson. New insights into another’s path may well plant tiny seeds of hope. Just one tiny seed of hope can grow and develop to increase the peace and joy in our lives.

Change is not an isolated event. Change begins at conception and continues throughout our lifetimes. These multiple changes consist of both hills and valleys. Some of those valleys involve death, disease, or disaster that are beyond our control. Many of these losses are part of the human condition. Our journey through the pain associated with loss affects every aspect of daily life. How we grieve is a very personal process. While others may give us much needed comfort and support, they cannot complete our journey. Some of us get stuck in the process and allow it to color our remaining days. It takes tremendous amounts of faith and courage to walk through the grief, grow, and go on with life.

Some of us may even assume responsibility for death, disease, or disaster that is outside of our control. It is not logical; I don’t know all the reasons why. I only know that I was one of those unfortunate people. Initially, I was reluctant to share these very private life lessons. It is painful to revisit them. Hopefully, sharing just a bit of my needless pain may help another person gain insight into their own pain and stop playing the “what if “ game. What if is a senseless waste of precious time! We can learn from one another’s life experience. I learned first-hand how unresolved grief accumulates. Grief does not go away; the pain must be dealt with directly to heal. Time does not heal all wounds. Grief unresolved colors every waking moment of our lives consciously or unconsciously.

My grief journey has been a long and painful one. Many times I have even felt responsible for death itself. If I had been more, done more, perhaps death would not have come my way. Have you ever played the “what if” game? What impact did this have on your daily life? How can we work through our loss and heal the grief that colors our days?

These powerful questions can be answered when we search and find new discoveries inside ourselves. Coming to terms with unresolved grief gave me back my life.

My first traumatic loss occurred when my second child, Anita Lynn, died. In my mind's eye, I can still see her laying between her Dad and I in a tiny baby blue gown. We were both so proud and happy that night. The next morning she was dead. They called it SIDS, or crib death, but she was not in her crib; she was in bed with me. Even then, I thought if I hadn't put her in bed with me, she would still be alive. My fears and, "what if", haunted me inside. It was too painful to talk about. Who could or would really understand the pain of loss? Death was not a subject to talk about. Who could I turn to, to deal with my guilt and grief? I tried to cover my pain by pushing it down inside.

Growing up, we had been taught that big boys and big girls don't cry. What needless pain has occurred in many of our lives because of such false claims? Thankfully, we learn in later years this is not true. Healthy big boys and big girls do cry! Through my volunteer work with Hospice, I learned the healing power of tears. When you have an infection inside your body, it must be cleaned out thoroughly to heal. When you have pain in your heart, God's gift to you is a healing power from releasing our pain through tears. Crying soothes the weary spirit, mind, and body. When our baby died, I didn't know big girls do cry. I stuffed my emotions, withdrew, felt heart-wrenching pain, shame, guilt, and fear.

Although I did not realize it at the time, my lack of closure affected all my relationships and the quality of life. The grief process is as unique as we are. We must take the time needed to recover from our losses. You pay now or pay later. The price is too high to pay later, work through your grief now! Healthy relationships can be destroyed by grief.

Next, came the death of my marriage. Divorce affected every area of my life. I not only lost my husband but also the children lost the security of a "real family". I often asked myself if divorce was one of those losses that is considered "out of our control"? For me it was, because my plan for our marriage had been to live happily ever after. He was my first real love, "puppy love"? We married very young, just babies having babies. We didn't have the maturity to maneuver the multiple challenges of married life. Looking back, I can see that because I didn't have the ability to love myself, I couldn't truly love someone else. I was trying to fill the emptiness inside with another person's love. It can't be done. Painfully, there would be no fifty-year anniversary celebration for us!

Once again, I felt totally inadequate; I felt at fault. If I had been pretty enough, sexy enough, had done enough, just been enough, then I could have made my marriage work. Divorce was a very dirty word. The fact that I could not keep my husband happy had to mean I was defective in some way. My beliefs added to my already low self-esteem. There were no support groups for divorced people. Our church did not offer to assist my family in any way. Moreover, I knew that should I choose to date and eventually remarry, I would be excommunicated from my church. Sink or swim was the option, and often I sank. I was between a rock and a hard place. Talk about a big valley; this had to be one. I was a single parent, alone with five children, and did not have the self-love, skills, or support to truly be a good mom. Certainly, there were those who tried to help in their own way; however, their own unmet needs had to come first. We stumbled forward, together, as best we could.

Have you heard it said that the secrets that keep us sick? Well, for me, being divorced was one of those secrets. It was not something I wanted to talk about. I felt shame and felt I could not be whole without being married. Sorry to say, I was more aware of my own pain than the children's during those days. My goal was to escape the pain as best as I could, so I started the dating game. It was my way to look for validation and acceptance.

Yes, it was like the old song, "Looking for love in all the wrong places." There were multiple valleys and very few hills in those days. Looking back, the few hills along the way were simple, few, but joyful. In spite of my immaturity, my children managed to pull us all through the tough times. Yes, I was devastated and lacked the emotional maturity to handle the valleys with grace. The tack in my shoe and the pain in my heart were unbearable at times. In essence, the children did not have a healthy father or mother available to them; we both failed. Looking back, my unawareness of their pain, not truly being there for my children is one of my major regrets. Emotional absence leaves scars.

Have you ever had a toothache? The intensity of the pain causes you to focus on two things, your own pain and the dentist who will relieve that pain. I had a BIG toothache and sought multiple ways to relieve that unbearable pain. While this approach momentarily eased my pain, it negated my own power and further diminished my lack of self-worth. Problems to be faced as a divorced woman and mother did not go away; they intensified.

The expression that a broken clock is right at least twice a day is so true. In spite of my divorce, my husband gave me six extraordinary children and my desire to read and write. Moreover, the pain of divorce led me to search for answers. Counseling did not save our marriage; however, it did save me. My need to figure it out led me to books such as, *Born To Win*, by James and Jongeward, *I'm OK You're OK* by Thomas A. Harris, and *Games People Play* by Eric Berne. Then, I read books like, *Erroneous Zones* by Wayne Dwyer, *The Art Of Loving* by Erich Fromm, and *Wake Up And Live* by Dorteia Brande. There were countless books, tapes, speakers and seminars that planted seeds of hope in my life. I began to discover some very valuable life lessons. Fortunately, Jim Rohn came into my world with his life changing, "Adventures in Achievement" tape series. As he shared his own life lessons, it became evident that I needed to change to create a better life. His philosophy and insights led me to look inside myself, find my own answers and sooth my own weary soul. It took many years before I understood and embraced his tape that revealed, "The Day That Turns Your Life Around".

Thankfully, my children grew to be caring, responsible, independent individuals in spite of their immature parents. Since those days, I have come to realize you cannot give what you do not have. It is like me, even in my lowest moments, to give what I have and--so I did. I had very little, so I gave very little. In the *Bible*, it recounts how just giving one penny, if that is all you have, can be the ultimate sacrifice.

Remember to remember that you cannot escape life's pain by running away. You must face both pain and fear. Certainly, you may look outside for comfort and counsel; however, the solutions you seek to your specific challenges are inside yourself. Keep looking for support until you find it. Be aware that any relationship, especially marriage, involves the commitment of two mature people who love themselves first.

In my day, it was considered selfish to love yourself. Self-love and selfishness were said to be the same. Certainly, this is not true! This unnecessary falsehood was promoted and believed by many. The value of self-love was not promoted. Yet, where does it say very clearly, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.”? Love of self precedes love of neighbor.

Then, the next loss in my life was so devastating that it almost destroyed me. Words are inadequate to describe the pain resulting from this sudden, unexpected death. This loss forced me to look back into every pain of the past. Little did I know how much grief had been accumulated and was left unresolved. About 8 years after the divorce from my children’s father, I had remarried. I recall our first encounter, our first dance, when I let Gordon know I had 5 children. It was thought that a man would be crazy to take on a wife with children, so it was like me to make this fact known up front. That first dance led to a dating relationship for about seven years; then we were married. My husband assumed responsibility for both my children and me. We both were divorced and had children previously so we became known as a blended family. It is not always easy for children to share their parents with another man or woman. Many challenges and adjustments awaited us; some hills were manageable while others were not. Within our journey, we shared hills and valleys. We shared experiences of joy, laughter, fear, sorrow and yes, even tears.

That upcoming July we would have been married six years; however, on March 2, 1984, I walked in to find my husband dead. No warning, no sickness; he just died. Once again, I blamed myself for his death. If I had only been there, maybe he would have lived. He needed me; I was not there. The doubts and fears took over my life. I could have been a better wife; I should have known his past discomfort was not indigestion. For me, death had a strange way of causing me to look past my husband’s humanness, so I canonized him. His goodness and strength were uppermost in my mind, and any of his faults were minimized. Once again, I turned on myself, highlighted my faults and felt inadequate.

Unrealistic? Yes. Yet, I blamed myself for every disagreement we had ever had. I was stunned and devastated, yet life had to go on, didn’t it? Again, I stumbled forward, stuffed my feelings and thoughts to escape the pain of loss. Was it illogical, irrational to think I had control over life and death? Yes, it certainly was! My husband was strong and decisive now where would my strength come from? My husband was dead; I was alone once again to face all of those unresolved hurts and pain of the past and the present.

So much happened in those next ten years it would be too mind-boggling to relate the details of our journey. These years were a mixture of multiple hills and valleys. The hills were diminished because of my unresolved pain and lack of worthiness. All the garbage of the past had not been pitched out! The pains and hurts had not been faced, sorted through and resolved, in spite of my endless search for the answers.

Thankfully, after much internal struggle, I have come to terms with the death of my husband. He and I were two good people trying to build a life together; we both had unresolved issues from our past that colored our lives. We built the best life possible with the tools we had to work with. We shared more hills than valleys. We shared a part of one another’s life, caring and loving to the best of our abilities. We both wanted to give our

best to the children. Yet, you can't give what you don't have. We failed some, and we succeeded some. We learned, first-hand, that you can't live on a mountaintop.

Our time together was too brief. Looking back, it is as if he knew it would be. On the very first card he gave me, he wrote these words. "For but a little while the paths of our lives run together. Therefore, if your path encounters any hardship, so does mine. Let me share a walk with you, because it is for but a little while." No doubt, if he were alive today, he would be one of my biggest cheerleaders. Remember how brief life really is, even at it's longest. Live each moment as if it is your last! If you have lost a loved one by any means whatsoever, grieve the pain in your very own unique way. Cherish the memories, and learn from each one of them as you go on with your life.

Learned that, "Ignorance is not bliss". There were many caring loving people in my life during this time. However, my mind was focused on those few who were quick to find fault and expected perfection. Slowly but surely, each loss, each fear and hurt had to be faced and resolved so I could move forward. Many years were spent in needless pain and suffering, because of ignorance. Not knowing, not having life lesson teachers early in my life was more hurtful than any poverty that I experienced. Who was available to tell me about normal and abnormal grief? I didn't know how to grieve.

Maturity comes in all forms. Lack of emotional maturity impacted my grief process. This unresolved grief impacted my relationship with self and others. It is imperative to learn that you must face the fear and pain. It won't go away; it must be resolved. It will diminish your good times and make the challenging times almost unbearable. In the past, we did not have the needed support to progress through the stages of grief. We do now.

There is *Good Grief*, as explained by a little book that was required reading, when I was a Hospice volunteer. Grief can be worked through and utilized to help us be more empathetic and caring to self and others. There is both darkness and light; we can enjoy the light as we release our pain. When our awareness increases, we can seek out those individuals who can support our growth through the grief process. We need one another!

Perhaps the best thing that happened through my grief journey was to finally make peace with God. I had heard the term, false pride; however, I never acknowledged that I had it. As long as I can remember, there had been a need to be independent and do it all myself. It was all right for others to need help but not me. It was ok if God wanted to be my partner; however, no way was I going to turn my life over to him. I still vividly recall the day, standing on that green shag carpet in our family room, when I hit bottom; I could not go on alone. My husband had been dead for several months. I was weary from the struggle. In tears, I screamed for God to take over my life; I had really done a lousy job on my own. I didn't realize it then; yet, looking back, that was the budding seed of my faith.

The seed of hope had been planted in my life. It has grown and developed since that day. No, it has not been a "happily ever after" event. No bells or whistles exploded. Yet, that was the day I was introduced to the love and mercy of God. Since that day, I have come to know that love of God and self is inseparable. "Do I have to give up me to be loved by you"? The good news is, God says, "No you don't." Just be you!

Many of you may have encountered similar types of losses and hardships. Possibly, you have already learned some important life lessons. Yet, there may be others stuck in the grief. Hopefully, seeing these words in print and reading the message behind them will give you the courage to seek for answers to heal your hurts. Search for ways to come out on the other side of the grief process. For me, knowing that each and every individual who touches our life will live on within us has been healing. We learn from one another both negatively and positively. Some of our most negative experiences can teach and mold us to be the unique creation God has designed us to be. I don't know why or how. I just know it has been true in my life. What we share or what has been shared with us lives on and on.

We truly never lose what we share with others! This quote has been very meaningful to me. "Some people come into our lives and quickly go; others leave footprints on our hearts and we are never ever the same." I can let go of my grief, cherish the memories, the life lessons, and pass them on to promote healing of self and others.

Thankfully, most of our valleys are not traumatic life and death situations. We are all exposed to daily annoyances, hurts, loss, frustrations, and stresses socially, at home or on the job. The book, *Good Grief*, taught me the importance of grieving the small losses. Getting the flu, burning dinner, moving to a new home, changing jobs, or retirement are just a few changes that can produce stress. Sometimes, we purposefully make the change; others times, the change is forced upon us. How many of us have been hit by the empty nest syndrome when our children leave to pursue a career, marry, or move out of state? Sometimes we must lose to gain. "You can't steal second base with one foot on first."

Contrary to some popular beliefs, we can't have it all. That is not negative--it just is. While writing this book, I lose the time that could be utilized in another activity. Lack of faith is not the reason we feel lower than a snake's belly at times. It's the adjustment, the transitions we make when bumping up against some unmet need or loss. Have you ever lost a job promotion or been the scapegoat at home or at work? Backbiting, gossip, just being "it" can occur in social situations, home, or job to cause needless hurt and grief.

Competition can be pleasurable to the winners but painful to those who have truly done their best and finished last. Not everyone has the luxury of having a support system to pick up the pieces when they are down and out. Increased awareness can minimize the stress and needless pain of any type of loss. Yes, needless pain exists when we believe that we should be above feelings of loss or grief. Loss in one form or another comes to all of us. How we respond to those daily life events will make us become better or bitter.

Some individuals manage to "go with the flow", and others may tend to take those daily challenges personal and play the, "Why me?" game. Then, there are those who are wise enough to grieve through the small and large valleys to learn and grow as individuals. Many courageous individuals privately and publicly use their own lessons in living to help themselves and others find joy in daily living. In grief as well as daily life, Kenny Rogers sings it so clearly and powerfully, "You gotta know when to hold em, know when to fold em," and yes even sometimes we must "know when to walk away."

We have all been exposed to those who forget how an elephant's an elephant, a turtle's a turtle, and a rabbit's a rabbit, each displaying basic inborn traits and

characteristics. No a fish cannot swim out of water. Unrealistic demands and expectations greet us all. We encounter needless frustrations and stress when we try to put a square peg into a round circle. Stay away from situations or people who require you to be less than what you are. There is a lot of wisdom and positive motivation in that old song that says, "I gotta be me."

Joy, oh how joy can abound and be found on the hilltops! Why does happiness, mountain top experiences, require fewer descriptive words than the valleys? Just saying the word "joy" produces a sense of peace and brings a smile to this face. Simple pleasures, like a smile, sunset, handshake, or hug can be overlooked, if we are unaware. Fun, delight, happiness, a sense of well being, are but a few words that come to mind, when I speak of joy. Some of my greatest mountaintop experiences were, the birth of my six children, getting my GED, my quartet, the Cardinal IV, winning first place medals, running and completing my first three mile race, the Citizens Challenge, graduating from College and currently writing, being the author of my very first book, *Remember To Remember*.

My greatest joy, by far, is being my children's Mom. We stuck together through the valleys and have shared many hilltop experiences. They are my greatest teachers. When nothing else could or would, they gave my life meaning and purpose. My legacy to my children is leaving behind those lessons in living that have helped me help myself. Daily joys of sensing God's presence in our lives, the hugs of children and grandchildren, a touch, a breeze, birds singing, sharing time with friends and family, are but a few of life's little treasures. What gladdens your heart? What memory brings a smile to your face and joy in your heart? Joy can be found in the little things. Fun and joy are integral parts of living life fully. Discover your joys! Simple joys can be found in your present moments.

Present moment living involves both joy and sorrow. Since hills and valleys are a normal part of living, why do some of us strive to live on a mountaintop? How does seeking a dead-end street affect the quality of our lives? What makes some of us equate the inability to remain on top of the hill as failure? My search for the answers to these questions led me to find out how words, and the meanings we attach to those words, can impact and color our daily lives. One seed, planted in the mind, can be developed to enhance our lives or can create needless unnecessary heartaches. I found this out firsthand.

Come with me as we discover some powerful insights that transformed my life. My perception, that it was an achievable goal to live on a mountaintop, interfered with the joy and quality of my life. Perception used to be a fascinating, yet nebulous word to me. The seed was planted to explore the meaning behind perception, when I was a fifty-year-old college student. My education led me to explore terms like perception and related terms such as model, theory, assumption, and frame of reference. However, at that time, I did not fully understand the meaning and impact those terms had on my daily life. My previous understanding was limited, since I had always been a black and white thinker. The term abstract thinking was simply that, a term. Certainly, there was only one right way. Who would ever believe that there was more than one way to view right or wrong, good or bad? Not me! I was taught the letter of the law; no way could I ever entertain the spirit of the law. This concrete thinking limited my perception and my learning from daily experiences.

Throughout my lifetime, I had studied through different methods and media to find the truth. Hints, along the way, told me my views were not adding quality to my life. Have you ever met anyone resistant to change? If a person finds a better way why would they refuse to change? They say, “I’ve done it this way for over twenty years.” Is it an asset to be set in our ways? It’s a mystery to me; yet, in some respects, I was one of these people.

Words have the power to change lives, if we let them! Stephen Covey’s words in the, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* introduced me to the term paradigm. The pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place. Covey explained how the word paradigm “is more commonly used today to mean a model, theory, perception, assumption, or frame of reference.” He told how a paradigm is the way we perceive, understand, and interpret our world. Then, he recounted, in detail, an exercise he encountered at a Harvard Business School. This explanation gave me true insight into perception and why “.... two people can see the same thing, disagree, and yet both be right. It’s not logical; it’s psychological.”

Briefly, the exercise involved passing out cards with two different images to the class; one side received a card with an old lady and the other a young lady. The students looked at these images for about ten seconds. Then, the instructor projected a combination of both images onto the screen. He asked the students what they saw. Most students said what they had seen for ten seconds, either an old lady or young lady. Arguments ensued over who was seeing the accurate image. Most students knew there were two points of view; yet, they persisted in their own viewpoint. A student began to point out details of the images on the screen and finally the students saw both the old lady and the young lady.

Yes, there are always two sides to every story. How often have we refused to see the other person’s point of view? What impact does our perception have on our lives? It colors our view of the world and, thus, our daily lives. The realization for me that life consists of both hills and valleys meant I needed to change my worldview. When my perception changed, what the good life really means also changed. For serious students of life, I would highly recommend Covey’s detailed account of this perception exercise, paradigm, and his explanation for change, the “paradigm shift”. It is impossible to recount the multitude of life lessons learned in this brief synopsis. Covey’s teaching and insights were seeds that I continue to nourish and develop to create changes my life.

Good books truly have the power to change lives. Jim Rohn taught me, “All leaders are readers”, and also not to ever give up the noble search for the answers to life’s challenges. Reading is only one method that can be utilized to figure it out, to discover life lessons. Your own personal life experience and the experiences of others, both positive and negative, can be tools to build a better life for you and others. Yes, life involves both hills and valleys. You can’t live on a mountaintop; however, you don’t need to dwell in the valleys. Every waking moment, there is hope for those who look for it. Each moment is a gift. Look inside yourself and others to find the joy. It is always available to those who increase their awareness of the precious gift called life.

**“The sun comes up every morning whether we see it or not”
Gordon Reed**

SEED FOUR

Freedom Responsibility and Independence

“I Have A Dream.”

Martin Luther King

As I begin this thought-provoking chapter I recall that although it is said, “All men are created equal”, this topic is highly debatable. The country you were born in, your genetics, being born with physical and mental handicaps, a family or lack of family, poverty or prosperity, the spiritual, mental, emotional, as well as physical environments, have all had powerful effects on who we really are. Moreover, the people we were exposed to early on taught us by their habits, customs, what they did and failed to do in their own lives. We consciously or subconsciously observed their attitudes, their spiritual, mental, emotional and physical health. We incorporated some of those habits and philosophies into our own lives. Our past has impacted our own growth and development. Our perception and our view of the world have also been influenced by multiple factors outside our control.

My experience has been very limited with individuals who have highly restrictive physical and mental handicaps. I have been blessed to be born in America and have never known the fear and oppression felt by those who are not born free. Therefore, I am not qualified to address freedom, responsibility, and independence for individuals in these specific areas. My views on freedom, responsibility and independence will be about ways we limit our own abilities or allow others to restrict us in our day-to-day lives. Exploration can lead to knowledge and, in turn, can lead to action. Positive action leads to positive change. Positive change begins when we accept the responsibility to claim our own freedom and independence. “If it is to be, it’s up to me!”

The lucky ones have been exposed to individuals who exhibit responsibility for their own lives. They lived life knowing every pot must sit on its own bottom. They not only respected their own needs but also demonstrated respect for others. They promoted freedom and independence. They did not try to make others over into their own image and likeness. Wow! What a life that would have been. Right?

Many of us had little, if any, exposure to these types of individuals. We were in a “sink or swim” environment. The “go along to get along” approach to gaining approval and acceptance was the norm. There were those of us who lived our lives being people pleasers. Oh, we may not have called it by that name. We gave up our needs and gave the responsibility for our lives over to others. This happens in so many subtle ways when we get caught up in self-sacrifice. We may equate self-sacrifice with being responsible. We fail to realize, “He who whittles himself to suit everyone, soon whittles himself away.” One of the biggest detriments to freedom and independence is fear. Multiple types of fear affect our spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health. Spiritual fear followed me throughout my life. Bare in mind, I have been very impressionable throughout my lifetime. Many individuals encountered similar experiences and shook them off like water off a duck’s back. This was not true for me. My early teachings instilled the fear of dying, hell fire, and damnation. Punishment was sure to follow me since I’d never be good enough.

In school, the teacher drew a big circle on the blackboard. Inside that big black circle signified how your soul looked with mortal sin. If you died with mortal sin on your soul you would go to Hell. She then put little dots in another circle on the board and said, "This is the way venial sin looks". If you died with venial sin, you must burn in purgatory to rid yourself of sin. You had to be perfect to go to heaven. With all sincerity, even at the young age of nine, I did want to be perfect. Yet, even then, I knew deep down that I couldn't be. My fate was to burn in purgatory or be in hell someday because of my sins.

The God of fear was what I was taught throughout my younger days. God was waiting for me to screw up, and I didn't disappoint him. Thoughts, not just acts, could be sinful and bad. Confession and a firm purpose of amendment could cleanse the soul of sin. After going to confession, to ask for forgiveness, I'd promised to be better. I really wanted to keep that promise and be the good little girl. Yet, I failed, time and time again. The impossible standard of being perfect had been taught so nothing was ever good enough. This fear of never being good enough dominated my life.

In my day, children were to be seen and not heard; there was no one to talk to. No one seemed to know or care enough to teach me the real truth about being human. There was needless pain and suffering for that little girl and surely others like her. Spiritual fear affected me emotionally, mentally, and physically. For example, when I was about nine years old, my sister and I saw a plane writing in the sky. In our little town, we had never seen such a sight. Surely, it must be the end of the world. The end of the world and the last judgment were hot topics in those days. So, fearing death and Hell, I knelt down by my sister's side and prayed the Act of Contrition. If you said that prayer and was truly sorry, you could be forgiven. Yes, hell could be avoided with sincere contrition.

Fear followed me into my adult life, even as a young wife and mother. It facilitated needless pain and interfered with my interactions with others. What a heavy burden to attempt perfection, knowing you never are good enough. Yes, a waste of precious life! It is my hope that you have been blessed to know the God of love. Fear motivation is not the pathway to God. "Ignorance is not bliss!" Certainly responsibility and accountability are part of spirituality; however, march to your own drummer. Our spiritual leaders are just that--leaders. It is our responsibility to question and discover the answers inside ourselves. The *Bible* is a great tool for self-discovery and spiritual freedom. Jesus Christ taught love, mercy, and compassionate care. Today, my hope is to live following the spirit of the law, not the letter of the law. Spiritual joy comes from knowing it's ok just to be the best me possible. Perfection was found in only one person, Jesus Christ.

The sky's the limit to developing our minds until mental fear stifles our potential to learn. We can explore and develop multiple skills. Openness to learning, combined with the proper environment, stimulates growth. Personally and professionally, we are exposed to the stress and pressure to walk in the footsteps of others. There is an art to living a productive, happy life. No doubt, we can learn many life lessons and skills from others. However, the challenge remains to be yourself and develop your own potential. Some pressures are internal like fearful thoughts and attitudes. There are also external pressures.

At school, home, or on the job, we can be exposed to situations that promote fear thoughts. When our minds are filled with fear, we may experience relationship problems, decreased productivity, and an inability to learn. Mental fear can begin in the school years when children are expected to measure up to the same yardstick. Many schools do not allow for the diversity of skills, and all individuals are graded by the same set of standards. An openness and appreciation for diversity allows for the promotion of unique talents and abilities. Fear of not measuring up intellectually can be a devastating fear!

Appreciating the diversity of skills is key to letting go of fear in this area. Why promote diversity? Vegetables, animals, and multiple other animate and inanimate objects are different. For example, an elephant's an elephant, a turtle's a turtle, and a rabbit's a rabbit. It would be unrealistic to expect an elephant to look like or perform like a turtle. Who would think a turtle inferior, if they were not fast like the rabbit? We also have a diversity of fruits. Apples, oranges, pears, peaches and bananas have different colors, textures, and flavors. This combination makes a delicious fruit salad. Humans are diverse and come in many colors, shapes, and sizes. Our diversity gives us strength and power.

Teachers must be experts in identifying and appreciating the different skills and abilities of each individual. Combining diverse skills and abilities will promote increased learning and growth for all. Diversity is not valued in many schools, homes, and work settings. Some individuals get stuck in the inability to conform and are seen as the misfit toys. How many of us have a tendency to compare one person's skills, talents, and abilities to others? Were we appreciated for our uniqueness or touted because of our differences? How many families appreciate the different personalities of each individual?

In the workplace, how are the diversity of skills and abilities of each person utilized? Sorry to say at school, home, or in the work place, we have seen an attempt to "clone" others to another's own image and likeness. When you embrace diversity there is no need to compare yourself to others or have self-doubt. You can develop your innate talents and abilities fully. Remember that both negative and positive environments shape our lives. Seek out positive environments and people who will support your growth and development. We become a part of what we are around; choose wisely! Then, accept yourself "warts and all", knowing each one of us has unique talents and abilities. Accept total responsibility for developing those talents and skills to promote true joy in life.

Gratefully, my life did not involve physical abuse or lots of physical punishment as a child. Yes, I was reprimanded and spanked at times. Physical punishment wasn't really required to keep me in line. Emotional fear, fear of not being good enough and the desire to be loved led me to being a people pleaser. My need for love and acceptance led me to want to look and feel pretty. Early in my life, I learned the importance of looking good for others. It didn't occur to me to take care of my body for myself. This need to please led me to focus on my body size as a sign of my value and self-worth. Twiggy was the role model in my day. Our society didn't focus on health and wellness like we do today. The outward appearance was what seemed to matter most, the thinner the better.

Physical fears of not being slim enough or pretty enough controlled much of my life. This fear led me to a lifetime of yo-yo dieting. Initially, as a teen, there would be a gain of

twenty pounds that would be lost and regained countless times. Then, slowly but surely, those twenty pounds escalated to thirty, forty, fifty, sixty pounds. Yo-yo dieting, up and down, followed me throughout my entire lifetime. Much of the time, I lived my life feeling I was between a rock and a hard place. Food was my drug of choice; yet, to be accepted by self and others, I needed to be slim and trim. Food was my pleasure, my friend to comfort me and fill my emptiness inside. Food also became my enemy, because it made me fat.

Body size became the sign of success or failure for me. No matter what else I achieved in my life, if I couldn't maintain the proper body weight, I was a failure. My fear of a physical body that was inadequate dominated each day of my life. After all--I take me with me wherever I go. How could anyone develop a love/hate relationship with food? Why not just exercise a little self-control? How did fighting the battle of the bulge end up being such a big part of my life script? Never let a reason become an excuse. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Beats me! What part does genetics, environment, and conditioning play to promote lifestyles and habits that lead to obesity? Who determines what the proper body weight is? How many diet programs, books, physical fitness programs promise to give us the final answer? One thing I know for sure is that one size does not fit all in fitness or any other area of life. That is the challenge we all face.

Look at past conditions and behaviors; see present results from previous decisions, and plan a livable future. It is not easy; however it is doable. In my lifetime, there were multiple reasons why food became my drug of choice. Let's explore a few reasons to gain insight and see how it is possible to make better choices. Perhaps we can use abstract thinking and apply these lessons to the other habits that detract us from being at our best.

Environment did play a major role in my food choices. We had a large family, thirteen children, Mom and Dad, fifteen people to feed on one man's salary. Dad was a chef, a big man that did not like fat people. He served people who looked fit and dressed in the best attire. Mom was a homemaker during my childhood. Both Mom and Dad were big, stout people. My mother, unlike me, was never obsessed with food or role in my food choices. However, Mom was a great people pleaser, especially with my Dad. We did not know the concept of eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full. We had three meals a day. Food was adequate; however, not bountiful. We were not permitted to eat between meals. If we did not eat our meal, we had to wait for the next one. We had to eat everything that was on our plates, even if we were full because of the starving people around the world. Sorry to say, there were, and still are, people who go to bed hungry. Still, I couldn't understand how eating food I didn't want could benefit others.

We lived a black and white life--even with food. "Sit down, and shut up." and "Be glad you have food in your stomach and a roof over your head." were two comments I still recall today. Eating was not a social event or conversation time. You were expected to be quiet, eat, and finish everything on your plate. My recall is not to place blame. It is hard to even imagine what it must have been like to feed and clothe thirteen children. My parents did the best they could with what they knew and had at the time. They deserved better too.

You cannot give what you do not have. Mom and Dad had little formal education or life experience before marrying and having children. In our religion, birth control was a sin, so the children kept coming until Mom was well past childbearing days.

Before I was nine years old, my dad worked out of town and came home on weekends. Mom was the boss through the week. She saved up our punishments during the week by saying, “Wait until your dad gets home.” It wasn’t Dad I wanted to see each weekend; it was the Pepsi Cola each one of us could buy the day he came home. We didn’t normally have snacks or soda pop. Pepsi was a real treat for all of us children. Another event stands out in my mind about our neighbor who was an only child. It was hard to believe she could have food any time she wanted it. A special treat was to go to her house and have toasted soda crackers and ginger ale. My plan, when I became an adult, was to have all the ginger ale and crackers I wanted. Yes, to me that would mean I was rich.

Another favorite memory involved heating leftover dried beans on the pilot light of Mom’s gas stove. Playing house, especially using the little dishes, pots, and pans were some of my fondest memories. We had Christmas stockings, Mom’s old nylon hose, filled with fruit and candy, Easter baskets with candy and even one family reunion where we could eat as much and as often as we wanted to. My good memories revolve around food. Since we were poor people we had to eat inexpensive foods that could fill up the empty spots. We did have meat, usually fried chicken, on Sunday. Occasionally we had meatloaf or a roast. We had jowl bacon or sausage for breakfast. Mostly, we had biscuits and gravy, fried potatoes cooked in lard, dried beans, macaroni with cheese, and lots of cornbread.

Today, when I hear that carbohydrates make you fat, it is easy to believe. Well over ninety percent of our foods were carbohydrates, because they were the cheapest. Basically food like steak, potato, salad and fruit were for rich people. We did not have a garden; moreover, fruits and vegetables were just too expensive for our big family. Needless to say, I developed some very poor eating habits. Mealtime was not a comfortable time; however, the food was tasty. There never seemed to be enough food to satisfy me. At that time in my life, I was unaware of all the unmet needs that food was trying to fill in me.

Food was given to stop the cry of a baby or child. Hugs were seldom given, and tears were not permitted. After all, we were taught, “Big boys and big girls don’t cry.” If food couldn’t fix it, we were told to, “Stop crying.” or “I’ll give you something to cry about.” The frustration of trying to care for so many on so little took a heavy toll on my parents. There is no recollection of friends or church members who cared enough to assist them. Dad, many times, would say, “You made your bed; now lay in it.” I guess my parents felt this way because they had to sink or swim in raising us children alone.

Yes, food and eating were big issues in our lives. When we were good, food was given as a reward. Good food, anything that wasn’t in our daily diet, was a welcome treat when received as a gift. Going out to eat with friends and family was a sign of affluence. Social events signified closeness through the sharing of food. It was as if real intimacy and sharing was too threatening. Food was a stabilizer; it promoted togetherness. Sharing a meal together produced an automatic connection. Mom and Dad’s biggest outings were going to the grocery store. Feeding us was their way of giving to us.

Most of my young adult life was spent making do, just not having quite enough. Don't get me wrong. My experiences helped me appreciate the value of money and what money could buy. It taught me the joy of sharing with others. Moreover, doing without has made me appreciate the abundance enjoyed today. When my children were young, we did without a lot of things, even food at times. Special foods were a real treat for us. I recall when my sister took me to bingo and we both won. On the way home we picked up groceries and White Castle hamburgers. This special treat was well received by all when we got home. My youngest child was so excited he ran out the door hollering, "We're rich, we're rich". That's how we all felt; it took so little to make us happy. Those of you who have never been there won't appreciate this story. Those who have been there know the truth of Nietzsche who said, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger."

Yes, my environment forced me to be stronger, but it also made me fearful and dependent. Sometimes it even felt as if I were between a rock and a hard place. Eating covered my pain, decreased my anxiety and made me feel more relaxed; yet, it also made me fat. The food tasted good, gave me pleasure and helped to fill the emptiness inside. Food literally became my best friend. Eating helped me manipulate feelings, cover hurt, loneliness, anger and disappointment. My tranquilizer was food; it helped me escape from the anxiety and stress of life. Eating went from being a comfort to a negative coping mechanism in my life. Substances like food, drugs and alcohol, when used to cover and escape feelings, go from negative coping mechanisms to addictive habits.

Balance is the key to freedom and independence in our lives. Our bodies are the vehicles we use to travel through our lives. Taking care of our bodies ensures we can use our talents and skills to enjoy life fully and share ourselves with others. No substance or activity can compensate for lack of love and care in our lives. So much of the pain in our lives can be avoided by being educated about real life. Life is not black and white; we live life in the gray. There are constructive ways to adapt and adjust to life's challenges and changes. We will all have hills to climb. The only way to create happiness in our lives is to accept total responsibility for where we are and for where we are going.

Things cannot stay the same and get better. We must release the fear and addictions of the past, in order to be free to design quality lives. Together, we can accomplish much. God's greatest gift to each of us is the ability to change. Enjoy the diverse talents and companionship of others. No man or woman is an island; we need one another. Each one of us has the responsibility to balance and nourish our spirit, mind, and body.

Recently, I came across an excellent article by Wanda Johnson-Hall who stated, "Freedom Ain't Free." I must agree wholeheartedly! She writes about the power of belief in self and the cost of pursuing your goals. No, there never has been or ever will be a free lunch; somewhere, someone always pays. It takes belief in oneself, responsible choices and a "Don't Quit" attitude to claim our freedom and independence. No, we need not be perfect. Our daily lives will be a reflection of freedom responsibility, and independence. We can then promote joy not only within our own lives, but also in the lives of others!

"Say yes to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Wanda Johnson-Hall

SEED FIVE

Self-Love and Healthy Relationships

“Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself.” God

Self-love is vital to living a joyful life and developing healthy relationships. Even the commandment, “...love thy neighbor as thyself...” is known and preached throughout the world. Yet many times, we are admonished and called selfish when taking care of our own needs. Other people’s needs are said to be more important than our own. If I fail to love myself, how can I truly love my neighbor? I can’t. What is self-love? How does self-love show itself? This is a complex question. I’ve spent a lifetime trying to acquire self-love.

Yes, loving my self has been one of the greatest challenges in my lifetime. I don’t know all the reasons why. I only know it has been extremely difficult for me to truly love myself. My lack of self-love has limited my ability to love God and others. Certainly, my life has been one of sharing with others. Looking back over my past, it was evident that this need to demonstrate care and share with others came about because I, myself, was so needy. Sharing became my positive coping mechanism to mask my need to be needed.

So often we may hear, “If you love God, all else will fall in place.” My belief is-- you cannot love God fully unless you love and value yourself. Self-love leads to love of God, and loving your neighbor as yourself. Self-love is not selfishness. In fact, the more you love yourself, the more you have to offer others. Being a people pleaser does not mean you are a good person. It means you value another person’s needs more than your own. When this happens you begin to resent the person you bent over backwards for. You expect other people will take care of your needs; then, over time they lose respect for you. They may take your goods and services; however, no one really respects a people pleaser.

A spouse, many times, will sacrifice his or her own needs for their partner’s, then, be surprised when their partner trades them in for a new model. On the job, many people give more than required, come in early, stay late, only to be passed over for that new job promotion to the new kid on the block? You may be taken for granted as a built-in baby sitter or loan officer for friends and family? Often our own dreams die by the wayside? None of us really want to be considered selfish, do we? So our needs go on the back burner and we can appear to be super human. Tomorrow never comes for those who say, “I’ll be happy when”. People pleasers do not honor themselves are eventually tossed aside.

Passive people are people pleasers who “go with the flow” regardless of what direction the flow goes in. Passive people think they are the victims of circumstance. How often do we play, “ain’t it awful”, and blame others for not being aware of our needs. The real truth is passive people allow others to use and abuse them. At home or on the job, we have been taught not to make waves. Being assertive, taking care of one’s needs, is often viewed as aggressive behavior. Assertiveness is not to be confused with being aggressive.

Assertiveness is not a dirty word; it is our right and responsibility to make our needs known. We show our respect to others by honestly conveying our feelings and needs. Fear

stands in the way of this honesty. This can be seen in many types of relationships. One partner caters to another, minimizes their own needs and desires, and eventually loses their own self-identity. "He who whittles himself to suit everyone soon whittles himself away."

Why would we ever let another person take over our lives? Maybe we want that other individual to give us the self-love we lack in ourselves. We want someone or something to fix that emptiness inside. No one else can fix our lack of self-love. It is an inside job; each of us must accept this responsibility. We may think wearing our masks will keep others from seeing our neediness but it won't. How do I know this? Because a great deal of my life was spent being a passive person. I didn't realize my behavior was passive. I only knew others ran my life because I let them. Like the willow tree blowing in the wind, others chose my directions for me. In 1982 Mary wrote the following:

Inside Myself

Sometimes when I awake
I pull the covers up over my head
and wonder if I have the courage
to face a new day.
Wondering who I am?
and what is my purpose in life.
Will I have the courage to find answers, or
will I continue to escape
when the tensions of life's realities
appear?
I think of inner victories and my defeats
and wonder
will I finally take charge
or continue like the willow tree
moved only by outside forces.
"This above all", as Shakespeare said
but is there a way to know
or is life and its' answers
just a guessing game?
The answers must be found
inside for each one of us.
Even time
cannot disclose them.
I can and must find
them for me.

Then, in 1983, my life began to change dramatically. Are any of you familiar with an anxiety attack? I learned first-hand what this really is. My passive behavior and inability to deal with the stress and anxieties of life led me to the hospital with what I thought was a heart attack. That night, I discovered my heart was fine; however, my

people pleasing ways were creating health problems and had the potential to destroy my life. The next day was a beautiful, sunshiny day. My family was enjoying the day--life went on for them--as I lay on the couch trying to recoup from the trauma of my hospital trip. I could hear the fun and laughter outside, and here I was, lower than a snake's belly, because of my inability to handle life. That day, I decided not to be passive any more.

Back when the children's father and I were trying to rescue our relationship, it was impressed on my mind the power of words. Dr. Ed Erwin had said (words), what you are called is very important, not only to how others treat you but also how you treat yourself. I decide Mary (my given name) had come to mean being a pushover. My Mother was named Mary and had been very passive, especially with my dad. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree so, like Mom, I had assumed if I was kind enough, catering enough to others and took care of their needs--they'd love and take care of me. They didn't. My middle name Elizabeth signified strength to me. So, I announced that from that day on, I'd be called Liz. That day Liz wrote the following:

Changes Inside Myself

A frightful storm in my life occurred,
and my willow tree has fallen to the ground.
It was shocking and painful to let go of my willow
so I've planted in its stead an oak.
Keeping close at hand the lessons of the willow,
the flexibility and warmth that it has given me and those close by,
I move forward to unknown ground.
The oak is fragile now and will require much care and tenderness
to become as mighty as it can be,
but with the lessons learned from the willow
that should not be too difficult.
With the help of those who stood by the willow
my oak will grow to be one day,
one of the mightiest in the land.

The evolution from the willow to the oak has not been an easy one. From people pleaser to being an assertive individual is a challenging transition. There is a tremendous amount of pressure inside and out that encourages us to avoid change and stay the same. Not only is it uncomfortable for the person who changes, but also it can be unsettling for those who no longer benefit from your old ways. In order not to revert back to my people pleaser mode, I must recall how destructive those days were to self and others. My thirst for knowledge led me to explore passive, assertive, and aggressive behaviors. Your choice of behavior will ultimately affect the quality and happiness of daily life. My findings and observations tell me that lack of self-love is at the root of passive, aggressive, and passive/aggressive behavior. Being assertive demonstrate respect and love for self and others.

There are many resources available to--help you help yourself--in the area of assertiveness, if this has been an issue in your life. The following is a brief synopsis of

some lessons I have learned. First, being passive means to violate your own rights and minimize your own needs and feelings. It is degrading to oneself and prevents the development of healthy relationships. Being passive can lead to repressed anger, resentment and even depression when the anger is turned inward. These emotions come about when we don't love ourselves enough to put "me first" and take care of our own needs. We fail to express honest feelings, needs, and desires.

Being passive can lead to passive aggressive behavior demonstrated by, "the straw that broke the camels back", and the incidents where we react, instead of respond, to any given situation. We become like a volcano ready to explode without a moments notice. We hurt inside. We have repressed our own feelings and desires for so long we don't even know what they are. So, we are quick to blame others, because they don't take care of our needs. It becomes a vicious circle and can only be broken if we become aware that we create our own problems by giving our power to others. "Not everything that is faced can be changed; however, nothing can be faced until it is changed."

For many years I allowed others to dominate and direct my life. No one really benefited from these relationships. The people I encountered didn't really know how to get their needs met either. I had taught others how to treat me. It was not until I learned to respect myself and found my own needs worthy that I refused to expose myself to insensitive abusive people. Learn this life lesson well. Being passive is negative and promotes abusive behavior. Putting other people's needs before your own does not make you a good person. It puts you and the other people whose lives you encounter into a no-win situation. Love of self precedes the ability to love anyone else--even Jesus Christ.

What is aggressive behavior? Aggressive people have dominating behaviors and want their way at all costs. They violate the rights of others by pushing their opinions, thoughts, and needs off as if they were the only ones that mattered. They do not know how to express thoughts and feelings in an honest way. They often are abrupt and abusive in their demands and tone of voice. Cutting remarks and unrealistic demands are the norm for aggressive individuals. Aggressive people, like passive people, are often unaware of the their behavior and the effect on self or others. Being involved with passive or aggressive people can evolve into unhealthy relationships. Peace at any price is no peace at all!

Learn the blessings of being assertive. Assertiveness involves standing up for your rights and expressing your own thoughts, feelings, and needs in a direct, honest way without violating the rights of others. It means acknowledging and valuing your own unique skills and abilities while respecting the unique differences of others. "Do I have to give up me to be loved by you?" No. Open, honest communication involves allowing for different points of view, and respectful dialogue and interactions. Being assertive means to respectfully disagree when appropriate. In order to communicate assertively, we must love ourselves. We must learn to trust and value our opinions. Of this I am sure, "Every pot must sit on it's own bottom." After many years of reading, study and self-analysis, my belief is that our ability to love ourselves influences our ability to love and trust God.

My challenge has been trying to love God and others without loving myself. I used many strategies throughout the years, trying to develop a healthy self-love. After being a

high school drop-out at sixteen, I started my college career at fifty years old. I didn't have the belief in myself to succeed in my business and wanted that badge of courage like the lion in the *Wizard of Oz* to prove my worth. It was at this time that I started using Elizabeth instead of Liz, because I thought I'd get more respect from my teachers. Neither my college degree nor my new name change gave me the self-approval I craved. "You can please some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time."

When I started this book, I decided to please myself and find a name I truly wanted to use. This name would signify the real me. It would not be used to impress other people or manipulate my self-image. My best friend in high school was instrumental in this new name change. Barbara had a sense of self-worth, freedom, and humor that I admired. She called me Lizzie way back when I was sixteen and everyone else called me Mary. It sounded good and made me feel like the person I wanted to be. While writing this book and trying to come up with the perfect name for who I am today, I thought of my high school friend. I thought of how hearing her call me Lizzie was affirming and said, "Why not?" So, Lizé is the unique spelling I use today for that old-fashioned name given to me years ago. Lizé is the author of her very first book and is now the "me" I choose to be.

For those of you who have known self-love throughout your lifetime, this chapter may not make a lot of sense to you. However, to those of us who were told way back when to sit down and shut up and kids are to be seen and not heard, this chapter may give insight into the whys, so we can plant some seeds for healthy self-love today. Self-worth, self-love, self-esteem, self-image, and self-concept are but a few words we may use to describe the value we place on ourselves. Those of us who did not have the love and acceptance we longed for, as children must learn to discover ways to validate ourselves.

Regardless of what our society may indicate, our skills, abilities, power, or possessions are not measures of our self-worth. True success in life comes from the ability to love oneself, developing a loving relationship with God, so we can reach out and share our unique skills and abilities with others. The old programming of the past will try to get you to remain as you are. Don't make waves! You must be willing to challenge the people or circumstances that deny your worth. Avoid people who are less than life affirming. Realize you must love and value yourself and your needs. Me first!

**"This above all to thine own self be true,
and it must follow as night to day,
thou canst not be false to any man."**

Shakespeare

P.S. or woman!

Lizé

SEED SIX

Failure: Pathway To Success

“When I knew better I did better”
Maya Angelou

What words, images or emotions would you use to describe failure and success? There are countless descriptors of failure and success. Some dictionary definitions say failure is “a failing to do or perform”, “a fracturing or giving way under stress” or “a lack of success.” Success is defined as a “favorable or desired outcome”, “the gaining of wealth and fame”, or “one that succeeds.” Each of us has tasted the feelings of sweet success and the defeat of failure. We don’t use these specific words to describe our outcomes; however, we know that failures and successes have colored the image we have of ourselves. Words are not adequate to describe the emotional impact of defeat and the joy of accomplishment. Failure can literally drain the spirit, mind, and body and success can uplift our souls.

There are many important life lessons to share concerning success and failure. The damage we do to one another can take lifetimes to recover, when we equate an individual’s self-worth with their successes and failures. We are unaware of the damage brought upon many children by telling them they are bad if they do not perform up to our expectations. You cannot equate self-worth with performance. Children and adults are often praised and called good when they live up to the goals set by others. Yes, there are good behaviors and bad behaviors; however, people are not good and bad. We are abusive when we use performance at home or on the job as a measuring stick for any individual’s self-worth. You must lose to gain. Investing time writing this book means I lose time doing other activities. I lose to gain; when it is my choice, I can welcome the loss. Some of our greatest accomplishments are built on trial and error. Failures are the pathway to success when used as tools for self-discovery. Failure is often a blessing in disguise.

My children were adults, when I attended college at age fifty. For the first time, I learned about normal developmental stages of growth for children. When children skip any of these stages, they develop what is termed splinter skills. Splinter skills, to me, simply was making do with what you had. I’d done that all my life! It was evident that I had not traveled those normal stages. As one of thirteen children, I was lucky to have food in my stomach and a roof over my head, like Dad said. Learning was not valued; I don’t recall seeing anyone in my family read a book. My why questions resulted in responses like, “You don’t need to know.” and “I said so didn’t I.” or “Don’t ask why; just do it!”

Perhaps that is why, even today, authority figures that do not take time to explain why are so offensive to me. My defenses surface to prevent the recall of pain from past rebuffs. Curt, abrupt responses from individuals in my life still have a way of tearing at my heart. Enough said! To compensate for my feelings of inadequacy in college, I would jokingly say, if I didn’t have splinter skills, I wouldn’t have any. However, it really wasn’t

funny to me. I not only felt like a failure as a parent, but also thought that I was inferior in some way, because I didn't have the necessary tools to maneuver successfully through life.

As a parent, I felt sadness and guilt that I had not been aware of these developmental stages. When my children were growing up--I was also trying to grow up. I lacked the knowledge or parenting skills of ensuring they would proceed through developmental stages in an orderly fashion. It was evident to me that not only did I fail to teach the stages to my children, but also my splinter skills found me trying to accomplish goals with one arm tied behind my back. Some of the reasons why I had struggled and failed in many areas of my life became evident. You cannot give what you do not have! My knowledge of splinter skills became a learning experience that could ensure tremendous success.

There is a big difference between a reason and an excuse. Never let a reason become an excuse not to learn and grow from past defeats and failures. While I acknowledged my splinter skills, it became apparent that I certainly wasn't alone. Some of the most successful people did not progress through normal developmental stages, had splinter skills, and were making do, compensating or adapting to daily life. We use our lack from the past to push us to success. What is failure but trial and error? Keep on trying!

Basically, the normal developmental stage says, you must crawl before you walk, and walk before you run and so on and so. These are the normal stepping-stones to proceed through life with a minimum of stress and strain. Spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically there are normal developmental stages to help us lead a successful life. People seldom, if ever, proceed through the developmental stages of all four areas of life. Many of us lived a life of hit, miss, or cripple and learned what we could, when we could, the best way we could find.

The good news is that some of us who didn't have normal routes to spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health discovered ways to survive and ultimately found ways to thrive. We had to be creative and use the tools we had until we discovered and developed new ones. Our lack of knowledge led to emotional immaturity and failures; however, our eagerness to develop and grow challenged us to create pathways to success.

Often, trial and error, called failure, can result in tremendous achievements. Edison's success in inventing the light bulb came about as the result of hundreds of so-called failures. One story relates how Edison told his critics that he did not fail time and again but had found multiple ways that did not work. What about the Wright brothers? We are able to fly from place to place today because, through trial and error, they made their first successful flight. How many people with visions and dreams do you know who are willing to risk failure, time and again, to live their dream?

To name a few how about Grandma Moses, Colonel Sanders, Walt Disney and Abraham Lincoln? All had dreams and did not let a few failures or set backs keep them from realizing those dreams. Failure is not an option for those who have a vision of the future. You find whatever you are looking for in the last place you look? We do not fail when we keep looking for the keys to open the door to our dreams. Explore your failures. There are multiple lessons waiting to help you unlock the treasures you have stored within.

My dad used to say, “Don’t air your dirty linen in public.” which was his way of only letting the public see the successes in our family. It is difficult at best to learn from our failures when they are masked in shame. Hats off to Oprah Winfrey, one of my role models for personal and professional growth. She has “aired her dirty linen in public” to help individuals like you and me; we know by her example that we can move beyond past deprivations and accomplish anything we are willing to work for. Oprah models positive change for all of us. She is a pro at climbing the hills and managing the valleys. She does not let failure rule; she continues to explore ways to enhance life for herself and others.

Oprah’s personal life led to life lessons for me. In 1996, Oprah teamed up with Bob Greene in the book *Make the Connection* to share her personal battles, within and without, regarding losing weight and staying physically fit. Her openness and honesty about the emotional pain and struggles are insightful and helpful. She lets us see that she succeeded through trial and error and so can we. In chapter four there were insights and thoughts on why we often use food for comfort. I believe Oprah reveals much more. She credits eating right, exercise, and knowing how the body works as important aspects of her physical change. However, Oprah says Bob Greene’s greatest gift to her was the realization that, “The most important part is to understand it’s not as much about the weight as it is about making the connection. That means looking after yourself every day and putting forth your best effort to love yourself enough to do what’s best for you.” She speaks of her biggest change as being spiritual and connects this change to the care and love of self.

Once again, we see that self-love is the vital ingredient in successfully maneuvering in all areas of life. The “me first” concept does not diminish others. It enables us to take care of our needs so we can share ourselves with others. Interesting how we can be worlds apart and yet so connected in our journeys of self-discovery. *Make The Connection* can be another seed of hope for those who seek answers on the spirit-mind-body connection.

Oprah also teaches another powerful life lesson as revealed in Dr. Phil’s book, in 1999, about *Life Strategies*. Oprah’s ability to face up to the assaults on her bank account and character, in spite of the multitude of human feelings, emotions, and unanswered whys are powerfully outlined in his book’s introduction. The event was well publicized. When push came to shove that day in Amarillo Texas and Oprah took the stand to face the jury, she looked her accusers in the eye and said among other things, “The buck stops here. If you have a problem, see me, and leave my people alone.” She demonstrated good self-esteem; Oprah used her assertive rights to defend herself and others in spite of any feelings or emotions she may have had to master at the time. Yes, she did have to face her emotions just as we do. We must walk through our fear of failure to meet success.

Oprah eventually was successful; however, not without going through many challenges inside and out. It is not always comfortable to be assertive; yet, it is another sign of self-love. Many of life’s failures come about because we lie down and play dead. It is your right to be assertive. You can read the rest of the story on Oprah’s powerful life lesson in Dr. Phil’s bestseller.

In the *Bible*, it says “Seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened unto you.” The answers are always available to those of us who are willing to persevere and continue

the search for a better life. Success is inevitable for those who refuse to quit. One of the greatest stories that ever came my way on perseverance was told about Winston Churchill. As I recall the story, Churchill was scheduled to give a speech and the person who introduced him went on and on. When Churchill finally got up to make the speech, He said: “Never, Never, Never, Never give up.” and then sat down. I don’t know the details or if the story is true; however, it has been an inspiration at trying times in my own life. When I think of how long I have searched for answers, it occurs to me that I am not alone. When we change our perception of failure to one of exploration instead of defeat, a whole new world awaits us. Our creative solutions begin to guide us to our destinations. Our interpretations of life events impact our thoughts; thus, new avenues of opportunity are available to us. Learning from failure can be the sure road to success.

Who are the seekers? Why does it appear that there are those who go with the flow, like who they are, and appear never to be searching for answers? Why are there many of us who are eternally on a quest for a better life? Sometimes I feel inadequate because at age sixty-five, I don’t have it all figured out. Then I recall a sign I read along the highway that said: “It’s what you learn after you know it all that really counts.” So true! Moreover, just when I think I have it all figured out, another dynamic enters the picture. One more life lesson presents itself for exploration.

Certainly, one of my greatest gifts is to know I don’t know. Therefore, I continue to be open to learning. It is always challenging and very exciting to learn. It is worth the time and energy when we get that “Ah ha” feeling, that awareness, and find another tool to help us design our lives. Yes, the trial and error approach can produce much stress. However, the successful management of daily life involves discovering and developing positive coping strategies. The use of these techniques will enhance the quality of daily life.

When I was growing up, we learned black and white living, do this and don’t do that. Even in our schools, there were teachers who went strictly by the book. There was often no room for individuality and creativity. A black and white education limited our knowledge and our ability. It is shocking to come out into the real world and be expected to be a pro at living real life in the gray. We were taught that there is only one right answer. Not true! The real truth is there are many answers and many possible solutions to overcome life’s challenges. It requires abstract thinking, thinking out of the box, many times to problem solve and design a fulfilling life. One size does not fit all spiritually, emotionally, mentally or physically. Perhaps, in trying to simplify life, we hope for black and white solutions. Maybe that is why we have a tendency to view failure and success as final products instead of being a changing dynamic process.

I recall believing that Cinderella story of one day finding a prince and living happily ever after. Certainly my prince would come along and make everything ok in my life. Although three good men shared my life, none of them were able to make everything all right for me. There were times they didn’t know how to make things right for themselves. We did the best we could with the education, knowledge and emotional maturity we had at the time. Looking back, I see how my relationships were developed to fill my empty spots. Certainly, I thought I was in love; sadly my ability to love was limited because I didn’t

know how to love myself. It was as if I lived life with one hand tied behind my back; although I tried, I couldn't untie that hand or release the fear of not being good enough.

My past failures forced me to learn many life lessons and discover ways to develop healthy self-love. I like me better today, because of those changes. My ability to love God and others has increased, because I am beginning to learn how to care about myself. When our failures are viewed in a different light we can learn from them. Then, our failures can be used as stepping-stones to success.

Is a balanced life a successful life? Having a family, a good job, church home, money, prestige, and leisure time are sometimes equated with success. One measure of success can be the awareness that we are doing the best we can with what we have. Striving to learn and develop all of our untapped skills and abilities can be very rewarding. Another important path to success is having loving relationships with family and friends. Demonstrating respect and care to self and others in your personal and professional life is a sure sign of success. It has been evident to me that this quote is true. "People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Successful people care about themselves and others. Success involves living life with purpose and passion.

In my profession, I have seen different types of people. There are those who have lost their purpose in life; then, I've seen people close to ninety that have a zest for life. We do have a choice. Life is precious; refuse to wander through it! My purpose and passion is to be a better communicator by writing, speaking, and sharing my life lessons with others. Risk takers have lots of successes when they learn from past failures. Be a risk taker.

Years ago, I recall Zig Ziggler saying that, "You can't wait for all the lights to turn green." to start your journey. So it is with following your dream. Define what success means to you, and go for it. Every great accomplishment begins with a single idea that can be taken apart like a kid takes apart a toy. Those ideas can be used to design a masterpiece. Yes, when love and skill work together, you can expect that masterpiece.

Finally, I have heard it said, "thoughts are things", and "what we think about, we bring about." Recently I had the opportunity to meet a new teacher Vic Johnson. He credits James Allen's insightful book, *As A Man Thinketh* with promoting positive changes in his life. Vic says, "Fear, doubt and worry rob us of a real life and keep us from moving forward." and point to the transforming power of our thoughts by saying, "The quality of your life will never exceed your thoughts. Change one and you'll change the other." Design your life. Expose yourself to multiple ways of developing your potential.

Walk past your fear into your dreams. Realize failure is truly nothing more than trial and error. What dreams lie dormant within you? Search within to discover your own uniqueness and pursue your dreams for the future. Follow those dreams to build the successful, fulfilling life for yourself and others that you deserve!

"Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream, so shall you become"
James Allen

SEED SEVEN

Choose Life!

“The greatest tragedy in life is what dies inside a person before they are dead.”

Einstein

Sayings and quotes have been an integral part of my journey through life. Words have the power to build us up or tear us down! Sometimes we can be very careless with words. We forget how our words influence one another. Other times our words may be as sweet as honey; yet, our tone of voice and facial expressions speak a completely different language. Have you heard, “Your actions speak so loudly, I can hardly hear what you say?”

There are not enough words to express my appreciation to those who touched me with their words. The kind, caring words were nurturing and supportive while the harsh, critical words challenged me to learn assertive skills. Some words taught me what to do to find joy in my life, like, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” while other words like those of Einstein cause me to search for ways to choose life instead of death. Marlow Thomas and Friends book, *The Right Words at the Right Time* reveals the power of words. Brian Tracy taught me the importance of clarity in thought, word, and actions. Denis Waitley taught me the power of sincerity in words; he speaks of how our words, our self-talk, guide our lives and his writings and poems inspire with words like, “If you think you can, you can.”

Another powerful lesson in living came from a classic written three years before I was born, in 1936, Dorothea Brande’s book, *Wake Up and Live*. These powerful words, “Act as though it were impossible to fail.” have influenced me and countless other individuals to take the risk and change the direction of their lives. We too have the power to change lives. We must choose our thoughts, words, and actions wisely! Our power to influence others is a privilege and a great responsibility. Be aware of those who appear to be unaffected by negative words or comments. The saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” applies to aggressive individuals as well as those with a healthy self-esteem. We cannot read another person’s heart. My advice is, be gentle with yourself and others. It takes a lot of strength to master the art of gentleness!

So, where are you in your life? Are you alive inside? In the medical field, we have a pain rating scale with 0 being no pain and 10 being excruciating pain. If we measured your aliveness, your joy and happiness level today, on the pain scale from 0 to 10, where would it fall? Silly question? No, this is a very important question. Why? Because life is not a dress rehearsal! Have you ever played the “I’ll be happy when” game? Many of us have played this game. It goes like this. I’ll be happy when I find the right relationship. I’ll be happy when the children are grown. I’ll be happy when I’m physically fit. I’ll be happy when I get that perfect job. I’ll be happy when I pay off all my bills, get a new car, boat, house by the beach, and on and on. You get the idea? I know this game well, because I played it most of my life.

If you learn this lesson well, it will be worth much more than the price of this book. Joy can only be found in the present moment. Can we be joyful all the time? In my opinion, no we can't. However, we don't have to be miserable either. What can we do when we find ourselves disappointed and frustrated, when life is not working out exactly as we had planned? There is an old saying "Stop, Look and Listen." It can be very effective when we find life closing in on us. Stop to assess what is really happening, look inside to see what emotion is surfacing. Then listen to past life lessons for ways to dissipate the stressor. When we use a problem-solving approach, it is similar to counting to ten. Simple? Not necessarily. Sometimes, it is easier said than done; however, it is doable.

Another technique someone shared with me is called HALT. Perhaps you have heard this one too. Never get too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. When we do, more often than not, we will react instead of responding to the situation. Find what works for you. Multiple techniques relieve stress. Study, and search until you find your own strategies.

There are many ways to feel pleasure. We can get high by acquiring things, power, or positions. You can experience pleasure and happiness together; however, don't make the mistake of confusing the two. Happiness is the ability to take what we have and design our own lives. How do we do this? Be present and live in the moment while you live your dream. "Happiness is not a station we arrive at but a manner of traveling." Life is not lived in the past or the future. One of the best cartoons that depicted this powerful lesson was in 1994, in *The Family Circus*, by Bill Keane. It said: "Yesterday's the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present." Yesterday is gone forever. No amount of wishing can give us back the past. Tomorrow is promised to no one. No amount of power or prestige can add a single moment to our lives. However, we can make the promise to ourselves that we will choose to stay alive inside until we die.

Today is my 65th birthday and I have accomplished a lifetime goal of writing my very first book, *Remember To Remember*. The name of my book has changed throughout the years, but my purpose remains. When I read a book, hear a speaker, or encounter another individual, there is always at least one idea, one seed of hope I can grow to make a positive difference in my life. In writing this book, my primary goal has been to share some of my life lessons with my family and friends. My first 65 years have been spent learning life lessons; the next 65 years will be spent implementing those lessons. My passion is to reach out and share those life lessons with others. One word, one creative idea, can lead to positive change. Within this book, if you are looking, you will surely find one idea; one seed of hope, when applied, that can enhance your life.

What a roller coaster ride I have had in this lifetime, joy mixed with sorrow. Some challenges I created for myself and others were created for me. My blessings have been abundant; God has given me my greatest gift--a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, He has given me an insatiable need to share with others. No, I didn't go through the normal developmental stages; yet, His plan has proved to be the very best life plan for me. Napoleon Hill wrote, "The strongest oak tree of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun. It's the one that stands in the open where it is

compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun.” This has certainly been true in my life.

My goal is to learn from my past, present, and future, search for ways to get better instead of bitter; then, use my discoveries to help others discover and develop their own unique life skills. Moreover, it is my desire to help all those individuals from 65 to 130 look inside to see that there is lots of life to be lived. At sixty-five, I am the baby of a woman’s barbershop quartet. “I’m Gonna Live Til I die.” is not just a song the Cardinal IV sings, it reveals our zest for life. I have often heard that a good salesman will “tell em what you’re gonna tell em, tell em, then finally tell em what you told em.” So, let’s get down to the basic life lessons that are too important to forget.

Through many hills and valleys I learned self-love is the foundation of the good life. Self-love, not selfishness, leads to the love of God. Love of self and love of God are inseparable. My ability to love God is limited by my ability to love myself. Trying to build a quality life without self-love is impossible. Believe me, I’ve tried it most of my life; it cannot be done. When this issue is resolved, then, and only then, is it possible to reach out and share your love with others. When we attempt to love others without self-love it is hit, miss, and cripple affair. Others are at the mercy of our many moods and feelings. Self-love and love of God allow us to love others, even when their actions may not be loveable.

What does self-love look like? It is an internal acceptance of self, warts and all. It says “me first” without apology. Self-love is taking care of my spirit, mind and body. It is being assertive and not passive. Jim Rohn says it best, “Humility is a virtue, timidity is a disease.” Value yourself enough to be heard. Self-love is accepting total responsibility for where we find ourselves in our lives. It involves making choices about where and with whom, we want to spend our precious time and resources. It is staying away from others who lack respect for our uniqueness. It is refusing to mold our self into another person’s image and likeness. It is throwing away the masks and loving our self unashamedly. It is experiencing all of life’s emotions, without apology. It is the awareness that big boys and big girls do cry. It is asking for help without shame. It is refusing to let external forces control our happiness. It is reaching out to others without fear of rejection. It is giving up the need for perfection. It is being open enough to love others and accept love from others.

Self-love is the knowledge that who I am and what I have to share is worthy and valuable. Self-love shows itself in many different ways depending on our uniqueness. For me, self-love is the awareness that what I have to give and share with self and others has intrinsic value. My head knows these things; my heart is still journeying to embrace them. My journey to self-love continues to be a work in progress!

How do I love God? I must honestly say that I am a novice in this regard. When I was younger I thought love of God came before love of self. My life has taught me that this is not true! Thinking I am not worthy has not led me to the love of self or love of God. It has been a destructive force in my life. “Oh Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” echo’s from my childhood. This prayer has not been a pathway to the love of God but a stumbling block.

My love of God has come about from the belief that, “If I have faith as a grain of mustard seed nothing is impossible.” This prayer I shared freely with my patients; “Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today that you and I together can’t handle.” My love for Jesus Christ is also a work in progress. What I know for sure is the spirit of God lives inside each and every one of us. I know God’s power is available to each one of us when we access it. Like the power of electricity we must flip the switch. I can’t help but wonder what my life would have been like, if I had been aware of God’s unconditional love throughout my lifetime. Then, I recall how God often works in mysterious ways. He has truly molded me, through trial and error, to serve others.

Know that God’s love is truly unconditional. He awaits our invitation to share in our lives. To know the love of God is having the blessed assurance that God is directing and guiding us daily. Although I am not a scholar of the *Bible*, much truth abides there. Yes, God is everywhere. We don’t have to go “out there” to find God. He dwells within each and every one of us. My belief is God’s love is shown by the service we give to others. The little ways we care and share with others demonstrates the love of God in action.

What exactly is love of others? In a children’s book years ago the topic of love was addressed. The story began, “I do not like the Doctor Fell. This I know and know it well. I do not like thee Doctor Fell.” The story went on to say that it is not necessary to like everybody; however, it is important to love everybody. Loving others, is wishing the best for others, in spite of the feelings we may have about them. Some people are just more likeable than others. We have certain people we are drawn to. Other people may be challenging to be around at times. Each of us can be less than loveable, at times. When we have problems facing us, it is easy to become so self-absorbed that we forget how our behaviors impact others. Love of others means respecting the differences we each have.

Love of others is demonstrated by respecting the good name of others. Spreading rumors and gossip is demeaning. Revealing the shortcomings of others may be considered an innocent pastime; however, that chatter can be destructive and hurtful. Years ago, I ran across this saying, “He who steals my gold steals trash. He who steals my good name enriches himself not, but, makes me poor indeed.” Many reputations and relationships have been destroyed because of insensitivity to others. One of the signs of respect is open, honest communication. This can be next to impossible, if you are a people pleaser and walk around on eggshells much of the time. It takes great self-love to risk an open, honest relationship. We stifle another person’s growth when we are not honest about our feelings.

When we expect others to march to our drummer we do them an injustice. It is necessary to confront those who do not respect our individual rights. Never confuse being assertive with being abusive. A sign of emotional maturity is to show respect for others and expect the same respect for oneself. None of us are perfect, so we may offend others. Saying “I am sorry.” is difficult but necessary, when we create pain in another person’s life by word or deed. It is true that no man or woman is an island. Loving ourselves leads to love of others and releases disappointments of the past.

Forgiveness of others is a gift we can give ourselves. Any unresolved resentment can keep us from experiencing true joy. What can we do to rid ourselves of resentments?

Praying for those who have been less than loving in their interactions with us can be healing. Also, we can learn to relate more openly and honestly with others. Letting others know our thoughts and feelings can be healing. “Look for progress not perfection.” and “Be Mediocre.” are two sayings I recite to rid myself of the desire for perfection. Joy and happiness can be found in the moment when we live with acceptance.

So what happens after we love ourselves, love God and love others? We can develop and nurture healthy relationships. Begin with your own family, neighbors, people at work, church and out into the community. It is easy to get busy making a living and then fail to design a life. My relationships took a back seat most of my life these last fifteen years. Balance was not in my vocabulary. Starting college at age 50, my time and energy revolved around just making it through. Two of my favorite sayings were, “That which does not kill me makes me stronger.” and “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” My goal was accomplished and I a practicing Occupational Therapist.

At work I tried to make a good impression--the real truth is I was still trying to prove my own self-worth. Very eager to learn everything overnight and afraid I couldn't measure up, I went in early and stayed late. Book sense doesn't work well in a clinical setting. My hoped-for magical transition from getting a college degree did not occur.

Lucky for me, however, my life experience skills were beneficial to my patients and their families. It was apparent that the spirit, mind and body had to be addressed when assessing and treating patients. While I helped others help themselves, my patients and families taught me a great deal about life and living. They helped me grow as a therapist, enhancing both my personal and professional life. From patients and families, I learned what to do to promote health and what not to do. When a patient had good friends, they proved especially helpful during the recovery period. “A friend is a present you give yourself.” was quite evident. WE all need a few close friends who accept us warts and all. My good fortune has been to develop some friendships along the way. Time passes so quickly. Take time for fun and laughter and cultivate lots of friendships. Take time for fun.

What about your dreams? What gives meaning and purpose to your life? Discover your purpose and make plans to live out your dreams. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Yet, many of us go through life making do and not knowing what we want our life to be. If we do not make plans for our own lives, someone or something else will.

One man's trash is said to be another man's treasure, and so it is with purpose and passion. In his classic best seller, *Man's Search For Meaning*, Victor Frankl discovered, while a prisoner in Auschwitz, that man has the “... freedom to transcend suffering and find a meaning to his life regardless of his circumstances....” The prisoners, with a reason to go on, survived in spite of the many hardships they endured. As a therapist, I have observed how patients with purpose, a reason to get up in the morning, appear to recover more quickly. Purpose is observable. It is evident as the ninety-five year old patient works to maintain his independence in basic self-care tasks. What motivates a stroke patient to work and regain abilities and skills to return to a full time job?

Purpose motivates and creates meaning in our lives. When the reason, the purpose, becomes strong enough in our lives, we make change happen. Sometimes we “can't see

the forest for the trees.” What we desire is right before our eyes and we can’t see it. The story comes to mind about a man who was on a mission to find wealth; He was searching for diamonds. The classic, *Acres of Diamonds* describes a man’s search; he sold his home and wandered throughout his entire lifetime looking for diamonds. He died penniless while his new homeowner found those acres of diamonds buried in his own back yard. How many of us are searching for money, power, prestige, when what we need the most, our own self-worth is found in the spirit that dwells within? When we look at our own lives, we may be surprised to find, acres and acres of diamonds, right in our own back yard.

Yes, there are multiple paths and purposes in life. The ultimate purpose for many is to love God and attain salvation; their lives appear to reflect that meaning and purpose. Others may profess the same purpose and their lives appear not to reflect that purpose. The good news is, only God knows our hearts. We are not the judge and jury of others. Each one of us is accountable for our lives. Knowing our ultimate purpose and passion, our lifetime game plan, ensures we can get on with living that journey called life. Some individuals know from early childhood their ultimate purpose, pursue their dream and never look back. Some of us are not that fortunate. We spend a lifetime finding the perfect fit for their lives. I came across these words from SARK, “Make your work your dream, or be sure it leads to your dream. If it doesn’t do either of these, quit it sooner than later.”

What goals facilitate meaning and purpose in our daily lives? As a child it may be getting good grades in school, winning a spelling B, or being a cheerleader. After high school you might want a new car, or leave home to get that apartment of your own. After you graduate from college, you can get married, start a family, pursue a career, or a multitude of other choices. We are unique and so are our choices. Our life roles, the way we create meaning in our lives will change. Some of us find purpose in caring for a child, volunteering, pursuing a hobby, or venturing out on a new career. Find out how to use your unique skills and abilities. Change, grow and get on with life. Whatever paths we may choose, balance is a must for a joyful life. You can “Take my advice I don’t use it!”

No, it’s really not a joke. Balance is one of the most challenging aspects of a fulfilling life. It takes, guilt free organization and planning to make healthy life choices. Ministering to our own spirit, mind and body enables us to share ourselves freely with others. We can’t give what we don’t possess. Living our purpose and passion allows for spiritual reflection, time with family and friends, and time to really smell the roses. Joy is found in little things. There is an ebb and flow to life when we balance out the days. Find what works for your life and do it. “Learn to do the things that make you happy and avoid doing thing that make you unhappy.” A powerful message for all of us to follow!

I have heard it said we should thank God for everything. Looking back over my life, it is evident how my need for self-acceptance pushed me to search for answers. Countless individuals, seminars, books, multimedia and a diversity of life experiences helped me help myself along life’s journey. When I recall my lifelong search for answers, it occurs to me that I am not alone. Changing our perception of failure from one of defeat to an opportunity for exploration gives us a new worldview. Our creative solutions begin to guide us to our destinations. Our interpretations of life events impact our thoughts and thus

new avenues of opportunity are available to us. When our choices and responses to daily life change we create a quality life and, in turn, influence others.

Recently, I had the opportunity to hear Charlie “Tremendous” Jones preach the life changing power of books. Reading has changed my life time and again. It redirects me; it guides me. How many simple solutions to life’s questions reside in *The Bible*? So many authors have been there for me when no one else could or would take the time to guide and direct me. Every book has at least one single idea that can be utilized to impact the quality of our lives. Be selective in your reading. What you put in your mind is as powerful, if not more so, than what you put in your body. Take the time to read. Applying what you read can create positive change in your life and be truly transforming. Zig Ziggler promotes the benefits of reading by saying “The person who won’t read is no better off than the person who can’t read.” There’s a lot of truth in his statement. There are many paths to learning. Whatever avenue you choose, vow to never stop learning and growing. Studying personal and professional material has facilitated my growth thus far and promoted many necessary changes in my life. Challenges await me; my life continues to be a work in progress.

Only a few of the people who touched my life are cited within these pages. There are countless others who have helped me journey through life to find my own answers, my acres of diamonds, within. Jeff Lair’s book, *I Ain’t Much Baby But I’m All I got*, promoted self-acceptance and positive growth. *Healing The Shame That Binds Me* reveals how it’s the secrets that keep us sick. My work as a hospice volunteer taught me the healing power of tears. The lack of acceptance by some, feeling like the misfit toy, taught me tolerance of others. Multiple failures have taught me the secrets of success. There has certainly not been enough laughter, fun and humor in my life. Sometimes, I not only take myself too seriously, but also let others behavior color my joy. This is changing--I am glad!

I’ve learned to compensate for the lack of acceptance from some by developing a variety of skills and seeking ways to promote a healthy self-love. The good news is, out of the search and the struggle evolved clarity of purpose and a clear vision for the future.

Finally, a story comes to mind of an old farmer who had a magnificent crop. A neighbor came along and said, “God sure has done a good job on your crop.” The old farmer replied, “No, it was God and I together; you should have seen this place when he had it by himself!” So it is with our lives. “God helps those who help themselves.”

Recently, I heard a speaker named Donna Krech say how there is a big difference in “believing in God” and “believing God.” Her statement planted a seed of thought within me. The challenge is not only to believe in God, but also to believe God’s promises. Yes, God works in mysterious ways. Sometimes in spite of me, His promises were developed and continue to grow in my life. Certainly, I will continue my search and my whys until the day I die. Yet, I know without a doubt, as the old song said years ago, “There is no secret what God can do.” It is truly amazing what---God and we---can do together!

**“Let the end of your life find you climbing a
new mountain, not sliding down an old one.”
Jim Rohn**

Life Transitions

2004

Interesting how, even knowing that the joy—
the answers lie inside,
Sometimes, I still look without
for meaning and validation.
The hills and valleys of life have led me
to entwine the flexibility of
the Willow tree with the strength of the Oak.
What a challenge!

The Search---T. S. Eliot says it best.
“We must not cease from exploration.
And the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we began
and
to know the place for the first time.”
And so it is!

Precious life experiences go on
and so does my search.
What a gift--My thirst for knowledge
and growth continues.
Still, at times, I forget to remember,
life is happening in the now.
Yes, the questions and even the answers change
as we explore and evolve.

Our changeless core--our Spirit--our inner Guide
remains ever present encouraging us to
Remember To Remember,
life is a priceless gift.
Embrace the moment--one step at a time!

Lizé

November 17, 2005

My Dear Readers,

If you have gotten this far, congratulations! Hopefully you have one idea, one seed of hope that can be taken apart, explored and utilized to--help you help yourself. Today as I write these words, I am a good tired. You have all experienced this kind of tired. This is the kind of tired where you've given well over one hundred percent and the finish line is in sight. Wow! Yet for me, this is not the end of the story. My intention is to pass the torch on to you; then, as you keep the flame alive in your life, you can reach out to share with others.

“We never lose what we share with others.”

Lizé

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Thank You!

