

Chapter One

The Power of Gratitude

I appreciate all of life's gifts.

Living in a state of gratitude is an important key to leading a joyful, abundant life. Being grateful means feeling sincere appreciation for what you already have. You could acquire every material thing in the world, but without gratitude, your possessions would be just objects. Feeling appreciation is one of the best emotions you can experience. Focusing on all you have instead of what you lack helps enhance your well-being, creating more happiness, optimism, and better health. And the more you appreciate, the more you receive.

*Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions.
The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely
you will have even more to express gratitude for.*
— Zig Ziglar, American author, motivation speaker, salesman

There are many degrees of appreciation, but when I'm fully present and in a grateful state, it is awe-inspiring. There are no words to express the immense joy, love, contentment, and peace I feel. My energy becomes lighthearted and wants to burst from my body. The feeling of gratitude has the power to cleanse and restore the body, mind, and spirit.

I didn't understand the healing power of gratitude before I faced my bleakest time. My life had been exceptional—I had an incredible husband, an amazing daughter, wonderful family and friends, a beautiful house, satisfying work, and incredible nature right outside my door. I loved my life, but I took much for granted. Then everything changed.

Quite unexpectedly, my husband Don died. His kidney ejected a blood clot, which led to sepsis and organ failure. I was inconsolably in shock right after his death—totally devastated. I

couldn't accept that he was gone and soon became lost and unraveled. Three weeks later, a fire destroyed a portion of our home. My sixteen-year-old daughter and I had to move into a rental for seven months while the damaged part of our house was torn down and rebuilt.

During this time, I could not find reasons to be thankful. My husband, the love of my life, was no longer there, and now our family home was uninhabitable. Not being able to grieve in the familiarity of our home was overwhelming. What was once my reality, my security, my life, no longer existed. I felt empty, hollow, alone.

Even so, gratitude started to surface. My parents, who had been visiting us stayed for a few extra days to help out, and my next-door neighbors, Dan and Stephanie, housed all of us for a week. The insurance company could not find a rental at first, so my friend Susan called Pat, a local realtor, who found a place for us to live. The owner of the townhome quickly prepared the rental so we could move in a week. Another friend, Ramona, and her daughter, Melina, took time off work and school to help us deal with the aftermath of the losses. I felt thankful for all the family, friends, and strangers, that came together to help us through this unimaginable time.

Moving into the rental, we only had a couch and the two beds the restoration company had cleaned, a few clothes, and my husband's car—both mine and my daughter's cars were burned in the fire. The rest of our belongings were removed to be deodorized and cleaned to eliminate the smoke damage. The cleaning would take several weeks, so a trip to the store was required. The last thing I wanted to do was go shopping, but we needed pillows, sheets, blankets, and towels. For five weeks, we lived with the bare minimum. I had just four turtlenecks, three pairs of jeans, and one pair of athletic shoes. Living with less gave me time to discover how little we truly needed.

All of these sudden life changes—death, fire, and moving—made me lose my sense of security. I grew depressed. But in the midst of these struggles, I slowly found gratitude and eventually, some peace. Let me share some of the details with you.

The fire occurred around 6:30 p.m., Election Night 2012. My parents, daughter, and I had just finished dinner, and I went to put my pajamas on to watch the results. My parents lived about ten hours away and had driven down for my birthday, something they had not done before, but they knew we were grieving and wanted to be there for us. They were supposed to leave the previous day but my daughter asked them to stay for one more night. In hindsight, this was such a blessing because they took care of her as I dealt with all the fire insurance paperwork, inspections, and aftermath.

The night of the fire, a man driving by happened to see the first flames. He knocked on my door and told me I had a fire in the garage. My first reaction was disbelief. How was this possible? I ran to the door leading to the garage, and when I opened it, I could not believe my eyes. I screamed, *There's a fire! Everyone get out of the house!* as I ran to the phone to call 911. We all met up outside in total shock. It had only been three weeks since Don had passed, and now this!

At first, it was just a small fire and I thought the fire truck would arrive quickly and distinguish it. But soon the whole garage was engulfed in flames and the fire headed to the second story. Our neighbor across the street set up lawn chairs for us in their driveway. Watching the fire grow, I was paralyzed knowing there was nothing we could do except wait.

Several minutes later, the fire trucks, with their sirens blaring, pulled up in front of the house and started hosing down the flames. I was sitting in the dark, in my pajamas, across the street from my house watching my home burn down. I was speechless. I felt nothing. No breath, no thought, no feelings, no time, just emptiness. My body was there, but the *me—my soul*—had vanished. It was like watching a movie, not a scene from my own life. A few friends who heard about the fire had come by to console us. We all just watched in silence. No one said a word. At least to me.

When the fire was finally out, a fireman walked me through the house to survey the damage. It was dark, deserted, and smoke-filled—like an eerie fog had rolled into my home. The floor was dirty and wet, with the imprints of firefighters’ boots left behind. Walls were missing and soot lingered in the air making it hard to breathe. It looked more like a war zone than my home. The destruction was hard to comprehend.

As the fireman walked me through the charred remnants to show me the damage, I realized we had lost all our holiday mementos, including ornaments of “Our First Christmas Together,” “Baby’s First Christmas,” and handmade items my daughter had made. Christmas was our favorite holiday so losing all that was so heartbreaking, especially with it being just seven weeks away. Thoughts started surfacing of *Why me, God? I know we don’t get more than we can handle, but a fire now, really?* I quickly willed those thoughts to stop, knowing they were not going to help. Somehow I knew I needed to be grateful for what I had, not the material items I had lost.

All my life I have tried to find a positive reason for unwanted situations, but Don’s death followed by the fire stopped me cold until I realized it could have been much worse. *What if the man had not been driving by at that exact time? Would the rest of my home have been destroyed? What if the fire had occurred at two in the morning when everyone was asleep? Would we have escaped safely?* Also, the fire happened a couple of weeks before Thanksgiving. I think it would have been too overwhelming and heartbreaking to live in our home through the holidays without my husband. Maybe there was a reason for the fire I could not see.

The week before the fire, I thought, *Why not me instead of someone else?* I felt this question deep in my soul. Bad things can happen to anyone. Of course, it took time to get there, but this one question provided me the opportunity to look at my life and be appreciative for everything I had been given. Don and I were together for 25 wonderful years. We raised a beautiful daughter that both of us adored, and built a happy life together filled with family and

friends. Not everyone gets to have this experience, and I feel extremely blessed that I did. And I am very thankful to all the firefighters for saving a portion of our home, to the man who first saw the fire, and for all the people who helped us to rebuild our lives. Yes, there was so much to be grateful for.

Finding Gratitude in Challenging Times

I believe we would not evolve emotionally or spiritually without life's ups and downs. When challenges present themselves, having a mindset of *I believe there is a reason for this or something beneficial can be created from this* helps to work through the obstacles. The event may be terrible, but some of our greatest learning opportunities come to us in painful times. Difficult periods happen to everyone and can make us stronger and, hopefully, smarter, if we gain new insight and understanding.

Another way to work through challenges is to acknowledge them, because they cannot be wished away. Eventually we must accept unwanted circumstances. For me, it took time to process all that had transpired. I had to learn to be gentle and patient with myself. Now, when challenging times occur, I try to remember it is a temporary situation and will pass.

Challenges can bring gratitude, because in their midst there are still good things in our lives—if we are open to seeing them. Looking for something beyond the loss allows us to appreciate the things we still have, such as family or friends. When we search for gratitude, it will appear.

It may be challenging to be thankful in difficult times, but blessings can occur. I know someone whose husband was laid off and it was hard for their family. During this time, he took several computer classes and at the end of nine months, he was offered a new position at the same firm for twice as much pay because he had acquired more skills. Now he is making three times as

much and is grateful for the furlough which allowed him the opportunity to improve his professional expertise.

When we feel gratitude, it is difficult to be in negative states like anger. The best way to get out of a negative space is by reaching for a grateful thought of something positive in life, for example, good health or your home. Embrace this feeling, and once it is there, hold on to it and watch negative emotions decrease.

Can't find anything to be grateful for? We can visualize a desired life—better relationships, improved health, or a more fulfilling job—then be thankful for the visualization. Practicing gratitude for a wanted desire *before* it happens unlocks the door for it to appear. Difficult events occur in everyone's life and finding something to appreciate can be hard to achieve. It may require extra effort to discover a blessing. I have had my share of such days. But appreciation for something, anything, can help to lead us out of this dark place.

The Benefits of Gratitude

Developing an “attitude of gratitude” helps to create inner peace. When we are in a grateful state, we feel whole, complete, and in awe. True appreciation is a feeling that cannot be expressed by words alone—it is the joy of simply existing. I no longer want to say *I am grateful* or *thank you* without feeling this emotion.

One of the easiest ways to enter into this space is to appreciate the present moment. This is where I feel a relationship with all things. Gratitude says to the world, “I am thankful for you, for me, for everything.”

When we appreciate and are content with our current gifts, more will come into our lives. The statement, “We reap what we sow,” is very true. What we put out to the world comes back to us. When we feel deserving and worthy of these offerings, we start to see more gifts appear. If we

feel we don't deserve these gifts, we can block them from coming into our lives. We are not given dreams we cannot achieve. *We receive what we believe.*

According to Robert Emmons, the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude, practicing gratefulness leads to better health, more joy and happiness, and having more compassion. His definition of gratitude has two components, "First, it's an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we've received. This doesn't mean life is perfect; it doesn't ignore complaints, burdens, and hassles. . . . The second part of gratitude is figuring out where goodness comes from."¹ Emmons continues, "We acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you're of a spiritual mindset—gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives."²

It may take some effort to feel grateful, but we can change our mindset. Repetitive thoughts are simply patterns we continue to create. When feeling ungrateful, we can switch our thinking and place our attention on something in life to be thankful for, and this starts a new thought pattern.

Gratitude changes attitude.

I purposely seek gratitude. Am I in grace all the time? No, but I now find it easier to return to this state when feeling down. Many of us have reasons to be thankful, but we tend to concentrate on what is wrong in our lives instead of what is right. Embrace the good and make a conscious effort to connect to gratitude. This act awakens positive emotions that spread throughout the body and into the brain, allowing for serenity and better clarity. Helping others also simulates better feeling emotions. Make gratitude an action word by performing an act of service, such as walking a sick friend's dog or delivering groceries to someone unable to shop for themselves.

Cultivating Gratitude

There are many ways to cultivate gratitude. One technique is to start each morning with appreciation. Create an affirmative statement like “I am grateful to be alive today.” And end each day with thanks. It can be as simple as, “Thank you for this day.”

Before going to sleep, try to find something new to be grateful for. The blessings do not need to be big or unusual. Be thankful for blue skies, or for the bed that allows our bodies to rest so we can handle tomorrow’s challenges. If we fall asleep in a negative space, we will not receive a good night’s sleep and could wake up in that same state. Why not get a better start on the next day by appreciating today? *Appreciation is paying it forward to yourself.*

A second technique is to create a gratitude journal because the act of writing down our blessings reminds us to focus on the good. Or if not a journal, take a few moments to think about life’s gifts. There is no magic number of blessings to count. Today there may only be one item and the next day five or ten. Do whatever feels right. Starting and ending the day with appreciation opens gratitude’s door.

*There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a miracle.*

– Albert Einstein, German theoretical physicist, Nobel Prize for Physics 1921

When we start looking for gratitude, new opportunities to be grateful appear. The more we practice seeking appreciation, the more we will experience it. Be thankful for even the smallest of gifts, like getting the perfect parking space or someone holding the door open. And when finding something to be grateful for, pause for a moment to acknowledge what is being received and feel gratitude. When we do, ordinary events become blessings.

Gratitude for Our Tribe

People are certainly among our greatest blessings and help us to develop and grow. My husband did that for me. When we first met, he said I was a rose ready to bloom. And in a card many years later, he wrote that the rose had bloomed.

*Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy;
they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.*
— Marcel Proust, French novelist, critic, essayist

I am so blessed for the unconditional love my husband gave me. He introduced me to new topics and ideas that opened whole new worlds. Don was intelligent, funny, compassionate, giving, and a calming force when I needed one. He was extremely dedicated and he tirelessly helped his clients prosper and improve their lives. Don's discussions were inspiring and thought-provoking because his thinking ran very deep as he considered all possibilities. He was always supportive, understanding, and never tried to change me. He accepted who I was, flaws and all, and for that, I am eternally grateful. Sharing his life with me is one of the best gifts I will ever receive.

I am very grateful for my daughter, who has walked this journey with me. Now, eight years after our tragedy, she is a beautiful young woman with amazing courage and compassion. Her incredible strength is one of an old soul and is exceptional. Her love, support, and positive words mean everything to me. I cannot express my appreciation for all she has done. She was my grounding force when I was lost and could not find the way back to myself. Through her loving spirit, I found joy again. She taught me to see what is truly important in life is everyday moments. She gets excited over ordinary things, like eating dinner with family, looking at a rainbow, or talking with her grandparents. She is my greatest blessing.

The people in our lives aid in the unfolding of our path—helping us to see something in ourselves that we do not recognize and assisting us to create future blessings that are not yet imaginable.

Teaching Moments

Tragic events can bring teaching moments, and I am grateful for the lessons I learned from experiencing a house fire. First is to be grateful for what I have now because there is no guarantee that I will always have these blessings. Second is that I can live with significantly less stuff. And third is to accept what comes and have faith that I can survive challenges.

A few years ago, on a flight back home, I sat next to a woman who was losing her eyesight. She mentioned that she could only see the outline of my face. During our conversation, she talked about working as a lab technician and how independent she used to be. This woman had visited Italy and lived in Anchorage, Alaska, before moving to Arizona, where she had resided the past forty years. But she was going blind and needed help so she was relocating to Seattle to live near one of her sons.

Her house sold in just one week, giving her little time to sell her possessions. Her exhaustion—physically, mentally, and emotionally—was clear. The flight from Arizona to Seattle included two plane changes, one in Los Angeles and another in Sacramento. Not being able to see, she had to rely on the kindness of strangers to get her from one plane to another. During the flight, I helped her to the restroom and then carried her bags to hand them to the next stranger, an airport employee who would help her board the next aircraft. This woman had to trust others to help her and that everything would work out. There is peace in letting go of the “how” and just having faith that all will be okay.

This brief encounter was a big learning experience that included great life lessons. It taught me to be grateful for the ordinary things we take for granted, like independence or eyesight, to have faith that solutions will appear, and simply to let others help. It’s important to be a giver as well as a receiver, as there are gifts in both.

And there are benefits in the sharing of stories because we may discover that it's possible to survive great challenges. This gives us hope and allows us to form connections, making our journey more of a collective pilgrimage rather than a solo one. We were not meant to travel alone. Be grateful for everyone and everything in life because when we live in gratitude, we will discover more happiness, love, and compassion.

In counting my blessings, not my losses, I found joy again. Life offers many wonderful opportunities to feel blessed. Waking up tomorrow is a hope, not a certainty. One of the most overlooked items on the gratitude list is our life-sustaining breath. We take it for granted. But without it, we cease to exist. And I am grateful, dear reader, that we are all here, enjoying each breath together.

Take a few moments every day to be thankful. Make gratitude a practice by feeling it, showing it, and doing it. Embrace the emotion and live in this space. I have found that being grateful leads to a more content, peaceful, and meaningful life. Appreciate the present moment because this is where all possibilities exist.

Tune Up!

Exercise One: Start a Gratitude Journal

Seek gratitude every day and record these events into a phone, computer, tablet, notepad, or book.

Revisiting thankful moments helps to recognize the joy in ordinary life. When we give greater attention to gratitude, more appears. Below are some prompts to get started.

1. What made you smile today?
2. Did you talk to someone who made you feel special?
3. Was time spent with a loved one?
4. Did you have a bed to sleep in and food to eat?
5. What made you happy?

Playlist:

“Thankful” by Kelly Clarkson

“I Wanna Thank You” by Mavis Staples

“I’ve Got Plenty to Be Thankful For” by Bing Crosby

“Wind Beneath My Wings” by Bette Midler

“Because You Loved Me” by Céline Dion

Chapter Two

Choose Joy

I consciously select joy.

There are moments in life when choosing to be joyful can be a difficult, if not impossible, task. I have experienced times where joy was nowhere to be found. Struggles and change can bring worry or pain. Rather than fighting against them, I've learned to accept that unwanted events are just a part of life. By lowering my resistance, I can move through challenging times with greater ease and allow more joyful opportunities to present themselves.

Often, it is my outlook on a situation that causes my distress. But I can consciously choose to have a more beneficial or empowering thought. I did just that during the worst period of my life. Instead of dwelling on loss, I began to look for things that gave me joy.

We cannot cure the world of sorrows, but we can choose to live in joy.

—Joseph Campbell, American professor, author, editor

Three weeks after my husband's death and the fire that had partially destroyed our home, I dropped out of life for several months. I needed to hibernate and make the pain go away—as if the loss had never happened. I desperately wanted my husband and my old life back. One morning, something changed. I don't know why, but I woke up and decided to accept my circumstances. I made a conscious decision to start living again. At that moment, I clearly realized that I was physically existing in my body, but had not been fully present in mind or heart. In the mirror, the lifeless person staring back at me was unrecognizable. The thought of my sixteen-year-old daughter continuing to see a depressed mother was suddenly unbearable. I knew it was not healthy for either of us.

Wanting to heal my heart and regain some likeness of my prior self, I intentionally started seeking joy in ordinary things—a green light at an intersection, a favorite song on the radio, a sunny day. I had taken so much in life for granted. But now, I was finding joy, if only just for a split second, in everyday moments. And each time I found joy, I would say *thank you*. Of course, this change did not heal me overnight.

We have to embrace obstacles to reach the next stage of joy.

– Goldie Hawn, American actress, happiness advocate, MindUp founder

Slowly, with practice and patience, small flashes of joy began to emerge. One morning while taking a walk, a hummingbird flew right in front of my face and hovered there. As I walked on, the hummingbird kept pace, flying alongside my head. A second hummingbird flew in and joined us, then the two of them fluttered off together. I was filled with wonder and my heart felt such happiness. From that moment on, I decided to look for joy everywhere in nature.

This experience made me more attentive to seeing butterflies swirling, squirrels frolicking, and beautiful white fluffy clouds floating gracefully in the brilliant blue sky. Had the hummingbird experience not occurred, all these other wonderful events may have gone unnoticed. I was appreciating and participating in life again, and for this, my heart felt truly grateful. Gratitude led me to joy.

Cultivating Joy

Joy is based not on a circumstance, but on our response. Reacting negatively to a situation can cause annoyance, upset, or impatience. Blaming thoughts, such as *someone did me wrong* or *something caused this* are crippling. Emotions mirror our words and thoughts. Although we can't control others or external circumstances, we are in complete control of our reactions.

Nothing in the world can bother you as much as your own mind I tell you. In fact, when others seem to be bothering you, it isn't others, it's your own mind.

– 14th Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhist monk, spiritual leader, peace activist

When we recognize that our responses come from an internal place, and not from the outside environment, then the external no longer has control over our thoughts and emotions. If we become annoyed or upset for an extended period of time, it's because we are choosing to stay in a place of negativity rather than consciously trying to improve the situation, or at least help ourselves to move past it. At times, I have to pause and process my thoughts or emotions to avoid reacting negatively. Otherwise, I am allowing an outside situation to influence my response. Consciously choosing more beneficial thinking leads to less tension and more joyfulness.

Experts say joy comes from focusing on the good in our lives, helping others, and finding meaning and purpose. Kira M. Newman, at UC Berkeley's *Greater Good Magazine*, states, "Fortunately, research suggests that happiness is something we can cultivate with practice."¹ Many studies have found that people can be happier just by thinking and acting differently.

Psychologist Deann Ware, PhD, explains that our brain cells communicate with each other and this connection strengthens over time. In his article "Neurons That Fire Together Wire Together" he states, "Messages that travel the same pathway in the brain over and over begin to transmit faster and faster. With enough repetition, they become automatic. That's why we practice things like hitting a golf ball—with enough practice, we can go on automatic pilot."² Tasks such as riding a bike, driving a car, or learning a new job were difficult at first, but now are completed without consciously thinking about the how-to process. We operate by the systems we create.

Frequently, we make unconscious choices based on past experience. For example, if traffic delays have caused us anger or frustration in the past, when faced with a new delay, we are likely to repeat a previous response. Actions based only on prior experiences will bring similar results to new events. To receive a different outcome, our thinking must be changed. A traffic jam used to bother me until I realized there was nothing I could do about it—this setback was out of my

control. Accepting the situation, releasing my expectations, and letting go melted away the stress. By revising our thoughts, we can form new neural pathways that will generate different behaviors.

Change the response and the result changes.

Next time frustration arises from a traffic delay, switch to a positive or neutral reaction. Negative thoughts can be interrupted by listening to music, a podcast, or an audiobook—a pleasant distraction can transform the annoyance into a better experience. When stress levels are lowered, our impatience naturally begins to disappear. Releasing anything that causes tension brings us closer to a peaceful state.

By changing our mindset and looking at a situation from a more positive point of view, happiness can increase. For example, when anxiousness arises in me because the grocery line is not moving, I tell myself a minute or two more will not be a hardship. This immediately changes my energy and I can release the burden. *Our thoughts follow our attention, so focus well.*

Visualization and the Brain

Our brains cannot distinguish between what is real or what is imagined. There have been several studies performed to prove this. Harvard’s well-known piano study compared brain scans of people who actually played the piano to ones who only visualized playing it. According to Dr. David R. Hamilton, “The changes in the brain in those who [imagined] playing piano are the same as in those who actually played piano. Really, your brain doesn’t distinguish real from imaginary!”³

For decades, everyone from business leaders to sport coaches have discussed the power of visualization to achieve dreams. Now we have the science to back this up. Dr. Frank Niles, social scientist, states, “When we visualize an act, the brain generates an impulse that tells our neurons to ‘perform’ the movement. This creates a new neural pathway—clusters of cells in our brain that work together to create memories or learned behaviors—that primes our body to act in a way

consistent to what we imagined. All of this occurs without actually performing the physical activity, yet it achieves a similar result.”⁴

Through visualization we create a conditioned response *prior* to the event. This can work in our favor or against us. If I envision beneficial outcomes, I help bring these experiences into my life. If I imagine unfavorable situations, I have set the stage for these types of events to occur. Our focus helps to shape our reality. We can choose a more beneficial response by how we view the situation.

Two people can watch the same movie and one can walk away happy and the other one sad. Even though they both saw the same movie, they can have different reactions because of what they perceived or how they were feeling. What we look for, we find. Esther Hicks states in her book, *The Law of Attraction*, “Deliberately guiding your thoughts is the key to a joyful life, but desire to feel joy is the best plan of all.”⁵ What we think and feel, we will attract. Seek joy and you will find it.

Visualize and feed the brain with more constructive thoughts and watch life improve. We create our experiences by where we place our attention. Begin the day and end each night by visualizing desires. Happiness, improved relationships, a new home or job, a more positive attitude about life—these things are all doable. Write down these dreams and look at them daily. And believe they are a possibility. *Believing is the magic to achieving dreams.*

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.
— Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady, political activist, human rights leader

Want a new car? Visualize the color. Open the door and savor the new car smell. Imagine driving this new vehicle. What does the steering wheel feel like? How does it handle driving up a mountain road? Experience the satisfaction of owning this automobile.

To manifest a desire, imagine it has already happened. What does it feel like to have this dream become a reality? What thoughts run through the mind? Ones of joy, excitement, pride, or success? By lining up positive thoughts with our desires, dreams cannot help but manifest into our lives.

Joy is the Journey

But what if we try to create joy in life and it doesn't work? After my tragedies, it felt like all hope and happiness were lost forever. Every time I got a glimpse at having a joyful life, another challenge would set me back. But I kept making little leaps toward joy, and gradually over the years, it emerged. Now I am able to stand in joy again. Looking back, I clearly see that holding onto a tragic story does not lead to healing but only keeps us living in a painful past. *The pursuit of joy is the path to overcome any struggle.*

Remind yourself daily that there is no way to happiness; happiness is the way.

– Dr. Wayne Dyer, American philosopher, author, inspirational speaker

On a morning walk, I saw a yellow finch singing in a tree. In “Finch Animal Totem Symbolism,” Leah M. Bostwick writes, “The finch spiritual totem has been associated with tidings of joy and happiness in various Native American cultures...and [is] the perfect animal symbol of happiness and celebration.”⁶ The article goes on to state, “Above all, the finch animal totem speaks to our souls, reminding us to be open to the wonderful things that can happen to us at any time.”⁷ It was remarkable since I was about to edit this section on joy! Her writing sums up my entire chapter—reminding us that amazing things can appear in a moment.

Open up to joy by asking yourself *What makes me joyful?* Your response will help you reflect on what made you happy in the past, and awareness of those memories and emotions can

help you feel happiness in the present. If we think, feel, and desire joy, it will be attracted into our lives. We are the ones in control of our thoughts, therefore we are in charge of our own joy.

Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habit. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.

— Lao Tzu, Chinese philosopher, author

When we consciously create beneficial thoughts and emotions, we can design a better outcome. Having belief that you deserve joy brings in bliss, well-being, and new possibilities. We are meant to be happy—so choose joy!

Tune Up!

Exercise One: Create a Happy List!

1. Write down situations, events, people, or places that bring you joy.
2. Next to each item, write down how they make you feel—bliss, love, peace, contentment, excited, fun, etc.
3. Incorporate at least one item from your Happy List into your activities each week, whether it is enjoying a cup of coffee, visiting a street fair, talking to a special person, looking at a picture of a favorite place, or taking a walk through the park. Making an effort to do what brings you joy leads to increased happiness and peace.

Playlist:

“Happy” by Pharrell Williams

“Don’t Worry, Be Happy” by Bobby McFerrin

“Joyful Life” by Popsie

“Good as Hell” by Lizzo

“Girls Just Want to Have Fun” by Cyndi Lauper

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Alekzandrea

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#) An Inspirational Book that Everyone Should Read !

Reviewed in the United States on July 26, 2021

My go to book for advice and guidance when I need them most. This is a book full of inspiration, reminders, and everyday life practices to better yourself and undoubtedly carries over into the community around you. Day to day life can be hectic and full of stressors, and this book offers great insight as how to better look at life and yourself. This book will start a dialogue within yourself that most of us didn't know we needed. You can look at a situation as a glass half empty or half full - the choice is yours. By simply changing your outlooks, attitude, and breaking down things one step at a time, you can greatly improve life around you, while beaming a positive presence around others. This book can most definitely change a persons perspectives and life for the better. Overall an excellent read !!!

Susan

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#) I highly recommend this this thoughtful and enlightening book!

Reviewed in the United States on June 5, 2021

Lynn Lok-Payne shares the difficulties of her personal story and how she navigated through them to find peace and joy. This is a book that is helpful to everyone with beautifully written chapters that include Lynn's direct experiences, quotations, creative exercises and a playlist of great songs which I truly enjoyed. The depth of Lynn's insights into gratitude, service, meditation, compassion, self-care, grief, courage, and love and how they are all connected and flow together to bring joy are the keys to the door of purposeful life. This is a beautiful inspirational book everyone should read!

jeepstergal

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#) Helpful for moving through life changing events

Reviewed in the United States on May 1, 2021

Wake Up! Change Up! Rise Up! is a self-help 'tutorial' to help people with challenging life events find a methodical path to recovery. The book is written in straightforward language, like you were speaking with a friend, but gives many examples stemming from science, philosophy, and even music to help one get through tough times or make significant changes for the better. The author uses her experience of losing a spouse and coping with personal disaster to fuel her desire to help others move forward. Her journey is a path for others to learn from and helpful to breakdown any barriers that may hold one back from moving forward in their life. Each segment of the book has helpful practices to inch the reader closer towards personal growth. Give it a read and see if you don't feel more inspired to tackle those hard issues you have been putting off, or need to work through. It is a comfort to know others are willing to speak frankly about their experience so that others may benefit.