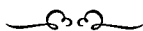


Chapter Twelve

It's Time to Thrive

Love... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

—1 CORINTHIANS 13:4,7-8



Noelle: Early one morning on a summer vacation with my daughters, I went beachcombing. Along the Pacific shore I saw a sign that said this: “Life in the Crash Zone: Wind against sea creates friction, causing waves to crest, then break with fury against the shore. Anything that finds itself in this crash zone has to hide out or hang on for dear life.”

No one could have better described my life. I thought of Cynthia in the movie *First Wives Club*, who jumped over a penthouse balcony after her husband walked out. If I had not hung on for dear life, might I have crashed the way she did?

I hoped my future would unfold as blossom petals do in those high-speed science films. I'd been through the hibernation and the crazy get-out-and-go-girl stages. I'd prayed my heart out. I'd journaled my brains out. A whole shelf of dog-eared notebooks under my bed was testimony to that.

Encouragement came in smatterings. Like Cynthia, I got over my ex but found loneliness the long-term killer. What was I supposed to do when my teenagers split in all directions? My best friend was dating, my married friends stayed home, the Christian singles group was flaky, and local nightspots were just places I'd meet people like my ex and The Neighbor. A family member, tired of my complaints, communicated, "Move away or shut up about it." That didn't help my loneliness a lot, either.

At the beach, I was thinking about the uncertainty that could put me over the edge; then I read the last phrase on the sign: "Yet a multitude of fragile life thrives right here in the crash zone." Thrive? I'd hoped just to survive. That day I decided to dig my toes deep into the foamy sand of the beach I'd been cast upon: I would refuse to fade away. I vowed not to disappear or crack up. I was determined not only to endure, but to flourish, succeed, shine.

Look at your feet. You are standing in the sky.

—DIANE ACKERMAN

Surf the Stops, Starts, and Surprises

Thriving after divorce is surging forward, tugging backward. You are alive and breathing in a restless, shifting sea. Like coral reefs enduring a pounding environment, you have to will to thrive.

You'll find that nothing on this earth can propel you toward the future and away from a toxic past faster than enthusiasm. It will cause you to stabilize right where you are and then go somewhere different. If you keep doing things the way you've always done them, you'll never have more than you've always had, or

be more than you've always been. If you want to change your life, you've got to build on changes within yourself. The pivotal point is the quality and degree of your ardent fervor for life.

"How can I," you ask, "after what happened to me?"

It's not difficult. You decide when you want to feel enthusiastic. You decide how impassioned you want to feel. You decide and you determine just how dramatically you will let exuberance change your patterns of behavior, your outlook on circumstances, and your charge into the future. Will you open your arms and become infatuated with life—or keep them clutched over your breast, withdrawn and afraid? Today you can make one change. You may as well, for the past is no longer an option.

"Let's face it," says Dory Hollander, "when you've traveled a path strewn with evasive deceptions, lies of exclusivity, broken promises, and a deliberate avoidance of straight and honest talk, it really is time for a change....However, changing partners won't be enough. If you're sick of what you've been putting up with, you have to consider changing the only person you can change—yourself."¹

If you adapted to him all those years, now do it for you. Adaptation in the name of love is part of a woman's repertoire from the beginning. You are brought up to respond and surrender: time, energy, affection, your body in lovemaking. You anticipate needs and respond to them, promising you'll be there.

You pay an enormous price for this 24-hours-on-call availability. Your boundaries are blurred by overlapping responsibilities. On the job you wonder about your child at day care and plan dinner in your mind. At home, you iron both your clothes and the family's, catch up on paperwork, make dentist appointments. Your personal fuel tank often runs on empty. When you think back, can you recall your former spouse pressing your blouse or dicing veggies for the

Crock-Pot before he left for work? (If so, please write us; we want to know your secret.)

You had geared up to continue to adapt for what was supposed to happen at this time of life, but wildly divergent changes were forced upon you. Now is the time to respond to the hunger of your own soul.

A [wo]man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams.

—JOHN BARRYMORE

Kari: My garden thrives not because it's in a tropical zone or on a level piece of ground—it's in neither of these places. It exists because it tolerates extremes: scorching sunlight, mildew-generating fog, an irrigation well that often runs dry, and hungry gophers chomping at roots.

"I'm amazed how that hill has responded to your touch—your faith was great," my mother told me, describing the steep, arid California hillside I turned into a lush habitat. It shelters not only fruit, flowers, and vegetables, but wildlife. A variety of birds, butterflies, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and reptiles find sanctuary there.

Mother is right. Tackling slopes, stubborn clay, and hilltop winds takes gutsy faith—both in my garden and my life. It is hard to believe that the thriving woman I am today once journaled, "God, there isn't enough strength anymore to hang onto your promises. I'm on the brink, ready to crack up." Often I thought I had wasted the best years of my life on Ed.

But it isn't true. Thriving isn't about an ideal location, perfect timing, or climate control. It's happening now as I endure opposition and refuse to give up—whatever I face. As much as I want my life to be a tropical vacation, friction is here to stay. When the

gopher turns my flower beds into a war zone, either I slam the gate never to return, or I figure he was there first. I endure his rototilling because it makes my digging easier, aerates the packed soil, and unearths surprises, like castoff pieces of flagstone fit for a footpath.

Sure, I rail at life's unfairness. What rubs against me creates heat. But more often than not, friction's heat drives my resolve to sling open life's gate and brave the elements one more time. Besides, I don't want to miss a great garden and life that's on the grow.

Exceeding Abundantly Beyond

Surprise yourself. Say *yes* to opportunities instead of thinking, *Oh, I couldn't do that!* Come up with one or two snappy aspirations, and trust El Shaddai to bring along the means and ways if he wills it. Dare to believe he does. Unless you have evidence to the contrary, believe that your burning desire was placed there by him. Look as far into the future as you dare, for it is all yours. Within the possibilities of faith are all you long to be and all you long to do.

Practice boomerang joy. "Boomerang joy" is something author Barbara Johnson loves to talk about. Sharing boomerang joy means you'll be more playful, give more compliments, and conceive at least one idea a day to cheer someone else. You learn to do random acts of kindness with panache. And the joy comes tumbling back. You don't look for results and it doesn't always come from the same source, but what you give away is never wasted.

Maintain a professional distance from the devil. As you decide to be enthusiastic and go for God's gusto, that's exactly when Satan is going to show up and try every trick in the book to pop your balloon, rain on your parade, and take away your sugar bread.

Be like Martin Luther, who woke up one night in fright, opened his eyes, and saw the devil standing at the end of his bed: “Oh, it’s only you,” he said calmly as he turned over and went back to sleep. Don’t let fear attach you to the devil.

Make the most of the fact that well-being attracts. When asked to list what attracted or repelled him as a single man meeting women, Kari’s husband, Richard, said he wasn’t attracted to women who were preoccupied with their own healing, exhibited a “poor me” attitude, or made gender-specific comments like “all men are jerks” (even in joking). Those he liked and wanted to know better were women who showed a positive attitude and were outgoing, curious, stimulated by new ideas, and able to converse on a variety of topics. Your vitality is a magnet for friends and opportunities.

It’s kind of fun to do the impossible.

—WALT DISNEY

Noelle: At a darling spoof on Pity Parties I attended, a woman who had also been dumped said she’d given up being concerned what her body looked like. “Who cares anyway?” she said. I was flabbergasted and thought, *How could she not care?* Being healthy and fit is more important to me than ever. I drink a lot of water to hydrate my skin and brain, and I exercise aerobically three to four times a week. Feeling good creates momentum to look good, and looking good motivates me to be more outgoing and friendly.

But all the makeup in the world doesn’t substitute for lack of twinkle. That’s why I stimulate hope however I can: combing bookstores for inspirational writing, seeking out people who’ve got pizzazz, listening to Mozart and Tina Turner, playing with puppies and polliwogs.

Still, I want more ways to thrive. I’ve always been conservative, thrifty, economical. “Make do” was my motto. One day I decided, *Enough of that!* I’m changing my poverty mentality and becoming generous, even to myself. I practice giving for sheer pleasure, indulge myself, and embrace the eccentric, the bizarre, and other people’s quirks—everything that’s wild as long as it is wonderful, too. I am emerging. I’m changing from within while learning to be at peace with what I can’t control.

Age may wrinkle the face, but lack of enthusiasm wrinkles the soul.

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Kari: I found the ability to adapt and grow goes far beyond those “be content whatever the circumstances” sermons. I recall the panic and confinement I felt in the beginning as I adjusted to being single-again in an unfamiliar house. Little sun came through the windows. And it wasn’t the lack of activity that got me down. After a full day’s work, I came home to more: sorting laundry as my printer pounded out the work I had brought home; helping with homework as I proofread. I appreciated friends who helped me regain my sense of self and showed it was possible to make a new start.

I thought of my mother’s garden, created with “starts” from friends and relatives. My great-great-grandmother tucked a wild yellow rose root in her trunk when she emigrated from Ireland. My mother passed one on to me. “Nurturing a new start takes my mind off myself,” she says. “I think about where it came from.”

Each time a start is given away, it will need to adapt to a new environment, and it does better if given extra attention.

Friends who were transparent helped me confront my fears; I saw how they had grown through their losses. They helped me accept the divorce card I had been dealt by showing they held different ones that weren't necessarily better: widowhood, illness, problems with children. They gave me confidence that I, too, could adapt and thrive on my own again.

Nurturing also came from those who didn't know what to say but stayed in touch anyway. "I apologize," Mary said recently. She and her husband had been our next-door neighbors for more than ten years. "I had no idea what you were going through or I would have done things differently." Yet I treasured her telephone calls, invites to tea, and help taping my new answering-machine messages. Just remaining my friend was enough.

Arlene had to pursue me. My friend since grade school, she'd been my maid of honor. Embarrassed by the divorce, I seldom stayed in touch, and she couldn't come to my wedding when I married Richard. When we met again later, she shared her own troubles. We cried together. I popped open a dusty box of journals and for the first time shared them with another person. Arlene gave me permission to touch my pain again and see it from a distance. The high and low moments I had endured in my crash zone helped her cope with struggles in her marriage.

He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.

—2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 MSG

Symbols That Life Goes On

Friends boost your immune system, according to public-health psychologist Blair Justice. A landmark study at the University of Michigan revealed that "the lack of supportive relationships is a factor that is almost as dangerous as well-known risks such as smoking, high blood pressure, or obesity."² True friends sense the velocity of the wind against your soul, knowing when to encourage or simply say nothing. When your hopes are dashed, friends encourage you to keep your chin up. With true friends, you do more than survive circumstances; you surmount them. You believe you can start again. Here's what some divorcing women did:

Debbie refused to withdraw. She found a friend to share secrets with—Robbie, who pulled her into the singles group. They started a singles pew in their church.

Jane was afraid nobody would like her if they knew her struggles. After she joined a parents' committee at school, she met Jack and Sharon, who included her in weekend outings.

Carrie invited an elderly friend for donuts and a visit to a garden nursery every other Saturday morning. She says, "The companionship and mutual interest in flowers took away the loneliness."

Katherine didn't have children, but she knew that healthy touch heals. She put her name on the calendar: a haircut every five weeks, a facial, manicure, a massage now and then.

When Karen's brother-in-law, Allan, said, "You troubled the marriage so he had to go outside to meet his needs," she started defending herself. Then, realizing Allan had shame issues similar to her ex's, she let it go. When he later accused, "You have never admitted your responsibility," she responded, "I realize I forced him out because I wouldn't accept his mistress—and failed to meet his needs for large breasts. Do you get it, Allan?"

Barb's best friend never wanted to marry again; but Barb didn't feel that way. She chose to believe the longings of her heart validated God's will for her. She realized no Mr. Wonderful was going to make everything perfect, but she kept handing her feelings to God and claiming his promises.

June called Linda after every harassing phone call from her ex. Linda was smart enough to say, "I love you. You're going to be all right," every time.

Beth's formerly close friends shut her out but invited her ex and children over for social occasions. Instead of starting a feud, she realized friends like that were not a big loss and found moral support elsewhere.

Kate had always longed for sexy encounters with her husband, which never happened; now she wanted a handsome man to come along and rip her clothes off. When Monica told her, "Yeah, what you need is to get laid," Kate thought about it; then her own values won out. She knew she had to live with herself.

Kari visited Israel when Melanie spent the first Christmas with her dad. That summer, she met her parents for trout fishing in Colorado during the week her daughter spent at camp: "I needed something to look forward to and needed interaction with others."

Noelle felt like staying in after the news of Dan and The Neighbor broke in their small town, but she forced herself out to community and school events. "My children's welfare took priority over anybody's perception of what had happened. Besides, I ended up having a lot of fun with the people around me."

The essence of genius lies in knowing what to overlook.

—WILLIAM JAMES

Wiser in Love

Kari: I was carrying a pot of baked beans to a barbecue when I met the man of my dreams. It was an ordinary day. In the months that followed, I danced between afraid-to-trust-again and wanting-to-risk-it. I told the Lord to take this man out of my life if he wasn't right for me.

Shortly before Richard asked me to marry him, he learned of an acoustic neuroma (tumor) behind his left ear. Without surgery his life expectancy was only two years maximum. Since surgery might leave his face paralyzed, he thought it best to end our romantic involvement.

"If that's what you want," I said as he turned to walk to his car.

Richard turned around. "I know what I want," he said, "and I'm looking at it." The crisis solidified our love. Together, we determined to cope with whatever happened. I addressed wedding invitations in the hospital waiting room while he underwent the risky eight-hour operation. The surgery left him with balance and hearing on the right side only, and an unexplainable nerve-related ringing in the deaf ear. In addition to tolerating this constant internal noise, Richard had to learn to walk, drive, and ride a bicycle all over again.

The two of us held few illusions about riding off into an exquisite sunset. I'm glad, because four days before the wedding the Loma Prieta earthquake shook the area. Shipments into San Francisco were curtailed, including deliveries of cut flowers. When the lady creating my bouquets shared her dilemma, I said, "Then we'll get a chrysanthemum plant at Safeway and whack off the flowers." When the windows fell out of the hotel we'd booked for our wedding night, we settled for any available hotel room.

Several guests called to say damages would prevent their attendance; we went on with the ceremony.

For me, thriving is picking yourself back up and going on with the ceremony of living. The only time I won't be hanging on for dear life is when I'm dead. Although finding a second love is an enviable position to be in, I know that having a life partner isn't a shield from crash zones.

*The best things are the nearest, breath in your nostrils,
light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hand,
the path of God just before you.*

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Noelle: “How do you do this single stuff?” I asked a never-married friend. “I’m not getting the hang of it.”

“Now you know why I’m so neurotic!” she replied.

I laughed. In spite of what I’m missing, some days I know I’m happier than I’ve been in years. Statistics show men get married faster after divorce, whereas women tend to adapt better, appreciating the autonomy singleness offers. Even when they didn’t want divorce, a whopping 80 percent of women say they are better off afterward.

I have to admit, part of my joy comes in the potential of meeting a man who also wants to commit to romantic love. I’ve heard remarried women say, “Now I know how love is supposed to feel.” Actress Jane Seymour said on an *Oprah* broadcast, “I came out of a very bad situation and didn’t know if I would ever know love again. When I did, I realized it was the only love I’d ever known.”

Something about these statements touches me. I hope to be wiser in love; I know I am in life. My days may be uneventful,

but they’re filled with more than romantic dreams. My inner life is rich. Besides, there are kids to raise, flocks to feed, wounds to tend, people to bless—the “I’ve been there” kind of blessing only I can give. And I think that I’m about to!

The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come.

—HABAKKUK 2:3

Surf's Up

Life in the crash zone is wind-whipped and scary. But each surging breaker is like the contractions of childbirth. With each pulse, new life is pushed farther onto the shore, like intricate driftwood and beautiful shells in which a multitude of fragile living organisms thrive. Hidden in the crevices is a multitude of micro-life that has adapted to the rush, the roar, and the rhythm. You, too, can live in the crash zone. Though pounded, you won't be crushed. Knocked down, you'll get up. Let enthusiasm and exuberance drive you forward.

It's Time to Thrive!

Using indelible ink, write your name on a seashell or a small rock. As you place it on your nightstand or desk, remember that persistence pays. Soon you'll start to thrive!

