

Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This

Stories and Strategies for a
“Less Stressed” Life



Jean Gatz, CSP

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Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This
Stories and Strategies for a “Less Stressed” Life

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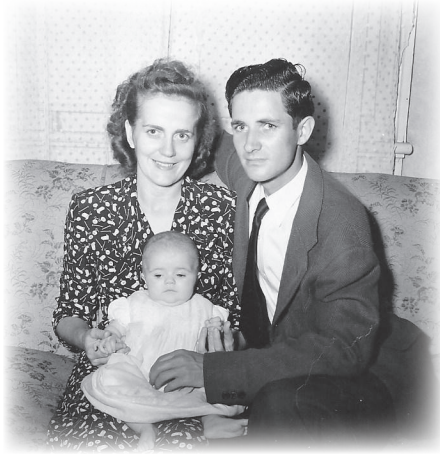
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 C A R T E R
R A N D O L P H
P U B L I S H I N G

Dedication



To my parents,
Noelie Daussin Barnett and Edmund Randolph Barnett
for their love and support, for encouraging me
and believing in me every day of my life.



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If You Would Stop Talking, You Might Just Learn Something.

It was Daddy, not Mama, who made that line famous in our family. And believe me, I heard it often. There is a distinct possibility that I began talking within minutes of my birth. While I don't remember exactly what I said, I'm sure it was profound, inspirational and entertaining. My parents used to tell people, "We think that Jean was accidentally vaccinated with a phonograph needle." And they may have been right.

I've learned that everything eventually makes sense if we just wait long enough to figure it out. So it didn't come as a big surprise to anyone in my family that I became a motivational speaker. It's a unique calling that's difficult to explain to others. I love what I do and I hope and pray that I am blessed to continue doing it for a long, long time.

This book is filled with stories I tell from the stage during my keynotes and workshops. People often ask me if all my stories are true. They are. We each have stories within us that can touch people's hearts, make them think, make them laugh, and yes – maybe even make them cry. All we have to do to find our stories is to live our lives, pay attention, and take good notes. When all is said and done, we might just learn something.

Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This



Introduction

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Introduction

“Is it morning time yet?”

This was the question I called out to my parents upon awaking every morning, eager to get started on a brand new day. I was five years old and life, as I knew it, was extremely good. Since I hadn't started “big school” yet, there were no worries about schedules, no homework, and no rules and regulations. Equally comforting was the knowledge that no one depended on me for anything! I smiled in anticipation of a carefree day ahead. My smile expanded to a big grin as I realized *my only job that day was to have FUN*. With a day filled with such promise, no wonder I couldn't wait to bound out of bed and get started!

Now fast-forward several decades later to how this morning started. It, too, began with such promise – until I mentally reviewed my to-do list, thinking about all the obligations, deadlines and projects that lay ahead. Nowhere on that list did it say *my only job today was to have fun!* As the reality of what awaited me began to sink in, I had absolutely no desire to bound out of bed and get started. In fact, my first instinct was to pull the covers up over my head, close my eyes and remain hidden away, safe and secure.

Does any of this sound vaguely familiar? Do your days often hold promise – until you actually get out of bed and begin them? Maybe you've had a day when a customer yelled at you for

something that wasn't your fault. Perhaps two of your employees are embroiled in a personality conflict. Maybe a teenager at home is testing his or her limits – and your patience. Perhaps there are so many people demanding your time and energy that you feel you never have a minute of privacy.

I remember such a day. It was quite a few years ago, but some days you never forget! Steven was eight years old, Michael was four, and I was pregnant with Jennifer. I dragged myself out of bed, feeling no excitement whatsoever that it was “morning time” once again. I was rushing around, getting the kids their breakfast, helping Steven find his misplaced homework, feeding the dog, packing school lunches, and getting Michael dressed for pre-school. In short, I was downright frazzled. Looking out the kitchen window, I sighed as I realized the stormy weather meant an extra 20 minutes of waiting in the “rainy day carpool line.”

At least I was still on schedule, which meant I had the luxury of 15 whole minutes to get dressed, put on my make-up and do my hair – all by myself. That particular morning, however, I hadn't allowed any extra time for morning sickness. This was extremely shortsighted on my part since I managed to spend the first two months of every pregnancy engaged in this particular activity. In the midst of my misery, four-year-old Michael started beating on the bathroom door.

“Hey, Mom, come on. What's takin' you so long?”

Certain I could appeal to his sense of compassion if I explained my plight, I answered in my most pitiful voice, “Michael, I’m feeling really terrible. I’m even throwing up.”

After a moment of silence, while he pondered the significance of my situation compared to his own, he replied, “OK, but could you hurry up? I need you to tie my shoes.”

That’s when a pearl of wisdom my mother had passed down to me saved the day, as it had many times before. I smiled to myself as I recalled, “Mama said there’d be days like this.”

Is your life filled with days your mama warned you about? As a woman born and raised in the South, I’ve learned a great deal about life from her bits of wisdom and advice, usually accompanied by a phrase that succinctly made her point. As a teenager I vowed that I would NEVER repeat those silly phrases to MY children. And as it turns out, I’ve shared them with my children and grandchildren because they help keep things in perspective.

When did we become so busy taking care of other people that we became the last ones on our own to-do lists? Surely we’re not destined to be in charge of so much *stuff*. That is the dilemma and the challenge I address in my presentations and in this book.

I’ve been privileged to speak to people of all ages and at all stages in life. Many of them are juggling a variety of demanding

roles and responsibilities, including the ones below. Perhaps you can relate to some of them. And I'm sure you can add some of your own!

- You head home from work, determined to leave behind your role as business owner, executive, manager, team leader or support staff. But you know your day isn't over yet, as you walk into the house to begin your *other* job as spouse, parent, chauffeur, cook, therapist, pet caretaker and homework advisor.
- You drive to a nursing home to visit your elderly mother or father.
- You've moved to a new area and you miss old friends but haven't had time to make new ones yet.
- You've gone back to school or you're taking on-line courses while holding down a full time job.
- You have a difficult time saying "No" and you're overwhelmed with volunteer projects.
- You've been promoted and you have to manage coworkers who are also your friends.
- You're trying to manage a younger – or older – workforce and understand what makes them tick.

- You're a home-based entrepreneur and you're feeling professionally isolated from your peers.
- Your children are grown and you're worried you and your spouse have nothing in common any more.

Although I believe everyone is unique, meeting so many people in my programs over the years has made me realize we're all much more *alike* than different. Haven't we all tried to change someone we love before finally giving up? Who among us hasn't tried to fix a problem when our advice wasn't wanted? At some point we've come to understand we're not in charge of what happens around us. All we're really in charge of are the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors we bring to those events in our careers, our relationships and our lives. We've discovered we can learn a lot from challenging people, insightful people, and experienced people who bless us with their wisdom. And we've found a good sense of humor helps keep our hurried, harried lives in perspective. With wisdom and courage, we've learned to celebrate the good times and survive the not-so-good times.

As a keynote speaker and author I have the unique pleasure and privilege of sharing my life lessons with thousands of people every year. My goal is to feature relevant, entertaining, and thought-provoking stories and strategies that lift spirits, lighten hearts, and help people focus on the people and the issues that really matter. I hope this book does that for you.

Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This



Chapter 1

I Never Talked to My Mother the Way You Talk to Me!

I Never Talked to My Mother the Way You Talk to Me!

It was Thursday, so it was my day to drive “the volleyball carpool” and bring several of Jennifer’s friends home from practice. The girls had all just turned thirteen, which meant they had undergone a rapid yet predictable change process. It seemed like only yesterday that they had been cute, charming, endearing, cooperative, amiable, polite, civil, courteous and respectful. Now that they were officially teenagers, there was an entirely new list of adjectives to describe them. In their defense, we know this metamorphosis wasn’t really their fault. Rather, it was all part of a Divine Plan.

If God had meant for children to live at home forever with their parents, He would have frozen them at a particularly cute and adorable age and stage of development. All parents have different opinions as to exactly what age and stage this might be. But I am not personally acquainted with any parents who would describe the teenaged years as “cute and adorable.” Part of the predicament in which teenagers find themselves is the knowledge that they now know absolutely *everything*, while their parents have become unbelievably stupid in a very short amount of time. In addition, they must deal with one of the ultimate embarrassments of the teenaged years – being chauffeured about town by their parents because they are still too young to obtain their driver’s license. Unfortunately, this

means they must endure the mortification of actually being seen in public with their parents.

So there we were, on our way home from volleyball practice with Jennifer in the front seat and her friends Amy and Lauren in the back. As the girls chatted I dutifully drove along, eyes fixed on the traffic, following the unwritten rule that applies when you drive teenagers anywhere. You know the one I'm talking about. Rule # 1 states that you may *drive* but you may not *speak*. This makes perfect sense because your teenagers think you are so old that you couldn't possibly have anything important – or intelligent – to say anyway.

Actually, this is not such a bad rule after all. In fact, it can have major benefits. If you drive long enough without talking you begin to merge with, and become part of, the steering wheel. As you gradually become invisible, your teenagers actually forget you are in the car and begin to talk about things they would have never discussed had they known you were in the vehicle. In this invisible state you can gather a wealth of information, as well as pick up bits and pieces of conversations you never wanted to hear – ever.

Just in case you thought there was only one rule, you need to know about the other two rules that apply when you are the chauffeur.

Rule #2: You may not, under any circumstances, tune the radio to any station that plays music you might actually enjoy.

Rule #3: Even if you happen to know the song playing on the station your teenager has selected, you may not sing along. It doesn't matter if you wrote and recorded the song. You are never permitted to sing out loud. Ever. Humming is also strictly forbidden.

So I'm driving along, following the rules and listening to the girls in deep conversation. I wasn't really eavesdropping. But I had to have something to do since I wasn't allowed to sing. Imagine my excitement when I realized the girls were having a discussion about a topic on which I could voice an opinion! Since I used to be a first grade teacher and precious little six year olds hung on my every word, why should these girls be any different? This was my first mistake, followed immediately by my second one. Since I am often hired as a keynote speaker because of my ability to make audiences laugh while they learn, I was confident that I could offer an opinion, teach these girls something *and* make it fun and entertaining in the process.

Waiting until just the right moment, I jumped into the conversation and offered my pearls of wisdom, phrased in such a way to evoke peals of laughter. Then I waited – for what seemed like a very, very long time. There was no laughter. None. Zip. Zero. Nada. What followed instead was an awkward and embarrassing silence. I must give Jennifer's friends credit for being so polite and well mannered. It seems that teenagers do have the ability to be polite in front of other parents – but not in front of their own. These girls had been our daughter's best

friends since kindergarten and I think they really liked me as a person. They felt sorry for me at this moment, of course, but they still liked me. Now they were torn between being embarrassed for both Jennifer and me, and wanting to make me feel better and save me from further humiliation.

As I looked in the rear view mirror and saw the pained expressions on their faces, I heard a barely audible laugh from the back seat. Unfortunately, it didn't do much to break the tension. The strain actually increased because Jennifer did not laugh along with her friends. In fact, she didn't make a sound. But as she turned in the passenger seat to face me, our eyes met and I got a message that spoke much louder than words. If you've ever been the parent of a teenager, you know what I'm talking about. I got THE LOOK. It spoke volumes to me. Translation: "Mom, you broke a major rule and you will pay." Then in an attempt to recover from her embarrassment, Jennifer turned to face her friends in the back seat. Smiling sweetly she said, "You'll have to forgive my mom. She obviously forgot to take her medication again."

Now at this particular moment I had several options. Option One was to pull over to the side of the interstate, open the passenger door and utter two words. "Get out." Option Two was to give Jennifer "a good talking to" as Mama used to say. But I knew that a lecture was not going to win me any points, especially since I was in "deficit point mode" anyway. So I decided to go with Option Three. I began to laugh. This made the most sense to me

because our three children have inherited my sense of humor. I could hardly reprimand our daughter for a comment I might have made myself.

My laughter broke the tension. Her friends began breathing again, and Jennifer looked quite pleased at having “put Mom in her place” and gotten away with it. Suddenly a look of sheer panic spread across her face. One of her friends asked, “Jen, what’s wrong?” My daughter answered in a hushed tone, “Do you know what my mother does for a living? She travels around the country telling stories and making people laugh. And she’s going to get a really good story out of this. Before long thousands of people will know what I just said to my mom.”

On behalf of parents everywhere I replied with a smile, “Well, Jennifer, sometimes we parents have to get our revenge the best way we know how.”

I didn’t learn much about dealing with teenagers that day, but it did confirm much of what I already knew. Because Jennifer was our third child, we had already survived the teenaged years with Steven and Michael. We thought we had seen and heard it all. But with a teenaged daughter there was obviously so much more to learn.

Now don’t get me wrong. I think teenagers are good people. In fact, I vaguely remember being one myself. As a parent, however, it took me quite a while to learn that every time I tried to change

a teenager's behavior I was setting myself up for failure and frustration. When you think about it, trying to change a difficult person is a lot like trying to change a teenager.

While we're programmed to expect difficult behavior from teenagers, it took me a long time to understand why some adults might choose to be difficult – on purpose. Then I realized that difficult people are who they are because somewhere along the way they have been rewarded for their behavior. It may have happened when they were toddlers and threw their first temper tantrum. Or it may be a skill they developed later in life. But they know what works and they use it to their advantage.

Perhaps you have a few difficult people in your life. You've probably noticed, as I have, that they often try to manipulate the rest of us to get what they want. Sometimes they try to make us feel fearful about confronting them. Or they whine and complain, hoping that if we feel sorry for them we won't expect much of them. Some are notorious for being affable and agreeable when others are around, then they sabotage us at the first opportunity – behind our backs. Others undermine us by gossiping, tattling and spreading rumors.

No matter what type of difficult people we must contend with in our lives, we inadvertently reward them in different ways on a regular basis. We frequently pay more attention to them than we want to, or probably need to. Not only do we give in to

them, but we make excuses for them as well. It's easier to leave them alone and do the work ourselves rather than deal with them when they're not happy. In the workplace, some managers repeatedly reward them by giving in or giving up. Coworkers and customers avoid them. Organizations consistently reward them with a paycheck. With those sorts of rewards in place, why would a difficult person go through the pain of changing a behavior if that behavior is working so well? Difficult people may be difficult, but they're not stupid. They know what works, and they're not afraid to use it.

Since we don't have the power to change or control another human being, all we can change or control is the way we respond to them. Through trial and error I've learned several strategies that have helped tremendously. I share them with my audiences, and I hope they will work for you as well.

1. Stop making excuses for them. How often have you tried to make a difficult person understand that their behavior is impacting others, only to be answered with, "Well, that's just how I am." When you've heard that excuse long enough, you begin to believe it yourself. Anyone can change – if they really want to. Difficult people choose not to do so.
2. Stop taking their behavior personally. If you step back and objectively observe them as they interact with others, you will probably notice that difficult people tend to treat other people the

same way they treat you. This knowledge allows you to be more objective – and successful – in your interaction with them.

3. Stop rewarding them. Take a look around your workplace, your family, or your circle of friends and notice how others reward difficult behavior in various ways. Sometimes it's appropriate to have a conversation with others who are also being affected. If you can agree on how you will stop rewarding the difficult behavior – individually and as a group – you may be pleasantly surprised to see the behavior gradually change over time. It's no fun anymore to be difficult. There's no reward. So why bother? My clients have shared stories of difficult employees who have left the organization rather than change their behavior. Deciding they didn't want to change, they simply took their difficult behavior somewhere else.

4. Put some distance between yourself and the difficult person. At times it can be physical distance. If you work with a difficult person, you don't have to carpool with him or go to lunch with her. At other times you can put emotional distance between yourself and that person, depending on the situation. You will probably have to experiment with some of these strategies until you find the one that works best for you. Be consistent in your interaction with them, and don't give up. And last but not least, utilize your sense of humor to help keep things in perspective. In fact, my sense of humor helped me stay calm, cool and collected with that car full of teenagers.

Maybe you're wondering how I was able to laugh at Jennifer's comment without taking offense. I've learned that whether I'm dealing with teenagers or with difficult people, I have to choose my battles wisely. And some battles are just not worth the effort it takes to win. A good sense of humor can go a long way in keeping our lives and our relationships in balance. As Mama once told me, "We have to be able to laugh at ourselves because most of the people we know are laughing at us anyway. They're just doing it behind our backs." Developing a sense of humor can help us get through tough times, difficult conversations and bad days, even when we're not in a car full of teenagers!



Chapter 2

**You're the Oldest.
Share with Your Sister.**

You're the Oldest. Share with Your Sister.

I don't know why I bothered to answer the phone again that morning. For the last few minutes someone had been calling and hanging up as soon as I said "Hello." This was long before the days of "Caller ID" so I had no idea who might be on the line. Finally, this time when I said "Hello," my younger sister Patty answered.

She lived in California at the time with her husband and their six-month-old daughter. We talked periodically and wrote lots of letters to keep in touch, as that was the greatest distance that had ever separated us. Being only eleven months apart in age, we shared everything while growing up, starting with our dolls, toys, and books. During our teen years we shared our wardrobes, a multitude of cool hair accessories, the pink Princess phone in our bedroom, and the family car. When it was time for college, Patty chose the same one I attended. She lived right down the hall from me in the dormitory. We even double dated a few times. I guess you could say that Patty and I have been sharing stuff since... forever!

Not wasting time with idle "Hi, how are you?" chitchat on this call, Patty got right to the point. "My doctor says it's time to make some decisions. I've got three options and I want to talk with you about my choices." This was a phone call my family had been expecting for quite some time, as Patty had been living with a rare kidney disease for the past year.

“OK,” I replied, “Let’s talk about your choices. What’s the first one?”

“My first choice is the easiest. My doctor says I can continue to take my medication, watch my diet, and enjoy the time I have left. But Catherine is only six months old and I want to be here to watch her grow up.”

“Then that’s not a very good choice. What’s your second choice?”

“My second choice is dialysis, but my doctor says I’m not a good candidate for that.”

“So that brings us to your third choice. What is it?” I asked. There was a lengthy pause and I could actually hear Patty taking a deep breath. “I’m so glad you asked. My third choice is a transplant, and I’m calling to ask for one of your kidneys.”

Now there’s a request you don’t hear every day in normal conversation! But our family was not dealing with what most people would consider a normal situation. When Patty first became ill, her doctor explained that a transplant could be an option in the future. My dad had already passed away, and although my mother was ready and willing to be a donor, Patty’s doctors agreed that one of her siblings would probably be a better match for a successful transplant. Extensive blood tests showed

that my brother, Randy and my sister, Kathy didn't even come close to being viable donor matches. In fact, you could hardly tell from the test results that Randy and Kathy were even *related* to my sister! The tests also confirmed that Patty and I were a perfect match. There was no doubt that when it was time to talk about donating a kidney, I would be the one getting the phone call.

To deal with her crisis, Patty had three choices. By the time I got involved, I had only two choices: "Yes" or "No." I wanted to do this for Patty because she would have done the same for me if I had been in her place. It wasn't about being a hero. It was about being part of a close family. And it was also about many prayers and extensive conversations with my husband, Les, to make sure I had his full support. The recuperation period for the donor was six weeks. Steven and Michael (ages 6 and 2) would require a lot of extra care from their dad and other family members while I recovered. Because I was working at a law firm at the time, I also talked with my boss and coworkers to make sure they were willing to fill in for me while I recuperated. The overwhelming support and encouragement from family, colleagues, friends and neighbors made my decision much easier.

As you can well imagine, this was a very serious conversation and a life-changing moment for both of us. Everyone in our family has an exceptionally good sense of humor, and in an effort to lighten things up a bit I playfully said, "OK. Let's get this ball rolling. Sign me up! I'm excited. I'm ready. Let's go!"

Rather taken aback, Patty asked in surprise, “Exactly what are you so excited about?”

“Well, I’ve got this thing all figured out. All I have to do is give you one kidney, and you’re going to feel so grateful and so obligated to me that you’re going to shower me with gifts for the rest of my life!”

“OK,” she countered. “And while we’re on the subject, I haven’t forgotten that when we were growing up I was always asking if I could borrow your stuff. Just so you know, I’m not asking to *borrow* your kidney – because I’m sure not planning on giving it back!”

After we ironed out all the details of what was to happen next, Patty solved the mystery of the earlier phone calls and hang-ups. She timidly admitted that she had called numerous times and hung up each time she heard my voice, trying to work up the courage to ask for the biggest favor she would ever need.

After several days in the hospital and extensive tests to make sure that both my kidneys were healthy enough to part with one of them, the transplant was completed. That was in 1976. Thankfully, it was a great success. Patty and I are both in good health and we each have one wonderful and dependable kidney!

There were so many emotions involved in this experience – the highs and lows, the fear mixed with faith, and the love and support

of family and friends that helped us get through it all. Everything hinged on our making a tough decision when none of our choices were easy. Maybe you've had to make your share of difficult decisions to get through life. Personally speaking, I can always come up with a good reason for putting off a decision I know has to be made. Here are a few that have worked well for me.

“I can't decide what's the best thing to do.”

“I know what I need to do, but it's going to be hard work and no fun!”

“If I wait long enough, my choices might get easier.”

“If I wait long enough, someone else might make the decision for me.”

“If I wait long enough, the problem may resolve itself.”

Do any of the above reasons (or excuses) sound familiar? Depending on the situation, any or all of them could be valid. I'll bet you noticed that three of my favorite excuses begin with the words “If I wait long enough...” Some problems do have a way of resolving themselves and situations can often improve if I'm patient enough to wait and see how things turn out. But Patty and I didn't have the luxury of waiting. This problem, like most, was not going to resolve itself. And with every day that passed, Patty was getting worse. Without a doubt, none of our choices were easy ones. But we did what we thought was the right thing – the best thing – to do at the time, based on the information we had. When it comes down to it, isn't that really all anyone can do?

This experience taught me quite a lot. There's no end to the number of decisions I will make over my lifetime. If I'm stuck, I won't get anywhere until I take time to figure out why I can't move forward. What am I waiting for? A guarantee? The transplant was a success, even though Patty and I knew we didn't have any guarantees. If I wait for a guarantee that I'm making the right decision, I could be in for a very long wait! Although it's sometimes easier to put off making a decision I know has to be made, I learned that it's usually better to make a decision and move toward some goal or resolution of the problem rather than to remain stuck in the same place.

Maybe you're currently facing some tough decisions in your personal or professional life. Perhaps you're contemplating a new job or a totally new career path. Maybe you have the "entrepreneurial itch" and you want to start your own business. Are you putting off a decision to deal with a difficult employee, even though you know he/she is affecting morale for the rest of the team? Maybe you're thinking of ending a relationship that's not working, but procrastinating because you don't like the alternative of being alone.

You've put off making that doctor's appointment because you don't want anyone to confirm your nagging suspicions that your blood pressure and cholesterol really *are* too high. Perhaps you've been dreaming about writing that best seller. You're relatively sure that everything you want to say is already in your head, but you haven't sat down with an empty pad of paper or in front of a

blank computer screen to write the first words. Getting unstuck takes effort and hard work.

I know that I have to make many important decisions alone. But I also know that I can get all the help I need if I'm willing to ask for it. Sometimes asking others for their advice is hard to do. Maybe you're thinking about accepting or declining a promotion. Perhaps you're weighing the pros and cons of selling your present home and buying a new one, moving to a different city, or going back to school. You don't always have to make every decision alone. While no one can make your decisions for you, don't overlook the people you respect who can lend an ear, act as a sounding board and offer their wise counsel to help you focus in the right direction.

When I'm faced with making a difficult decision, here are some questions I ask myself to help me get through the process.

1. Who is stopping me from making the decision I know must be made?
2. What is stopping me from making that decision?
3. Who needs to act?
4. Who needs to get out of the way?
5. How much longer can I afford to wait until the easy choices come along?

Once I take time to answer these questions honestly, the issue usually becomes crystal clear. If I'm perplexed about what needs to happen next, I write my thoughts down on paper or have a conversation with myself – out loud. Once I hear myself speak the words, clarity seems to follow. Les is always a willing listener and an excellent sounding board, which also helps a great deal.

I've noticed that when I put so much time and energy into procrastinating about a decision, I just make it harder on myself. Although I won't always make the perfect choices, things do improve once I get "unstuck" and move forward. As Mama always said, "Most of the time, doing *something* is better than doing *nothing*." Then she would usually add, with a twinkle in her eye, "And if you're busy *doing something*, you'll stay out of trouble."

I can't end this chapter without telling you the rest of the story. Remember, during our phone conversation, my joking comment to Patty that she would shower me with gifts because she would feel so obligated – and grateful? I must confess that my strategy has worked out very well so far! Without a doubt, the most unusual gift Patty ever gave me came on our first transplant anniversary. She called me a few days prior to The Big Day.

"I want to send you something special for our first anniversary. What would you like?"

“That’s very sweet of you, but I really don’t need anything. Save your money.”

“Well, I’m going to send you something. You might as well tell me what you want, so I don’t waste my money on the wrong thing.”

“OK, if you insist, you can send me a dishwasher.”

“Did you say you want a dishwasher?”

“Yes. Our dishwasher just broke, and it’s going to be a while until Les and I can save up enough money to get another one.”

That conversation ended shortly, and so did my thoughts about a new dishwasher. Two days later, on our first transplant anniversary, I was at the kitchen sink washing dishes. The doorbell rang and when I answered it, there stood a man with a dolly that held a very large brown carton with a big red bow on the top.

“I’m here to deliver a dishwasher for Jean Gatz. Is that you?” he asked rather gruffly.

Since Les and I had agreed we couldn’t afford to replace ours yet, I asked if he was sure he had the right address. He did. Totally forgetting my earlier conversation with Patty, I muttered to myself, “Well that’s strange. I wonder who sent

me a dishwasher.” With a rather irritated look, he answered harshly, “I don’t know, lady, but we’re both about to find out.”

Then, looking rather apologetic, he added, “I’m sorry, Ma’am. It’s not your fault. But I’ve worked for this company longer than you’ve been alive and I’ve delivered every major appliance we sell. But this is the first time I’ve ever been told by my supervisor to deliver a dishwasher and read the little gift card that came with it.” Then he began to read:

Dear Jean,

I decided that if you were going to be washing my blood for the rest of my life, the least I could do for you was to wash your dishes.

Love, Patty

Looking at me over the tops of the little glasses perched on the end of his nose, he asked, “Who’s Patty?”

“She’s my sister.”

Then he dropped his voice to a whisper. “Is she on drugs?”

About ten years later that dishwasher quit working. After the repairman gave us the bad news that it had washed its last load, Les said, “We’ll just have to buy another dishwasher.”

“OK,” I answered, but first I’m going to call Patty and have some fun.”

When Patty answered her phone I got right to the point. “I thought you should know that our dishwasher is broken.”

“You mean the one I gave you?”

“Yes, the one you gave me – after I gave you a kidney.”

“Gosh, I’m sorry to hear that, but why are you calling me?”

“Well, I think you need to buy me a new dishwasher . . . or give my kidney back!”

With a laugh Patty replied, “Bless your heart. I may be grateful but I’m not stupid.”

And with those parting words, my sister hung up on me. Even though it was all in fun, I got what I deserved. As Mama used to say, “Nobody likes a smart aleck.”



Chapter 3

**I'm Only Telling You This
for Your Own Good.**

I'm Only Telling You This for Your Own Good.

While I understand that no family is perfect, I've often thought about the propaganda I was exposed to when I was taught, at the tender age of six, that some people really did have perfect families and perfect lives. As a first grader, I read stories about a brother and sister named Dick and Jane. They had a little sister, Sally, a dog named Spot and a cat called Puff. I should have figured out then that this book was fictional because Puff didn't have "an attitude" like normal cats do.

In later years, no matter how hard I tried I couldn't recall the names of their parents. In fact, I've spent an inordinate amount of time trying to recall Dick and Jane's parents' names, until it finally occurred to me that the reason I couldn't *remember* their names was because they didn't *have* their own names. They were simply known as "Mother" and "Father." This confirmed another piece of misinformation I was given early in life, that is, when I became a parent I would no longer have an identity of my own. I would, from that time henceforth, be known only as "Mother" or some derivative thereof.

Maybe your first grade reader was similar to mine. Each page contained only 12 to 15 words, none of which had more than two syllables. No story was more than six pages long, and each page was filled with wonderful pictures of the main characters and their family and friends. I distinctly recollect that nothing bad ever happened in Dick and Jane's neighborhood. Mother

never nagged, screamed or lost her temper. She never asked Father, “Do you think this skirt makes my hips look too big?” They never argued and Father never had to sleep on the couch. Dick and Jane were each other’s best friends. They both doted on little sister Sally who, even though she was the baby, wasn’t the least bit spoiled. They did their chores without being asked, looked out after each other so they wouldn’t get into trouble, and actually enjoyed spending every moment together as a family. Even though I was only six years old, I remember thinking, “Could this family be real?”

As a fourth grader a few years later, I rushed home from school and hurried to finish my homework so I could watch the TV shows that depicted a variety of perfect families in action. Perhaps you grew up with shows like “Father Knows Best,” “Ozzie and Harriet,” “The Brady Bunch,” “My Three Sons,” or “The Partridge Family.” The amazing thing about all of them was their ability to solve every family crisis in 30 minutes. Well, actually, it only took 22 minutes to create a perfect ending. The other eight minutes were dedicated to commercials.

My favorite show was “Leave It to Beaver” – mainly because I had a secret crush on Wally. Of course Theodore (Beaver) was adorable, and even looked a bit like my own little brother. Ward was a solid citizen and a good provider for his family. But deep down inside I knew June was suspect. How did she manage to cook, do the laundry, vacuum, dust and scrub the bathrooms in

those stiff petticoats, stockings, three-inch heels and a strand of pearls, with never a hair out of place?

June certainly had a strong talent for running a household and I have no doubt she could have run her own company. In numerous episodes when Ward was clueless, her wisdom came shining through. In just as many episodes, however, when she was stumped by one of Wally or Beaver's questions, she had a standard answer. "Go ask your Father." Oh, well, we're not supposed to know everything, are we?

I must honestly admit that I used to poke fun at June Cleaver, until I realized one day that I was *becoming* the June Cleaver of our family. While I understood that the perfect family didn't exist anywhere on the face of the earth, that didn't stop me from trying to single-handedly create the perfect family life for our children. As a recovering perfectionist I won't embarrass myself by telling you the things I did – and the pressure I put on myself – especially when it came to creating perfect holidays for our family!

The year that Steven brought his fiancée Catherine home for Christmas, I realized I had gone over the edge and needed help. Michael, Jennifer and our extended family were also there for Christmas dinner and our gift exchange. After several days of holiday activities I was feeling tired, overworked, underappreciated and more than a bit cranky.

Over the years I've learned that when I put too much pressure on myself, I seem to handle the big things with relative ease. But it's the little things that put me over the edge. It came as no surprise, then, when I fell apart and had a minor meltdown over something very trivial and insignificant. When Steven found me crying in the kitchen, he put his arm around my shoulder and said quietly, "I think we need to have a little talk."

"Mom, we know that you work really hard trying to create the perfect holidays for all of us, and we appreciate it very much. But we want you to know that we'll still love you, even if the holidays don't always turn out perfectly every year." What he said next took me completely by surprise. There have been times in my life when our children utter a thought or opinion so deep and so profound that it shocks me into reality. Then I have to grudgingly admit that they are right. This was one of those moments. Steven spoke, his voice filled with compassion.

"Mom, I think it's finally time to bury June Cleaver."

At first, this statement infuriated me. Not because it wasn't true, but because no one had ever called me June Cleaver – at least not to my face! I knew they were doing it behind my back, but this was different! After the holidays were over I spent a lot of time thinking about what Steven had said. Actually, he made a lot of sense and I decided to take his advice.

When everyone came for Christmas the following year, I was a very different person. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, fatigued and exhausted (my usual holiday demeanor) I was relaxed, calm and stress free. To my great surprise, it was one of the best holidays I've ever had. I thought it was going to be very difficult, since it was my first Christmas without June by my side.

As I stepped back and let everybody be in charge of their own holidays that year, an interesting phenomenon occurred. Not only did everyone step up and volunteer to help, but Steven jumped in and took over my role. Because he and I are so much alike, I wasn't too surprised. After all, he reasoned, *somebody* had to be in charge! As I watched him run the show for several days, I jokingly remarked to Catherine, "Well, isn't this interesting? June may be dead, but Ward seems to be alive and well."

I will never forget the look of shock and surprise in her eyes as she turned to me and whispered in a panic-filled voice, "Do you know what's written right under my senior class picture in my high school yearbook?"

"The girl most likely to marry Ward Cleaver."

This experience taught me two very important lessons. Whether at work or at home, aiming for perfection and trying to take charge of things that are out of my control are not part of my job. Being the perfect woman or the perfect professional, day in

and day out, is not a realistic goal to set for myself. While I can continually strive to improve in all areas of my life, I've decided that being perfect is no longer an option for me. Maybe you've had a similar epiphany in your personal or professional life.

In your commitment to do a perfect job at work, you've noticed that you've gradually begun to come in early, skip lunch, stay late, and take work home on the weekends. An ongoing preoccupation with work related-issues leaves little time for family, friends, outside interests and any semblance of a personal life. While your job is important, you have to be *more* than your job. Like most employees today, you're expected to work harder, smarter, faster and better – with more creativity and energy than ever before. To do that, you need time to recharge yourself so you can focus your energy and enthusiasm in the appropriate direction. Working to create a *balanced* life is healthy, while working to create a *perfect* life can be detrimental to your physical and emotional well-being.

The other lesson I learned is that I can't be in charge of the entire world. Trying to be in charge of a small portion of it, or the people in it, was creating more stress than I could handle. Maybe you have finally accepted that you can't be in charge of a hypocritical boss, a difficult committee member, an angry customer or a coworker who refuses to do her share of the work. Perhaps you've come to the same conclusion when you're dealing with a disgruntled teenager, a neighbor who delights in spreading malicious gossip, or family members who prefer

whining and complaining about the tough breaks they've gotten over the years instead of getting on with their lives.

Trying to be in charge of too much can leave me feeling frustrated, overwhelmed and inadequate. Perhaps you've been suffering from your own version of June Cleaver Syndrome. If so, maybe it's finally time to tell her goodbye. Although you'll miss her for a while, you'll be fine. I'm constantly reminded that life isn't perfect, and neither am I. And that's something I need to remember as I plan my holidays – and my life. As Mama used to say, "You don't have to be perfect. All you have to do is try your best."

In the next chapter I'll share some strategies for creating stressfree holidays. I learned all of these lessons the hard way. Isn't that how the most effective learning usually takes place?



Chapter 4

Have Yourself a Stress-Free Little Christmas.

Have Yourself a Stress-Free Little Christmas.

As I promised at the end of the last chapter, I've included some strategies you can use to create your own stress-free holidays. You've probably attended your share of holiday gatherings that included a sumptuous buffet. If you're like my husband, you tried every single dish on the buffet table. If you're like me, you sampled different dishes and maybe even went back for seconds on the ones you liked best. Some items on the menu didn't appeal to you at all and you decided not to try them at all. I encourage you to use that approach with these suggestions. Take the ideas you like best, the ones that appeal to you, and use them to make your holidays more enjoyable. Leave the rest if you decide they are not necessary for your holiday survival. Bon appetite!

Now I totally understand that some of my readers may wonder why anyone would *need* strategies and tips to reduce holiday stress. That's probably because the person entertaining this thought is not the one who decorates, addresses, stamps, mails, shops, buys, wraps, returns, prepares, cooks, bakes, calls, invites, serves, and cleans up before and after. The rest of you, however, have already identified this person in your own life. So I'll share some tips and strategies for dealing with them.

As I'm sure you've experienced for yourself at one time or another, the annual countdown to the holidays often invokes feelings of excitement, anticipation and joy along with thoughts of over-commitment, added stress, too many extra activities

crowded into an already busy schedule, not enough time and not enough money. It's so easy to get caught up in the holiday experience and all it brings that we often sacrifice the very essentials we need to survive. Those include adequate rest, relaxation, healthy food, exercise, some quiet time for ourselves and time with the people who are special to us. Unfortunately, we're so busy taking care of others that we forget to take care of ourselves. So I've created a list of special gifts you can give yourself. Use the ones that work for you, and feel free to add to your own Gift List as other ideas come to mind.



Tear up your “holiday script.”

Haven't we all watched more than our share of TV “Christmas Specials” and read one too many magazines on decorating and entertaining for the holidays? In every medium we're exposed to Norman Rockwell – like images of the perfect family at the perfect holiday gathering. And haven't we, at least once in our adult lives, decided that *this* year we will BE that family? Sadly, we're often disillusioned because our reality fails to measure up to the pictures we've created in our imaginations. It's no wonder we're disappointed! Think about it. Another holiday has come and gone, during which we spent time with other less-than-perfect people and all their holiday hang-ups. What did we expect? It wasn't *perfect*. But it was our *reality*.

Have you ever attended a holiday party at which every woman (men don't do this) is commiserating and comparing notes about how her stressful holidays are shaping up? Have you, like me, ever thought, "For THIS I put on makeup and shaved my legs?" Not a year – or a party – goes by that someone doesn't comment, moan, groan, complain and whine about holiday stress. So what, exactly, is it? Personally, I like to think of it as a *state of mind* we often create for ourselves. It's the difference between the holidays we *expect* and the ones we *experience*. Let me see if I can explain it – the way it looks to me, anyway.

No matter what the occasion, every adult guest brings something extra (and invisible) to family gatherings. I refer to it as their own special "mind script" of expectations (often unrealistic and unattainable) of how they think the event should go. Holidays are always the worst. As you reflect on your last holiday gathering that didn't go as well as you had planned, why did things go wrong...again? Part of the problem may be that you had prepared your script of how you thought people should behave. Unfortunately, those in attendance didn't follow your script. Why in the world would they want to do that – especially since they each brought a script of their own?

By now you may have figured out exactly what was in their script. It was filled with a list of expectations of how they thought you should behave. My good friend Donna has a favorite saying at this time of year. "If you lower your expectations when family's

involved, you'll seldom be disappointed!" So give yourself Gift #1 and tear up your "holiday script."



Don't get caught in "the family time warp."

Depending on the make-up of your family you may be the only child, the oldest, the youngest or somewhere in the middle. No matter how old you are now and how much progress you've made so far (on your own or thanks to therapy, which I strongly endorse), family dynamics can make you feel like you're being pulled back into a role you played many years ago. But you don't have to play that role any longer if you don't want to, now that you're all grown up! It's your choice and you do have the ability (and the personal power) to do what's best for you.

One of the biggest challenges in many families is that most people never change. Not because they can't, but because they choose not to change. Over the years I've been astonished at some of the stories women in my audiences have shared with me after attending my session on creating stress-free holidays and stress-free lives. Here are a few of my favorites.

A daughter was having 15 family members for Christmas dinner. On Christmas Eve her mother called to announce that she would bring her own dressing, in case she didn't like the dressing that

another family member had offered to bring. The daughter held her ground and explained, “You are welcome to join us, but you have to leave your dressing at home.” The mother came, enjoyed the dressing, and forgot to bring the one dish she had offered to bring to add to the meal.

A woman called her sister, a full six weeks after being a guest in her home for the family’s Christmas gathering. She was unable to forgive her sister because she had not been invited to sit at what she considered “the best table” for dinner. When I asked this woman how she handled that, she explained that her sister had been the chronic complainer of the family for many years. So she listened attentively to her sister’s litany of complaints about the evening, then calmly suggested to her sister that if the table accommodations were not to her liking, perhaps she should find somewhere else to enjoy Christmas dinner next year. The Whiner apologized when she realized she would have nowhere else to go. Who else would want her? Would you want her at your house? Oops, maybe you already have her at your house. I’ll pray for you.

One family member always arrived late for Christmas dinner. She had no one but herself to get ready. After she showed up over an hour late with an appetizer, as people were ready to sit down for dinner, the hostess assigned her a dessert the following year. She is still late every year, but the amount of stress on the hostess has been greatly reduced.

By the way, if you're reading this chapter and thinking to yourself, "I can top those stories any day of the week," I would love to hear from you! Tell me your story! Email me, jean@jeangatz.com and maybe I can feature your story in my keynote, "Have Yourself a Stress-Free Little Christmas." I'm happy to give you full credit, although you may prefer to remain anonymous for your own protection! You never know who might read your story and recognize themselves – or you!



Cut yourself some slack.

Many years ago, when our three children were all young and I was enmeshed in running a household, raising a family, working part-time and volunteering at school and church, a dear friend invited me to a "cookie exchange." I had never experienced this particular holiday happening, but it sounded like a great idea. In theory I would come home from this fun-filled holiday party with a variety of 12 dozen yummy homemade cookies. I could then serve them to family and guests throughout the holidays, thus greatly simplifying my life during this busy season. The reality, which I didn't realize until I accepted the invitation (and which I'm sure you've already figured out), was that in order to BRING HOME 12 dozen cookies, I had to BAKE 12 dozen cookies. There are two things you should know about me. I don't enjoy baking and I don't like cookies.

My entire family was delighted with “the cookie exchange” concept and very disappointed that I never participated again. I graciously declined the invitation the following year after realizing that my family reaped the benefits and I did all the work. Is there an equivalent task on your holiday “to do” list? Maybe you love baking but there’s some other task you dread. What do you do because you have to and not because you want to? And how can you cut yourself some slack to spend more time on the projects you really enjoy? (You can be your own project if you so choose).



Make a different Holiday Wish List this year.

Make a list of everything you wish were different about the holidays, including the length of your “holiday to-do list.” Now create another list of the things you would *like* to do if you had more free time and were not so overwhelmed. With those two lists in hand, now it’s time to work on a plan to make your vision a reality for you. Start by dividing your “holiday to-do list” into these categories:

1. Important and/or enjoyable tasks and projects, with completion dates listed;
2. Non-essentials that won’t even be missed and can be scratched from your list;

3. Tasks related to the overall experience others enjoy, which you've been doing for a long time and which you can now delegate, in whole or in part, to others;
4. Tasks that you will discontinue doing on your own, if everyone is not in a cooperative mood about #3 above.

Now is the time to plan ahead and do whatever you can to start transforming your Wish List into a reality! My college roommate and longtime friend, Mary K., finally realized that hosting the big family Christmas dinner didn't mean she had to do all the work every year. She puts her plan into action on Christmas day, but she organizes her plan far in advance. The first year she explained her new plan to everyone, she was happy to discover that family members were willing to help with whatever she needed. All she had to do was ask. Now her new plan is working well. After everyone has arrived, she assigns tasks appropriate for the ages and abilities of various family members. Here are some tasks on her list:

After the gift exchange, pick up all the wrapping paper and take it out to the trash bin.

Help set the table.

Put ice in the glasses and fill them with water.

Pour the wine.

Help carry the food dishes to the table.

Clear the table.

Help serve dessert and coffee.

Wash the dishes, load the dishwasher, and help dry dishes.

Put away the leftovers.

Take out the garbage.

I'm going to try my friend's plan this holiday season. Will you? Can you? What can you do to recruit the help of others to reduce both your stress and the length of your to-do list? Let me know how it goes this year. I'll be anxious to find out what creative ideas you came up with on your own. Maybe we can compare notes!



Acknowledge your limitations.

These may change from year to year depending on what else is going on in your life. Make sure that you're doing whatever it takes to care for yourself in mind, body and spirit. If you don't do that first, you can't possibly take care of anyone else. For me, another aspect of knowing my limitations means acknowledging and accepting my lack of ability (and interest) in any project which includes the word "crafts." I do not want or need to create a gingerbread house in 42 easy steps. In fact, I don't want to do anything that takes 42 steps, no matter how easy they are.

I also do not want to make my own Christmas ornaments from objects found in my home. The very thought of what those ornaments would look like, hanging on my tree, makes me shudder. I have no doubt that giving my homemade ornaments to family and friends to hang on *their* trees would make them shudder as well. There is, however, another category of homemade ornaments I have enjoyed over the years. If you're a mother, you know I'm talking about the ones our children made while they were in grade school. Over the years when Steven, Michael and Jennifer were each in first grade, they had the same teacher. So the Christmas presents our kids made for us in the first grade were always the same. How can I describe ornaments resembling Santa, a snowman and a reindeer – fashioned from empty toilet paper rolls? They actually looked a bit more attractive than they sound. We certainly didn't want to hurt any child's feelings, so this meant that we had nine empty toilet paper rolls, all decorated as Santas, reindeer and snowmen, hanging in prominent places of honor on our tree. They certainly looked better than anything I could have made, and they were very precious to me. If you're a parent, what do you have hanging on your tree?

I still smile when I recall offering them to our grown children to hang on their own trees.

“Oh, no, Mom, we wouldn't want to take those away from you.”

“Well, if you're sure... but I wanted to offer them to you. I would love to keep them.”

The look of relief on their faces told me all I needed to know. So give yourself Gift # 5. Honestly identify your limitations, acknowledge them, and take care of yourself.



Remember the true spirit of giving has nothing to do with money.

It's difficult to get motivated and excited about buying presents *this* year if you're still paying off last year's credit card debt. Or perhaps your financial situation has changed and the extra money for gifts is simply not in the budget. If you can't afford it, it's perfectly OK to tell everyone that you won't be giving gifts this year. Perhaps you could give them the gift of your time instead. Bake cookies (or give them some from your own cookie exchange), offer to baby-sit, or run errands. On the upside, don't be surprised when you find out someone else in your family or circle of friends is in a similar situation but was afraid to speak up until you did. This person will breathe a sigh of relief and happily follow your lead. You'll be a hero for being honest enough to set limits and stick to them. What about the people who aren't happy with your new plan? You already know who they are, don't you? Be strong, stand your ground and let them deal with it the best way they can. That's part of taking care of yourself, isn't it?



Re-evaluate long-standing customs and traditions.

Determine if they've become obsolete, burdensome, or just plain boring. Then take the steps necessary to make some changes that are long overdue. And don't be surprised when others thank you for taking the lead and having the courage to make a change they have wanted to make for a long time!



Start some new traditions.

If you've suffered a loss and someone you love is not with you this year, following all the old and familiar traditions may be too painful. Maybe the very thought of it is more than you can bear. That's perfectly alright. This might be the year to start some new traditions to help you get through the holidays. Go back to Gift # 5: Cut yourself some slack. Do what works for you. Perhaps you're spending the holidays away from home and family. If following old traditions is not possible, start some new traditions of your own. Friends, neighbors or coworkers who are also away from family could become your "extended family" for the day.

And speaking of family, have you ever wished you could spend the holidays with someone else's family for a change? Another friend of mine suggests that instead of exchanging *gifts* at

Christmas, we should exchange *families*. She says we are all much better behaved when at least one non-family member is present. Reflecting on our own family gatherings, I have to admit that she may have something there! Look around for a friend, neighbor or coworker who might be alone on a special holiday and invite them to your family gathering. According to my friend, your own family members will be better behaved. She speaks from experience, as she has tried this and it works!



If you're feeling depressed, sad or angry, ask yourself why you're feeling that way.

Then figure out what you can do about it. Are you putting extra pressure on your already hectic life to provide perfect memories for others, while your own needs go unnoticed and unmet? Are there other areas in your personal or professional life causing you stress, sadness, grief, pain, sorrow, anger, resentment, frustration, or whatever feeling or emotion you want to insert here? Remember that the most well-intentioned people in your life are not mind readers. It's your responsibility to let them know, in an appropriate way, how you feel and what you need from them.

For some people it's much easier to give than to receive. We can get so focused on giving to others (and the pleasure we experience from our own generosity) that we fail to understand or acknowledge how important it may be to other people to let

them give to us. The gift may not be one we can touch but rather one that touches us. Gifts in the form of time devoted to listening, reading, writing notes, addressing cards, babysitting, cleaning the house, mowing the yard or running errands can be invaluable if the receiver needs them. There's an endless list of other ways they could help – if we are generous enough and gracious enough to accept their gifts of time. Is there help in some form that you really could use, but are too proud to ask for, or accept? Would this be an easy way to bring pleasure to someone else who would enjoy doing you a favor or helping with a task? How can you give joy to someone else by allowing them to do something for you?



Decide on a “stop date.”

Pick a date when you will finish rushing around to get everything done and start enjoying what you've accomplished so far. Stop feeling guilty about what you didn't finish on your “to-do” list and congratulate yourself for all the things you did get done. Enough said.



Do what you enjoy most – even if other people make fun of you!

Les and I really enjoy decorating our home for the holidays, both for our own pleasure and that of family, friends, colleagues and neighbors who come to visit Trust me, no crafts are involved!

We have quite an extensive “Christmas Village” collection of miniature shops, houses and people that takes many hours to set up. Creating our little village every year is not a chore but a joy. Seeing our visitors derive pleasure from our efforts is part of the fun.

When we moved to a new neighborhood after being in the same home for 27 years, one of the first questions people asked was, “Is there enough room for your Christmas village?” These are the same people who will start calling the first week in December to ask when they can stop by and “tour the village” to help them get into the holiday spirit. We welcome them, knowing they won’t expect any homemade cookies as part of the tour. In fact, some of them bring US cookies! What a deal!

Our children and their friends have also enjoyed our little village over the years, when they lived at home and even when they were older and brought friends home from college during the holidays. The only time they ever got uncomfortable with the village (and downright panic-stricken, by the looks on their faces) was the time I brought up the question, “Who wants the village when Dad and I die?” Steven and Jennifer were quick and honest in their responses, “No thanks, not me, I’ll pass.” We were all quite surprised when Michael spoke up and said, “I’ll take it.”

“Really?” I replied, in shock, “I thought you, of all three of our kids, would be the one least interested in having it.”

Michael responded with a grin, “Oh, I’m interested. And trust me, it’s going straight to Ebay. It’s worth a lot of money, and I can use the cash.”

Well, so much for sentimental family traditions! But I’m glad we have children with a sense of humor! So do what you enjoy most – even if other people make fun of you!



Make time for JOY.

“Christmas is for kids,” or so the saying goes. But I believe there’s “a little kid” in each of us. So indulge yourself! Drive around to look at lights and decorations, watch a favorite holiday movie, listen to music, call a friend to catch up, send out holiday cards or do whatever it takes to make you feel like a little kid inside. Time passes, and so do the preferences of the special people in your life, so you will need to modify some of your traditions. As our children grew up and no longer considered it fun (or cool) to spend an entire evening riding around looking at decorations and lights, Les and I continued the tradition with two special little girls who lived across the street from us. Margaux and Miranda enjoyed accompanying us on our “decorations tour” for many years and their enthusiasm and excitement always added to our own. Each year we ended the evening with hot chocolate and beignets, those yummy New Orleans style donuts coated with powdered sugar. What memories we made! What memories are you making?

As you reflect on the gifts I've mentioned in this chapter, maybe you've had the same revelation I had. I've come to realize that the strategies I've used to de-stress my *holidays* can also be applied to de-stress my *everyday life*. So I'm working to incorporate some of the following gifts into my life on a daily basis.

Gift # 1. Tear up my "life script." Life isn't perfect and neither am I.

Gift # 2. Don't get caught in "the family time warp." Some people never change.

Gift # 3. Cut myself some slack.

Gift # 4. Create my own Life Wish List, then work to create the life I want and deserve.

Gift # 5. Acknowledge my limitations and take care of myself in mind, body and spirit.

Gift # 6. Remember that some of the best gifts I can give are my time and attention.

Gift # 7. Make some changes that are long overdue.

Gift # 8. Don't be afraid to replace outdated thinking with new thoughts and new ideas.

Gift # 9. When I'm feeling out of sorts, figure out why and then do something about it.

Gift # 10. Take pride in my accomplishments and stop feeling guilty about the rest of it.

Gift # 11. Do more of what I love to do – even if other people don't understand why.

Gift # 12. Make time for joy.

As Mama used to say, “Christmas comes but once a year. And for most of us, that's often enough!”

Perhaps you celebrate other faith based or culturally based traditions instead of celebrating Christmas. Or you may not celebrate at all. Whatever you call it and however you choose to celebrate, I hope you will think about the real message I've tried to convey in this chapter.

Wouldn't our lives be much simpler, less complicated and far less stressful if we gave ourselves these gifts all year long?

I encourage you to spend some time reflecting on each of the gifts I've mentioned. Then grab pen and paper and ask yourself two questions:

“Which of these gifts do I want to incorporate into my life all year long?”

“What's my plan for getting started and making it happen?”



Chapter 5

When It Rains, It Pours.

When It Rains, It Pours.

As I put the finishing touches on this book, the television news this morning includes mention of a tropical storm brewing in the Gulf of Mexico. Feelings of uneasiness and apprehension rush through my mind and heart as I ask Les, “Can you believe it’s already hurricane season again? I wonder what’s in store for us this year.” Even though it’s been several years since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, the images are still fresh. During those horrifying days and nights while Baton Rouge became a refuge for several hundred thousand Katrina evacuees, our home became a shelter for several family members. Some of them arrived with nothing, and when it was all over, they had nothing to return to in their beloved city of New Orleans.

During the weeks that followed, reading and responding to emails from friends helped me keep my sanity intact. And my colleagues in my speaker mastermind group reassured and comforted me daily with their emails and phone calls. We’re scattered all across the US – New York, Kentucky, Florida, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. Now their emails filled with encouragement and support helped me feel more connected to the outside world. I came across those emails recently and realized that they’re similar to journal entries that detailed the events here, along with the emotions we were experiencing. So I’ve decided to share them with you.

Sunday morning, August 28, 2005

Hello, dear friends – I'm not going to start by saying, "Wish you were here." Nobody wants to be here right now. We're ready for Katrina, or as ready as we can be at this moment. We're expecting lots of rain along with winds of 50 to 75 mph, and hopefully, nothing more. During the last bad hurricane a couple of years ago, we lost power during the night. Les and I lay in bed, with our battery operated radio, listening to the wind howl as it blew through our huge oak trees, praying they would be strong enough to stand and not come crashing down on our house. We didn't lose any trees that year. Katrina, we fear, will be much worse. We still don't know how close she will come to Baton Rouge, as her path can change at any moment. OK, guys in the group, no comments about how women are famous for changing their minds!

We've combed the front and back yards and picked up every object that could possibly become a projectile. Garbage cans, empty flower pots and lawn chairs are safely tucked away. Jennifer and her roommate have arrived from New Orleans. They share a rental house right off St. Charles Avenue, close to both of their schools. PJ, a really nice girl from Virginia, is a law student at Loyola. Jen has one more year at Tulane to finish her MBA.

The majority of Tulane students are from the northeast, and that's way too far to get back home on short notice. When Jen was an undergrad at Tulane, she brought quite a few out-of-

state friends home whenever a hurricane threatened. The kids thought of it more as a hurricane party than a worrisome event. Les made his famous gumbo, and they enjoyed an excuse to be out of classes and have a place to relax and stay safe for a few days. Those hurricanes bypassed the city, but Katrina is coming straight towards New Orleans. I think we're all in for a different experience this time. Jen is optimistic enough that she brought home some school books and a large bag filled with dirty clothes. She plans to get her laundry done and head back to New Orleans in a day or two. Just to be on the safe side, she did bring home her laptop and her golf clubs – both treasured possessions for any self respecting Gatz child!

Sunday afternoon, August 28, 2005

As evacuees begin to pour into Baton Rouge, we've become over-populated within a matter of hours. Since we're only an hour away from New Orleans, our small neighborhood is beginning to overflow with temporary visitors. Cars with New Orleans license plates are lining the streets on both sides. Les just spoke with our next door neighbors, Donna and Rene, who have taken in fifteen family members. Some New Orleans residents have decided to stay and ride out the storm, but most are heeding the warning to evacuate. News reports show traffic backed up for miles. People traveling westward have to pass through Baton Rouge, even if they don't plan on stopping because they are trying to get to family or friends in other cities or states. Jen just

got a call from some of her friends who have arrived in Baton Rouge. Typical drive time is 90 minutes. It took them 7.5 hours to make the trip.

My cousin Suzanne is back in the hospital for another round of radiation to treat her cancer. I don't know what will happen there, or if they will stay in New Orleans. I guess a hospital is a pretty safe place to be right now.

I think we're safe here, but New Orleans could be devastated. Just a few months ago, a friend mentioned that she'd read a frightening article. It pointed out that since New Orleans is surrounded by water on three sides, if it ever took a direct hit from a hurricane it could be completely submersed in flood waters. That concept seemed incomprehensible to me at the time, or maybe I just didn't want to think about the truth of that ever happening. How could New Orleans, the place I called home for several years that holds so many treasured memories for me, simply disappear?

The next few hours will tell the story. Weather experts are predicting storm surges of 20 feet. The good news is that the Mississippi River is very low, due to lack of rain this summer. But the main danger is Lake Pontchartrain, which could empty into the city if the levees break.

My sister Kathy moved into her new home, only a few blocks from the river, less than a month ago. Before that, she lived in

another neighborhood a few blocks from the lake. It's difficult to live anywhere in New Orleans without being close to water somewhere, but you don't think about the danger until a hurricane threatens. Kathy got her PhD in May and was supposed to start teaching at Loyola this week. That won't happen now, as the city is officially closed. She's just arrived at my mother's house, about 20 minutes from here.

Everyone is so worried. Hopefully no lives will be lost. Everything else can be replaced. Please keep the people in the path of Katrina in your prayers. I will keep you posted as best I can. We may be lucky and not lose power, but that is a lot to hope for.

Tuesday morning, August 30, 2005

Hi, Gang- An update, now that our power has been restored and I have internet access again. We are safe. High winds but not a lot of rain, and very little cleaning up to do around the yard. We were without power since early yesterday morning but it came on last night around 6 p.m. Michael and Amy (they were married in May) arrived Saturday night with their two golden retrievers, Knox and Lola. They live in an older neighborhood across town, still have no power, and tree limbs and debris are scattered all over their yard. A huge oak tree (about 100 feet tall) fell across their yard and into the street, but thank God, did not fall on their home.

Yesterday wasn't such a bad day here. After the storm blew through, the skies stayed overcast all day. Since we were without air conditioning, we opened the windows and managed to stay pretty comfy. The kids pulled out some decks of cards and old board games. In their late 20's and early 30's, they managed to have fun playing Clue and Monopoly. That sure brought back some memories! Thank goodness, no one mentioned playing charades! Since we have a gas stove, I cooked and Les grilled some burgers.

As soon as the air conditioning came back on, we immediately called my mother and invited her and the family members staying with her to come here, as they are still without power. Our home is now filled to overflowing. There were ten extra people sleeping here last night, along with an assortment of pets. I've always thought it would be fun to run a bed and breakfast, but this isn't exactly what I had in mind!

Aunt Helen and Uncle Jerry (my mother's brother) maintain a vigil in front of our TV, watching and waiting to see and hear news of their neighborhood. My aunt is hard of hearing, so the volume is turned up quite loud and it's difficult to escape from the noise. I can't ask them to turn it off once in a while and give the rest of us a break, when they are waiting to see if there is anything left of their home. Other than the few possessions they hurriedly tossed into their car when they escaped the city (insurance papers, my aunt's medical records, the deed to their

house, and two changes of clothing for each of them) everything else they own in this world is still at 5614 Arts Street.

Thursday morning, September 1, 2005

National news is now broadcasting scenes of the wreckage and devastation by helicopter cameras and the pictures – as you’ve seen for yourselves – are unbelievably gruesome. Last night about 10 o’clock we were all gathered in the living room when the pictures of Aunt Helen and Uncle Jerry’s neighborhood finally flashed on the screen. All we could see were the rooftops of houses that were still covered with 12 feet of water. That video footage confirmed that they are now homeless with literally nothing but the clothes on their backs. No one could speak. What do you say? How do you find the words of comfort? Are there any such words?

Their three adult children are scattered everywhere, but they are safe. Because cell phone towers were destroyed or are still under water, cell phones with New Orleans exchange numbers are not working. Many people still haven’t been able to find out if their loved ones are safe – or even alive. They’ve been able to send text messages back and forth to confirm everyone is OK. Their son Andre has lost his home, but we don’t know about the homes of their two daughters, Denise and Suzanne. Speaking of Suzanne, we just found out that flood waters rose five feet high on the first floor of the hospital where she is receiving her

radiation treatment. They have moved the patients to higher floors. So much for my earlier comment about a hospital being a safe haven in a storm!

There is more shocking news. We just heard that after Katrina wiped out much of New Orleans, she crossed Lake Pontchartrain and hit the town of Slidell, located on the north shore. It's the town where I grew up and where many of my grammar school and high school friends still live. It looks very bad there as well. Jennifer and Kathy have had no word on the condition of their homes. Although Jen lives in a rent house, she is worried about her clothes and personal possessions because of all the reports of looting. The news from Kathy's neighborhood doesn't sound good at all. We haven't seen any pictures yet. Of course the entire city is shut down. For how long, no one knows.

Thursday afternoon, September 1, 2005

The mood here is somber. While we are grateful to be spared, many in New Orleans have died. Thousands more are without homes. Some are still being rescued from their roof tops today. Please continue to pray for strength and courage for what lies ahead for all of them.

Our New Orleans chapter of the National Speakers Association has begun contacting our members, many of whom are already spread far and wide. Some have lost not only their homes but

their business offices, all of their records, and everything they have worked so hard to build upon since beginning their speaking careers. I received an email today that plans are being put into place for the NSA Foundation to help them financially, as soon as they can be located. I've volunteered to help gather information as to what they need and how we can be of most help to them. It will give me a project on which to focus, and I definitely could use a project right now!

I spent last night thinking about what I would take if something like Katrina ever came our way. Y'all know me well enough to know that the first things I would grab are photos and family albums. And the dog! Oh, and Les, too! I came up with a list, but it made me sad to think of all that we would have to leave behind. Then I realized that it's just *stuff*. It can be replaced. Next I thought about what's in my office and what I would need to take to keep myself in business after such a major catastrophe. It was overwhelming. When things settle down I'm going to put some plans into place to do a more thorough job of protecting my business.

Well, my time is up and it's someone else's turn at the computer now. My relatives are spending a lot of time on line filling out all kinds of forms, checking bank account balances, applying for various types of financial help, and trying to locate family and friends through email. With my computer, fax machine, copy machine, and three phone lines available for our temporary

guests, we are certainly a full service refugee center! And there is more TV to watch. Kathy is hoping to spot her neighborhood soon. We will help her when she is able to go back home. That is not something anyone should have to do alone.

I'll update you later – hopefully with some encouraging news. I appreciate, more than you know, that you are there for me. Your emails were the first ones I opened when I got back to my computer. I am so richly blessed to have such friends in my life.

Sunday, September 4, 2005

Hello, All – It's a quiet morning here, so I will take time to update you. News is improving, little by little, and we are grateful for any good news at all. For the first time in almost a week no one is sleeping in my office, either on the sofa or on the floor. After five days, Mother's electricity finally came back on, so she and Kathy and Aunt Helen and Uncle Jerry (don't you feel like they're *your* aunt and uncle now?) have returned to mother's house.

Jennifer and PJ drove home to Virginia and PJ has enrolled in her last year of law school there. Jen went with her so PJ wouldn't have to drive alone. She sounded so discouraged last night on the phone. "I don't know if I have anything to come home to." It was good for her to get away for a few days. I wish I could get away

for a few days! I'm not choosy at this point. I'll go just about anywhere!

Part of our good news is that we are now housing four guests instead of ten. My cousin Suzanne and her husband are here with two kids and two dogs. After they evacuated the hospital because they ran out of food and water for the patients, Suzie has come here to continue with her radiation treatments. We have an excellent facility here, so she is in good hands and they are all in fairly good spirits. They had four inches of water in their home, but they can't go back because the city is still officially closed. No electricity, water, food or any of the necessities of life we take for granted.

On a lighter note, Katie (our little Maltese) has been very tolerant of all these strange dogs who have taken up temporary residence here. Gary's two beagles spent their first few hours in our backyard looking in the window and barking at Katie, who was safely ensconced in her doggie bed in the living room. When I finally asked Gary why *his* dogs were barking at *my* dog he laughed and said, "They're hunting dogs and they think Katie's a rabbit." She was not impressed!

My cousin Andre and his wife Maureen came by Friday night (with their two dogs, of course!) Aunt Helen and Uncle Jerry came over, and Suzanne was already here. It was the first time their family had been reunited since the storm. As you can

imagine, it was a very emotional evening. They lost their home, but Maureen's beauty shop in Slidell is still standing. So they're living in their camper in the parking lot outside of her shop.

They are so relieved to have finally found their son, Rene. He works for the City of New Orleans and the last contact they had with him was the morning of the storm when he told them he had to evacuate his office because windows were breaking and water was pouring in. Then the phone line went dead. They were frantic, but he has finally been able to call to let them know he is safe. Denise's home did not flood, so they can return. Now we are worried that looters will steal what few possessions our family members may have left in their homes (the ones that are still standing) but we will have to wait and see.

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

More good news! Jennifer's rent house close to the Tulane campus is high and dry! We got a call from the woman who lives in the other side of the duplex, and she says the house did not have water damage and is safe from looters so far. Sadly, many of Jennifer's close friends did not fare as well, and they are choosing to relocate to other cities. Every school in New Orleans is closed for the fall semester, and maybe longer. At first Jen didn't think she would have anywhere to go to school, but in the past few days schools all across the country have opened their doors – and their hearts – to students displaced by Katrina. She

accepted an invitation to the University of Texas at Austin. They have an outstanding MBA program in Entrepreneurship.

The next hurdle was finding a furnished place to live, since we can't get to her furniture yet. One of our good friends contacted a friend of hers in Austin. Without a moment's hesitation they invited Jen to come and stay with them, rent free, while she's in school. What a blessing! And there are many such blessings, happening every day, as people join together to help each other. Jen is very sad to be separated from her friends, but everyone is scattered to the winds for this semester. Tulane has announced they will be open for business next semester, and Jen is already looking forward to returning home.

Wednesday, September 7, 2005

Dear Friends – You'll be pleased to know that I took your recent email advice to heart. You wrote, "Care giving is both the hardest and noblest of work. So take some time for yourselves." Last night Les and I went out to dinner – just the two of us. While this might not sound like a big deal, it's the first time since Katrina hit that I've left the house to do anything but transport relatives to the doctor, bank, drugstore, gas station, grocery, insurance agent's office, and anyplace else they needed to go.

Fortunately, our favorite restaurant is located only two minutes down the road, so we didn't have to fight the traffic to get across

town. We were seated at a table with a white tablecloth and real dishes. What a welcome change from the paper plates we've been using for the past week! Even better, for the first time in what seems like ages, someone else actually cooked a meal for me and served it to me. I felt like a queen! It was so quiet and peaceful there – no blaring televisions, barking dogs or hushed and worried conversations.

And they had air conditioning, too! Don't laugh! Our high heat and humidity can make August and September quite miserable, and many Baton Rougeans are still without electricity. In fact, our young waiter shared his new pick-up line with us – the one he uses when he meets a cute girl. "Hey, my apartment has air conditioning. Want to come over?" He admitted he hasn't had much luck so far, but it gave us a good laugh – which we sorely needed.

Les has been working extra hours, including weekends. Banks all over town are trying to accommodate evacuees who need to cash checks, move money from savings to checking accounts, cash in CDs (penalties are waived) and get the money they need to survive. I must admit that for the past few days I've envied Les and his ability to get away from home to go to work. I feel trapped here, working from my home office. I've enjoyed it for many years, but it sure is different now. When Les pulls out of the driveway in the morning I want to jump in the car and go with him. I'm feeling overwhelmed as each day unfolds with the many

demands put upon me, not intentionally, but by people who have nowhere else to turn. Keep those prayers coming!

But getting back to Les, you already know he is such a true Southern gentleman. So it came as no surprise that he bought a huge coffee pot and he's been serving coffee and donuts to anyone who comes by the bank – customers and non-customers alike. Yesterday an elderly couple came in to see him, after walking over a mile from the condo where they are temporarily housed. They lost their car in the flood but needed to get to the bank. Naturally, after Les finished helping them, he drove them back to their condo. Now that is customer service! Similar scenarios are happening all over town. People comment about how thoughtful, gracious, and kind we Baton Rougeans are. They are so right! But we already knew that!

Thankfully, Kathy's house did not flood after all, so Les will go in with her next weekend to pack up some of her things. To gain entry into her neighborhood Kathy must show her driver's license with her photo ID to the National Guard troops that are monitoring the entrances to the city. They're trying to combat the looting by making sure that people are actually going into their own neighborhoods, and not to places where they don't belong. She will stay with my mother until she can get back into her home for good. New Orleans still has no sources for food, water or electricity, and none of the stores are open. Cars, trees and other debris are piled up everywhere, so it's not safe to drive in the city.

Thursday, September 22, 2005

According to estimates on the local news last night, as well as traffic everywhere you look, Baton Rouge is bursting at the seams. Within days after Katrina hit, we had 200,000 evacuees here. Predictions are that we will end up with thousands of new residents who will choose not to return to New Orleans and will make Baton Rouge their home. Large firms have grabbed every available bit of vacant office space. People are buying homes for the full asking price, and paying cash. Michael's friend, a builder, sold ten houses last week – in one day! More airlines will be coming here, as the New Orleans airport will be closed for some time. Many government agencies and medical facilities are moving their operations here until New Orleans is functioning again.

What does all this mean for the future of our fair city? To say we are “overcrowded” is an understatement. Traffic is mindboggling. It usually takes me about 15 minutes to drive to my mother's house. Now it takes at least an hour. As one neighbor put it, “We went to sleep one night in Baton Rouge, and we woke up in Houston!” How true! Gasoline is scarce, lines are long, and we are grateful to get it and pay whatever the asking price is. People are going to the grocery stores early in the morning to get items such as milk and bread, which fly off the shelves. It's like living in another country in another time.

As for me, I'm in better spirits. I had a good cry yesterday while talking to Steven on the phone, but I'm OK today. I would give anything to hug those two precious grandbabies in Dallas right now, but I'll have to wait a while longer to do that. I do look at pictures of Carter and Hudson often, and that definitely helps me get through the day! I'm feeling the pressure and stress of taking care of lots of people. And the devastation is constantly on TV, as my relatives watch for any good news. I'm still trying to absorb all of this, as are so many, and I've learned to retreat to our bedroom, close the door and get away from it all for even a few minutes whenever I can. Of course I take Katie with me, as she is also in need of some peace and quiet.

Thanks for your prayers and good thoughts. The NSA Foundation has already been a huge help to those members who lost everything. It is very comforting to see them in action. It makes me proud.

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

Dear Friends – Good news! We are finally going in on Saturday with a truck to get all of Jennifer's possessions. Her roommate is there today with her family, and the house is secure. No water damage and no looting. They didn't have much cleaning up to do, and the biggest chore was disposing of the refrigerator – without opening it, for sure! The house has been without electricity for 30 days, and there is still no hope of it being turned on any

time soon. So they did what everyone else in New Orleans is doing when they can return home. They taped the door shut and wheeled the refrigerator out on a dolly to the curb, where it joined the hundreds of other refrigerators that are now lining the streets of the city.

I've been very hard on myself the last few days, convinced that I should not be feeling so sad and weary because none of these tragedies have actually happened to me. But they happened to the family members we love. And to people all around us. And to friends we've known forever. And to evacuees we meet in grocery stores and at church. Stories of devastation and heartbreak are in every conversation. Most conversations with friends, neighbors and business colleagues begin with the same three questions:

“Is everyone safe?”

“Did you have any damage?”

“How many extra people are living with you?”

A couple of nights ago Les and I were watching the local newscast in our bedroom. I mentioned that I was feeling guilty after seeing yet another story of local citizens going to shelters every day to help cook for all of those New Orleans residents who now have nothing.

“Why are you feeling guilty?”

“Because I haven’t been going to work at a shelter.”

“Jean, look around. You’re running a shelter.”

Short conversation, but the message came through loud and clear. This is an extraordinary time and we’ve been drafted into a service we weren’t really prepared for. But we’re doing our best to rise to the occasion. We are certainly being tested. But we have what it takes to pass the test. People have found safety, peace, comfort, refuge and love under our roof and under many other such roofs across our city, our state and across our country. We press on, with faith, courage and trust in God and in ourselves.

Friday, September 30, 2005

Dear Friends – I wish you could hear the beautiful sounds of silence that fill our home this evening. For the first time in over a month we are alone. It’s finally just the three of us again – Les, Jean and Katie. And it’s wonderful. To update you on our family, which I’m sure feels like *your* family now, the news is good. Kathy and Jennifer are back in their homes. Aunt Helen and Uncle Jerry have moved next door to Denise, in a duplex she owns, where she can oversee their care. Suzanne and Gary are back at home. Everyone important to us is safe and has a place

to live. From my heart, I thank you for your notes and phone calls over the past month, and for being the kind of friends no one should ever be without – the kind of friends I hope and pray everyone is blessed to have in their lives. I'm glad I have you in my life, and I love you all.

To my readers:

I didn't realize what an emotional experience it would be to reread these emails and relive the days following Katrina. The lessons learned are many, and I will trust you to take what you need from this story. I do want to mention a specific lesson I learned and what I've done about it. We never think that such a tragedy could befall us. It happens to other people, but not to us, right? Tornadoes, hurricanes, collapsing bridges, earthquakes, fires, floods, mud slides – the list of possible catastrophes is endless and unthinkable. While Les and I understand we are powerless over many natural and man-made disasters, we know it's our responsibility to be as ready and prepared as possible. Here are the steps we've taken so far.

1. We bought a generator. Next time we might be without power for longer than 24 hours. And if we're housing elderly people again, a refrigerator and some electric fans are not a luxury but a necessity. Oh, we bought fans, too.

2. I invested in a software program which automatically backs up everything on my computer, once every hour. All this information is stored on a website I can access when needed. Whether it's a natural disaster or a hard drive crash, I'm now protected.

3. I finally did something I've been talking about doing for years. I recorded video images of everything in our entire home, inside and out. Office equipment, clothes, jewelry, furniture, dishes, artwork, pots and pans – it's all on tape now. Then I went outside and captured video of the exterior of our home, the porch furniture, the gardens, plants, Les' riding mower and all of his tools – you name it – I have it on video. True, there are things we can never replace. Still, it's a huge relief to know we have a documented record, safely tucked away in our bank box, of exactly what we own in case we ever need to prove it to our insurance company.

Maybe you've already decided that even though this sounds like a good idea, it also sounds like a lot of work. You're right on both counts. Is it necessary for you? Here's an easy way to decide. Get a pen and paper, leave your house or apartment, and go someplace where you can sit and write, undisturbed. Make a list of every piece of furniture and everything of value around your home or office, inside and out. Record every article you would have to replace if needed. Picture it all, room by room.

Take as long as necessary. When you think you've recorded it all, go back home and look around, room by room. What did you miss? I guarantee you didn't remember it all. No one's memory is that good! I hope it never happens, but one day you may need to provide such a list to someone. How much easier, and less stressful, would it be to take photos, a video tape or a DVD out of your safe deposit box? If you don't own a camcorder or a camera, borrow one. Rent one. It doesn't matter how much or how little you own. Set a deadline to get this done and stick to it. After seeing the list you may decide to increase the coverage of your homeowner's policy or get renter's insurance for contents. Yes, it is a project. The peace of mind it brings will more than make up for your efforts.

4. We purchased flood insurance, even though we are not required to have it since we don't live in a flood plain. And Jennifer purchased renter's insurance.

Of course I cannot end this chapter without giving you a few questions to think about. When I share (a much shorter version of) this story with my audiences, I talk about survival and what that means for each of us. We're all different so we all respond differently in times of crisis. Then I ask them two questions:

“What's the name of your storm?”

“What are you doing to be a storm survivor?”

After my keynotes and workshops, people come up to share their stories and describe their storms. They might involve a cancer diagnosis for themselves or someone they love, a divorce, a child on drugs, a miscarriage, a husband who committed suicide, an eating disorder, loss of a job, home, or relationship or the death of a loved one. I am continually amazed that in every city someone names a new “storm” that no one has mentioned before. Then we talk about what they’re doing to be storm survivors. Their courage and determination continue to inspire me.

I’ll close this chapter by asking you the same two questions:

“What’s the name of your storm?”

“What are you doing to be a storm survivor?”



Chapter 6

**Always Send a Thank-You Note
to Your Hostess.**

Always Send a Thank-You Note to Your Hostess.

Mama ingrained those words in all of us from the time we could write and put two sentences together. I have to admit that I don't write as many thank-you notes as I should. I'm working on that, as I know how good I feel when I receive such a note. Even if it's a brief few lines, I always appreciate that someone took time out of their busy life to say thanks, and it means a lot to me.

Some people have a gift for expressing their thanks in ways that touch countless lives. That's my friend, Kathy Schott. Without a doubt, her "Letter to the Editor" in our local newspaper touched thousands of lives and brought smiles – and tears – to the faces of all who read it. Here it is.

December 29, 2005
Letter to the Editor, The Advocate
To the people of Baton Rouge
From a grateful New Orleans evacuee

Dear Baton Rouge,

We have caused you to sit in traffic, wait in long lines at stores and post offices, and listen to our stories. We ran to you for refuge and consolation. We have come to your churches, your businesses, and swelled the ranks of your schools. I would like to thank you for your warm

embrace, your patience and your generosity. Some of us are returning home, to our houses, to rented apartments, to FEMA trailers, to relatives. Some of us are staying a while longer. Still others have made Baton Rouge their permanent home.

To the postal worker who patiently helped me change our address, to the salesperson who handed me a tissue as I cried while buying new Christmas ornaments to replace the ones my children made when they were little, to the kind drivers who always motioned for me to turn in front of them and to the countless others who have touched me with kindness, I give a heartfelt thank-you. I am going home to my beloved and battered New Orleans, but Baton Rouge will always be held fondly in my heart.

Kathleen Schott
New Orleans native
Baton Rouge adoptee

In just a few words, Kathy reminds us how important it is to acknowledge acts of kindness and sacrifice, no matter how small, instead of assuming that people know we are grateful. Her letter is a beautiful and timely reminder of how much we all need each other, and how important it is that we're always there for each other, no matter what. Although they were here under terrible circumstances, Baton Rouge is a better place because of people like Kathy and her family. We miss them, but our prayers have been answered. They are home.

Kathy has graciously given me permission to reprint her letter. When I showed it to Mama she said, “Well, I don’t know Kathy Schott personally, but her mother must have raised her right. She’s obviously a very gracious Southern lady.”

That she is! Thank you, Kathy.



Chapter 7

**Don't Bring that Stray Dog
into This House!**

Don't Bring that Stray Dog into This House!

During our marriage Les and I have raised three children and four dogs. Looking back I have to admit there were times when the dogs were a lot less trouble. Thank goodness, neither dogs nor children all arrived at the same time. Although we've long since finished having kids, we'll probably always have a dog.

I've learned a lot from both species, but in this chapter I want to share what I learned from our dogs. We adopted our first dog when Steven was attending pre-school two mornings a week while I worked part-time for a law firm. Someone had abandoned him (the dog, not the child) and one of the teachers brought him to school in hopes that a parent would give him a good home. Dirty and disheveled, he had no collar or tags but lots of fur. When he looked at me with those big brown eyes that pleaded, "Please take me home," I couldn't resist. I checked with Les to make sure he was ready to welcome a dog into our family. He agreed, and Steven and I put that cute little mutt into the car. Giggling at his over-abundance of curly gray hair, Steven decided to name him "Pepper."

We stopped at the vet's office before going to the groomer. Pepper checked out just fine with the vet, who pronounced him to be in very good health. We got all of his shots and his new tags, and then dropped him off at the groomer's place. When I picked him up several hours later I was quite confused. I looked at Pepper, then at her, and said, "Oh, I think you made a mistake."

That's not the dog I brought in earlier." She laughed and said, "Yes, it is. He just looks very different. You brought in what you thought was a mutt and you're bringing home what turned out to be a poodle."

Friendly and good-natured, Pepper was the perfect playmate for Steven. His only fault was that he was overly adventurous and kept finding new and creative ways to dig out under the fence in the backyard and scamper off around the neighborhood. Every time we went searching and brought him home, Les would locate the most recent escape hole and try once again to "Pepper-proof" the fence. But that little dog began each day determined to dig a new hole and find his way out.

Early one morning after escaping once more, he got into a fight with a very large dog that constantly ran loose in our neighborhood. Though I'm sure Pepper was valiant and brave, he didn't stand a chance. By the time he found his way home and Les rushed him to the vet, it was too late to save him. We only had Pepper for a few months, but for a little dog that weighed a mere four pounds, he sure left a big hole in our hearts. The lesson Pepper taught me was to have fun, consider every day as a potential adventure, and live that day to the fullest.

Our next dog was also an energetic and playful poodle whose elderly owner could no longer care for him and wanted to give him to a family with children. Steven (8) and Michael (4) fell in love with him in a heartbeat, and the feeling was mutual. As soon

as we got him home, however, we realized we had a problem. Now we had a dog and a child who both answered to the name “Michael.”

When Michael Charles was scolded, Michael the Dog ran and hid under the bed. Teaching the dog to use the doggie door got very confusing. Whenever I said, “Michael, go outside and potty,” our Michael headed for the doggie door! After several days we had to admit that a name change for the dog was definitely in order. Steven didn’t agree, however, and protested loudly.

According to the wisdom of his eight years, Michael Dog was older than Michael Child. Thus it was only fair to change Michael Child’s name because he would have an easier time adjusting to being called by a new name. Hearing this explanation, I fast-forwarded about twenty years into the future and envisioned our adult son explaining to his therapist that his parents changed his name because they liked the dog better. Once I explained to Steven that his idea might not be as simple as it sounded, we compromised and renamed our dog. From that day forward he was known as “Mike Pup.”

A very smart dog, Mike Pup knew he was supposed to sleep in his doggie bed in the den. So he would wait until Les and I were busy reading or watching TV after the boys were in bed. Then he would quietly creep along behind the sofa, go all the way around through the dining room and slink down the hall to Steven and

Michael's room. He loved to jump into bed with Steven – his only choice since Michael slept in the top bunk.

Mike Pup lived to the ripe old age of fifteen. All four of us grieved openly and honestly when he died. Laughing and crying, we shared our favorite stories along with our sadness as we recalled how much joy he had brought into our lives and how little he asked in return. We thought Mike Pup would be our last dog, but we soon changed our minds. Later in this book you'll meet Heartsie.

It's been a long time since I thought about those two sweet and lovable little dogs and their attitudes on life, but putting this story on paper gave me a chance to reflect on how much a pet – or a person – can touch our lives, even for a very short time. Who are the people you've known for a very short time who have had a major impact on your life? What about the ones you've known for a very long time? And why did you think of each of them in particular?

Our pets do bring a certain "attitude" into our homes and our lives. You've noticed that I used such words as feisty, brave, friendly, good-natured, energetic, playful and adventurous to paint pictures of our pets for you. You probably have pets of your own, or maybe you've had some in the past. It wouldn't be difficult at all for you to describe their attitudes, would it? Certain words and phrases would immediately come to mind. In fact, it's usually easier for us to describe an animal's attitude than it is to describe a person's attitude. Without a doubt, however, people and animals do look at life with "attitude."

It's sometimes difficult to explain what we mean when we talk about a person's attitude. Maybe it's best depicted as a state of mind that's revealed through our behavior, tone of voice, facial expressions and body language. That's why most of us tend to use words like "happy and cheerful" or "enjoyable to be around" when describing a person with a positive attitude. In other words, our attitude affects our behavior, which in turn is demonstrated by our outlook on life, along with the way we treat people at work and at home.

What about you? From the list below, which words would you choose to describe your attitude and behavior as you see yourself interacting with others?

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| happy | sad | irritable |
| creative | thoughtful | sensitive |
| easygoing | reliable | professional |
| competitive | honest | cooperative |
| withdrawn | distracted | sullen |
| energetic | angry | helpful |
| tolerant | demanding | controlling |
| positive | calm | sarcastic |
| kind | enthusiastic | pushy |
| impatient | complaining | resentful |
| grateful | negative | optimistic |
| caring | good listener | non-stop talker |

As you look at this list and think about your own attitudes and behaviors, which other words come to mind? Whether they are positive or negative words, write them down.

Then think about this. There are people in your life who have known you for a very short time, a very long time, or somewhere in between. You have probably touched their lives in a positive or negative way. Have you ever wondered how they would describe you if given the opportunity? Which of the words on that list do you think they would use? Now here comes the hard part. If you really want to know how others perceive you, give this list to several of your friends, family members or co-workers whom you trust to tell you the truth. Ask them to circle the words they would use to describe you, and to add any of their own that are not on the list. Are you willing to spend some time looking closely at the results? How open are you to receiving this feedback? How comfortable – or uncomfortable – will you be with it all?

It's hard for most of us to muster up the courage to ask for honest feedback because we're not exactly sure what we might learn about ourselves. We may not be comfortable with this kind of feedback, helpful though it might be. As a result, we often don't have a clear picture of how we come across to others. *Our* reality doesn't match *their* reality, but we continue to practice the old adage, "What I don't know can't hurt me." In this case, that may not be true. What we don't know, or aren't willing to

acknowledge, *can* hurt us when it damages relationships with people we care about at work and at home.

No one ever professed that keeping a positive attitude is always easy. Life on this earth is far from perfect. Every day, without fail, some very bad things happen to some very good people. It's impossible to live our lives without going through some tough times. We've all had our share of days when we say to ourselves, "How can I have a positive attitude about this? Give me a break!" Even if we manage to escape some of those tough and trying situations, we still have to deal with difficult people who try to pull us down.

Have you noticed that difficult people aren't very good at taking responsibility for their attitudes? They are, however, *very* good at saying, "No one has the right to tell me what kind of attitude I should have. This is just who I am!" Actually, they are correct. We all have a constitutional right to have any attitude we choose. But when our attitude negatively affects our behavior, our performance on the job, and the way we treat other people, then we've crossed a line.

If you're not proud of some of the words you or others chose to describe your attitude and behavior, you're the only one with the power to make the necessary changes. What is one Action Step you will take to begin the process? What is one negative trait you can replace with a more positive one that will serve you better in

your personal and professional relationships? While you ponder over that, I'll leave you with one question. If "attitudes" were contagious, would anyone want to catch yours?



Chapter 8

**Slow Down.
You're Going to Fall.**

Slow Down. You're Going to Fall.

“It seemed like such a good idea at the time.” Does that phrase ring a bell? Looking back and re-evaluating our past decisions, it's often easy to see where we made our mistakes, especially when we've had to learn something the hard way. The trials and tribulations of trying to get my life back in balance certainly provided me with some valuable learning experiences! I do a lot of the right things to take care of myself, but when I turned 60 a few years ago I decided it was time to tone up, build stronger bones and improve my cardiovascular health. Since we already owned a treadmill I bought some weights and a couple of videos that focused on weight training and low impact aerobics, and I began to work on my plan to get in shape.

After the first few weeks of my training program, I was very pleased with my progress. Feeling better overall, and with much more energy, I was even beginning to notice some areas that didn't jiggle nearly as much as they used to. My self-talk was pretty positive. “Wow! I feel great!” “This is what exercise is all about!” and “Why did I wait so long to get in shape?” Well, actually, this was how my self-dialogue went for the first four weeks. By the fifth week my conversations with myself included phrases like, “I might have overdone it just a bit.” and “I don't think feeling good is supposed to hurt this much.”

Within a matter of a few short weeks, my new exercise program resulted in two major injuries. My left shoulder was very painful

and my right foot kept slipping out from under me when I walked. Of the two injuries “my balance thing” was my major concern. It wasn't as much of a problem while working in my home office because I could grab onto a piece of furniture to steady myself when I felt like I was falling. But travel was a very different story.

As a keynote speaker my job involves speaking at conferences, conventions and corporate meetings all across the country. So I spend a lot of time in airports, hotels and convention centers. I've always enjoyed the travel, seeing new places and meeting new people. Some trips were harder than others, but travel was part of my job and I took it in stride. Now my stride – and my attitude – had changed from determined and confident to unsure and insecure. My greatest fear wasn't delivering a keynote in front of several thousand people. I was now afraid of losing my balance and falling on a stage, in an airport, a hotel lobby, or anywhere else I happened to be.

After more than a few close calls, I realized I had to find out what was going on before I injured myself further. This “balance thing” was getting worse and it was time to see a neurologist. It wouldn't be a problem to find a good one, once I consulted my list. You see, I've reached an age where I pay very close attention when one of my friends sings the praises of a particularly wonderful and caring doctor, no matter what their specialty happens to be. Just because I don't need them *today* doesn't mean I won't need

them *tomorrow*. So far I hadn't needed to utilize my list, aptly named "Doctors My Friends Love." But now was the time. I called his office and made an appointment.

Are you a worrier like I am? When I don't know exactly what's wrong I tend to imagine the worst. As I sat in the neurologist's exam room a week later, my imagination was running wild. What could this be? What was I about to hear? How serious would it be? How would I handle the news? Was my future about to change in ways I could not even begin to comprehend? Was my career over? Thankfully, I didn't have long to wait and worry before the doctor appeared.

After listening to my history, asking me some questions and putting me through a few simple tests to evaluate my balancing abilities (or lack thereof), my doctor ordered a series of tests to rule out certain conditions. Meeting with him a few days later to get the test results, he explained the problem and what we could do about it. I didn't have a brain tumor and I didn't have a debilitating neurological disease. There was, in fact, a very simple explanation for my current lack of stability.

While pushing myself to lift weights that were obviously too heavy, I compressed a spinal disk that was now pressing on a nerve that leads to my foot. My brain sends a message, through this nerve, that my feet are supposed to move. That's part of the process that enables me to walk. This circuit was being

interrupted because of my injury, and my foot wasn't getting the correct signal. So it would simply stop moving in mid-step, which caused me to falter and lose my balance.

Then he smiled and spoke three encouraging words. "This is fixable."

To my great relief he recommended physical therapy as my first option. If that didn't work, we would move on to other options, none of which sounded especially pleasant to me. If Option Number One went according to plan, specific PT exercises would reconnect the broken circuit between my brain and my foot while my damaged nerve and disk continued to heal.

"Great choice," I thought. No surgery, no recovery time *from* surgery and – best of all – exercise shouldn't hurt. (If you've ever been through physical therapy, you're probably laughing at my ignorance by now). While physical therapy certainly wasn't the cake walk I anticipated, I stuck with it. Thankfully, after three months of working with a caring physical therapist and her team, my balance greatly improved. And so did my outlook on life.

Reflecting on that time, I now realize that my trauma was much more than physical in nature. My attitude and emotions were profoundly affected. Each time I lost my balance and felt like I was going to fall, I became more and more afraid and insecure. So I began to dread traveling, shopping, running errands, going to church or any places where I might feel unsafe and unsure.

And that pretty much covered any place I could think of, besides the confines of our home.

Normally a very active person, I didn't leave home except to go to physical therapy. That became my only outing of the day. On the days when I did have to travel to a speaking engagement, I spent most of my time in fear of what might happen. I carried an umbrella, even on sunny days, and used it as a cane. In airports I rolled my laptop case behind me, and the weight of it helped ground me. I avoided all smooth surfaces and went out of my way to walk on carpet whenever possible, as it gave me better traction. The ever-present question on my mind was, "How can I get from here to there without falling?"

Things changed when I was on stage, too. In my keynotes I use personal stories and lots of humor to connect with my audience. I never stand behind a podium because I don't want to create a barrier between us. During those days, however, I often stood next to the podium and tried to look relaxed and nonchalant as I kept one hand on it to steady myself. It was tough to concentrate on doing my job as a speaker, which meant I had to work much harder to do my best – to be my best – for my client and the people in the audience.

After a long and arduous three-month process my therapist took me through one final session. It felt like a graduation of sorts, and my "diploma" came in the form of the progress report she sent to my neurologist. She observed the ease and accuracy with which

I could complete each exercise, compared to what I was able to do when I first arrived (which wasn't much!) and pronounced that I was "balanced in body" once again. But she had no idea how much that physical therapy helped me become balanced in mind and spirit as well.

Performing countless repetitive exercises to improve my physical balance gave me time to think about other parts of my life that might also be out of balance. I reflected on the areas that were important to me: my relationship with God, personal relationships with family and friends, professional relationships with speaker colleagues, clients and audience members, my work, my life outside of work, and my overall health in mind, body and spirit. In the process of self examination I became aware of some areas of my life that needed minor repairs, along with others that were definitely in need of a major overhaul!

How can we tell when our lives are out of balance? Sometimes it's a temporary situation, when pressure in one area outweighs the others. There are countless examples of lives thrown into a tailspin within the blink of an eye because of a sudden crisis. Accident, illness, injury, death of someone close, natural disaster – the list goes on. Reclaiming your balance during those trying times can be a major challenge. Sometimes it may feel like an impossibility. If you find yourself in such a situation, what can you do to take care of yourself while you're taking care of others? How will you stay balanced in mind, body and spirit?

Where will you go, to whom will you turn, to get the help and support you need and deserve?

If you're known as the caretaker in your family or in your workplace, people fall into the habit of depending on you. If it's hard for you to say "No," you may have helped create the situation without realizing it. So it's going to be a much greater challenge for you to reclaim your balance. Taking care of everyone else leaves very little time to take care of yourself. In fact, it's sometimes difficult to notice that your life is out of balance because you're too busy with tasks, people and projects to pay close attention to what's happening to *you*. If you're at this point in your life, what conversations need to take place? And who should be involved in those conversations?

For most of us, our lives are often in a constant state of imbalance. Rather than suffering through an obvious catastrophe, subtle things happen that often go unnoticed. Small problems, left untreated, continue to build until they become big problems. If we don't pay close attention to what's happening in all areas of our lives, we may end up doing unintentional damage to ourselves – damage that can be difficult to repair. What about you? Which small problems have you noticed that are suddenly getting worse? What's happening in your workplace or in your family? Sometimes it's much easier to look the other way instead of looking within ourselves to honestly identify and acknowledge the problem and then work on a solution. You can't begin to address a problem you won't admit exists.

As for me, I wasn't remotely aware that I was creating my own balance problem. Busy focusing in one area (exercising to get in shape), I didn't realize I was actually hurting myself, little by little, every day. By the time it was serious enough to notice, the damage had already been done. Sometimes we get so busy concentrating our energy and attention in one area that we fail to see how out of balance our lives have become. We try to do it all. We try to be it all. Then we reach a point at which, perhaps for the first time in a long time, we have to move ourselves to the top of our own "to-do" list and "to care for" list.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned was that when I slowed down and conserved my energy for the people and projects that really mattered at that time, the world did not come to a screeching halt. Clients still called. Family and friends were understanding and helpful.

Here's a simple exercise you can do to see if your life is in – or out – of balance. At the end of this chapter is a page with the words "I AM" at the top, followed by the numbers 1 through 10. Take a few minutes to write down ten words you would use to describe who you are. Think of them as *life titles* rather than job titles because they should extend beyond your job. They may include words such as *employee*, *supervisor*, *parent* or *spouse*. You get the idea.

When I give this “assignment” to an audience during one of my keynotes or workshops, I usually have at least one person who comes to me at the break and whispers, “I couldn’t get past Number 2. I wrote down my job title and one other thing, and that’s as far as I got.” Could this be a life out of balance? I think so! While our careers are important, we have to be more than our jobs. If we are more than our jobs, we can survive anything that happens – in the economy, the world, our companies and organizations and our personal relationships. Balance is more important than ever because our jobs – and our lives – are more challenging than ever.

Whether in work or in life, we have to be prepared to face our challenges with more creativity, ingenuity, and energy than ever before. If our lives are not in balance, there’s no way we can do our jobs (however we define them) to the best of our abilities. Our challenges are as individual and unique as we are. They may include, but are not limited to, sudden or ongoing illness (ours or someone else’s), having and raising children, caring for aging parents, caring for grandchildren, losing a current job, getting a new job, moving to a new home across town or to a new city across the country, marriage, divorce, separation, financial problems, going back to school, or finding it difficult to say “no” and being overwhelmed with tasks that are not our responsibility.

Whether we were riding our bikes or roller skating, Mama was right when she told us to slow down and be careful so we wouldn't fall and hurt ourselves. Promise yourself to slow down and stop trying to do it all – to be it all. Do it today. Taking a fall in body, mind or spirit is never pleasant. And the older we are, the harder it is to get up again and keep going.

I AM:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.



Chapter 9

**Everybody Needs
a Shoulder to Cry On.**

Everybody Needs a Shoulder to Cry On.

Focusing all my energies on physical therapy to regain my balance didn't leave much time to think about my injured shoulder. Actually, I assumed it would get better on its own, like a sore muscle or a bad bruise that you favor until it heals by itself. Because it was painful to move it in certain directions, it seemed perfectly logical (to me, anyway) to simply stop moving in those particular directions. Can't reach for a glass, brush my hair, or close the driver's side door with my left arm? No problem! I'll just use my good arm instead.

After several months of practicing this "shoulder, heal thyself" approach with no apparent success, it was obviously time once again to consult my handy "Doctors My Friends Love" list. Now my mission was to find a good orthopedist. Once I met him I could easily understand why this doctor's patients not only loved him but also recommended him to everyone they knew.

Breezing into the exam room, he perched on the end of the exam table and introduced himself. "So tell me, what's it like to be a motivational speaker?" he asked with a broad grin. Completely taken by surprise (he had actually read my chart and my personal history before coming into the room!) I did my best to answer his questions. After several minutes of pleasant chit-chat I was finally able to turn the conversation toward the purpose of my visit. "I wonder if you could take a look at my shoulder."

“Oh, sure, I was getting to that. But I don’t like to merely *treat* my patients. I like to get to know a little bit about them first.” Well, *that* was impressive! He put me through a series of exercises to measure my ability to stretch, reach and bend my left arm – all of which I failed miserably. Finally, he gave me his official medical diagnosis in laymen’s terms. I had a “frozen shoulder.”

Then he proceeded to explain that, in addition to damaging my disk, the strain of lifting those heavy weights caused the tendons in my left shoulder to become irritated and inflamed. As the pain from the tendonitis increased and I gradually quit moving my shoulder to avoid that pain, adhesions formed over the joint and (for lack of a better descriptive phrase) hardened into place. So now my shoulder was locked, or frozen, with very limited movement. Then my second favorite doctor spoke those same three words I had been hoping and praying to hear one more time.

“This is fixable.”

“We’ve got several options to consider. I suggest we start with physical therapy. Do you know of a good physical therapist or would you like me to recommend one?”

“Oh, I know the perfect place for therapy,” I answered. “In fact, it’s sort of like that neighborhood bar on television – the place where everybody knows my name!”

The next day I brought my doctor's orders to my physical therapist so we could get to work on twelve more PT sessions for my shoulder. While therapy for my balance problem didn't hurt much, I had noticed several patients in the large exercise room getting therapy for their shoulder injuries. Now *these* people were definitely in pain! And as it turned out, this time so was I. While I made remarkable progress, after twelve visits my shoulder was still partially immovable. So we moved to Plan B.

I checked into the hospital and went under anesthesia while my orthopedist manually rotated my shoulder in every direction. Although the procedure didn't take more than five minutes, I was relieved to sleep through it and miss the fun. But as soon as I woke up I knew it had been successful for two reasons. Not only was I able to move my arm with ease, but the nurse confided that everyone in the operating room heard the popping and cracking noises as my doctor broke up the adhesions. Twelve more PT sessions later, my shoulder was as good as new.

What life lessons did I learn from *this* experience? Oh, my! Where shall I begin? I learned that everyone is at different levels of fitness in mind, body and spirit. What's natural and normal for one person may not work at all for someone else. My own impatience caused my injuries because I jumped in too quickly and expected instant results. I pushed myself as hard as I possibly could. If it took me over 50 years to get out of shape, why did I think I could get back in shape in no time at all? I'm

often impatient with myself, as well as with projects that (in my opinion) just don't move along fast enough. Sometimes it's not such a good idea to be in such a big hurry. This experience taught me that lots of things take more time to fix than I think they will require. But the end results are always worth the effort – and the wait.

Although they may not suffer from a frozen shoulder, some people may be frozen in other parts of their lives. Maybe they're in an unhealthy relationship or an unrewarding and thankless job. Staying where they are is painful, but not as painful as the fear of the unknown and what might lie ahead. Maybe they're suffering a loss of such magnitude that they can't even begin to fathom how to deal with it. They're too frozen with fear to take the necessary steps to stop the pain. Sometimes it's easier to look the other way and let a situation continue to worsen than to find the courage to make necessary changes. If we don't deal with our pain, it may never heal and it may never go away. Instead, it may continue to get worse and eventually spread to other areas of our lives.

This experience opened my eyes in other ways I did not anticipate. Spending months in doctors' offices and at physical therapy, I was constantly surrounded by people with disabilities much more serious than mine. While both of my injuries could eventually be repaired, I met people who would never be the same again. I learned a lot about what it takes to keep an upbeat

and optimistic attitude when you're having a pretty bad day. Despite their setbacks, every single one of them had a positive outlook on life. My bad days didn't begin to compare to theirs, yet I never heard one person complain. I learned a lot about the unimaginable inner strength that some people pull from to help them face their daily challenges with faith and courage.

Looking back, I've come to appreciate exactly how valuable that "Doctors My Friends Love" list was in helping me make the right decisions in the doctors I chose. Their excellent reputations for being knowledgeable and insightful made it clear they excelled at the *science* of medicine. Equally as important to me, they both practiced the *art* of medicine as well. Let me explain.

Although they were extremely busy, both doctors took the time to get to know me and to find out more about me. They acknowledged me as a *person* and not simply as another patient to be seen and checked off on their appointment book. Rather than keeping their heads bowed and eyes focused on my chart, they looked directly at me when they spoke and showed me the common courtesies we all appreciate. Listening patiently as I read from the notes I had written, they asked probing questions and listened once more. They welcomed my questions (of which there were many) and translated their diagnoses into simple terms I could understand. Their blend of the art and science of medicine showed they were masters of technique, experience and expertise.

Those two similar and extremely positive experiences have led me to challenge my audiences with some tough questions. Excelling at our jobs (however we define them) requires a blending of art and science. Wouldn't our personal and professional relationships be more meaningful – and more pleasant – if we slowed down long enough and took the time to find out what's really important to the people with whom we live and work?

What if we looked people in the eye when engaged in conversation, instead of trying to multi-task and shave two minutes from our hectic daily schedule? Suppose we listened more and talked less? Imagine asking someone how they are – and then actually sticking around long enough to hear their reply! How could we get better at what we do if we practiced both the *art* and *science* of communication?

What else did I learn? Let's see. I learned that some people may appear normal and “totally together” on the outside while they're struggling internally with fear, panic, anxiety, worry and dread. If we make time to pay better attention and tune in to them, we might be able to help in some appropriate way.

I learned that something that looks very easy while you're watching someone else do it can be much harder than it looks. In a corner of the PT room was a narrow wooden board, similar to a piece of molding with grooves cut into it, nailed to a wall. I watched other patients inch their way up this “shoulder ladder”

as it was called, forcing their bad arm to stretch as high as they possibly could reach. I didn't understand why they were grimacing with pain. "Well, that little exercise couldn't be *that* tough. How hard is it to let your fingers do the walking up a little wooden board? What's the big deal?" When it was my turn to perform that very same exercise a few days later, I quickly came to understand what the big deal was, how much it hurt, and how it took every ounce of energy and effort I could muster to finish the task.

It sure is easy to judge someone else when we think we can do a better job, isn't it? Trying to actually *do* their job, whatever that job might be, is often not as effortless as it looks. Instead of offering criticism and unsolicited advice, how about offering a bit of empathy and understanding? Maybe you're struggling with your own version of that "shoulder ladder" as you try to manage your physical, emotional or spiritual pain. Don't be afraid of the work involved, no matter how hard it looks. The effort will pay off, sometimes in ways you least expected. And don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.

Last but certainly not least, I learned about self forgiveness. It took me a long time to finally quit blaming myself and asking, "How could I have been so stupid?" Instead, what could I say to myself that would serve me better and help me heal? I began to remind myself on a regular basis, "What's done is done. Now I've got to fix what I can and move on."

Aren't there times when we're all much too hard on ourselves? We may be good at forgiving others but we rarely treat ourselves with the same kindness and compassion we so readily bestow on them. What's happened in your life for which you need to finally forgive yourself?

Lots of the little stuff that happens in our lives is manageable on our own. That's not always true when it comes to the big stuff. When we realize we can't solve the problem ourselves, we have to be willing to ask for help. Separating the big stuff from the little stuff is one way to facilitate healing. Some people tell me they're hesitant to ask for help because they're afraid of appearing weak to others. I can't remember ever meeting a weak person who asked for help. It's the strong, proactive people who realize they are powerless to deal with their dilemmas alone and who reach out to others when necessary.

Since we expect honesty from other people, we also have to be honest enough to let others know how we feel and what we need. Because the healing process takes time and effort, we must be generous enough to cut ourselves some slack. Remembering that some of our greatest challenges are full of good days and bad days can help us stay the course.

As Mama has reminded me in my adult years, "Not even grownups can be brave all the time."



Chapter 10

That's the Last Time We'll Eat There!

That's the Last Time We'll Eat There!

A few years ago Les and I went out to dinner with three other couples to celebrate a successful garage sale. Like most men, Les is not a garage sale person. So he was amazed that people had spent their hard-earned money to buy our junk. The wives who hosted the sale decided to take our husbands out to dinner. This was only fair, since some of the junk we sold actually belonged to our husbands. Seated around a U-shaped table with a grill in the center, we enjoyed watching the chef prepare our meal right before our eyes. Then he asked each of us to hold out our plates so he could serve our individual portions.

Seated at one end of the horseshoe shaped booth, I was served last. This didn't bother me at all, until I noticed that our young chef had made a major miscalculation. He divided the food into seven portions instead of eight, so by the time he got to me there was no food left on the grill. "How's he going to handle this?" I wondered. "Oh, I'll bet he's going to get more food from the kitchen and prepare something special just for me." As it turned out, that's not exactly what he had in mind. In an obvious panic, he held up his hand in a "STOP" motion and shouted, "Wait! Don't anybody eat yet!" Then he asked my seven dinner mates to pass their plates back to him. I watched in disbelief as he scraped some food from each of their plates onto mine. Then he handed my plate back to me with a rather embarrassed smile.

"Enjoy your meal," he muttered meekly.

At this point I had several options, including storming out in a huff or demanding to see the manager. But I decided to laugh instead, because I was already thinking what a unique customer service story this would be to share with my audiences and my readers. And believe me, it has served me well!

It's only fair to give the guy the benefit of the doubt. Maybe he was having a bad night. Perhaps he was distracted or tired. As his customer, however, none of that mattered to me. What mattered to me was his attitude. I couldn't help but wonder if his manager ever had a conversation with him that would have prevented such an incident. Obviously not! Managers, supervisors and other leaders are so busy these days that communication tends to suffer. It's easier to assume that everyone knows how to deliver good customer service than to take precious time to explain it. They trust that someone else has taken care of training and educating their employees. Or they fail to pay attention to customer complaints.

Even worse, some managers have an attitude about customer service that sends a definite message to their employees. They say customer service is important but their actions don't support their words. When customer service falls apart, it's rarely the fault of one person. As service deteriorates, so does trust. That leads to a loss of customer loyalty, followed by a loss of business and a loss of income.

“So what’s the worst that can happen?” a manager or employee might ask. “One customer got treated poorly, and a few other customers saw what happened.” As we all know, people have *lots* of choices as to where they dine. They also have lots of choices when it comes to any other product or service. And they can’t wait to share their stories about poor customer service with everyone they know.

So what is the worst that can happen? This restaurant is no longer in business, although I can’t take any of the credit. When I tell this story in my keynotes and workshops, I never mention the name of the restaurant. So I’m not discouraging people from going there to spend their money because I don’t identify the place. Unfortunately, it looks like they managed to put themselves out of business – one customer at a time.

Setting aside the slogans about satisfied customers and happy employees, the Number One Goal of every successful organization is to **STAY IN BUSINESS**. Every manager’s daily challenge is to find ways to *make* money and save money while delivering outstanding service. If you’re a manager, supervisor or leader in business today, how are you meeting this challenge? If you’re not involved in some aspect of customer service, I’ll bet you know someone who is. They might find this chapter enlightening. Why not share it with them?

Mama's philosophy on customer service was fairly simple. "I work hard for my money. Why should I give it to people who don't appreciate it?"



Chapter 11

Try It. You'll Like It.

Try It. You'll Like It.

On a recent vacation I was introduced for the first time to the adventure of snorkeling. Believe it or not, that experience taught me an important lesson about leadership and life. My biggest issue, first and foremost, was that snorkeling broke one of Mama's cardinal rules about water safety when we were kids. In case you're wondering, I'd already figured out that I no longer had to wait an hour after lunch before going swimming. So it wasn't that rule. I'm talking about the other one. I guess it was more of an admonition than a rule. Mama always reminded me, before I went swimming, that if I put my face under water and breathed in through my mouth, I would surely drown.

Now here I was many years later, facing a dilemma. My snorkeling instructor was giving me advice that was the exact opposite of Mama's. He told me to put my face under water, breathe through my mouth, and have fun! It took me a while to work up my courage but I was finally ready to give it a try. With my mask covering my eyes and nose, the snorkel tube in my mouth, and fear and trepidation in my heart, I began to swim slowly away from the boat while a torrent of negative thoughts raced through my mind. "What am I doing out here?" "What if I get too tired swimming the distance to get out to the reef?" "What if I panic?" And the ultimate question, "What if Mama was right about that drowning thing?"

Sensing my fear, my instructor offered words of encouragement. “You can do this. Just keep your eyes open, stay calm, and don’t forget to breathe.”

Offering a quick silent prayer, I put my face under water and breathed in through my mouth. After a few panic filled moments, I realized that I wasn’t going to drown after all! Once my fears subsided I was soon at ease, floating effortlessly and enjoying the spectacular panorama of the coral reef below. The only sound I heard was my own breathing, which I found very calming. Without a doubt, this was one of the most awesome experiences of my life. And it never would have happened if I hadn’t been willing to take a risk and try something new.

Perhaps you’ve faced a similar situation at home or in your personal relationships. It’s easy to fall into patterns of behavior that are safe and worry free. While there’s nothing wrong with being safe and worry free, we often get so cozy where we are that we never venture out of our little comfort space. We’re so involved with following outdated rules that we miss out on adventures that await us. We become creatures of habit, totally predictable. As we fall into everyday patterns of living our lives on auto pilot, those closest to us take notice. They begin to make plans without including us, or offer polite excuses when we try to include them in our plans because ... well... we’re just *boring*!

What about you? Have you fallen into the pattern of following the same old routines because you've gotten comfortable where you are? Of course it's easier to rent a DVD than to go to the trouble of actually driving to a theater once in a while and seeing a movie on a *really* big screen – complete with popcorn, of course. You can go to your favorite restaurant and order the *same* fish dish every time. But doesn't that usually result in the same type of experience? When is the last time you tried something new? It takes energy to get out of a rut, but it's usually worth the effort to get unstuck. It could be anything – a new vacation spot, a new food item on the menu, a new grocery store, a new exercise routine or a new magazine. What fun and rewarding adventures, large and small, might be waiting for you if you're willing to give them a try?

Maybe you're facing a similar challenge in your workplace. Perhaps you've gotten comfortable with your leadership style because it's worked so well in the past. So why try something different? While some leaders get excited about new learning experiences, others keep trudging along, following outdated advice that's no longer relevant or effective. Instead of staying open to learning new skills that can take them to the next level, they employ a litany of excuses. "I can't find the time." "I'm too busy, overworked, tired, old, afraid, or insecure (pick one or more) to learn something new."

If you're thinking, "Hey, not me," take a look around. What's different? Maybe your department's goals have shifted to accommodate a new project. Perhaps some long-time staffers have retired or left, and new people have come aboard. Maybe your working relationships have shifted slightly or your organization's dynamics have changed dramatically. How can you learn new ways of leading more effectively to meet these new challenges? There's a wealth of options to explore. You can take classes, read the latest leadership books and articles, or participate in online teleseminars and webinars. Attend conferences to share problems and solutions with your colleagues from across town and across the country. Find a mentor to help cut your learning curve. Letting go of old fears and making time to learn new skills can have an enormous impact on your ability to lead more effectively.

Think about your printer at work or at home. Once you determine the settings, they're fixed in place unless you decide to change them. Until then your printer will continue to print out your documents in the same font and same size. Functioning in default mode, it will produce the same results every time. If you want different results such as italics, underlining, bold print or a new font you have to adjust the settings and take your printer out of default mode.

Life is a lot like that. Are you in a job, a relationship or a marriage by default? Sure, it's easier to settle than to expend the effort to

make some changes and improvements. Being open to new ways of doing things often requires hard work, a willingness to take risks, and sometimes even an adventurous spirit. The idea may be a bit unsettling at first. But you'll adjust and adapt. Just remember the advice of my wise snorkeling instructor.

“You can do this. Just keep your eyes open, stay calm, and don't forget to breathe.”



Chapter 12

Are You Talking to Yourself Again?

Are You Talking to Yourself Again?

Our oldest son, Steven, is the most persuasive person in our entire family. He's had this talent since he strung his first words together to form a sentence, and he continues to fine-tune his negotiation skills on an ongoing basis. It's absolutely no surprise to anyone who knows him that he chose a career in sales and that he's been quite successful at it. He's a natural born salesman and I mean that in the most positive and complimentary way. As a parent, you get to observe and enjoy your children's gifts and talents as you watch them grow up. At some point you may find yourself thinking, "This kid's got a future if he knows how to use this to his advantage." One such moment is indelibly marked in my mind.

Steven's persuasive skills really came to light when he was about nine years old. We were in New Orleans for Mardi Gras weekend and to watch Les ride in one of the big parades. After breakfast on Saturday morning I asked Steven to go down to the hotel gift shop to buy a newspaper. Although Steven handed me the newspaper as soon as he returned, he didn't hand over the change. Having given him a \$10 bill, I assumed there would be change. "Oh, well," I thought, "he's just excited about the parades today. I'm sure that at some point during the day he's going to reach into his pocket, find the money, and return it to me." Although I waited all day, that little scenario never took place. Over an early dinner before Les left for the parade I said,

“Steven, I’m a bit curious. Did you get any change from the \$10 I gave you this morning when you bought the paper for me?” Looking surprised, he smiled and answered, “Oh, yes, Ma’am, I sure did! I’m sorry, Mom, I just forgot to give it back to you.”

As I watched him reach into his pocket to retrieve the change, I thought I was safe. But when I saw that little grin spread across his face, I knew what else was coming. Sure enough, he started talking ... about the weekend ... all the things he wanted to buy ... how he wished he had brought more of his allowance money with him ... how it was too late to do anything about it now. Even at nine years of age, he had this technique finely honed.

So how did I respond? As he sat there smiling innocently with the money in his outstretched hand I said, “That’s okay, honey, you can keep it.” Then I reached into my purse, pulled out a \$10 bill and gave it to him. Les, who is the most non-manipulative person I’ve ever known, was completely taken aback by Steven’s comments. When he regained his ability to speak, he looked at Steven and spoke sternly, “Son, I am shocked and disappointed. I cannot believe what I just heard. Are you aware of how you just manipulated your own mother?” Steven looked at his dad, smiled proudly and with total honesty replied, “Yes Sir, I know what I did. But Dad, I’ve been thinking about it. This is a gift. And I don’t think God wants me to waste it.”

Over the years I’ve met a few people who truly believed they were God’s gift to the world. I’ve also known people who were

good at manipulating others and considered it a real talent. Maybe you've encountered a few of your own in your personal and professional life. Have you noticed these same people fail to understand why they can't maintain their personal and professional relationships? It's really not that hard to figure out. While most of us don't mind being persuaded to see an issue from someone else's point of view, no one enjoys being manipulated by another person. Being described as scheming, calculating or controlling won't win any points with family, friends and business colleagues.

On a recent trip to Chicago, I was thinking about how much time I've spent negotiating over the past few months. From my publisher to my car mechanic – from my graphic designer to a convention committee member – we had to come to terms with what each of us needed and wanted from the process. We all negotiate every day, a lot more than we realize. Some people think that negotiating means getting your way, even if it means wearing the other person down until they agree, give in or give up. There is a way, however, to negotiate fairly and equitably so both parties share in the success. Over the years I've learned that planning and preparing in advance makes me a better negotiator. I talk to myself before I talk to someone else, and I start by asking myself a few questions.

1. What do I really need or want? Instead of rushing in, I take time to identify what's really important to me. I used to think that everything was essential but I learned that some lesser points

are actually sideline issues. These can become my bargaining chips if I'm willing to yield on some points while holding firm to others. It's better to identify my non-essential issues in advance than to walk away from the negotiation frustrated because I got several concessions I didn't really care about, and missed out on the critical ones I really needed. Negotiating a curfew with teenagers is a good example. They suggest a time that is much later than you would allow, knowing you will set an earlier time than they would ever agree to uphold. You both know you will meet somewhere in the middle. There may be concessions and bargaining involved, such as your allowing them to stay out later on Saturday night if they agree to come in earlier on Friday night.

2. What does the other person need or want? I'll bet you know some people who don't even understand this question! We all understand what it's like to work with someone who is always in "I, my, me" mode. But words like "we, our, us" can also create problems if used inappropriately. Think about the teams and departments in your workplace. If you and I are on the same team and we're so focused on what's important to us, what we need, and what *our* goals are, we can lose sight of what other departments need from us to reach *their* goals. The same holds true for our personal relationships. It's no fun to be part of a family or a friendship in which the other person is always focused on himself or herself. If I concentrate only on what I need, want, require, or expect I can easily lose sight of what is fundamentally important to the other people involved. And that scenario can bring any negotiation, or any relationship, to a screeching halt.

3. What am I willing to give up to get what I need or want? Those sideline issues I mentioned earlier can become my bargaining chips if I'm willing to yield on some points while holding firm to others. In any negotiation, each person likes to feel that they won something. If the same person wins all the time, there is very little negotiating ever taking place. If I know in advance I won't get everything I'm asking for, what am I willing to give up to lead the negotiation toward a more successful outcome?

4. What issues are not negotiable for me? As we all know, some things are simply not negotiable. While most of the issues on which we negotiate are not life threatening, many of them are very serious matters. So I have to decide if the "non negotiable" rule applies to a particular situation.

5. What issues are not negotiable for the other person? To be fair, I must be willing to accept – or at least try to understand – what is not negotiable for the other person involved in this process as well. If I can do that, we've got a much better chance of working things out to our mutual satisfaction.

6. How do I handle it when I don't get what I want? Some people think of themselves as very gracious losers until they actually lose at something. If you've ever observed a five-year-old in action, you've noticed they may use a variety of persuasive techniques to get what they want. They can usually smile and charm their way into or out of almost any situation. When the cute tactics fail, however, they change strategies. They may pout, whine,

scream, or stomp their feet to get their way. Adults who resort to childish antics to get their way don't usually realize how their "less than mature" behavior is affecting their credibility and their relationships.

Negotiations are rarely isolated events, especially in the workplace. Over time we develop a reputation based on how well we achieve our goals while taking other people's needs into consideration. Although it feels good to come out a winner every time I negotiate, I have to make sure I don't burn any bridges while basking in my success. If I got everything I wanted every time I had a conversation with someone, people might not necessarily describe me as being a good negotiator. Instead, I might develop a reputation for being manipulative, pushy, stubborn, bossy, obstinate, inflexible and immovable. Ouch!

Over the years I've learned a lot from my children. One of the most important lessons was one that Steven taught me when he figured out how to "keep the change and make \$10 extra." Anticipating my question, he planned, prepared and rehearsed before our conversation ever took place. At the tender age of nine, he had already figured out his own negotiation strategy. As Mama likes to remind her grown children, "You never forget the day you discover that your kids are smarter than you are."



Chapter 13

One Day You'll Thank Me.

One Day You'll Thank Me.

In an earlier chapter I promised to introduce you to another one of our favorite canine family members. So it's time for you to meet Heartsie. One Sunday I noticed a listing in our church bulletin. A couple in our parish was looking for a good home for their two-year-old dog. When we took the kids over for a visit, they explained that they traveled a lot and felt guilty about boarding their dog at the kennel for weeks at a time. They wanted her to be in a family with kids where she could get lots of exercise, love, and attention. After watching this adorable little dog take an instant liking to our kids, as they did with her, we all knew without a doubt that she would be a welcome addition to our family.

Born on Valentine's Day, her official name on her registration papers was Madame Hearts. Within a few days, however, we all agreed that this playful and fun loving creature certainly didn't fit such a stiff and pompous moniker. So we renamed our spirited new friend "Heartsie" to match her loving and big-hearted nature. Steven (12) and Michael (8) loved her. And four-year-old Jennifer dramatically announced how glad she was to finally have another "girl" in the family.

When she was ten years old, Heartsie developed cataracts in both eyes. Although I'm sure it happened gradually, it seemed to us that she could see fine one day, and the next day she couldn't

see at all. It was very upsetting for us to watch her bump into the furniture, acting generally confused in her once familiar surroundings. While we thought our only option was to end her misery and “put her down,” our vet explained that when some dogs lose their sight, they adjust very well within a short time. Using their sense of smell and their memory of where objects used to be, they’re quite capable of finding their way around. Our vet advised us to give Heartsie some time and see how she would do. Much to our surprise – and relief – she adjusted quickly and easily, taking her new challenge in stride.

I still felt so sorry for her that I wanted to do whatever I could to “fix her problem.” I had heard of a specialist in Baton Rouge who operated on dogs with cataracts and had very good results. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if Heartsie could get her sight back? Wouldn’t we all be relieved to see her back to her old self again? And whatever the price, it would be well worth it.

I can still remember the look on my dear husband’s face when I told him of my plan. Even more memorable than his look were his words to me. “Jean, I love that dog as much as you do, but we’re paying tuition for three kids to go to a Catholic school. We have a house note and a car note. And we enjoy the luxuries of groceries and electricity, too. I don’t have any extra money for dog surgery. If you want Heartsie to have this surgery, you’ll have to pay for it yourself.” Well, how was I supposed to do *that*? By this time I was well into building my career as a keynote speaker, putting all my extra money back into the business. But there had

to be a way. Have you ever wanted something so badly that you knew, without a doubt, that you could make it happen?

Filled with equal amounts of confidence and uncertainty, fear and bravado, I took Heartsie to see the specialist. While he made no promises, he assured me there was an excellent chance that our beloved pet could regain her sight. The cost would be \$1,000. I smiled, swallowed hard, thanked him for his time, and told him I would think about it. Carrying her out to the receptionist's desk to pay for our office visit, I kept thinking, "There has to be a way. There just *has* to be a way!" And then I saw it. "The Way" appeared as a small sign on the counter with only five small but very important words printed on it.

"We accept Visa and MasterCard."

I hugged her to me and whispered in her ear, "Heartsie, you can have your operation!"

Unfortunately, the surgery was not successful. Heartsie didn't get her sight back, and I didn't get my money back. Had you been a visitor in our home, however, you would never have known that she was blind. She continued to find her way around the house, as well as roam our huge backyard, using her sense of smell and her memory. That dog could even find her way to her favorite chair, jump up in it and settle in to relax, sleep, or "hear TV." This particular chair had long been Jennifer's favorite, but she finally grew tired of trying to squeeze into it next to the dog.

So the chair officially became “Heartsie’s chair,” as well as her place of honor and comfort in our family.

She lived a long and happy life. When she was sixteen years old, she developed a heart problem and Les and I had to make that heart wrenching decision that so many pet owners eventually have to make. Late one Saturday night, on an emergency trip to our veterinarian, we finally agreed that it was time to let her go. It was difficult to watch her laboring so hard to breathe, knowing that she didn’t understand what was happening. It made sense. It was the right thing – the humane thing – to do. Knowing all that, we still held each other and cried after we said our goodbyes and our vet took her to another room to give her the painless medication that would bring her final peace.

“Do you want me to take care of disposing of her?” he gently asked when everything was finished. “Oh, no,” we answered, “she’s part of our family. We’ll take her home and bury her in the back yard.” Since we had brought her to his office wrapped in her favorite blanket, he took it to the other room, wrapped her in it and carried her out to us in a sealed cardboard box. We put the box on the back seat of the car and drove home, already feeling relieved that our loyal and loving pet was no longer suffering. We decided we would bury her on Sunday morning before we went to Mass. Our next decision, as we walked into the house, was where to put her until then.

“How about the laundry room?” Les asked. “Oh, no,” I quickly responded. “You know how she hated sleeping there when we first got her because she was so far away from us.” To this day I still appreciate that my kind and compassionate husband, seeing my eyes fill with tears once again, did not even try to argue that rationale with me. “OK,” he gently suggested, “let’s put her where she loved to sleep every night – on the floor right next to your side of the bed.”

With a grimace I replied, “I think that’s a bit too close for comfort for me tonight.” Suddenly we looked at each other, grinned, and said in unison, “Her chair!” So we gently placed the box in her favorite chair, patted it lovingly and said “Good night, Heartsie.” Then, emotionally drained and exhausted, we went to bed. Just in case you’re wondering, she was still there when we checked on her the next morning. We buried her in the backyard by the kids’ tree house, sharing a few “Heartsie stories,” crying a little and laughing a lot. Then we went back into the house to get ready for church.

As I was fixing my hair and Les was sitting on the edge of the bed putting on his socks, we talked about how different it was going to be with just the two of us in the house now. Adding my thoughts to an already poignant morning I commented, “You know, first it was just the two of us, then the house was filled with the excitement of three children and assorted pets. One by one the

kids have grown up and moved on. For a while now it's been just the two of us again with our dog. And now we don't even have our dog any longer. It's going to be pretty quiet around here."

Les nodded in agreement and asked, "Are you thinking we should get another dog?"

"Actually," I replied, "I was thinking that maybe we should have another baby."

Turning to see his reaction, I watched Les fall right off the bed!

Rushing over I exclaimed, "I was just kidding! I didn't mean it!

It was just for effect!"

Still sprawled out on the floor, he grinned and answered, "So was this."

I've thought about the lessons I learned from this experience. While they are pretty simple and easy to figure out, I think they're still worth mentioning. Some problems just can't be fixed. No matter how much I want something to happen and how hard I try, I can't always make it happen. I just don't have that much power. While I can take a proactive stance instead of sitting back and waiting for someone else to do something, I do have my limits. I must learn to work within those limits and accept the fact that I'm not in charge of the universe. I'm only in charge of ME.

Has that thought resonated with you due to a recent experience at work? Have you finally come to realize that you're not in charge of a lot of what's going on in your workplace? Even if you're the CEO, you can only be in charge of so much. If you work in healthcare, you can't single-handedly solve the nursing shortage crisis that's affecting patient care in our hospitals. While you may be in charge of the company checkbook, you're not in charge of the national economy. You are accountable to your employees for your actions, but you can't control the actions of your employees.

Maybe you know someone who's going through a very rough time. Illness, separation, divorce and death are all monumental problems you don't have the power to fix. But you do have the power to lend a hand, or an ear, when someone needs your help or your attention.

I learned that it's OK to laugh, even in the midst of pain and sadness. Sometimes it's the best thing, and the only thing, I can do. A sense of humor has helped me through some very tough times. Bad things aren't funny when they happen to me or anyone else. But laughter, like tears, can be an outlet for our pain. Do you remember that song by the Four Seasons? It's titled "Big Girls Don't Cry." Nonsense! Of course we cry! And thank goodness we can!

Over the years I've learned, as I'm sure you have, that life is made up of happy memories and sad ones, of good times and bad times. This story is about my dog. I'm not ashamed to admit

that I did my share of crying while I was writing it. But it's still a story about a dog. As much as I cared for Heartsie, I would never compare the loss of a pet with the loss of a person. I've lost special people in my life over the years. Maybe you have, too. Our home has always been filled with photographs of people we love. Some of them are no longer with us. For me, remembering everything that made them who they were helps keep their spirit alive in my mind and in my heart.

Maybe you've been thinking about your favorite pet as you've read Heartsie's story. And perhaps you've also been thinking that it's sometimes easier to bond with your pet than it is to bond with certain people in your life. Maybe it's because your pets are more fun to be around than a few of the people you know! Our pets accept us unconditionally, no matter what. We're lucky if we're surrounded by people at work and at home who can do the same. Sometimes others can't – not because they're cruel or uncaring, but maybe because it's a lot to ask. I can't expect everyone to like me. To accomplish that, I would have to spend all my time trying to be all things to all people. In the process, I would lose sight of who I really am and who I really want to be.

It's unrealistic to think that everybody in this world can like everybody else. However, I can still work on becoming the sort of person others find it easy to accept and enjoy. Whether I'm at work or at home, I can certainly treat people with respect. I can do a better job of admitting my mistakes. I can be more tolerant and less critical of others. I can take the time to compliment someone

for a job well done instead of assuming they know I appreciate their efforts. I can slow down my hurried pace and pay more attention to others when they need me. I can stop complaining about people I can't change. I can work, instead, on changing myself for the better.

I'm not in charge of a lot that's going on in my workplace, my family, and my life. I'm still only in charge of ME. This means I do have an enormous amount of power after all – to make things better for those around me. In the process, I'll be making things better for myself. As Mama used to say, "What goes around comes around."



Chapter 14

You Can Do Anything If You Put Your Mind to It.

You Can Do Anything If You Put Your Mind to It.

Because my clients' conferences are held all over the country, I spend a lot of time on airplanes getting to those conferences. I've learned some of my best life lessons while flying. Occasionally I've learned other lessons as well, such as "Next time, take the bus." For example, I've been on a plane when that small but critically important front wheel refused to come down and lock into place for landing. As we circled for an hour to use up our extra fuel, I prayed that the gas gauge in the cockpit was more accurate than the one in my car. After what seemed like an eternity, we finally landed on a runway covered with foam. Fire trucks and ambulances, their red lights flashing, waited to greet us. Not one of my best travel memories, to be sure!

I've been on another plane when we were told to "assume the crash landing position" because one engine had apparently stopped working. In an attempt to console me as I hunched over in my seat with my head touching my knees and a pillow clasped tightly to my chest, the man in the next seat told me not to worry. He had survived a crash landing into a snow bank when *both* engines had failed. Somehow I found that strangely comforting, even though it was the middle of July and there were no snow banks in sight. Although we landed safely once again, both of these memories are ones I find hard to forget.

On a flight to Jackson Hole, Wyoming I added another chapter in my “Next time, take the bus” lesson book. After boarding and getting situated, I had a brief but pleasant conversation with the woman seated next me. Then I settled in to review my notes for my keynote presentation the next day while my seatmate curled up with a pillow to take a nap. Two hours later, as we began our descent, some strong winds began to rock the plane. While I’ve come to accept less than perfect flight conditions as a traveler’s way of life, this experience made me more than a little nervous. In all my years of flying, this was the worst turbulence I had ever experienced. I was more than willing to follow the instructions issued by the flight attendant as her voice came over the public address system.

“Ladies and gentleman, the captain has turned on the ‘Fasten Seatbelt’ sign, indicating some turbulence in the area. Please remain seated (like I was getting up to go anywhere!) and check the security of your seat belt.” CHECK IT? I’d already tightened it three times. Any more tightening and I would probably faint from my inability to draw a breath.

I always try to reserve an aisle seat on an exit row for a bit more room to stretch my legs. So I’m used to the flight attendant stopping at my seat to ask if I’m willing and able to open the exit door and help others leave the plane. While I always answer with a confident “Yes,” the thought now crossed my mind that I might have to prove myself. Perhaps it was finally time to pay for the

privilege of sitting in an exit row all these years. I might actually have to demonstrate my ability to lift a door weighing 30 to 40 pounds, cast it aside without aiming it directly at any passengers, and help those passengers to exit safely.

As a myriad of possible scenarios raced through my mind, my seatmate awoke with a start. Clutching my arm in a death grip, she whispered one sentence in a panic-stricken voice.

“We’re all going to die!”

Assuming she must be a novice air traveler, I tried to reassure her. “Oh, I don’t think so,” I replied with my most confident smile. As she became more and more agitated, I decided to try and distract her by engaging her in conversation.

“So, tell me. Is this your first time to fly?” I gently asked.

Dropping her voice to a whisper she replied, “Not exactly. I’m a flight attendant.”

WHAT? If this flight attendant was in a panic, I obviously wasn’t worried nearly enough for my own good! Maybe it was time to take out my wallet and start looking at pictures of my children!

Seeing the look of alarm on my face, she smiled and patted my arm as she admitted, “I do tend to overreact at times, so maybe

we should check to see how my husband is handling all this. He's seated right across the aisle from us."

"Why would we want to do that?" I asked in my own panic-filled whisper.

"Because he's a pilot."

Now I had a decision to make. To look... or not to look... THAT was the question!

Working up my courage, I stole a glance across the aisle. What would I do if he had already taken out his wallet and was busy looking at pictures of *his* kids? I've never been so relieved to see a man calmly and nonchalantly reading the newspaper! Then the voice of the pilot who was actually flying the plane came over the PA system.

"Sorry about that, folks. But everything looks fine from where I'm sitting."

New lesson learned: Next time forget the aisle seat on the exit row and sit with the pilot.

"Due to the stronger than usual wind currents and the way Jackson Hole is nestled in between these mountains, we're experiencing a pretty rough landing today. Just sit tight and we'll have you safely on the ground in a couple of minutes."

He kept his word, and I uttered a silent prayer of thanksgiving as the wheels touched down. As I later reflected on that scenario, I realized that while both of these people were in leadership positions in their jobs, each had reacted very differently to a major change in their environment that day. Even though they weren't "on the job" on this particular flight, I wondered how well that flight attendant would have been able to keep her fears to herself if she had been on duty.

If your job also requires travel, maybe you've noticed that travel is more stressful than ever, especially with all that's going on in our world today. You've probably also noticed that compared to the stress of dealing with *change*, handling the trials and tribulations of travel is a cinch!

There have been times when I've felt uncertain and even fearful about change. Have you had those feelings too? I've come to learn that those feelings are more universal than most of us may realize. As I prepared to deliver an in-house leadership workshop for a healthcare client, the director of Human Resources shared her thoughts as we drove from the airport to the corporate office.

"As the head of HR, I felt the pressure to set the tone and help my staff through the process, even though I wasn't confident I was going to make it. That's when I realized that in order to be effective, I had to figure out how I personally felt about the impending changes. Then I had to put myself in the shoes of

the employees in my department and try to be more empathetic. For example, I found myself getting impatient when some staff members didn't instantly buy into the changes when I broke the news to them. I had to remind myself that I had some advance time to deal with my thoughts and feelings before sharing the news. I wasn't comfortable with the changes at first, so why should I expect them to react and respond differently? I had to allow them adequate time to adapt and adjust."

She continued, "I was extremely careful to avoid sending mixed messages. My staff was smart enough to know if I was simply chanting the mantra sent down from above, or if I really understood the impact these changes would have on our department. I had to work extra hard to communicate what needed to happen, along with supplying the details to make it all work. I talked, but I also got very good at asking questions. I listened to what was being said, and also to what was not being said. Encouraging employees' comments and feedback, I invited them to express their concerns at team meetings. When the change process was complete, I was more convinced than ever that open, honest and inclusive communication had gone a long way towards getting the commitment I needed from them to make change work."

As I listened to her story, I realized there's a lesson here for all of us to learn. What are some of the biggest changes you've experienced at work and at home? What feelings come to mind

when you recall them? Excitement, anticipation, joy, happiness and delight? Maybe you're thinking of some very different feelings other than the ones I just mentioned. Some changes, as we all know, are not exciting or joyful in any way, shape or form.

If your company is going through a downsizing and you lie awake at night wondering if you're going to be the next one to get that pink slip, you're not feeling very joyful. Going through a separation or a divorce, losing a family member or a friend, watching aging parents slow down and gradually lose their sense of independence and freedom as they become more dependent on others – all of these changes can be hard to bear.

I've learned that before I can help myself or anyone else deal with changes in my personal or professional life, I must first honestly face my feelings. Am I sending mixed messages? When I'm going through difficult times, I often think it's easier to "put on a happy face" to family, friends and colleagues. Inside, however, I may be crying instead of smiling. "Everything's fine," I tell them. "I've got it all under control." Those who know me best can usually tell when I'm faking. My tone of voice, facial expression and body language often give me away. Now that our kids have matured into responsible (and wise) young adults, I'm amazed that they can look me in the eye during a conversation and ask, "OK, Mom, what's *really* going on?" It's very satisfying to know we've raised intuitive, caring kids. But it sure feels like the roles are reversed when I "get busted" by one of them!

Maintaining strong relationships in the midst of change requires open and honest dialogue between all parties involved. I have to communicate what I need, along with my thoughts and ideas. I didn't marry or give birth to mind readers, and I don't work with them either. No one I know possesses that particular gift. So I have to provide the information they need as to how the change can be accomplished, while causing the least discomfort for everyone involved. Once I've had time to deal with my thoughts and feelings, I have to give others the opportunity to do the same before we try to figure out what – if anything – to do next. Time can be a luxury when it comes to change, but I don't always have that luxury. This means I have to adapt and adjust as best I can. Then I have to give others a chance to do the same.

There's usually someone willing to help, even if it means all they can do for me at the time is to listen. Part of my responsibility to myself and my own well-being is to reach out to others as needed. Maybe, like me, you're the one to whom others turn in times of crisis. As the oldest of four children, I'm known in my family as the peacemaker, the counselor and the problem fixer. At times, depending on the people involved, I've been able to help. Sometimes I sense my efforts have been unappreciated – maybe because I attempted to help make change easier when I should have let them figure things out on their own. Translation: I should have minded my own business. I remind myself that there will be times when my opinion or advice is not relevant, appropriate, or even invited. During those times I try to be a

supportive onlooker and let others handle change in their own way. That may sound simple, but it's really hard for me. My children assure me, however, that I'm making progress!

Whether you're dealing with change in your personal life or in your workplace, how do you think others perceive you? Would they describe you as the pilot or the flight attendant in my story? When it comes to change, panic and fear aren't wise choices. There are always more helpful options available. I just have to remember what Mama used to tell me when I was nervous or afraid. "You can do anything if you put your mind to it."



Chapter 15

You're Never Too Old to Learn Something New.

You're Never Too Old to Learn Something New.

I remember a phrase that was quite popular a few years ago. “Stop the world. I want to get off!” That perpetual merry-goround we know as LIFE can still spin us around and point us in a new direction at a moment’s notice. Because each day has the potential for new challenges and changes, it’s easy to feel almost dizzy from trying to keep up without falling off. When I think I’m too old to change, I just think of my mother and that particular excuse becomes totally unacceptable.

Mama has always been a very independent and self-sufficient woman. Following graduation from secretarial school, she worked as a medical transcriptionist in a hospital and later at the naval air station in New Orleans, where she met my father. After they were married, she helped run my father’s business for twenty years. When he died she continued to support herself, along with putting my youngest sister through school. Using her medical transcription skills once again, she found a job at a very large medical facility in Baton Rouge. Over the years she worked her way up and eventually became the chief medical secretary. Although she occasionally talked about retiring, she never acted upon it. She loved her job, enjoyed interacting with people and derived great pleasure from helping others.

As her 75th birthday approached, she called me with the following instructions. “Put this date on your calendar. I’m finally going to

retire, and I want all my children here for the big party they're throwing for me on my last day of work."

"Well, Mama, that's wonderful! You know I'll be there. You've been talking about retiring for so many years and this is exciting news! But I'm really curious. Why did you choose this particular date to be your last day at work?"

"Oh, it was quite an easy decision," she assured me. "You know, Jean, we're going through a lot of changes around here. And I think most of them are good ideas. But I just found out there will be a big change that will have a major impact on the way I do my job. I picked that date to retire because on the very next day after my retirement party, someone is going to come into my office, take away my IBM Selectric typewriter, and put a computer on my desk. And I am way too old to learn how to use a computer."

Relishing her first few months of retirement, Mama tackled all those projects that had accumulated on her to-do list while she was busy working full-time. She cleaned out closets, organized her kitchen cabinets, worked in her yard, cleaned her house from top to bottom, caught up on her reading and letter writing and had lunch with friends she hadn't seen in a while. She eventually completed everything she wanted to do, at which point she decided to slow down a bit, relax and enjoy her new life. That lasted for a couple of weeks and it came as no surprise to any of her children when she announced that she was officially bored with the retired life.

As she put it, “Sitting around and doing nothing is not good for my brain cells.” She decided she needed a hobby that would challenge her intellect as well as keep her busy. Without a word to any of us Mama went shopping, and to the shock and astonishment of all her children, Mama came home with a computer.

She’d always been interested in tracing our family history, so she thought a computer would be a valuable tool for her research. But before she could start on this project, she had to learn how to use the various software programs and how to access the Internet. She began by teaching herself how to send email. One morning she called my office to alert me to an impending event and to explain the rationale behind her decision. “I’m getting ready to send my first email, and I’ve decided that since you’re the oldest of all my children my first email should go to you. So get ready, because it’s coming.” As a dutiful daughter I prepared myself for that first historical family moment of receiving Mama’s email. I waited for quite a while and, thinking that she might be having some difficulty with the process, I called her back.

“Mama, I didn’t get your email yet.”

“Just hold your horses. It’s coming.”

After a long wait, Mama’s first email finally did appear. But it didn’t arrive until the next day. Instead of showing up in my Inbox, it was waiting in the mailbox on my front porch. As she later explained, Mama wasn’t sure that computer technology had

been around long enough to trust it completely. And because this was a very important email, she wasn't taking any chances. She decided to send it through a more reliable process she knew from personal experience had worked quite well for many years. Instead of clicking on the SEND button, Mama printed out that email, folded it, put it in an envelope, put a stamp on it and drove to the post office to mail it.

I'm proud to say that Mama's come a long way with her computer skills since then. As I reflect on the tremendous progress she's made and how much she's enjoyed the expanded version of the world that technology has opened up for her, I can't help recalling her reason for retiring from a job she loved. "I'm too old to learn how to use a computer."

Mama has always believed in the value of lifelong learning. I think about her whenever I meet people who tell me they gave up a long time ago on learning anything new. They use a variety of *excuses*, which they call *reasons*. They're too old, or too tired, or too busy, or too overworked or too.... well, you can probably fill in the blanks if you know one of them in your workplace or your personal life.

"Intelligence is one thing, but how you use it is something else," Mama likes to remind her children and grandchildren. And I have to agree with her. The initials and credentials that come after a name may be important. But what's equally as important as *what* we know is how we use that knowledge to help us do a better

job, whatever that job might be. When it comes to our careers, lifelong learning means being brave enough to ask for input on how well we're doing our job. It takes confidence and courage to ask for honest feedback, but the rewards to our careers can be well worth the risk if we are willing to take the next steps to act on the feedback we receive.

Lifelong learning enables us to expand our knowledge base and improve our skills in a variety of ways. This may include taking classes, reading books, attending seminars and participating in on-line teleseminars. Like my mother, we can even learn while being involved in a hobby we're pursuing for our own personal fulfillment. Attending conferences to share information and network with others can be invaluable. Working with a mentor can help cut our learning curve. Making time to read and keep up with what's going on inside and outside our organization is also important. Lifelong learning means having the vision to look at the big picture of our organization, our industry, or our field, and then figure out where we fit into that big picture – both now and in the future.

Maybe you've thought about the trends that could bring about serious change in your organization – and your job – in the near or distant future. Have you identified the skills you will need to remain valuable in the midst of change? What are you doing to obtain those skills if you don't already possess them? How are you investing in yourself to prepare for your future?

After attending my keynote at her industry's annual conference, an audience member confided over lunch, "Our company is automating a lot of the services we've provided to our customers in the past. If I don't update my skills, there's a good chance I'll be replaced by a machine. I have to admit, it makes sense from a financial point of view. A machine doesn't need sick leave, paid vacation, medical coverage and a retirement plan. So I've been going to school at night to earn an accounting degree, and I've applied for a transfer to the accounting department. My job was in jeopardy, and so was my future. But I took charge and learned new skills. It was the only thing I could do."

Lifelong learning can also apply to expanding our knowledge and experience about our relationships, marriage, parenting, or anything else of importance to us and to our future. No matter how busy we are, we have to make time for lifelong learning. Once we stop learning, we stop growing in mind and spirit. And that's something none of us can afford to do. As Mama says, "You can take your knowledge with you wherever you go."



Chapter 16

Stop Whining and Act Your Age.

Stop Whining and Act Your Age.

When I graduated from college, my parents gave me a very generous gift. I was thrilled with my two-door Chevy Impala, the first and only brand new car I've ever owned. But it was only after driving it for many years that I came to appreciate its true value. In addition to playing a part in some very important moments in my life, that car helped me create some precious memories I will never forget.

Les proposed to me in that Chevy, and it later transported us to our honeymoon in Mobile, Alabama. As prospective homeowners we drove it all over Baton Rouge in search of our first house. Five years later, it carried our growing family to a new and larger home. In all the years we owned it, the most memorable trips we ever made were the ones in which we brought Steven, Michael and Jennifer home from the hospital when they were each only a few days old. We brought a variety of dogs, parakeets and hamsters home in it as well. Family vacations, ball games, school functions, shopping trips, holiday travels – that car handled them all with ease and dependability. Over the years, Les has reminded me that the only reason he married me was because I came with a dowry. I owned a car and a sewing machine.

As the kids and their list of activities grew, we decided to move up to the “ultimate carpool vehicle” at that time – a station wagon. So we ran an ad in the paper and a young couple bought

my trusty Impala. The night before the new owners came to pick it up I told Les, "I'm going outside to say 'goodbye' to my car." Knowing how sentimental I am, he didn't question this rather bizarre statement. I climbed into the front seat and spent some time sitting in the dark, reminiscing about the memorable moments this car and I had shared. The next morning I couldn't bear to watch as the new owners drove away in *my* car. But I felt better knowing it would become a part of the new memories they would make with their own family.

Although I realize that cars are only objects, this experience reminded me that it can be hard to let go of something we hold dear, even when we've outgrown it. Old habits are the hardest to break, even when we know they may be holding us back. Sometimes we cling to them because it's too painful to even think about replacing them with new ones that could serve us better. We become very attached to them and they become a part of who we are. Rationally we understand that change is necessary, practical, and the right thing to do. Emotionally, however, it's often difficult to accept. Sometimes we expend so much emotional energy hanging on to old habits and beliefs that we don't have the energy necessary to explore positive changes that could make a big difference in our lives.

Maybe you're in the midst of a major change in your personal or professional life. Your "old habit" could be a job or a relationship that's holding you back or no longer serving you well. Or maybe you're resisting change because of fear. While it's easier to say

we don't *like* change, the underlying reason (and the one we're usually not comfortable sharing) is that we're *afraid* of change. It takes courage to admit it, but once we do, that knowledge can help make the change process much easier to survive.

Even positive change can bring feelings of fear and uncertainty. Getting married, having a child, changing jobs, moving to a new city, or buying a new home are all examples of changes that, while exciting and exhilarating, can also be stressful. Feelings of inadequacy can begin to plague us. "Do I really want to get married and be with this person for the rest of my life?" "I don't know anything about being a parent!" "At least I had security in my old job. Why did I make such a colossal career change in such uncertain times?" "What was I thinking when I moved to a new city where I don't know anyone? How will I ever meet people and make new friends?" "What if we can't afford the payments on our new home?" The more questions we ask, the more nervous we become and the more we begin to second-guess our decisions.

For most of us, the challenge of change can run the gamut from worrisome to exciting – and every emotion in between. But one fact is certain. Change has become a permanent fixture in our personal and professional lives. If we have the courage to let go of our past, we will have the strength we need to create our future. Our odds of surviving change increase dramatically once we develop the skills and the mindset to face change with resiliency, determination and optimism instead of resorting to

complaints, anger, apathy or fear. As Mama used to tell us, “Stop whining and put on a happy face. You’ll feel better, and so will the people who have to look at you.”

There is another car in my life that provided lots of memorable moments for me. When I was in my mid-forties, the time came for me to replace my car. Since all three of our kids were now old enough to drive themselves wherever they needed to go, I was more than ready to retire the family station wagon. My plan was to do some research, check the Classifieds for some great buys, and test-drive a few cars. Then I would be well informed and prepared to purchase a sturdy, practical and efficient car that would get me where I needed to go. This logical and rational plan made perfect sense – until one Friday afternoon when I pulled into a local dealership’s used car lot and spotted a shiny black convertible with red leather bucket seats. That car had my name written all over it!

At that precise moment in time my thought process shifted. While quality and dependability were still important, I immediately added one new standard to my list. I decided that if I would be paying the monthly note on a car for a very long time, it made sense to buy a car that would make me smile every month when I wrote that check. Obviously, a black convertible with red leather bucket seats made perfect sense!

This was a major shift in my decision making process because it was definitely NOT the practical car I had planned to buy. At that

point a salesman appeared, introduced himself, and proceeded to sell me on the benefits of owning this car. We talked at length and I took it for a test drive. I could barely contain my excitement as I sat behind the wheel, but I was still very unsure about taking the next step. Sensing my apprehension he wisely suggested, “Why don’t you take it home for the weekend? If you decide it’s not the car for you, just return it on Monday and drive your own car back home.” What a deal! How could I resist? His offer sounded fair and reasonable. It would give me time to logically decide what I should do. Of course I had no way of knowing that I would throw logic out the window that weekend as I fell in love with a *car*!

Perhaps you’ve experienced crystal clear moments in your life that remain with you no matter how much time passes. Pulling into our driveway in that convertible was definitely one of those moments for me. I will never forget the look of shock and surprise on the faces of our three kids when they saw “good old Mom” driving a sporty convertible with the top down. A variety of comments and compliments followed, but the unspoken message was clear. “Mom, we didn’t think anyone as old as you would ever have a car this cool.” Don’t kids have a way of making you feel special when you least expect it?

I spent many hours that weekend driving around town enjoying the car and the “cool status” it brought me. My logical left-brain did manage to function, and I had the good sense to ask our mechanic to check it out. He pronounced it to be in excellent condition and a very good deal for the price. Bright and early

Monday morning I drove back to the dealership. We finished up the paperwork; I gave my trusty station wagon one final parting glance and drove my “new wheels” off the lot. As I headed home I knew that I would be paying that monthly car note for a long time. But I didn't mind, because I had no doubt I would be smiling with every payment I made and every mile I drove.

One of the things I enjoyed most about driving that car for the next few years was seeing the reaction of friends and family. Could this be “practical, organized, logical and sensible Jean” driving a *convertible*? Comments like, “What came over you?” and “What were you thinking?” soon gave way to “How cool!” ... “What fun!” ... “I want one, too!” and “When will you take me for a ride?” Looking back, I realize I would never have had that exhilarating experience if I hadn't “broken out of my rut” and changed my way of thinking. Since then, I've done my best to avoid “stuck-in-a-rut thinking” whenever possible, and instead looked for ways to do something a little bit out of the ordinary. It hasn't always been something as dramatic as buying a convertible. Instead, I've initiated small changes that have helped make my life a bit more exciting, rewarding and just plain fun.

Maybe you've found an opportunity to step outside your regular and predictable behavior to try something new and exciting, different or fun. Perhaps you've thought about going back to school, learning a new skill, taking on new responsibilities, letting go of others, or redefining a career path. New adventures could involve travel, finding a creative hobby or cultivating a

new friendship. It makes sense to incorporate a little bit of fun, excitement and adventure to help us cope with the stressful demands in our personal and professional lives.

To keep our passion for life alive, we must be willing to explore our attitude along with our goals to see what's working, what's not working, and what could be enhanced. There's nothing wrong with playing it safe. But if we don't push ourselves to the limit once in a while, we'll never find out how far we really can go. As Mama says, "Don't just sit there. Do something."



Chapter 17

Don't be Nervous. You'll Do Fine!

Don't be Nervous. You'll Do Fine!

Do you remember how you felt that day in grammar school or high school when you had to stand in front of the class and give your first speech? Were you nervous? Did your palms sweat and your legs feel like spaghetti? Were you embarrassed and afraid of failing? If you experienced any of these thoughts or sensations, you're perfectly normal. If you couldn't wait for your turn to get up in front of the class and regale them with your wit and wisdom, you may have been on your way to becoming a motivational speaker!

Now fast forward to the present. Are you preparing to speak at a team meeting or represent your organization to a larger group? Perhaps it's part of your job, or you serve on a volunteer committee in or out of your workplace. Maybe you have to speak at civic meetings on behalf of your company or some other entity. Whatever the situation, are you having flashbacks of sweaty palms and wobbly legs? Are you still afraid of failing or being embarrassed? If so, it's no wonder you're nervous and on edge during the days leading up to your presentation. If your stress level is high and your comfort level is low, take heart! You're not alone.

While some people are born with a natural ability to speak with ease in front of a group, others are uncomfortable with both the idea and the process. The good news is that, like any other skill,

this one can be learned. Because I meet so many people in my audiences who share their fears of speaking in front of a group, I decided to do something a bit different in this chapter. Rather than sharing a story and life lessons learned, I'm going to share a step-by-step process to help you conquer your fears and deliver your next speech with competence and confidence. Here are a few ideas and strategies that have helped me in my twenty years as a professional speaker.

1. Know your “audience.” Who are they? Why are they there to hear you? What do you know about them? I recently spoke at a conference as one of 10 presenters. Since this was my first time to speak in this particular industry, I did my homework to learn everything I could about them. I asked the meeting planner to send an email survey with a few brief questions to the attendees who would be in my audience. While I hoped to hear from at least a few of them, the response was overwhelmingly positive and the emails came pouring in. These busy professionals were eager to respond to someone who cared. Now I had enough information to totally customize my message to address their specific needs, challenges, worries and concerns. Evaluations confirmed that they appreciated my efforts, especially since I was the *only* speaker on the program who took the time to get to know them and find out what was important to them.

Depending on the audience and the reason you're there, you probably won't need to do as much in depth research. But you certainly can ask a few questions to make sure you and your

audience are in sync. As I've listened to some of the speakers who have preceded me in various programs I've often wondered, "Does this speaker even know who this audience *is*?" I imagine that the audience is asking the same question. So do your homework. Your audience will appreciate it and you'll be a lot less nervous because you'll be much better prepared.

2. Define your purpose. Why are you there? Have you ever heard a speaker who obviously *didn't* know why he/she was there? Decide in advance what you want to accomplish with your presentation. Do you want to enlighten your audience, inform them, sell them on an idea, or persuade them to take some sort of action? Knowing why you're there helps you clarify your message.

3. Develop your cornerstone idea – your main message – and stick to it. Instead of trying to cover too many ideas in a short period of time ask, "What are the most important points to mention in the time I have?" When I first began speaking about 20 years ago, I tried to crowd too much information into the time allotted. My intentions were good, as I wanted to share as much as I possibly could with my audience. When I saw their comments on the evaluation forms I was flattered. "Needed more time." "Speaker was rushed." "We should have had more time." Then it dawned on me that their feedback reflected their frustration that I tried to cover too much material in too short a time. I had rushed through some of it and didn't get to other parts at all. So I began to narrow my focus and cover less

material, but cover it more thoroughly. Both my audiences and I felt better about that.

4. As you begin planning your presentation, no matter how long you will speak, transfer your thoughts and ideas to paper. I find it very helpful to write my main ideas on different colored post-it-notes to represent the varied range of serious content, humor, stories, audience participation and other aspects of my speech. Then I begin arranging and rearranging those post-it notes on a couple of sheets of paper. I play with them until I get the pieces in the right order and my presentation makes sense and flows well. If you try this, you'll find it works better than creating an outline, which automatically forces you to decide what you're going to say *first*. You might not know what you want to say first, until you see how the speech is going to flow. With the post-it notes, your ideas can flow more freely if you jot them down and arrange them as your presentation takes shape. Then you're ready to put them in order and create an outline of your key talking points.

5. As you review your key points, ask yourself: "So what?" If *you* don't think your message is important, you can hardly expect your audience to take you seriously. Make sure every point and every idea is worth their time and attention.

6. Practice your presentation out loud. Get comfortable with the words and phrases you will use. If you keep stumbling over the same word, use your trusty thesaurus to find a similar word

that flows better. Time yourself to see exactly how long your presentation lasts. If you read silently, you'll finish much faster than if you have to articulate the words aloud. Then you fool yourself into thinking you have a lot more time to fill, so you add more material. When you're in front of the group, however, the time factor will expand. You can count on it.

One of your ideas generates a discussion. Someone asks a question. All of a sudden, your time is up and you've only covered half of your message. Or perhaps the speaker before you went way past his or her allotted time. So your time is cut short because the meeting is running late. Now you've got too much material, which means you must race through it or skip over important points. You're frustrated because you didn't get to finish. Your listeners are disappointed. Everyone feels shortchanged. And the comments you'll get? "Speaker needed more time." So practice out loud – in the car, in front of a mirror, or anywhere – until you're comfortable with the words and you don't feel rushed to deliver them.

Now the Big Day has finally arrived. You're prepared and ready to go. The following strategies can help you stay calm, deliver your message with ease, and reap the benefits of your hard work. You're about to be introduced and you're feeling a bit nervous. That's normal. So relax. Don't fight it. Acknowledge the feeling and then remind yourself that you are very well prepared and will do an excellent job.

Watch your intake while you wait your turn. Caffeine causes dry mouth, so avoid coffee and tea. Fruit juices and milk create mucus, so avoid those. Stay away from alcohol. Stick to water, without ice, to sooth your vocal cords and reduce the strain on your voice.

Understand the basics of the technology you're using, or get help from someone who does. Starting your presentation with a question like, "Does anybody know how to work this projector?" doesn't exactly instill confidence in you with your audience. If possible, arrive a bit early and practice with your equipment in advance. Some things will be out of your control, so being as prepared as possible will help reduce your anxiety level.

If you're using PowerPoint slides or overheads, don't talk to the screen! It's OK to glance at the slide or overhead and then talk about what's there. But don't read the slide to your audience. They can read! When you talk to the screen you lose eye contact and disconnect from those who are trying to connect with you. Your visuals should reinforce your knowledge – not get in the way of your energy and enthusiasm!

There are several ways to immediately engage an audience. Ask a question or use a dynamic opening statement that gets their attention. Quote a famous – or not so famous – person. Share an attention-grabbing statistic. Once you've got their attention, here are some strategies to make sure you maintain their interest.

1. Make eye contact. Find a friendly face, talk to that person for a few seconds, and then look for another friendly face. Remember that your listeners are on your side and they want you to do well. They don't want to trade places with you, so they're rooting for you to do a good job. Pretty soon you'll be comfortable with the audience as you realize they are open to your ideas and eager to hear what you have to say.
2. Pause after you've made an important statement, introduced a new concept, shared information, or asked a question. Why? Because your listeners need time to hear, understand and process what you've just said. Many speakers are uncomfortable with the silence, so they fill in the spaces with words such as "Uh," "Um," or "OK?" Think of pauses as the way to give your audience a chance to catch up with you. Even though you know what you're going to say next, your audience doesn't. Avoid stepping on your own ideas by talking too fast or rushing ahead to fill the quiet moments.
3. Create energy by varying your tone. Change the tempo or speed of your words and phrases. Vary the loudness and softness of your voice to create interest. If you notice that people are leaning forward to hear you, increase your volume. But make sure you're not talking too loud and accosting them with your voice.
4. When appropriate, use stories to personalize your message and make a stronger connection with your audience. While everyone loves a good story, your audience will appreciate relevant stories

that tie in with your message. Otherwise they may miss the point and the message you wanted to reinforce. Have you ever heard a speaker tell a powerful story and later think to yourself, “What a great story! But what did it have to do with her speech?” Use stories to help your audience make the connection. Leave them thinking “Aha!” instead of “Huh?”

At a recent storytelling workshop as part of an association’s conference, I took my audience “behind the scenes” to show them why I chose the specific stories I used in my keynote earlier that morning. I chose every story with care. When your audience remembers your story they remember the learning point that went with it.

If you’d like to develop a structured plan for telling your stories with more impact, there are free resources on my website, www.jeangatz.com. On the Menu pull down “Programs.” Then click on “Coaching” to learn some very helpful strategies you can incorporate to improve your storytelling skills and abilities.

5. Respect your audience by keeping your material clean in every way. And be sure to wrap up your remarks on time. If the meeting is running over, ask the person in charge (quietly, before it’s your turn) if he wants you to stop at the allotted time, go a few minutes over, or deliver your entire message. Let him advise you how to proceed.

I often follow someone who has exceeded their time limit. The audience hasn't noticed yet, but the meeting planner is acutely aware that we're running late. So I quietly check with her to find out how she wants to handle the situation. Does she want me to deliver my entire message or adapt it to get her meeting back on track? Then I make the necessary adjustments before I take the stage.

During that workshop I just mentioned, one attendee was a college student doing an internship for the association. She shared her frustration with a recent guest lecturer in one of her classes. He rambled on well beyond his time limit, and when students began leaving to get to their next classes on time he ordered, "Sit down. I'm not finished yet, and this stuff is really important." Her point was valid, and I made sure to end my session on time that day!

You may choose to leave your audience with a thought to ponder, a question to answer or a challenge to consider. You can leave them with a laugh or a smile. But you do have to leave them when your time is up. Thank them for their attention and participation. Then take your seat, and silently congratulate yourself for a job well done. You survived – and your next presentation will be much easier because you now have a proven success plan that works! As Mama always says, "It's better to be safe than sorry."



Chapter 18

Clean Your Plate. Do You Think This Meal Cooked Itself?

Clean Your Plate. Do You Think This Meal Cooked Itself?

There are many things I love about my job as a keynote speaker – the opportunity to travel, visit new places, make new friends, and visit family members when I’m in their part of the country. After speaking at a conference in Denver, I went to spend a few days with my brother and his family who live nearby. Randy’s wife, Addie, is a superb cook. Unlike me, she actually enjoys cooking.

My sentiments toward cooking are reflected by various little signs strategically placed around my kitchen. “Tonight’s menu: two choices – take it or leave it.” “If my cooking doesn’t meet your standards, then lower your standards.” “If you want breakfast in bed, sleep in the kitchen.” Another one of my favorites doesn’t actually have anything to do with cooking. It reads: “Insanity is hereditary. We get it from our children.” But let’s get back to my brother and his wife’s culinary expertise.

As we sat down to breakfast on the first morning of my visit, I realized Addie had made a special effort to provide the type of meal I would normally eat at home. She’s thoughtful that way. And there it was – my breakfast feast. Cheerios (excellent for lowering cholesterol), skim milk, a banana (for the cereal, of course) and a tall glass of juice. Brownie, the family dog, had already positioned himself next to my chair and was waiting

patiently for me to drop something that would contribute substantially to his own breakfast. If he had been tall enough to see what was in front of me, along with what else was on that table, he would have wisely positioned himself at a more promising food station.

After glancing at my breakfast of choice, I surveyed the array of food Addie had prepared for her family. A platter of bacon and sausage was next to a plate filled with a light and airy egg omelet. In the center of the table was a plate piled high with homemade biscuits, golden brown on top and dripping with butter. The crowning touch was a platter of blueberry pancakes with warm syrup running down the sides of the stack. Taking in this feast spread before me, I looked down at my bowl of Cheerios. Not wanting to waste food, I asked my brother a very logical question.

“Does your dog like cereal?”

I then proceeded to consume a scrumptious breakfast, wipe my mouth daintily, smile, and ask, “What time do we report back for lunch?” What can I say about lunch, other than that it was a vast improvement over the peanut butter and jelly sandwich I usually eat at my desk every day? Dinner was absolutely delicious, as I knew it would be, although it was overshadowed by what followed. DESSERT!

Earlier that afternoon Addie asked us to vote on what kind of pie we wanted for dessert, so she could bake everyone's favorite to celebrate my visit. With Randy and their four children all getting a vote, and then adding mine to the mix, we ended up with a three-way tie. Undaunted, she got busy in the kitchen once again and baked three pies. When dinner was over, I knew it was time for the question I'd been preparing for since we all sat down at the table. Addie handled it smoothly. "Jean, what kind of pie would you like?" I was ready with my answer, which I hoped would sound equally as smooth.

OK, now let's be honest. If there were three homemade pies in front of you, each one looking more tantalizing than the next, and someone asked you that question, how would you respond? Remember, I asked you to be honest. So of course I said, "Oh, I'll have just a small slice of each – just a tiny piece – just a sliver." Remember those phrases. They keep you from looking and feeling like a glutton. Much to my chagrin (and pure enjoyment) that evening, I polished off three slices of pie.

While driving to the airport the next morning, Addie and I were alone in the car. During a brief lull in the conversation Addie said, "Jean, it's been a truly enlightening experience having you here. But I'm a bit confused. Last week I attended my exercise and weight loss class and our instructor gave me a helpful suggestion. She said that one effective way to lose weight, stay fit and trim, and maintain healthy eating habits was to choose a role model whose dietary example I would like to follow. In

other words, I should pick out a healthy looking person and watch what she eats. Before you arrived, I decided to choose you.” She hesitated for a moment, then added, “I’ve watched you eat for several days, Jean. Has anyone ever told you that you eat like a pig?” Then we both burst out laughing, knowing she was absolutely right.

As I reflected on my visit during the flight home, it dawned on me that I had unknowingly become Addie’s role model for the past few days. What a major disappointment I must have been! Of course Addie was smart enough to know that I was not “walking my talk” about eating right during those few days. My willpower, along with the rest of me, was obviously on vacation! Her comments prompted me to wonder about how many other times I may have been a role model for someone else and didn’t even know it. And how often, I wondered, had I set a less than stellar example by just being *ME*?

Have you noticed how hard it is to deal with the added pressure of being a role model at work and at home? It seems like you never get a break! When it comes to this particular assignment, some of us get an earlier start than others. A few days after returning home from my trip, I witnessed an interesting example of “role models in training.” Arriving at the school gym early one afternoon to pick Jennifer up after basketball practice, I saw all the girls sitting in a circle, listening attentively to their coach. I moved in closer to hear her comments.

“Girls, you’re the District champs and you’re our school heroes on the court. But remember that you’re heroes off the court as well. You know those little first graders you see in the cafeteria and up in the stands when they come to watch you play? You might not have thought about it, but they look up to you. They respect you. And some of them want to be just like *you* when they grow up. So you have to do more than play a good game. You have to set a good example, both on and off the court.”

“Wow! Even seventh graders have to be role models?” I asked myself. Well, why not? Come to think of it, we are all “on stage” all the time. So being a role model is an important job. People are watching us to see if we “walk our talk” – if we practice what we preach. They notice if what we *say* is congruent with what we *do*. The problem is that we’re seldom aware they’re watching. They’re not trying to catch us doing something *wrong*. If they respect us, look up to us, and want to emulate our words and actions in some way, they’re hoping to catch us doing something *right*.

Before Les and I had children, I often wondered how good we would be at parenting. How would we teach our children the values that were important to us, as we had seen our parents do for so many years? When we did become parents, we quickly learned that we couldn’t simply *teach* values to our children. We also had to *model* them. It soon became clear that a theory that sounded so simple would be a challenge to practice on a daily basis.

I realized early on that being a parent is the most important – and the most difficult – job I will ever have. And if Les and I were going to do it right, then we definitely had to live by example and practice what we preached. If we said one thing and did the exact opposite, then we were sending our children a very mixed message. If our actions didn't match our words – if they weren't congruent – then our children couldn't believe or trust us. Once that happened, there would be no way to build and sustain a solid and loving relationship as a family.

Working with my clients has also taught me that being a leader in today's competitive global environment is a lot like being a parent. Perhaps you feel like you're "on stage" every day, from the time you arrive at work until the time you leave. Maybe you've felt the pressure of constantly having to walk your talk and practice what you preach. You're smart enough to know that you have to model the attitudes and behaviors you expect, and need, from those you lead.

Values can't be taught. They have to be modeled. They must radiate from every leader at every level to create and maintain the character, heart and soul of every organization. If leaders say honesty and integrity are cornerstone values of the organization, then everyone in a leadership role must model those values – every minute of every day. Unfortunately, the people we choose as role models sometimes disappoint us by their words and actions. All you have to do is turn on the evening news or pick up a newspaper to see what's happening when it comes to

trusting people at the top. Thankfully, they don't represent the vast majority of honest, dedicated, hard working leaders who are giving their best – not just when it's convenient, but every single day.

I keep reminding myself that I'm only human, so I will continue to make mistakes. But that doesn't absolve me from trying my best. No matter who we are and what we do, serving as role models comes with the territory. The impact we have on others can be monumental. We may not notice every time it happens because we aren't looking. But they are. As Mama used to say, "Always behave yourself. You never know who's watching."



Chapter 19

**Don't You Kids Have Anything
Better to Do?**

Don't You Kids Have Anything Better to Do?

In an earlier story I shared the excitement and delight that accompanied my purchase of a sporty little black convertible with red leather bucket seats. As I was driving out of the dealership's parking lot on that gorgeous spring afternoon, the founder and owner of this family business came rushing out to the car to introduce himself, shake my hand and personally thank me for buying a car from his family. Now *that's* customer service!

Then he leaned toward me and said, "Judging by the smile on your face, I assume this is your first convertible." As my smile broadened I nodded. "OK, let me give you a bit of advice," he offered. "On days when you have to drive with the top up because it's too hot, too cold or raining too hard, you will exhibit a certain personality. But when you put the top down, your personality will undergo a definite and pronounced change." Because of my background in Psychology, I assumed this gentleman didn't have a clue about what he was saying. So I smiled, thanked him politely, and drove my "new wheels" home. Little did I know that this wise "teacher" was giving me my first lesson in owning a convertible.

It only took a couple of weeks for me to realize that his prediction was absolutely right. On days when I chose to drive with the top up, I listened to classical music, motivational tapes and "talk radio." But on good weather days when I could "pop the

top” I changed stations, tuned out all educational programming of any kind, and hit one button on my radio that would take me to my favorite station, “Oldies But Goodies Rock and Roll.” And I would sing. Out loud. You may recall from my earlier story that singing in the car by someone of my advanced age while teenagers are present is against the rules. Naturally, my children refused to ride with me during daylight hours in case one of their friends might recognize them at the moment I burst into song.

While stopped at a traffic light one afternoon, I glanced in my rearview mirror and noticed a jeep directly behind me, filled with teenaged boys. Watching them laughing, talking and pointing in my direction, I knew that my convertible and I were the main topic of conversation. I’m not a mind reader, but since Les and I have raised two teenaged boys of our own, I knew a plan was about to unfold. It involved waiting until the next red light, pulling up alongside my car, and “hitting on the blonde in the convertible.” You’re probably thinking that these boys must have been *really desperate* to bother with me. But remember, they could only see me from the back. And from the back I look pretty good. It’s not until you get right up in my face that you notice, according to a typical 16-year-old’s standards, that I am OLD!

Sure enough, at the next light I was first in line again and they pulled up next to me. The boy in the passenger seat had been appointed the designated hitter. His job was to deliver the smooth

line that would impress me and perhaps even entice me to share my phone number. The boys were clean-cut (as only a mother would notice) and, to their credit, were all wearing their seatbelts. But let's get back to the pick-up line, which was supposed to be, "Well, hello there. Have you got the time?"

Now I must admit that the line itself was pretty smooth. But this unsuspecting young man had not yet seen the face of the old woman in the cool car. I turned, smiled brightly and slowly removed my sunglasses to watch the color drain from his sweet little face as he realized what had just happened. Trying to recover as best he could, he altered his pick-up line just a bit. This is what I heard. "Well, hello there. Have you got the time, MA'AM?"

The boy who was driving mumbled a phrase I would rather not put into print. The two boys in the backseat were speechless. One dropped his head into his hands. The other pulled his baseball cap further down over his eyes to hide his face from me. I'm sure he thought the only way this situation could get any worse was if I recognized him and said, "Well now, you look familiar. I think I know your mother! Be sure and say 'hello' to her for me." I actually would have said that in a heartbeat if I HAD known his mother. And for a split second I even considered saying it anyway.

The boy who had delivered the less-than-smooth line moved quickly from shock and surprise to admiration. He said, "Ma'am,

that is one fine car. I would give anything to have a car like that, but my mom would never let me get one.”

All of a sudden, here was an educational opportunity staring a former schoolteacher in the face. What else could I do? This was too good an opening to miss. Looking him in the eye, I smiled and said, “You know, there *will* come a time when you won’t need your mom’s permission to buy a car like this.”

He asked incredulously, “REALLY? WHEN?”

“Sooner than you think. You just need a plan. First, make good grades and finish high school. Then go to college or learn a trade. Work hard and save money out of every paycheck until you can buy your own car. Then you won’t need your mother’s permission anymore. So the moral of the story is that one day you CAN drive a car like this, SONNY!” Then the light turned green, I hit the accelerator, and left them in my dust.

After spending a few years as a teacher, I guess I’ll never completely get rid of my “teacher mindset.” I believe we’re all called to be teachers at some point in our lives. In our roles as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, coaches and Scout leaders, or whatever other roles we play in our families and communities, we have the power to make a lasting impression. People who look up to us will remember what we did and what we said long after we’ve forgotten both.

My most memorable teachers certainly made a lasting impression on me. Maybe you had some who did the same for you. What were the qualities and abilities they brought to the classroom that made them memorable? Were they good listeners who were interested in their students' opinions? Did they have a sense of humor? Could they be trusted to keep their word? Did you always feel they wanted you to succeed, and were willing to help you reach your goals? Did they make you feel valued while offering concrete suggestions on how to improve? Were they tough, yet fair? Did they help you grow and develop, not only as a student but also as a person with potential and a belief in yourself and your future?

I believe that teachers have a lot in common with leaders in today's organizations. Just as teachers work hard to create an environment to help their students succeed, effective leaders do the same for their employees. I've come to this conclusion after spending a lot of time talking with audience members in my keynotes and workshops. A small group often gathers and they begin to share stories about the best and worst leaders they've ever had. Through their stories they confirm my belief that the leader sets the tone for the department and the organization just as the teacher sets the tone for the classroom.

I've also learned that life is full of opportunities to learn from others if we're willing to open ourselves to the experience. And for me, "being open" means changing my preconceived notions about other people. In no way did I think that the kind gentleman

who owned that car dealership knew what he was talking about when he told me my personality would change while driving my convertible. And I'm *absolutely* sure the boys in that jeep didn't plan on learning anything about the benefits of a good education and hard work when they pulled up beside me at that traffic light! Sometimes we're so busy judging people that we fail to see who they really are and what we can learn from them.

At the end of the day I try to spend some time reflecting on what I've learned from "teachers" in unexpected places and circumstances. In the process I realize I've learned a little bit more about life and about myself. As Mama used to say, "Some of the most important lessons you'll ever learn won't be taught in a classroom."



Chapter 20

A Little Change Will Do You Good.

A Little Change Will Do You Good.

Opening the new phone book that arrived about the time of my 45th birthday, the first thing I noticed was that our local phone company had reduced the print size to conserve paper and save some trees. How admirable of them! The second thing I noticed was that I could no longer read anything IN the phone book. When I could no longer decipher any print that wasn't big and bold, I finally had to admit that I needed glasses for reading. Problem solved.

After losing several pairs of glasses in a rather short amount of time, I decided to get more organized. So I bought one of those little gold chains that attached to my glasses and hung around my neck. Now it was so simple to keep up with them! If my glasses weren't on my face, all I had to do was look down and there they would be, dangling from my little gold chain. I loved that chain, and because it was so handy, I wore it all the time. Our three teenagers, however, were totally embarrassed by my new fashion accessory. They could not comprehend why any self-respecting adult would go out in public wearing such a thing! But I did it anyway, much to their dismay and chagrin.

One Saturday morning I was sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspaper, glasses and chain in place. Some of Jennifer's friends had invited her to go to the mall, and they had just arrived to pick her up. In a hurry to answer the knock at the door, Jennifer came flying through the kitchen. Then she spotted me.

Freezing in mid-air she stared in disbelief, then pleaded in a rather pitiful little whisper, “Mom, my friends are here. Pleeeeease lose the chain!”

“Sorry, honey, but this is who I am. The chain stays.” I was so proud of myself for standing my ground. That is, until one of her friends came over to hug me and exclaimed, “Oh, Ms. Jean, you have one of those cute little chains. My Granny wears one of those!” From that day forward I stopped wearing my chain in public and was especially careful to hide it when Jennifer’s friends came to visit.

Now I could read small print again and life was good. About that same time I began waking up every morning with a terrible headache and an aching jaw. My dentist diagnosed the problem and offered a solution. “You’re grinding your teeth and clenching your jaw while you sleep, and the tension and pressure are causing your headaches. We can fix that. I’m going to fit you with a splint that you will slip into your mouth before you go to sleep. It will correct the problem and you won’t have any more pain.”

At that point I was more concerned about how the problem *started* rather than how he was going to *fix* it. With a perplexed look I asked, “This doesn’t make sense. Why would I start grinding my teeth and clenching my jaw at this stage of my life when I’ve never done that before?” My dentist answered with a mischievous grin, “Because old people tend to do that.”

Sure enough, after sleeping with my new “appliance” for less than a week, my headaches disappeared. I’ve slept with that splint for more than ten years. If I forget to pack it when I travel, I pay the price the next morning with a bad headache and a sore jaw. So I make sure to sleep with my splint, then with its replacements, ever since. Granted, I may not sleep with my husband every night, but I do sleep with my splint every night!

At this point I could read small print, my headaches were gone, and life was good. But as we all know, nothing good lasts forever. A lot of people think that traveling all over the country is a glamorous way to live. If you’ve ever had to travel extensively to do your job, you know the real story. Traveling on vacation is fun. Traveling on business is hard work.

Heaving heavy suitcases into overhead compartments on planes finally took its toll. I damaged some tendons in my arm. The pain was so intense that I could barely use that arm, which didn’t make travel any easier. To my great relief my doctor advised, “You don’t need surgery. But you’ll have to wear a splint during the day to support your arm and help it heal.”

“Oh, great!” I muttered, “Now I’m going to be wearing a splint somewhere on my body for 24 hours a day!” Dismissing my objection with a wave of his hand he continued, “You’ll wear the splint during the day, but part of the healing process will take place at night. Before you go to bed I want you to remove the splint and massage this cream over your entire arm. The deep

heating action will penetrate into the tendons and help them heal.” He put a small amount of the cream in my hand and I got a good whiff.

“This stuff smells awful!”

“Well, yes, it’s rather unpleasant. But it will do the job and that’s what counts. You’ll get used to the smell. It might help to take one of your husband’s socks, cut the toe out, and sleep with a sock on your arm.”

OK, are you with me so far? Now I had my glasses and my chain, a splint for my mouth and one for my arm, and life was good. It was a bit more challenging, but it was still good. Sitting in the dentist’s chair a few months later so he could readjust my splint, something really weird began to happen. Suddenly I felt a strange and new sensation. I tried everything I could think of to distract myself. Taking deep breaths, listening to the music on the radio, and practicing my visualization techniques didn’t help at all. Not knowing what else to do, I held up my hand indicating that I wanted him to stop working in my mouth. Removing my splint so I could speak more clearly I asked, “Is it just me, or is it really HOT in here?”

Yes, you guessed it. I was having my first hot flash – in front of my dentist! So now it was time to see my gynecologist, who prescribed hormone replacement therapy. To this day I’m not sure

who was more relieved that I was now on hormones and in a much better mood – my husband, our three teenagers, or me.

With my glasses and chain, a splint for my mouth, another splint for my arm, and a bottle of little purple hormone pills, life was still good. It was starting to get a little irritating, but it was still good. I thought I was handling things pretty well. But sometimes I'm so busy dealing with my own issues that I fail to notice how they affect those around me. The collective impact of all these changes over the past couple of years finally came together one evening.

Les was watching the late evening news and I was already in bed, deeply engrossed in a good book. Dressed in one of my favorite flannel ensembles, I had my glasses and chain in place. I had already put in my mouth splint, removed my arm splint, applied that disgusting cream and put the sock on my arm. Because Les snores, I had also donned the bright orange earplugs I wear every night.

As he climbed into bed, Les gave me a quick kiss on the forehead and turned off the light. I thought, "Well, that wasn't very romantic. I wonder what's wrong with him?" And then I heard a little voice in my head whisper, "Jean, there's nothing wrong with *him*. But have you *looked* at yourself tonight?"

Then, in the darkness, Les spoke in a quiet and hesitant voice. "Jean, I'm really proud of who you are and what you do. You

know I've always been your biggest fan and your most loyal supporter. But something's been bothering me for a while."

"OK, I'm listening."

"You've always told me that a really good speaker walks her talk. She's the same person in her real life as she is on stage in front of an audience. And I know that you work very hard trying to help people understand that change is a very scary thing. But honey, I need to tell you – you're getting scarier and scarier every day."

Like everyone else, I've been through a lot of changes in my life. Some were good and others weren't. Some happened slowly, while others followed each other in rapid succession. I don't always handle things as well as I thought I could. The people who know me best, like Les, can give me valid feedback to help me accurately gauge how I'm doing. But I have to be willing to ask for their help.

Perhaps you can relate to the thoughts shared by an audience member following my keynote at a women's leadership conference. She lamented, "My company has been going through what seems like a never ending cycle of mergers and acquisitions, downsizing and restructuring. I've survived new competitors, new products, new hires, a new boss and a new job description. During these times I often daydreamed with thoughts like, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a team filled

with people who are excited and thinking positively about the changes ahead?’ Then reality would set in. ‘Excited and positive? I’d be happy if I could just get people on my team to talk to each other!’”

Or maybe you can identify with this mid-level manager in one of my workshops as she shared what she learned about herself while dealing with major changes in her organization. “It didn’t take me long to figure out that when it comes to dealing with change, I have several choices. I can accept that I may not have control over change, but I do have control over my attitude and behavior when it comes to dealing with change. I can try to learn from every experience I have and from every person I meet. My second option is to come to work every day, cross my fingers, keep a low profile and try to become invisible so change won’t find me. A third option is to tell the other people on my team that I understand the need for change and I will catch up with them as soon as I can. In the meantime, they should feel free to move ahead without me.”

She continued, “Choosing these last two options won’t make me a very productive or popular coworker. While it was comforting to sit around the lunchroom and reminisce about ‘the good old days,’ I soon realized why our company couldn’t afford those days any more. They reflect a time when we could run an inefficient, ineffective operation and still remain profitable because our customers were so loyal they would never dream of going anywhere else. And those days are long gone.”

Maybe you've noticed that some people in your workplace enjoy change while others hate it. Some welcome it and some fear it. To deal successfully with change and help others do likewise, you can set the tone and model the behaviors you want and need from them. Find ways to share information and get things out in the open to address their fears and help them work through the change process. Before you can lead by example to help others, you have to decide in which of those groups described above – the positive people, the invisible people, the complainers, or the fence sitters – you belong.

Dealing with change in our personal lives can often be more stressful than dealing with change at work. At times I've resisted changes I know had to be made for the good of others involved. When all is said and done, the longer I wait, the harder change will be to face. I can choose to change, but at my own pace, my own speed, and on my own timetable. While this approach may bring me comfort, it makes it extremely difficult for others around me who are trying to deal with change to the best of their ability. I'm not much help to them if I've got my head down and my eyes shut tight.

In the midst of any major change, open and honest communication between all parties involved is crucial. Unfortunately, fear of change (facing the unknown while feeling that I've lost control) has the power to freeze me in my tracks and keep me from working through the issues that count with the people who matter most.

I hope I never again have to hear the words, “You’re getting scarier and scarier every day.” If the time ever comes when I DO get that message in some way, I’m going to pay close attention. While I can’t always be in charge of change, I can be in charge of the attitude I choose to deal with the changes I’m facing. And as Mama used to say, “That’s one thing that will never change.”



Chapter 21

Winning Isn't Everything.

Winning Isn't Everything.

Our son Michael is an accomplished golfer. As a member of his high school golf team, he played in various tournaments across the state. Chauffeuring his teammates to a tournament one summer gave me the opportunity to watch them play golf for several days. Those memories have stayed with me to this day, not only because I was so proud of our son, but also because I met a father no parent could ever forget.

Instead of a team event, this tournament was about individual achievement. At the beginning of the competition each school team was split up and new teams were formed with boys from other schools. In addition to being spectators, parents were allowed to help in only one way. We could provide our sons with drinking water and wet towels to help them handle the high heat and humidity so typical of our summer weather in Louisiana.

We were not allowed to carry their clubs, transport them in a golf cart, or offer any advice on which club to use for a particular shot. The latter was certainly not a problem for me because no one in his or her right mind would ever ask me for golf advice. In fact, I'm the only one in our family who doesn't play. I get impatient because it takes too much time and there are many other things I would rather do – in a climate-controlled environment. And besides, golf attire is just not that cute!

For the most part, all of the parents followed the rules. One father, however, stood out from the crowd. While he didn't offer any advice on how to play, he certainly had strong opinions as to how his son was doing. Instead of keeping his comments to himself, he spoke loudly enough for everyone to hear. As his son sliced a ball that veered off into the woods, this dad spoke up, "After all the money your mother and I spent on golf lessons, this is what we have to show for it." Comments like this continued throughout the tournament. His final remark on the last day made every parent in the gallery cringe. "Your teammates must be so embarrassed that you even showed up."

In spite of his dad's obnoxious outbursts, that young man played well enough to place second in the tournament. Michael didn't win any trophies that day, but that didn't stop him from congratulating his teammate. After shaking hands and checking out the impressive trophy his new friend would proudly display in the trophy case at school, Michael glanced around and asked, "Where's your dad?"

I could tell by the look on Michael's face that he was shocked by the answer he received, because it was such a foreign concept to him. When our kids were growing up they were all involved in a myriad of sports. Whether it was baseball, softball, volleyball, flag football, basketball, tennis or golf, their dad was at every game, cheering them on and lending his support. He even helped coach some of their teams. It never mattered to him if they won or lost. He was still their biggest fan.

Responding honestly to Michael's question, this boy shrugged his shoulders and said in a barely audible reply, "Oh, he's around here somewhere. But he never comes to the awards ceremony if I don't win first place."

Michael squared his shoulders and answered, "Well, I'm going to find him." And so he did, walking up to this dad and extending his hand. "Congratulations, sir. You must be very proud." Refusing to shake hands with my son, he asked, "Why are you congratulating me, Michael?"

"Well, I was just at the awards ceremony. They announced the winners and gave out all the trophies. You may not know this, but your son won second place. He's the second best high school golfer in the whole state."

This father, whose job it was to be a role model and supporter said, "Michael, you had better learn this early in life. Second place doesn't count."

I've thought of that conversation over the years and wondered what kind of man that boy grew up to be. He certainly had more than his share of challenges with such a discourager in his life. One maddening thing about discouragers is that while they make comments that the recipients may remember for the rest of their lives, they often can't recall ever saying anything so offensive. The damage, however, has long since been done.

Another frustrating trait of discouragers is that no matter what you do, they are never supportive. Their negative feedback in the workplace includes such phrases as “That will never work.” “There’s no way you can make that happen.” “Don’t waste your time.” “What a dumb idea.” “Are you crazy?”

When it comes to the people in their personal lives, they see no problem with making comments such as, “You’ve really gained a lot of weight.” “You’re not a very good parent.” “Why can’t you get your life together?” “When is the last time you cleaned your house / got a decent haircut / bought a new outfit / or looked at yourself in a mirror?”

Discouragers can have such a monumental impact on someone else’s future when the person on the receiving end takes their negative opinions and comments to heart. All of us have regular contact with people who have discouragers in their lives. Because they may not talk about it, we have no way of knowing what they’ve been up against in the past, or what they’re dealing with on a daily basis. While we can’t undo the damage others have created, we do have the power to be encouragers for others. Sometimes, however, it’s a challenge to find creative ways to do that.

Several years ago, Michael received one of the most original and inventive bits of encouragement I’ve ever seen. During his junior year in high school our mailbox was flooded with brochures and catalogues from colleges all across the country. As I carried in

the mail one day, I noticed a large brown envelope addressed to Michael with a rather disturbing message emblazoned across the front in big red letters.

WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE
AND WE SAW WHAT YOU DID.

Handing him the envelope when he came home from school, I learned that if you want to get a teenager's attention in a hurry, all you have to do is give him an envelope with *that* phrase printed across the front! Looking confused and more than a bit nervous, Michael announced that he would open his mail in his room and get back to me.

Wearing a big grin and an even bigger look of relief when he came into the kitchen a few moments later, he handed me the letter. What had Michael done? Actually, he had done the same thing that thousands of other high school kids do every year. He had scored very well on his ACT. Instead of the typical "congratulations" letter, this college's recruiting team used a unique approach to let him know that they were aware of his test scores and wanted him to consider them as he made his college plans.

Every day we have countless opportunities to encourage others, but we often let the best ones slip by unnoticed. When you look at the average workplace, however, it's easy to see how this can happen. Juggling multiple priorities and working on an endless "to do" list, we become so focused on our own needs that we miss opportunities to thank others for their dedication and hard work.

When we're busy, it's easier to assume they know we appreciate their efforts instead of taking precious time to tell them. But our colleagues and coworkers aren't mind readers. So it's up to us to let them know by telling them and showing them. It could be something as simple as a nod, a smile, a "thumbs up" or a few encouraging words. We can acknowledge their efforts at a team meeting, or jot down a few words of thanks and support.

In today's competitive global environment in which everyone is expected to work harder and faster with fewer resources, a little credit and a bit of sincere praise can go a long way. With budgets as tight as they are these days, a word of thanks and some well-deserved recognition can be very cost-effective ways to boost morale and improve productivity. The possibilities are endless and affordable.

At some point we leave our workplaces and go home to the people who are supposed to be the most important ones in our lives. But we often leave our good manners at work. We can just "be ourselves" at home, right? No one cares. No one notices if we're not at our best. We've been performing all day and we just want to go home and relax. That doesn't mean, however, that we should relax our awareness of others who may also have had a tough day. This attitude makes no sense at all, though I have to admit I'm sometimes guilty of it myself.

Why do we smile and thank a total stranger for holding a door open for us, then assume that those closest to us know we appreciate

the many kind and helpful things they do? Why do we apologize for bumping into someone in a crowded store, yet find it hard to apologize when we've hurt someone's feelings or damaged our relationship by a thoughtless comment? Preparing a great meal, running errands, helping around the house, cutting the grass and taking out the trash are all necessary jobs that often go unnoticed and unappreciated. Awards and certificates of appreciation for effort and hard work are given out at company banquets every year. But words of appreciation at home often go unspoken.

Thanks for doing such a great job.

I couldn't make it without you.

Thanks for understanding.

You're important to me.

You did your best.

Great report card!

I'm proud of you.

I appreciate you.

I care about you.

I'm listening.

I respect you.

I was wrong.

I trust you.

I love you.

When we stop taking people for granted and let them know how much we value them, we can have an impact more powerful than we ever imagined. Encouraging words are never wasted. But if the words are never spoken, they will never be heard. One of Mama's favorite sayings is apparently back in style these days, and all of us can benefit if we put it into practice. Simply put, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."



You're Smart.
Figure It Out for Yourself.

You're Smart. Figure It Out for Yourself.

Instead of providing the answers to the countless questions I asked throughout my youth, Mama always encouraged me to come up with my own answers that would fit me best. I encourage you to do the same as you reflect on my stories and life lessons and how you can apply them in your life if you choose to do so. Remember, it's *always* your choice.

Chapter 1.

I Never Talked to My Mother the Way You Talk to Me!

1. How do difficult people manipulate me?
2. How do I reward them through my words and actions?
3. Which of Jean's strategies am I willing to try?

Chapter 2.

You're the Oldest. Share with Your Sister.

1. What are my tough decisions, and what needs to happen next?
2. Who needs to act and who needs to get out of the way?
3. How much longer can I wait for the easy choices?

Chapter 3.
I'm Only Telling You This for Your Own Good.

1. In what ways do I put too much pressure on myself?
2. How do I react to feedback that's difficult to hear?
3. How do I feel about how others perceive me?

Chapter 4.
Have Yourself a Stress-Free Little Christmas.

As I look at the 12 Gifts listed on page 63:

1. Which gifts do I want to incorporate into my life?
2. What steps can I take today to begin that process?

Chapter 5.
When It Rains, It Pours.

1. What's the name of my "storm"?
2. What am I doing to be a "storm survivor"?

Chapter 6.

Always Send a Thank-You Note to Your Hostess.

1. Do I thank people instead of assuming they know I'm grateful?
2. How can I improve on acknowledging acts of kindness?

Chapter 7.

Don't Bring That Stray Dog into This House!

1. What words would others use to describe me?
2. How can I replace negative traits with positive ones?

Chapter 8.

Slow Down. You're Going to Fall.

1. Is my life out of balance at the moment?
2. What have I done to create my own balance problems?
3. Based on my answers on page 119, WHO am I?

Chapter 9.
Everybody Needs a Shoulder to Cry On.

1. How do I practice both the art and science of my “job”?
2. Do I pretend I’m OK on the outside while I struggle within?
3. How good am I at forgiving others and myself?

Chapter 10.
That’s the Last Time We’ll Eat There!

1. What is my favorite “poor customer service” experience?
2. How have I improved communication in my workplace?
3. At work and at home, do I assume people know what’s important to me or do I tell them how I feel and what I need?

Chapter 11.
Try It. You’ll Like It.

1. Am I living my life in “default” mode?
2. Am I so comfortable that I’m not open to new ideas?
3. What changes can I make for more positive outcomes?

Chapter 12.
Are You Talking to Yourself Again?

1. How good of a negotiator am I?
2. How can I be more aware and sensitive to others' needs?
3. How do I react when I don't get what I want?
4. How does that impact my relationships?

Chapter 13.
One Day You'll Thank Me.

1. Do I waste energy on people and problems that I can't fix?
2. Can I admit my limitations regarding situations I can't control?
3. Do I use humor to help me handle my stress?

Chapter 14.
You Can Do Anything If You Put Your Mind to It.

1. What changes am I experiencing in my life right now?
2. How am I responding to those changes?
3. Am I good at expressing myself honestly and directly?
4. Do others see me as the flight attendant or the pilot in the story?

Chapter 15.
You're Never Too Old to Learn Something New.

1. How committed am I to lifelong learning in all areas?
2. Do I ask for honest feedback to improve my skills?
3. Am I confident enough to act on the feedback I receive?

Chapter 16.
Stop Whining and Act Your Age.

1. What detrimental habit would I like to break?
2. How can I improve my personal and professional relationships?

Chapter 17.
Don't Be Nervous. You'll Do Fine.

1. What are my challenges in this area – planning, delivery, or both?
2. How can I use these strategies to improve my presentation skills?
3. How can I better prepare and present my ideas at work and at home?

Chapter 18.

Clean Your Plate. Do You Think This Meal Cooked Itself?

1. What did I learn from positive role models in my life?
2. Who sees me as a role model at work or at home?
3. Am I “walking my talk” and “practicing what I preach”?

Chapter 19.

Don't You Kids Have Anything Better To Do?

1. Who were my most memorable teachers, and why?
2. Who are the current leaders/teachers in my life?
3. What have I learned, and how can I share it with others?

Chapter 20.

A Little Change Will Do You Good.

1. Reflecting on recent changes, am I a victim or a survivor?
2. How can I get more comfortable with asking for help?

Chapter 21.
Winning Isn't Everything.

1. How can I reduce the number of discouragers in my life?
2. How can I include more encouragers in my life?
3. How can I be more of an encourager to others?

My additional thoughts and ideas:

Thanks and Appreciation

Throughout my career and my life, I've been blessed to be surrounded by so many extraordinary people who have supported my every effort. While I do try to express my appreciation at the appropriate moments, this book calls for special thanks to some of them.

Les Gatz, my husband of 50 years. You are the best husband and greatest dad I know. You are also my rock, my biggest cheerleader and my best friend. And as Mama's been reminding me ever since I first met you, "Les is such a good boy."

Steven and Michael, for being the best sons any mom could ever hope for and for being supportive of my career ever since the beginning – even when you reminded me that I didn't have a REAL job.

Catherine, our daughter-in-law, for adding a wonderful and exciting new dimension to our family.

Jennifer Gatz Fowler, my editor. Jen, as mother and daughter we think so much alike. And as we've learned over the years, sometimes that's not a good thing! But as my editor you knew exactly where I was going with every story. And every suggestion you made was the right one. I am grateful to have you as my editor and proud to have you as my daughter.

My sisters Kathy and Patty, and my brother, Randy, for listening to my stories – probably more than once.

Joell Escude, for your enduring friendship and support since our college days.

My speaking colleagues and mastermind buddies, Susan Friedmann, John Paling, Jeff Tobe, Don Blohowiak, David Mainz and Phillip VanHooser. Your advice and your friendship are great blessings in my life. Thank goodness you're never short on opinions – bless your hearts!

Sam Horn, for your irreplaceable blend of expertise and kindness, wisdom and grace.

Connie Podesta, for your guidance and direction, as well as your friendship, in this ever-evolving journey we call “professional speaking.”

Kerri Pepper, my production editor, and Joni McPherson, my graphic designer, for your dedication and good work on this and every other project we've worked on together. And to Ronnie Bucci for being so easy to work with and for teaching me what a compositor really is!

Women are talking about Jean!

“What a refreshing and inspirational message! Your ability to focus on people and relationships is amazing. God has blessed you with a very special gift! Thank you for sharing your wisdom and humor with us.”

“This is the 12th year we’ve hosted our *Spirit of Women* event and the overwhelming feedback was that YOU WERE THE BEST we’ve ever had!”

“Women left our conference laughing and feeling good about themselves. Months later they are *still* talking about it. You delivered a heartfelt message, to which we could all relate, punctuated with your hilarious stories. I’ve attended many women’s events but this one was the best by far!”

“Your program *Refueling Your Spirit When You’re Running on Empty* was just what we needed! Your wonderful sense of humor kept us laughing while your message of the heart touched many lives in the time we spent with you.”

“You can always gauge the ‘enjoyability’ of a speaker by the number of times you check your watch. When Jean Gatz is speaking, you don’t even realize you’re wearing a watch!”

“Real-world information presented with humor and energy. Jean’s message is not only inspiring and uplifting but extremely entertaining as well!”

Jean's Promise to you!

As your conference keynoter or retreat speaker my # 1 Goal is to make your event a tremendous success and make you the HERO of the day! (OK, that's *two* goals, but you get the idea!) I'll deliver the message you want your audience to hear – in a way that connects and resonates with every single one of them.

I've learned that every audience is filled with good, dedicated, hard-working people struggling with tough decisions about their families, relationships, kids, careers, health, financial security and their future. So I help them understand that although they may not be in charge of whatever Life sends their way, they ARE in charge of the choices they make to handle those challenges. I promise to deliver value-rich content in a way that gives everyone permission to laugh, relax, unwind and take a breather from the pressures of work and life.

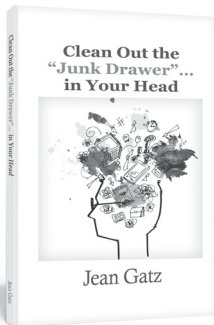
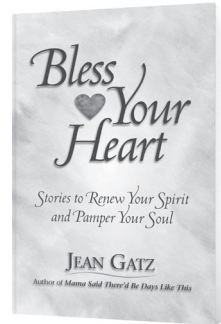
Relationships built on trust are the cornerstone of my business – and my life. So I work hard to build trust with every client and every audience. My reputation is based on delivering what I promise. To stand behind that promise, you have **My Personal Guarantee**: I will learn everything I can about your organization and your attendees' greatest challenges. Then I will design a program that connects and resonates with them, accomplishes your goals and meets their needs. I promise to *exceed your expectations* and deliver *absolutely outstanding results!*

Jean's other books are ready for you!

Go to www.jeangatz.com/Shop

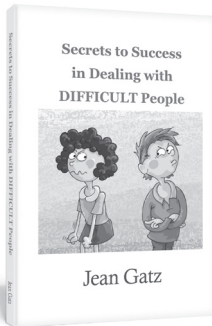
Bless Your Heart

Jean's stories will make you laugh, think and reminisce about your own life experiences. When you open your mind and heart to look at life from a fresh perspective, you can renew your spirit and pamper your soul every single day. You'll discover countless ways to bless your heart while you bless the hearts of others. And that will qualify you as an honorary Southerner even if you weren't born and raised in the South... Bless your heart!



Clean Out “the Junk Drawer”... in your Head

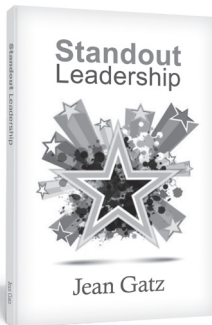
Why make life harder by holding on to limiting thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors? Jean uses real life examples to help you start fresh and get rid of whatever is holding you back. Understand how your attitude impacts how others perceive you and relate to you, and how making even minor adjustments can improve your career, your relationships and your life on every level. She also shows you how to put other people in charge of their own “junk drawer thinking” instead of unloading it on you!



Secrets of Success in Dealing with Difficult People

If you have difficult people in your life – at work or at home – this book is for you! Jean explains exactly how they manipulate you to get what they want. Then she delivers proven, time-tested strategies to make sure they no longer ruin your days! Learn the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Jean's ideas are a great alternative to asking the question you really want to ask of difficult people: "I already took a pain pill, so why are you still here?"



STANDOUT Leadership

Discover the top leadership strengths you need to influence others in a positive way and set yourself apart as the leader successful people are proud to follow. This is an eye-opening book for seasoned leaders and for those who are new to their leadership position or aspiring to move up to a leadership role.

Use Jean's strategies to develop advocates and allies at every level to help you get the job done. Learn how to lead with a voice that inspires, influences, and achieves results.

To order, go to www.jeangatz.com/Shop