

The background of the cover is a soft-focus photograph of green leaves. A butterfly with dark wings featuring blue and red spots is perched on a leaf in the lower-left quadrant. A single water droplet is visible on a leaf in the upper-left quadrant.

**Foreword by Bernie S. Siegel, MD**  
*New York Times Best-Selling Author*

**Sacred Stories of Transformational Change**

# Chaos to Clarity

**Rev. Patricia Cagganello &  
Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos**

## Other Books by Rev. Patricia Cagganello

*God is in the Little Things: Messages from the Animals*  
*God is in the Little Things: Messages from the Golden Angels*  
*Scanning for Signal (Co-Author)*

## Other Books by Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos

*Surviving Cancerland: Intuitive Aspects of Healing*  
*Dreams That Can Save Your Life: Early Warning Signs of Cancer and*  
*Other Diseases (Co-Author)*

Sacred Stories of Transformational Change

Chaos  
to  
Clarity

Rev. Patricia Cagganello &  
Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos

 Sacred Stories  
PUBLISHING



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*These are the Sacred Stories of our time.  
Powerful voices from around the globe that  
speak to our shared human experience.  
May they inspire you and give you great hope.*

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-Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos

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And finally, thank you to my co-author Kat Kanavos for making me laugh and reminding me to enjoy the long and winding road of our co-creative process and this crazy little thing called life!

-Rev. Patricia Cagganello



# FOREWORD

## Loss, Gain, and Change

by Bernie Siegel, MD

*To everything there is a season; And a time to every  
purpose under the sun; A time to get and a time to lose;  
A time to keep and a time to cast away;*

~ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

*What the caterpillar calls the end of the world,  
the Master calls a butterfly.<sup>1</sup>*

~ Richard Bach

The earthworm is my role model and mentor for handling change. It can swallow anything you throw at it, turn it into rich fertilizer, and make it a positive growth experience. In much the same way, coal under great pressure becomes a diamond.

### **My feelings about change and loss can be very different.**

Loss and change can relate to objects and material things that do not experience feelings such as pain, love, or consciousness. So, I can lose my health, or my car keys, or even my house if it burns down—but when one of our pets dies, or one of our children leaves home, we don't lose them. Their consciousness remains with us, although our life has now changed

due to their physical absence, and you can't physically replace what is dead. Now you have to learn the role change plays in your life.

**Change is a labor pain through which we can give birth to a new self and life, which makes the pain meaningful and justified.**

The most significant preparation for life and the changes we must all confront is growing up with parents who love you. Ninety-eight percent of Harvard University students who said that they did not have loving parents suffered a significant illness by middle age, while only 24 percent of those who felt loved did.

I was born to a very sick mother who was told by her physicians not to become pregnant because it might threaten her life. She became pregnant anyhow because her mother wanted a grandchild. When they finally pulled me out of my mother, had it not been for a loving grandmother who spent many months “pushing things back where they belonged” who knows where I'd be today? Touch makes a difference.

Because of the difficult childhoods my parents experienced, I received mottoes to live by as I grew up. My dad's father died of tuberculosis, leaving six children and his wife with nothing. My mom's family had to escape from Russia to survive.

**Here are their mottoes, which I did not appreciate as a child. I sought solutions, not advice.**

1. “Mom, I have a problem, and I don't know what to do.”  
“*Do what makes you happy.*”
2. “Mom, I had a terrible day. Everything went wrong.”  
“*God is redirecting you. Something good will come of this.*”

My father said that his father dying when he was twelve was one of the best things that ever happened to him. I couldn't understand what he was talking about until he said, "It taught me what was important about life."

I learned early on that sometimes a curse can become a blessing. He was always helping people to survive and thrive, and that memory gets me through tough times and helps me deal with people who abuse me.

### **I have learned to be a love warrior.**

Yes, love is my weapon, and it blows violent people away. I don't have space to tell you all that goes into this, but try saying "I love you!" to people who are a problem and watch their reaction.

Norman Vincent Peale said his mom used to say, "Norman, if God closes one door, further down the corridor, another will be open." When you grow up with hope in your heart, you know there will be another door. You can handle change and the labor pains of life by giving birth to yourself.

As the Bible tells us, help your neighbor find what they have lost. Be it their health or car keys. God never punishes you by taking things from you. God is a healing resource through faith. I have had patients who went home to die and returned free of cancer. When asked how she did it, one woman said, "I left my troubles to God."

### **I had a near-death experience as a four-year-old.**

I can tell you from experience that our consciousness doesn't die when our body is lost. I have learned that we are not our bodies. Our bodies are the tools we are given so that we can make a difference. We are spirit, soul, and consciousness. These things learn but do not change, as your body

and emotions can and do. I think past-life experiences are also part of this experience of the eternal life of our consciousness, which is never lost but becomes recycled through those who come after us. When you see a five-year-old on TV playing the violin at the level of a master, that is the result of past-life experiences.

### **Death is the ultimate change experienced by everyone.**

In the hospital, death is seen as a failure and a lost battle. Rarely do you hear the word “dead” used when a patient dies. People say the deceased are lost, passed, gone. At Yale, when my friend Alan died, I was told he had “Brady’d.” The morgue is in the Brady building, so people didn’t say he died—he Brady’d.

Most people choose to lose their lives at night in the hospital, so the doctor won’t be there to interfere with their dying. One doctor wrote an article entitled, *Not on My Shift* when he realized that he and two other doctors, all on eight-hour shifts, were keeping a man from dying in the ICU. He let the man die when he realized how cruel and senseless their actions were. Life is an experience, and although disease or tragedy may cause us to lose our life, it is essential that we love our lives and bodies. If we fight a battle against illness, we empower the enemy instead of healing our lives and bodies.

When we die, we become perfect again. Many cases verify that. People born blind could see during near-death experiences. When we die, we become dreamless, unalive, and perfect again.

I think of death as a *commencement*. Why is it that a graduation is called a commencement and not a termination? Hey, you are finished with school. Why do we describe it as just beginning? Because that is the nature of life.

## **Loss is change, and change is a commencement.**

One thing I would ask you to lose forever is the fear of loss. When you live in fear of loss, you do not live. I ask you to lose your fear of living and the difficulties you create in your mind. Fear is a helpful feeling when a vicious animal threatens you. Then you run and climb and do things a calm person could not achieve because you are motivated and empowered by the fear. But when you fear what is not reality but just your mind's problems, you are more likely to lose your life. The constant, unreal fear of loss can have adverse effects on your health.

If you have love, you will never be at a loss or be unable to survive loss because you are complete. I know from our love, how my wife and I were complete when we were together. We did not need anyone or anything. We had it all because we had each other and our love for each other. No change, event, or disease could separate us.

It is also essential to love yourself, no matter how much parents and others abused you—even if they asked you to commit suicide. I know children who have experienced this. But when I became their CD, or Chosen Dad, and helped them to see themselves as children of God, they did not lose their lives—they created them. When you know, accept, and see your beauty and divinity, you can't lose yourself, no matter what others do or say. You find yourself as you never had before. When you become a CD or CM (Chosen Mother), you can rebirth people and help them become children of God.

## **Change does not have to be interpreted as loss.**

We all experience change; it is the nature of life. Change can be seen as a labor pain of life that leads to a rebirth rather than a loss of the life you

desired. Meaning can never be lost from your life unless you encounter circumstances that eliminate it from your mind and make you feel your life has lost all meaning. Dr. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, known for his Existential Therapy, learned this in a concentration camp and shared it in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*: “To live is to suffer. To survive is to find meaning in the suffering.”<sup>2</sup> But, first, you have to stop focusing on the suffering and find ways to give your life meaning, before you lose your life. When you change someone’s life in a meaningful way, you become real and immortal through love.

**“Love is immortal, while hate dies every minute.”**

When you fill your mind with hate, you do not see the truth. Think about being rejected and pushed out of your nest, as the Ugly Duckling was in Hans Christian Andersen’s tale. The duckling didn’t go off and spend his life hating his mother and seeking revenge. Or consider the tiger whose mother died after giving birth in a parable often told by mythology author Joseph Campbell. The tiger was raised by the goats his mother had been chasing, so he thought he was a goat. How did these creatures, who had lost their identity, allow themselves to find peace and truth and healing?

**I found the answer to the world’s problems is a quiet mind.**

Let me compare a turbulent mind to water that is being blown by strong winds or a whirlpool. You cannot see your reflection in the turbulence, but what happens when the wind dies down, and the water is still? The truth is revealed to the quiet mind, which can then communicate with all of creation and consciousness. The quiet mind and still pond reflect the truth—but you have to create that stillness and lose all the disturbing emotions. Otherwise, the ugly duckling would have never been able to see



he was a swan. The tiger also was taken to a still pond by another tiger, who told him to look and see he was a tiger and not a goat. The quiet mind is like a state of meditation, and the truth you find can heal you and your life. What you lose are your wounds and the untruths you were exposed to. Then you can release the life imposed on you and find your true beauty.

Loss is not failure; not living is failure. So, lose your untrue self and become your true and authentic self. Find what you lost. Do not wait for a disaster or life-threatening illness to wake you up so you can start your search for your true self. In one study, 95 percent of lottery winners said winning was the worst thing that ever happened to them. Why? Because they didn't learn what my father had learned as a child—what was important about life. I hope to win someday so I can help improve the world and become family for many people.

### **Let me close with some thoughts that have helped me.**

One is that what we call loss can be defined as change and that change can bring something new into your life. Labor pain leads to the birth of a new life. In the same way, loss can be the pain that stimulates and produces new growth in your life.

Once you open your mind to this concept, you will turn every curse into a blessing. Although everything is impermanent, a loss can become a gain if you maintain a quiet mind and allow yourself to see the truth. As psychologist Carl Jung said, "The future is unconsciously prepared long in advance and, therefore, can be guessed by clairvoyants." And I know that is true from my work with patients' dreams and drawings. There are no coincidences.

Perfection is not creation. It is a magic trick, and loss can be God's redirection. When you realize that, you will see how the loss of life is not about losing but about choosing a new life and rebirthing your soul

and spirit. You will embrace loss like a graduation and not a termination. Imagine getting a flat tire on the way to the airport, only to learn you missed a flight that had crashed after take-off. That apparent loss saved your life.

I will conclude with the death or loss-of-life-experience we had when the lives of my father, father-in-law, and a patient occurred. A hospice lawyer refused to allow the removal of a feeding tube from a dying, comatose woman, despite her family's desires. The lawyer said, "You are murdering her." Because we can hear in a coma, I stood by her bedside and told her that her family was beside her and if she needed to go, it was alright, because her love would stay with them. She died peacefully a few minutes later with no conflict.

My quadriplegic father-in-law, at age ninety-seven, told us, "No dinner. No pills tonight." He died quietly in his sleep that evening, as did my wife years later on the same date her father had died.

My dad told my mother, "I need to get out of here." I told Mom he was talking about his body and not his bed. So, he had a day set aside for him to die, and we let our family know so they could come and be with him. The day he chose to die, a voice told me, "Ask your mother how your folks met." So, I did when I arrived at the hospital.

My mother said that my father had lost a coin toss and had to take her out on a date. She went on with more stories, which had everyone laughing. My father died laughing. He looked so well that I thought he was going to change his mind. But when the last family member arrived, he took his last breath and became perfect again, although he had no way of consciously knowing who was coming last.

Dad didn't lose his life. He gave us all more and better lives.

Remember, when you are confronting a loss and change in your life, you can always ask for help. That is a survival strategy. We are here to restore, heal, and guide each other. So, share your loss and wounds with those who are natives; those who have loved and healed what you are experiencing and have survived and thrived. They can be your life coaches and help you survive change and loss.

### **True faith can overcome every change and loss.**

My wife died eighteen months before I wrote these words. We were married for sixty-three years. What has changed is that I have lost her physical body, and it makes my life feel emptier than it ever has been. But at the same time, I still have her with me. What do I mean by that? I mean that her humor, beauty, love, and spirit are always beside me and will never be lost. As many wise authors note, love is immortal, and it makes all things immortal. The bridge between the land of the living and the land of the dead is love.

I know my wife is perfect again, and I am grateful to have had messages from her spirit and consciousness since she died through a mystic who was a patient of mine. Some messages she brings me directly, and other signs I detect—like pennies from Heaven and the number nine (her birthday was 9/9) appearing on my medical wrist band. Those are without question signs from my beloved wife.

So, I leave you with this poem, written by me, knowing my beloved wife Bobbie is alright and wants me to feel her support. As my mother shared, “God is redirecting you. Something good will come of this.”

## The Great Teacher

*Death, what a great teacher you are*

*Yet few of us elect to take your class*

*And learn about life*

*That is the essence of death's teaching*

*Death is not an elective*

*We must all take the class*

*The wise students audit the class in their early years*

*And find enlightenment*

*They are prepared when graduation day comes*

*It is your commencement*

# The Spirituality of Change

by Rev. Patricia Cagganello

*In the experience is the emotion, and in the emotion is the gift.*

The spiritual journey is one of change. It is an opportunity to expand our awareness of the consciousness we hold, and to transform our limited and limiting beliefs to encompass the wholeness of who we are and our part in our larger Collective journey.

**Every story is a sacred story.**

There is a power and a resonance in our stories, our shared experiences. I have learned that *in the experience of our story is the emotion and in the emotion is our gift*. In the gift of emotion is where we can find compassion for ourselves and expand our awareness of the whole.

Important events in our lives are our opportunities to do this; they are our change agents. The more significant the event—or rather, the more significant the emotion the event generates—the more attention we pay, and the greater the opportunity we have for transformation.

Many people today hold to the belief that these events must be traumatic. In some cases, they are. In this book, you will read stories of profound grief and loss. The courageous individuals who wrote them are to be applauded for their willingness to be of service to others. They share their most painful stories so others may know they are not alone, and there truly is light waiting at the end of the tunnel. These are examples of individuals who have gone through a spiritual transformation and are now holding a consciousness of selflessness.

However, the good news is, the experience of spiritual transformation is not a punitive life sentence we must serve. Rather, it can be a joyful experience we choose to have. This book also includes narratives of great change experienced through love, joy, and beautiful life-changing events.

All these stories have something in common: The individuals experiencing the change developed a new and expanded perception of themselves and of the lives they are choosing to live. They have moved through chaos to clarity. As I said, not every story has a happy ending, but they all have an ending where the men and women emerged with a deep appreciation for the wisdom they have gained.

### **In my personal life, I have experienced significant change.**

I was the quintessential fifty-year-old, middle-aged, suburban, U.S. soccer mom leading a relatively happy, mainstream lifestyle with a husband, two kids, a dog, and four cats. Then the rug that was my life got pulled out from under me. One day, my former husband—the one I thought was my person, the one who I thought would love me forever—unceremoniously told me that he didn't love me anymore and couldn't remember when he did love me.

*What did he say?*

Did I mention that—to add insult to injury—this was the year I turned fifty years old? Oh, and I was also going through menopause, and my two teenage daughters were going through puberty. In retrospect, this might not seem too earth-shattering, especially when you read about the experiences others have lived. But for me, *it was huge!*

This experience exposed some deep wounds that I had very neatly covered up. In fact, it ripped the scabs right off my wounds, and I quickly sank into a depression. Yet all these experiences combined became my agent for change. They sent me searching for deeper answers and ultimately sent me on my journey of spiritual transformation.

**What has sustained me through all of it is my unwavering knowing that I am Spirit.**

We can move beyond the suffering and the doubt that life changes create. When we see the changes not as lessons or punishments, but as opportunities to experience emotion, our awareness expands. Changes become possibilities for growth and service. Our confidence increases and our wounding patterns heal. Our self-talk changes from “Why me?” or “What’s wrong with me?” to “I got this!” and “How can I help?”

When we know deep down in the core of our being that we are Spirit, the chaos clears. As Spirit, we are not small. Our lives have a purpose, and we are embraced and supported by the Divine Oneness of which we, and all of life, are a part.

To support you on our beautiful, collective journey, I offer a part of my sacred story. This experience gave me a glimmer of understanding of the support we have and our interconnectedness to all.

## **Wisdom from the Whale**

I was blessed for eighteen years to live in a home whose backyard is protected by a large rock face. The rock looks like a gigantic whale that is forever floating, watching, and recording life and the endless cycles that play out before it. I had spent many happy times gazing at it and wondering about life’s mysteries. What has that gigantic rock seen through the eons that it has stood, steadfast, as the silent observer? What secrets could it tell?

But the whale also offered me a personal struggle. For in the contours of the whale’s belly and fin, weeds grew, and those weeds distracted me and upset my peace and calm. I could easily pluck out the weeds growing near the bottom of the rock face, restoring my whale to its unfettered self, but I had a hard time reaching the weeds that were higher up.

For years, I struggled with this. When I was married, I would ask my husband to climb up and pull them for me, as I was afraid to climb the rock myself. A few times over the years, when I could no longer wait for my husband to do it, I would attempt that climb. Then I would get stuck, halfway up the rock face, afraid to move, frozen in panic. My fear of heights would engulf me, and I would scream for my children to come to my rescue, to offer me their hands and help me back down to safety.

Forever optimistic or possibly obstinate, one day, I decided to try again. As a living being, the rock face was always slightly changing; parts of it periodically loosened and crumbled to the ground below, making the climb a slightly different challenge each time. On this day, I approached the whale and found footing a couple of feet up.

*Maybe I can reach the weeds from here*, I thought, and I stretched and strained to reach the little plants that had grown too high up. However, as in all the times past, the weeds were still beyond my reach. To make matters worse, this time, the footing I was on did not feel secure. I realized I needed to take another step up or make my way back down, defeated once again. But I was determined to succeed, so I looked around to find a better foothold. A few feet above me, I spied what seemed to be solid footing. If I could get to the next step, I'd be able to reach the weeds above.

I centered myself and went inward for strength, knowing this was about more than pulling weeds. I thought about the journey I had lived so far—the changes in my life that I had experienced and the wisdom and courage I had gained. Through it all, I was reminded that I am a spiritual being, and I am part of the Oneness that is all around us. This Oneness includes nature and all living beings, seen and unseen.

**I knew at that moment that I would not fall.**

I knew I was supported and loved and protected by the Divine Oneness, including my special friend, the whale. For the first time in eighteen years,



I was going to reach the unreachable weeds, and in pulling them, take a giant step forward in my healing.

I relaxed into that knowing, and I stepped up. My new footing was secure—in fact, much more secure than the place I'd been standing. I had to laugh as I received great clarity. In life, we only need to trust. Relax into and trust the Divine Oneness. With a smile on my face and peace in my heart I pulled the weeds and climbed back down without assistance. As I stood on the ground, I looked up at the newly groomed whale and gave thanks for the gift received.

### **And in the next step, the struggle lessens.**

As we move forward on our journeys, and our awareness expands to include the depth of who we are, our footing becomes more secure. Often it is easier to take the next step and move forward than to stretch and strain from a place that no longer serves us.

Relax into your knowing and trust. As you begin to thoughtfully practice your trust, the gifts from the experience of change emerge.

### **Take the next step with us.**

On our journeys, we don't need to have everything figured out. We only need to take the next step, secure in the knowledge that we are loved and supported. Join us as we travel together through these heart-opening and heartbreaking stories of change. May you laugh and may you cry, for in the experience is the emotion, and in the emotion is the gift.

Much love,

Patricia



# The Psychology of Change

by Kathleen O’Keefe-Kanavos

*Change can bring with it a deluge of emotions,  
from sadness to clarity—and, finally, gratitude.*

Welcome to true-life stories about change and its human connection to worldwide Oneness. The Global Voice of authors who dared to bare their souls and report on their darkest hours—and the times chaos changed into defining moments of clarity—is a gift to all who seek solace from life’s challenges. I am eternally grateful for their unfettered honesty. Their journeys are Joseph Campbell’s “The Hero’s Journey.” In my opinion, every author in this book is a hero.

All the stories are from the personal experiences of people around the world. These tales are built on the complexities of the multiple layers of real life. The stories are not cookie-cutter health stories or love sagas. They cross boundaries that are blurred by reality, and they are spoken with a global voice. They reflect our Universal connection to life, emotion, and thought, and depict our natural desire to overcome crisis and emerge from the conflicted storms of life physically and mentally intact—and grateful.

Chaos Theory is a part of mathematics that describes certain systems as very sensitive; therefore, a very small change might make a system behave differently. Life is sensitive. One aspect of Chaos Theory is the so-called “Butterfly Effect,” which states that even the flapping of a tiny butterfly wing can create enough wind to change weather patterns around the world. Science might not be able to measure how much change will result from the flapping of the small wings, but science can indisputably

predict that change will be a result. It is cause and effect in motion. Change creates change.

**Even a very small shift in initial conditions will create a significantly different outcome.**

What this means is when a butterfly beats its wings, the airflow affected around it will be indirectly felt on the other side of the world, because everything on Earth is interconnected.

Another way to explain the effect of change is the example of a pebble dropped into a still pool of water. The pebble creates ripples that will affect the edges of the pool, no matter how far away they might be. Multiple stones make ripples that interconnect, creating shared space.

Imagine the stories in this book are pebbles in the pool of human consciousness. The rapid heartbeats from lessons learned can be compared to the beating butterfly wings of change. A sigh from a reader becomes the wind beneath its wings. A story that touches the mind of one reader creates ripples that touch the edges of humanity through Universal awareness. If one reader can create a ripple effect, imagine how multiple readers can create intersecting rings in Universal Consciousness. Therefore, according to the mathematically proven Chaos Theory, by reading these stories, you have the potential to be a part of world change.

If you think of the book as a magic carpet ride, one strong common thread of change woven throughout its tapestry is the unselfish hope of helping others who may still be on their life's Hero's Journey. We can see this in Helen Brennand's story about the death of her infant son. Death can herald a coming-of-age change, as seen in my mother's death and in the grief and loss experienced by the other authors. Death is the ultimate life-changer. But, as so many stories share, love never dies. Like the circle of life, the circle of love remains eternally unbroken.

♪ Love is a Many Splendored Thing ... or so the 1955 song goes, until it isn't. And truth be told, who wants to live in a world without love, or without the hope of ever finding love again? Divorce is often seen as a psychological death, causing many of the symptoms of severe grief. Yet after the painful life-lesson of lost love, we can find love again—no matter how wrong they may seem at the time, like Denise Alexander Pyle, and at any age, like Lynn Forrester. These stories are a breath of fresh air.

Cassandra Tindal's story exemplifies the psychological importance of the need to be heard and accepted as being worthy of love, especially as a child. The habit of suppressed emotions can be deadly.

Humans are creatures of habit. Our traditions and rituals bring us a sense of comfort and emotional security in our habits. When we change, the results can be devastating to an individual, group, culture, or planet. Yet we know physical and psychological change is inevitable.

Every new thing learned creates a psychological change. Some of our physical body cells change daily. Change does not have to be painful or frightening. When accepted as the natural flow of life on Earth, even death can be embraced as an opportunity for growth.

Earth is a fickle home. Change in the form of floods, volcanic eruptions, strikes by giant meteors from space, and drastic climate changes can test the adaptability of physical and emotional change on a species. The bones of dinosaurs attest to this fact.

**Without the ability to adapt to and embrace change, there is no hope for a future.**

The emotional symptom of change is often stress, which can make you feel like pulling out your hair—although occasionally, it falls out on its own. Glenda-Ray Riviere writes about a stress-related condition known as *telogen effluvium*, a form of temporary hair loss that usually happens after a shock or traumatic event. It occurs when a large number of hairs

enter into a resting phase while the body and psyche overcome a stressful change or situation. Telogen effluvium is different from the drug-related alopecia I experienced during chemotherapy.

The stress of change can also lead to cravings, which began with early Man's first food binges and continues with junk food today. According to Dr. Leigh Gibson of the University of Roehampton<sup>1</sup>, "We're programmed to eat fatty and sugary substances during stress that began during the time of caveman." Cravings happen when the brain's opioid and dopamine react to the benefit of high-caloric food as a fight-or-flight survival mechanism, or a kick-start out of depression. Kristi Tornabene's story of being repeatedly told "You're fat!" is a hero's journey to overcome eating habits, despite her genetic tendencies, so she could fit into her favorite jeans again. Name-calling hurts. Sticks and stones may break our bones, but names will break our hearts or even shatter our minds.

Our minds are our invisible brain, and our brain is our body's master computer that alerts us to physical and emotional changes. We often communicate with ourselves about change through dreams and nightmares. Our dreams are more than the random firings of a sleeping brain. According to the research in the book *Dreams That Can Save Your Life*<sup>2</sup>, co-authored by Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos and radiologist Dr. Larry Burk of Duke University Medical, dreams can be early warning signs of disease.

Dreams can be a microcosm of our daily life, or as in the case of Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos' story and that of Tamee Knox, an answer to important information about a health crisis. A deceased loved one spoke to Tammy in her dreams. Kathleen heard from Franciscan monks. Persistent dreams like these, when validated by medical tests, can change and save lives.

Challenges often present themselves as opportunities for change, and change can be the ultimate challenge. The thirty authors in this book share how they suffered tears of rage, sadness, fear, and joy. Their eventual

change created a life where they now live in joy. They have left the suffering behind.

Author Gina Roda said to me in a phone call, “Writing my story on change created a huge breakthrough in my life. I’ve always wanted to write but never could complete what I started. I feel so good! This has never happened to me before.” Change is powerful!

I went through breast cancer treatment while still grieving the death of my mother, who had died of colon cancer. The most life-changing lesson I learned was that it is human to be in physical pain, but emotional suffering is a choice. It is all a matter of perception. When I changed my thought process, it changed my life. If I did not *mind* it (take it into my psyche), it did not *matter* (manifest.)

These are easy words to mouth, but they can be hard to live; however, we must start somewhere. Even reading the words can lead to the beginning of change. This is the Butterfly Effect in action.

Enjoy your magic carpet ride. And thank you for being one of the ripples of change.





# PART 1

## LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS Crazy Little Thing Called Love

*Listen to the voices  
that sing remembrances  
to your soul*





# Message Received

by Rev. Patricia Cagganello

*You are lovable. Just breathe.*

Life can be funny, in a twisted sort of way. The year I celebrated my fiftieth birthday, I got divorced, went through menopause, and battled depression, while being a single mom to my two hormonal teenage daughters. To tell you it was easy would be silly. I was hanging on by a thread.

Once I stopped mourning the loss of my relationship with my ex-husband, I focused on recovering a healthy relationship with myself. However, it seemed that any self-love or self-esteem I was trying to establish was blown away with even the slightest amount of teenage angst my daughters directed my way. Normal adolescent behaviors—like rolled eyes, a tone of voice, correcting me, wanting to hang out with their friends instead of me, and even not cleaning their rooms—would send me into a tailspin.

To say I was sensitive would be a gross understatement. I took everything my girls did personally. Every word or action was a specific judgment of my value and the ability for someone to love me.

**You are lovable. Just breathe.**

“Patience, patience, patience,” I would tell myself. “Just breathe. Don’t take things so personally. Slow down. You are lovable. Just breathe.”

But relentless waves of emotional challenges kept getting in my way. Arguments with my girls erupted almost daily. They said I was moody and hard to deal with. They felt I was picking on them. But to me, they seemed insensitive and self-centered.

We had more “start overs” than we could count, our way to deal with disagreements or misunderstandings. In the past, we’d been able to release any lingering blame or hard feelings and move forward simply by agreeing to a start over. This strategy worked great when they were little, but eventually, even a start over couldn’t fix things.

My girls kept trying, though. They saw the mother that they had always known changing and their support, their foundation, cracking. I know it scared them; it scared me. They reached out to me in their own ways, trying to help me. They fought to restore some semblance of normalcy in their lives.

**Battling my own thoughts, perceptions, and feelings was the hardest thing I had ever done.**

Each morning, I woke up and resolved to make it a better day. It was going to be a kinder and gentler day, not only for me but for my girls. I would be calm, nice, and less critical.

Sometimes this happened—but most days, I would see myself and the people around me through my distorted lens of emotion. I would take offense. My feelings would be hurt, and I’d lash out with wounded and angry words. Most nights, I went to bed deflated and mad at myself, resolving once again that I’d do better the next day.

My older daughter would challenge me and question my behaviors and emotions. Seeing my weaknesses unnerved her. She wanted to see my strength, wanted me to fight. What she didn't realize was that I was fighting.

We both knew the script by heart; our disagreements seemed unending. We were like two performers in a play, forever acting out our roles, performance after performance, in a drama that should have long closed.

But my daughter's capacity to love is boundless, her capacity to forgive is great, and her resolve is strong. Even after the worst disagreements, she would always come to find me, to try and make it right.

"Mom, I love you!" she would say. "I'm sorry."

"I don't believe you," was my typical reply, as I turned my face away from her. Too hurt and ashamed to look her in the eye.

"Mom, look at me! I mean it. I love you, and I don't want to fight."

"I don't know what to do," I would sob, truly at a loss.

"We love you. You have to believe me. It's going to be ok," she would promise as she reached over to hug me.

"I love you and I'm sorry too," I assured her, overcome with remorse, hugging her back and praying my reactions would improve.

**One day during this stretch, I had retreated to my bedroom after a particularly bruising confrontation.**

I had needed a break, just for a few minutes, to calm down. That was my new strategy: I'd remove myself from the argument before it escalated. I began to pace the floor, trying to clear my head.

One of my favorite things about my bedroom is that it looks out over "the cliff," which is a giant slab of rock that runs parallel to our back patio.

The rock is sixty feet wide and boasts a steep, twenty-foot drop at its highest point.

From my bedroom window, the rock face seems to resemble a giant whale. I have always imagined how it has floated through time, calmly and lovingly observing generations of all species, and how it holds untold history and knowledge in its unwavering, all-encompassing gaze. The cliff is a striking backdrop in our yard, and I have spent many hours admiring and breathing in its majestic presence.

That day, I paced back and forth, too upset to do more than glance at the landscape. But after a few minutes, something caught my eye. I paused and peered out the window. It was a deer—a large mother deer— standing on the apex of the rock. It looked like she was listening for something. Her head was tilted upward. *How pretty*, I thought, and began pacing again. We see deer all the time in our area, so it didn't hold my attention.

A short time later, I noticed that the deer was still there. She hadn't moved, from what I could tell. Her head was still pointed to the sky, as if she was entranced by some distant star. The pose was unusual – it no longer seemed like she was listening for something. Her ears weren't twitching, and she hadn't moved her head. Yet I still wasn't sure this was odd behavior for a female deer. *Maybe she's just standing watch*, I thought. *Maybe her young are playing just beyond the edge of the rock.*

I quickly became engrossed in my thoughts again, mentally replaying the argument I'd had with one of my girls. She had left me a little annoyed with her actions, but mostly, I felt guilty for fighting with her. I regretted putting more strain on our relationship.

Ten minutes or so must have passed before I out the window again. The deer was still standing in the same position, as if frozen in time. I did a double take. *What was she still doing there?*

I trained my eyes and really focused on the deer for the first time and was immediately struck by how beautiful she was. The best word I can think of to describe her is “regal.” She exuded a tranquil presence.

She had a white underbelly that led to the rich, caramel-colored fur that covered most of her body. Her face was a mask of white accents in graceful symmetry. Her ears were outlined in light gray fur. A long, snowy rectangle sprouted at the base of her chin and curved downwards to the middle of her neck. Her shiny black eyes and nose rested in pockets of white. Her deep, wise eyes were clearly visible.

The deer stood atop the rock as if it were a throne, as if God had made this royal mantle the place where she had been born to stand. My eyes lingered on her for a moment longer as I took in this powerful sight.

I stepped away from the window, shaking my head, feeling genuinely lucky to have witnessed the presence of this wonderful mother deer. I couldn’t believe she had stayed still for so long, with her head held high.

*‘Wait a minute.* I raced back to the window, but the deer was gone. Of course, she was gone.

**She had a message for me, and I had finally gotten it.**

Female deer are graceful creatures, never aggressive to humans or other animals. Deer are herbivores that eat vegetation: nuts, seeds, fruits, and often the flowers from your favorite plants. The females are mostly seen as they quietly travel with one or two other female deer and their fawns. It is so unusual to hear a deer make a sound that most people couldn’t describe the sound they make.

Because of these characteristics, deer are associated with gentleness. The message of a deer is to be kind and gentle with yourself. After a visit from a deer, an opportunity might present itself for you to be kind and

gentle to others, and that might open up new possibilities for you. The deer's appearance asks you whether you're being too critical with yourself.

Did this apply to me? Was I critical with myself, feeling I couldn't do anything right? Yes!

Was I kind and gentle to others? No, not on most days—especially not to my girls.

The fact that the deer was standing on the top of my very large rock face also seemed symbolic. A rocky landscape is symbolic of sturdiness and steadfastness. An animal standing on a high perch, as the deer was, also indicates looking at things from a different perspective.

### **I needed a different perspective.**

The deer was standing perfectly still. She was pausing. Perhaps she was my reminder to really pause, breathe, and be gentle with myself and others. Her visit encouraged me to try to look at things from a perspective that was different from the one racing through my head.

*Mom we love you. You have to believe us.*

My daughter's words echoed. Yes, I could be kinder and gentler to myself and my girls. Just pause and breathe. Don't take things so personally. Believe in their love.

This time, I was not only fighting for my girls; I had to fight for myself. With new clarity, and feeling support from our animal friends, I knew that this time, I could do it.

This story appears in Patricia's first book *God is in the Little Things: Messages from the Animals*.



# They Are Coming Home

by Anrita Melchizedek

*The timeless, eternal NOW moment, where all is love.*

*For truly, love is all there is.*

I was completely alone, save for my fifteen-month-old, teething toddler in the next room. I didn't feel quite prepared for this birth but wanted to honor the natural rhythm of my body. The contractions grew stronger and more uncomfortable. Lying in the bath, I breathed deeply and counted the seconds between contractions, hoping these were Braxton Hicks contractions—practice contractions to remind my body of the imminent birth. But then the pain intensified. I was in labor—alone, and two weeks earlier than anticipated.

This was my second birth, and I attuned naturally to the rhythm of my body while focusing on the beautiful soul choosing to have me as its mother in this lifetime. This baby's energy had been felt powerfully three to four months previously, appearing in my meditation. I remembered the delight of merging with this celestial soul—the familiarity and deep sense of love.

I hoped this soul would have less karma to unravel in clearing and dissolving lower timelines. The vision of our lifetimes together—as lovers

and friends, priests and priestesses, healers and monks—played like a movie screen on fast-forward with no sound.

**When I thought of my husband, my breathing changed. I was glad he was not here.**

Ours had been the complicated, karmic relationship of the narcissist and empath. Finally, tired of the victim/persecutor consciousness roles we had chosen, with the accompanying fighting, shouting, and abuse, I'd decided on divorce, but knew it was not yet the right time.

I had recently returned to Cape Town, after a year in Lisbon with my husband, to have a home birth. At the time, home births were not available in Portugal. My husband had given me six months to return. I knew I would never return as his wife.

The cries of my fifteen-month-old teething toddler brought my attention back to this moment and the realization that there were no adults in the house to help me give birth. My child's back teeth were coming in, and he was running a fever. When his crying escalated, I quickly got out of the bath and put on my dressing gown. I needed to pick up my toddler, to apply more teething gel on his sore gums and again take his temperature. It was still rather high. I gave him paracetamol syrup for the pain and fever and hoped he would go back to sleep.

I walked around with my toddler on my right hip, trying to continue my deep breathing and call the midwife who had delivered my first child. I'd been in labor seventy-two hours with him before my home water birth and cringed at the thought of going through that again! My call went to voicemail. It was around ten p.m. on a windy night in Cape Town, South Africa, where blustery weather conditions often weakened the mobile phone signals. My calls were not going through.

**The midwife was staying in a remote area with bad cell phone reception.**

After sending a text message, I prepared to give birth alone. Candles and gentle background music created a calm atmosphere as I rocked my toddler. The contractions shot a brief, sharp spasm of pain through my lower abdomen and back.

I had not seen a gynecologist in Portugal. Being comfortable with my body had convinced me I didn't need medical intervention. Now my deep breathing lulled me into a deep, trance-like state. If the midwife did not arrive in time, I would be fine.

My phone started to ring at about three a.m. The midwife was on her way. By then, I had been in labor for five and a half hours.

Fighting against the wild wind as my contractions increased, I hurried to open the wooden side gate for the midwife, who arrived thirty minutes later. I put the kettle on for us, and then she checked my cervical dilation. I had hoped for another home water birth, but the midwife told me the baby would be born soon. It was too late for a water birth. I settled on a horseshoe-shaped, wooden birth seat that would allow me to comfortably squat and give birth.

**My water broke and I vomited twice. This baby was about to arrive.**

Squatting, I lifted my gown to my waist and vocalized in deep, primordial groans as the baby's head peeked out from my vagina. With another deep push and groan, out came a beautiful baby boy. After the midwife cut the umbilical cord and wiped him down, I took him in my arms and helped his mouth find one of my breasts. He started to suck, gently at first, and then with a more confident latch.

The love in the room was palpable. *This is truly heaven on Earth*, I thought, smiling broadly at the midwife. I loved being a mother, although

being on my own was hard work with a toddler and my own consulting work.

My husband arrived two weeks after the birth and stayed for two weeks before returning to Portugal. He knew I was not ready to return to Portugal, and we arranged for him to spend a couple of weeks in South Africa every four months.

We would not be staying together permanently. Even our short time together, along with our daily Skype sessions, created a great deal of inner torment. Our relationship worsened. A couple of months after my baby's first birthday, I asked for a divorce.

He surprised me by being amicable to the idea of divorce. Since we had been married in South Africa, he returned to the Sheriff's Court and signed the divorce papers so I could complete the proceedings through the High Court. Waiting for the High Court in Cape Town, I reflected on the past four years, and how he had changed shortly after we married.

### **He had become jealous, possessive, controlling, and judgmental.**

Portugal had been a lonely time for me, as he had often left me in the house while he went out on his own. His name-calling, shouting, and shaming created a chaotic and miserable environment.

But now there was a light at the end of the tunnel. At three and five years old, my boys had unique and amazing personalities. My oldest loved to dance and I would often dance with them around the house, with my baby swinging from my hip and my older son dancing by my side or balanced on my other hip.

I moved into a new rental, but the relationship with my ex-husband changed very little. Knowing it was important for the children to have their father in their lives, I stepped back from our disagreements as much as possible. Finally, I no longer wanted him staying in my house when

he came to visit. The disharmony when we were together affected the children, too.

And, he started to bring his girlfriend, later to become his third wife, along on visits. I found the courage to tell them to find their own holiday accommodation and to take the children with them for the weeks they were in Cape Town. This made him angry. But I hadn't realized how much he resented or perhaps even hated me.

They came out again in August 2012 to take the boys for a ten-day holiday. As I packed their bags, we all felt the excitement. My children would have a holiday with their dad, and I'd have some time for myself. Waving goodbye left me feeling slightly anxious, but I wasn't sure why. We had agreed I would call daily and for the first few days, all seemed well.

**Five days later, I was not able to reach them.**

My ex-husband's home phone had been turned off, and so had his international mobile. I continued to call with growing panic, afraid there had been an accident. The next day, I reported my concern to the police. Two days later, my ex sent me a text message saying he had taken the boys to Portugal.

He had organized Portuguese passports at the consulate in Cape Town, and with his girlfriend, had passed through international customs. Seven months prior, he had stopped paying monthly child support and had presented me instead with an agreement for financial assistance. This would help him receive financial aid from the Portuguese government. I had not realized he would use this to claim I neither cared for the children nor was able to provide any income to support them. He also had opened a case with the Family Court in Portugal prior to coming to South Africa stating I was an unfit mother. He claimed I was a drug addict and alcoholic who had sexually abused the children, locked them up, and beaten them.

**He had abducted my children.**

*How could this have happened?* It felt like the plot of someone else's movie. My babies were gone. Although I called daily, almost a year passed before I spoke to the boys on the telephone. I felt the angels telling me to trust in the process and reassuring me that the highest good would prevail. I tried to surrender to this process, but my grief was overwhelming.

I researched my options for child abduction cases and was advised to take my complaint to the High Court in South Africa. In December 2012, the High Court in Cape Town ruled the children must be returned to South Africa. I traveled to Portugal with the High Court Order, only to discover the order was not recognized in Portugal.

Some months later, the National Central Authorities in Portugal ordered the Family Court to return the children to South Africa—but the Family Court refused, based on their father's testimony of abuse. They would need written testimony from the South African courts attesting to my character.

As my court case took shape in Portugal, I submitted to psychological evaluations, social worker evaluations, court appearances, and legal meetings. My friends in Cape Town provided testimony on my behalf.

Almost three years passed. I came to forgive my ex-husband for what he had done to me, but it took much longer to forgive him for what he had done to the boys. The few times I was able to speak on the phone with my eldest son, he had shouted about imaginary abuse, spurred on by his father. Their confusion and sense of abandonment broke my heart into tiny pieces. I knew how they felt; their confusion, their issues of abandonment.

**I would never stop fighting for them, no matter how long it took.**

Then it happened. I was able to walk in my ex-husband's shoes through the heart of compassion, to understand his pain: his father's early death, being sent to boarding school when his mom remarried. His childhood had lacked love. His arrogance stemmed from a sense of inferiority and being unseen and unheard.

I recognized that we'd had an agreement, prior to incarnating, to play out the victim-persecutor consciousness roles. The goal was to come to know ourselves as love. Love was revealed in all its facets. I forgave him and released blame.

My heart told me the children would soon be coming home to me. Within a week, one of the social workers called to say, "They are coming home. Your children are coming home. The Family Court in Portugal has released the boys into your custody."

"They are coming home," I repeated. "They are coming home." I smiled with the wisdom of experience and the stillness of a loving heart. Many lower timelines, karmic timelines, dissolved.

Back in South Africa with my boys, I offered a path of reconciliation to my ex-husband with a parental agreement in which he could be a regular part of their lives, but I did not hear back from him.

**The highest outcome had prevailed.**

What I see clearly now is that I chose this experience, as we all did. I am grateful for being able to pass through the karmic timelines and enter the Portal of Divine Love—the timeless, eternal *Now* moment, where all is love. For truly, love is all there is.





# Courage Is Fear That Said Its Prayers

by Teresa Velardi

*Never let anyone steal your joy.*

Who are you and why are you here? I demanded, sobbing as I gazed at myself in the mirror.

It had been a long time since I'd looked myself in the eye. With tears streaming down my face from swollen eyes, it was difficult to recognize myself. It wasn't just the tears that had me wondering who the stranger in the mirror was. It was the lack of life, the long-lost joy, and the missing smile that made me ask those tough questions.

**That was my “come to Jesus” moment. You know the one I mean.**

It was the moment I finally got real about life, my authentic self, and God.

My two-fold question had to be answered from two perspectives. “Who are you?” I had become completely lost in the insanity of my marriage to an abusive, alcoholic, drug-addicted man. Everything I'd once loved had been sacrificed in the name of love: my art, my writing, my friends. Everything was now under his control. Without realizing it, I had utterly abandoned myself and my power. Even my perspective on what it meant to be a good mother to my young son was lost. We weren't safe.

That led to, “Why are you here?” The answer scared me. I didn’t know how to get out and was overwhelmed with fear—afraid for my life, my sanity, and my child.

My answers to those questions needed to come from a higher perspective. Who did God create me to be, and what was my purpose in life? I had no clue how to answer either of those important questions—just the desire to find out!

For nearly fifteen years leading up to that moment, I’d lived a “scripted life.” There was never any hope of my dreams coming true, because someone else had become the center of my every day. It seemed as if my life didn’t matter. I’ll admit, at times, I believed it to be true.

If not for my son, I might not have lived to tell the story of breaking free from a life of unimportance.

### **My life was controlled by manipulation, codependence, and deceit.**

Would life have been different without the drugs and alcohol that seemed to consume every waking moment of my husband’s existence? Was I dealing with who he truly was, or with an alter-ego created by the effects of the substances? There was no way to know. I only knew I was living with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

I kept telling myself, “He said he was gonna stop being verbally abusive, yet he’s doing it again. It must be the alcohol and drugs talking. That’s not really who he is—is it?”

With every critical moment that came and went, his promises to change his ways evaporated. It made no sense for me to believe he would honor the promise he’d made to stop drinking and drugging when we got married. So why had I ever believed that lie?

**I stood at the altar before the priest who had married my parents more than a quarter of a century before.**

The limousine had been tardy to pick me up. That was the first thing that went wrong. I arrived at the church for my wedding nearly an hour late. Although I didn't realize it then, God had put up a huge roadblock. The Long Island Expressway traffic kept the limo from getting me to the church on time. It's no coincidence that the roadway is called the LIE, because my life became just that—a LIE!

My father had doubled up on his dental appointments the previous day so he could look his very best as he walked me down the aisle. As Dad handed me over to my soon-to-be husband, I was overcome by a sinking feeling of dread. Gazing lovingly into my groom's eyes, I could see that he was high as a kite.

**He couldn't even keep his promise to be sober when we took our vows!**

For a fleeting moment, I thought about running. I gave my future husband a look of disappointment that said, "Really?"

Why did I go through with the wedding? I was more concerned about what everyone else in the church would think if I were to hightail it out of there, with my dress flapping in the wind, than what I would think of myself if I did not run from this mistake. However, obstacle number two was quickly swept under the rug.

Then the priest read the wrong passages. After all the time I'd spent choosing the perfect words for my wedding, I was left with a puzzled look on my face. The groom could not have cared less. Another thing had gone wrong. What else could possibly happen on this most important day of my life?

Our vows were next. The groom said his vows first, and then it was my turn. The priest asked, “Teresa, do you take this man to be your wedded husband ...”

As the priest was reading the words, I was staring at the kite flying high in the eyes of the groom. My heart spoke: *Teresa, don't do this*. It stopped me cold.

I looked around the room at all my family and friends who had gathered to witness that very special moment. The *voice* was probably just the stress of having been late, I figured—and the disappointment of seeing my groom high. I later came to believe it was the voice of God directing me to a different future, which began with me running like hell out of that church. But I stood in silence, trying to talk my way out of listening.

How could I leave the altar when my father looked so proud? My future mother-in-law was dressed to the nines. I looked at my mother. She knew. She could see I was having second thoughts.

The priest began again. “Teresa, do you take this man ...”

Again, I heard, *Teresa, don't do this. I have someone so much better for you*.

Once again, I froze, looking around the room. How could I walk away from all these people? I caved. “I do,” I whispered, and as the words left my lips, my heart fell to my feet.

**At that moment, I'd sold my soul for a wedding band. And that was just the beginning.**

After the thrill of the wedding wore off, I was left with day-to-day life with a man more married to bottles of booze and pills than he ever was to me. The more he drank, the nastier he became.

Although he seemed delighted when he found out he was going to be a father, he declared the baby would be a boy and they would do their best to “gang up on me.” Who says something like that?

We attended a wedding where he served as a groomsman, and I watched him cast me aside. He was more interested in the bridesmaid he was paired with than he was in me. While he told the bartender to keep my glass of ginger ale full, I recognized the evidence of his cheating heart. Infidelity was a regular part of my too-many years of marriage.

I did my best to make my son my top priority, even knowing his young eyes and ears were witnessing far too much verbal, emotional, and soon, physical abuse. He developed behavioral issues. His father would tell him, “Don’t listen to your mother. She doesn’t know what she’s talking about,” teaching him to defy me. By the time he was six, child psychologists had diagnosed him with something called “oppositional defiant disorder.” The diagnosis spoke for itself.

Our son was not a good sleeper. His internal clock kept him awake all night, so getting him up for school on time was a daily nightmare. His father was no help because he was out every night doing his thing. Although still married, I felt like a single parent.

I felt like God was punishing me for not listening to him at the altar. I’d grown up in a household where God was depicted as punishing and vengeful, so I was afraid to call upon Him now to help me. Even though church on Sundays was still a part of my life, I felt spiritually bankrupt.

It was time to change the focus of what had become a pathetic life. I knew I needed to focus on me—to find my joy again, my smile, and the light in my eyes. In my heart, and the depths of my broken soul, I knew I’d never find joy inside this marriage of madness!

**A friend invited me to Al-Anon, a 12-step program for friends and families of alcoholics.**

The meetings taught me how to shift my focus away from the insanity of the alcoholic and concentrate on how to be a better me and a better mother to my son.

As I began making myself a priority and talking about what was going on in my life, a heaviness was lifted off my shoulders. The reassurance and support of the friends made in Al-Anon kept me hopeful that my life could change. Gradually, it did—but not before I had to go to court several times for orders of protection, when things got really bad.

While I was taking control of my life, my husband was spiraling downward, often losing his temper and taking it out on me. When he threatened to kill me, I left my home and went into hiding with my son.

Anticipating my husband's every step was a full-time job. One day, he tried to kidnap my son from school. I'd had the foresight to leave a copy of an order of protection at the school, prohibiting him from doing that. The law student who had helped me in court said the judge would never include that clause, but I'd dared to explain to the judge that because my husband was addicted to pain pills, the people at the school might not recognize that he was under the influence. Luckily, the judge had agreed with me.

Now, here we are, many years later. My ex-husband is out of my life. My son is successful and passionate about what he does, and he lives nearby. I'm grateful that I get to be an example of what it means to live an abundant life full of blessings, healthy relationships, spiritual well-being, and emotional health—each worth more than financial abundance.

**They say courage is fear that said its prayers.**

I learned to flex my courage muscle, big time! I did my best by trying to stand up for myself in every fearful situation until it became my way of life. And, I was never alone on the journey. After believing God had abandoned me and was punishing me for so long, I finally found my way back to Him, and I've let Him guide my every step.

It has not always been easy, but my struggle brought me closer to becoming the woman I was created to be. God loves me more than I can imagine. He protects me, brings the right people to me, and guides me to abundant life. He also has a great sense of humor. It is through Him that all things are possible—and once again, I can laugh and be joyful.

Never let anyone steal your joy!

## **End of Excerpt**

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