
OVERCOMING THE STORMS OF LIFE

A Guide to Spiritual and Personal Empowerment

By

Dr. Pearlie Jones

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“The Rage of Silence”

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Alana Daniels for her continued friendship, technical support, and commitment to the goals and objectives of Change Enterprises, Inc, my family, friends who provided encouragement to me in all of my creative ventures, and nurtured me when I was ill. They gave me the energy, motivation, and desire to go on to greater heights by having faith in me.

I am especially indebted to my Aunt Tiny who continues to be my most avid fan and cheerleader; she was and continues to be a strong and positive force for me as I grew into adulthood through perilous times.

I appreciate the challenges posed to me by the negative forces and people in my life; these challenges afforded me the opportunities to grow and to crystallize my faith.

PREFACE

I have grown through many of the challenges I used to find daunting when I was a young woman. I can get beyond the big storms; it is the small thundershowers that keep me in an emotional quandary. My daily goal is not to do or say anything negative to or about anyone and I am challenged daily to find creative ways to achieve this objective. If I do not work hard at it, I find myself slowly slipping into a negative abyss.

Allowing negative people into my space drains my energy and sometimes I gladly relinquish the control. If it were my money, I would fight for dear life to hold onto what I have worked hard to earn. How about you? Do you give in to negative energies easier than you would give up your last dollar?

I am reminded of a story that I read in Elementary school about a group of monkeys who played hard in the sunshine and, when the rain came, they promised themselves that when the sun shone again, they would build shelter. However, when the rain ceased they would play among the trees once again completely forgetting the promises they made when it was raining. Isn't it easy to be spiritually grown when everything looks bright and rosy? The challenge comes when the storm hits.

When the thunderstorms come, if you aren't careful, your positive energy will ebb and your thought processes will change, your patience will wear thin and soon you are likely to find yourself complaining of all manner of physical ailments. When this happens, it takes weeks before you can get back to a calm and peaceful state. During this spiritual absence, you may not have the inclination to meditate and before long, your whole being resonates with guilt, anxiety, and sometimes depression.

This book is an impetus to get you started on your spiritual quest. I use these principles daily in my work with a group of women who met with me weekly in a support group. I witnessed women who came in with a defeatist attitude and stance, but once they learn that they had the answer, and that they control their own destinies,

it's like watching the metamorphosis of a butterfly. The first step and sometimes-greatest challenge is just to decide to seek peace and not allow anyone or anything to deter you from your goal.

I wrote this book to help enhance your spiritually, emotionally, and personally. Parts One through Six discuss the spiritual component represented by poems, a narrative of experiences and guidelines to achieve spiritual peace.

The workbook section provides activities and instructions on eradicating specific maladies that may plague you. Take this book a whole; purchase a spiral notebook to take notes as you read through and work the different exercises in the workbook. Record your thoughts invoked by the different passages that you read in the book. Take the time to work these exercises consistently, you can and will start on the journey to find inner peace.

This book is not a cure-all. It is suggested that you continue on your journey by locating resources in your community to help you enhance your self-esteem, learn how to cope more effectively, increase your circle of positive friends, and other specific resources that are unique to you. This book only to be an impetus to get you started on your journey.

You may decide that you need to seek professional assistance once you have analyzed your issues. That is a very good sign of growth and maturity, and it is okay to seek outside help in any problem or challenge that you may or have encountered.

Read this book more than once and review your notes after a week or so, and you will get an idea of your journey. I wish you good fortune and self-discovery on your journey. Not all that you find will be positive or happy, but it will serve to make you a happier and more peaceful individual.

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PART I

AN ENDING IS A NEW BEGINNING

Life is an ever-evolving experience. You cannot truly be a part of that experience if you do not know “you.” The understanding of self begins in the reflections of your childhood. As a child, you receive countless messages of who you are or who you will become. As an adult, you come to recognize that those messages may not truly represent your real self, but the messages still lie deep within, reinforcing your innermost thoughts and feelings, limiting the quality of your life.

In order to make positive changes in your life, you must identify your limiting core beliefs. These are the beliefs that you know to be true; that stop you from taking risks in order to grow and change. With awareness of these beliefs, you can learn to let go of that which no longer fits and create new realities and beliefs.

This is an ever-changing process that requires your continuous involvement. However, you are not alone in the process. Your relationships are vital and are affected by and contribute to your growth. If those relationships are promoting, nurturing, and reinforcing they will broaden, and not narrow your life.

The balance in a person’s life is the key to increased quality. An integration of your internal and the external . . . the self; the self’s rejuvenation which is leisure. However, remember, it is all about personal growth, which is only possible, when you choose to take

paths and cross your bridges. We have all stood on the path of life staring at a bridge asking, “Who am I? Who do I pretend to be? What is life?”

THE JOURNEY WITHIN

The journey within is the scariest trip to plan and to embark upon because you don't know where to begin or the destination you seek or where it will end.

What will you find? What myths and misconceptions will you throw on the wayside. This is uncomfortable because at least now, you know what you think you know.

How comfortable is it for anyone to risk going forth to discover what and who they really are?

What will you find on your inward journey?

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Jacksonville, NC

If you are reading this book, then you must feel that you need to know how to start this journey; at least you know that it is time to do something different. Anytime you embark upon a new adventure, there must be a starting place and an inward journey is no different. How did you come to this place in your life? What forces directed you to this juncture in your life? If you do not like it, how can you do something different? To answer these questions, we must go back to the very beginning to understand the development of your attitudes, actions and resulting personality.

There are four major socialization agents: family, peers, mass media and school. I will cover the basic ones discussed in this chapter.

In addition to the family unit, churches, educational systems, politics, our cultural/racial and ethnic groups work together to socialize both men and women to believe specific things about their roles. The above are referred to as socialization agents and they influence all the norms, taboos, mores, values, and even our sense of morality. These concepts form our belief system that affects what we feel; these feelings are translated into actions and actions translate into habits and habits form the basis of our personalities. Even though we are ultimately responsible for our actions, some of the actions and choices that are available to us are contingent upon the social milieu in which we grow and learn.

If you become unemployed and cannot find a job, you may become homeless or get divorced because of the inability to find a job that will meet your financial responsibilities. When people meet you, some will treat you as if it is your fault and you may buy into this belief. If you believe this, you will start to act the way you think a poor person should act, and consequently people will continue to treat you as such. It becomes a vicious cycle. If we look further into this situation, we may find that the type of work that you do is no longer available in your locality, and there are many other people in your same predicament. Is it your fault?

This is now a social problem. When a large number of people experience the same issues(s), politicians and social workers join forces to make things better or try to come up with a solution. This message may never filter down to the individual in the predicament because they are too bogged down to see the total picture; so they continue to struggle and believe that their failure is theirs when it is actually a societal issue. This impacts the individual's self-esteem and self-concept and when this happens, it is very difficult to move from that 'bad place in life.' We see later on how this affects goals, dreams, and all of your choices.

One of the solutions to this dilemma is to question the beliefs, values and habits ingrained in us because of our own 'stuff' and the 'stuff of society.' The only way to do this is to understand where it all came from and commence with a systematic program of changing the way you think about yourself arming yourself with information and analyzing events surrounding your life. Unfortunately, if you continue faulty thinking for an extended period, it erodes your spiritual core.

Challenges and constraints. Sociologists purport that one must recognize the constraints that our culture and society impose, and how they interplay into our lives to be able to alter controllable circumstances. Constraints such as economic forces, popular culture, family, and politics influence every one of us on an individual level.

Economic Forces: As the U.S. economy changes, it affects the replacement of higher paying jobs to low-paying service oriented jobs, and this poses economic hardships on single mothers and under educated single fathers. Even the higher paying jobs have created barriers and constraints. To get one of them, one has to have a college education or be skilled in a particular area. This also affects young married couples, who are struggling to make ends meet. Many relationships face difficulties over finances and many fall apart. The growing divorce rate contributes to poverty, high crime rates, domestic violence and the list goes on and on. In addition, the listed social problems directly affect the lives of individuals; however, the individuals who are affected do not recognize the societal constraints that hold them captive.

Technological changes have extended the life span of the average American and the decline in the birth rates. This sounds like a blessing, but look at the other end of the spectrum. Since people are living longer, wages are going down and health costs are steadily rising. Therefore, rising medical costs eat up savings and that could easily cast a borderline middle class family into financial distress or homelessness. In addition, with discoveries, there is a new pocket of poverty established because not everyone will be able to adapt to the steady rate of changes. If you are one of the unfortunate ones caught up in this transition, what is happening to you may not be totally your fault. This is why it is important to get as much information as you can to make

decisions, establish long range, short range goals, and have a master survival plan.

These changes can certainly influence our personal development because of the tendency to self-blame when things do not go as planned. Some people may think that maybe they do not deserve their dreams and desires because of the inability to negotiate their environments. This can lead to anger against God and the angrier one becomes, the more alienated he/she becomes. Once this happens, it affects relationships, choices of jobs, and poor health and the over all stability of the family.

The political environment influences families and the definition of what makes up a family. In the last fifty years or so, how we see family has changed drastically. The traditional families consisted of man, woman and children. Now, because of the transitions in our cultural beliefs, values, and mass transportation, the family now consists of same sex marriages, friends living together, or any individual or group of individuals who consider themselves a family.

The mass media is another agent of socialization and changes; and the internet is becoming a power tool to disseminate data. It is both a blessing and a negative in our society. It provides a cost effective means of getting information out to a large audience and it provides a means of putting out harmful information. Many people have fallen victim to swindles perpetuated by Internet scammers, internet chat rooms, websites, and dating services that

have made national news because of their negative effects on children, consumer relationships and the family. Experts worry about the destruction of personal relationships fostered by the use of computers by young people and it becomes a reality more and more every day.

How these advances impact you depends on the extent you rely on the information that you receive. Television shows, movies, pop music, magazines, radio, advertising, sports, hobbies, fads, and fashions pose constraints upon us by influencing our personalities, decision-making abilities, and subsequent family life. There are other constraints in our society, but the ones listed provide examples of how our choices may not be because we are unable to make good decisions. It is exacerbated because of the indoctrination of the printed, broadcast media, and the influences left in place. It is important to monitor the type of information that goes in the psyche. It is equally important to become aware of all the barriers imposed by your environment, your values, beliefs, educational and skill level, and your social class placement.

The vast changes in society have led to the change of women's roles over a period of time, but the traditional role expectations are still there. Conservative religious leaders, educational institutions, politics, and the printed and broadcast media reinforce them.

Therefore, when we start to think about change or taking our lives to another level, we must consider the social conditions under which we make decisions and the type of information we let into

our minds. Both men and women are shaped by the social structure in which they live, the status of males and females, and how each play out their roles and role expectations.

Traditionally, women's **roles assigned to them the responsibility to give, to nurture and support to get love**. If, at anytime they go off to seek their own destinies, they seem selfish. Traditional roles program women to give in order to receive. This is in direct contradiction to the socialization that men receive; to achieve their highest with women backing them. Women are now stepping outside of their traditional roles to pursue their own dreams and ambitions. This often will cause guilt because of past socializations, but efforts must be made by women and their partners to strive beyond it to rediscover lost dreams. If the environment that you created or the one you just inherited does not support this journey, make a special effort to align yourself with a group of personally and spiritually powerful women and men who do.

What constitutes womanhood? Many women make the mistake of believing that because they were born female they automatically know what makes a *real woman*. They perform the duties that go into making a home run smoothly, by raising the children, holding down full time jobs, and at the end of the day, many still have to find the time and energy to be a playmate to their partners. However, deep in their minds, they wonder, what does it really mean to be a woman?

Females go through an identity search every decade of their lives. Based on age, life styles, and self-awareness many think they already have the answer. They look to their partners, their fathers, their brothers, and their friends in search of themselves as they try to reach some unidentifiable goal and silently wonder if they have the right or the liberty to ponder...what it really means to be a woman. Therefore, they just tuck their fears, insecurities, unclaimed dreams, and desires deep inside and go into the world pretending that all is well. Can anyone really see beneath the mask and see the real woman? Where is she? Who is this real woman?

Where are the real men? Men, throughout the annals of time, have devoted much time and contemplation defining womanhood, and it was not until recent times that women have started to address these same issues. All of the various institutions that form our socialization system (church, family, marriage, politics, etc.) help to define women's roles and identities. The problem with this is that these definitions are incongruent with what many women feel and experience. This incongruence causes imbalance in the psyches of many women, creating all manner of dysfunctions within them that are naked to the visible eye. Armed with dreams and desires formed by their peers, parents, the media, and all the information that comes in through all of their senses, females form relationships with faulty belief systems that are based on these imbalances and life expectations.

Men learn from socially assigned roles and many men never find out what it means to be a man because of the changes in society. When they interact with other men, they join them in the persecution of those men who openly admit or show that they do not have a clue about what it means to be a man, and those who accept the changes and redefine themselves.

Many men who try to hold down traditional definitions of manhood feel that they must prove their manhood by demonstrating control over their partners; sometimes this equates to violence, manipulation, and psychological imbalances in many men. Overall, society expects men to hold down a full-time job and take care of the financial and emotional needs of their families. Traditionally married women can work, if they choose, to but due to the economic situations in modern times, many women have to work in order to help support the needs of the family. Some men continue to believe that they must work and many base their masculinity on their ability to take care of their families.

This trend is changing, however, not as rapidly as for women; men are opting to stay at home while their wives work. Their peers question them because men are expected to be the breadwinner while simultaneously trying to find it within him to show kindness and sensitivity. *Still, many wonder, is that what it means to be a man?*

Many men, attempting to define their own selves, attempt to define the roles of women. We know that their socializations as a man depend on their ability to perform specific duties in cooperation with the woman being the submissive partner. It is understandable that some men strive to maintain the status quo whether it is the man or the woman who changes. The partners have to change with them, and this change is leading to the displacement of many men's self-concept, and their views of manhood in modern times.

Many of the roles assigned to women do not fit all women and to try to push them on all women, regardless of their talents and interests, often spells disaster. Who accepts the blame when disaster strikes? I maintain that no one is to blame. Our society is changing and everyone has to seek his or her own place in the new realities. The travesty is to keep using an outdated and faulty reality.

Seeking the truth is the ultimate key to ascending to a higher level of consciousness because on each level there awaits a new truth and a new reality. With this truth comes new challenges and opportunities just waiting for the eyes to open. Many people from all lifestyles may be on the same journey and it has nothing to do with race, ethnicity, income, sexual orientation, etc. However, there must be a starting point within the self - where one can face their demons, deal with them and move on. If an individual is overly concerned about their roots, looks, life scripts formed

during childhood, then healing will not begin until internal peace is reached; that is the essence of personal and spiritual growth.

An individual must rise above the surface level (his or her own issues), to seek the truth; this makes it easier to communicate with each other because there is no tendency to delve into the outer layers of reality, but to go within the self and meeting God. When we are able to shed the outer layers of reality, we can start to deal specifically with the true spirit.

The individual who is able to stand back and look at their life in perspective is able to recognize their own contributions to their own pain, as well as recognize the strengths gained from the experiences.

The individual, who is not allowed to speak of the challenges of their own, creates two dynamics; the speaker will not be able to process those experiences; and the receiver will not understand anything of that person's journey. In addition, this affects the total society as well as prevents him/her from having empathy and compassion for the other person and this lack of sharing will impede the receiver's own sense of his/her own. For example, men and women have different paths and both experience pain and disappointment. When one person cannot hear the other's story, cannot see that their paths are parallel, just perceived differently, healing and growth is hampered.

You create your own reality. It is imperative that you not spend a lot of time thinking about what you do not have or complaining to others about your failures. Through a process of social construction of reality, you create your reality through social interactions. As you present yourself in terms that suit the setting, your purposes, and if others relate to you in this reality, your *reality emerges*. This makes it very important to be mindful about what you say about yourself and your dreams and to whom you tell. Even if what you say does not represent your true feelings, but you present them as real, they become real in their consequences. When an individual tries to downplay their contributions around friends and family that are not as accomplished, the family will believe what you say about yourself and will react to their beliefs and you wonder why they do not understand you.

IS IT TOO LATE?

*I have wondered up and down life's highways
Headed on a path that I did not chart. I thought that my
life is predestined, but now I learn that I have choices,
but is it too late for me? How do I, at this late stage, begin
to chart a new course? Where do I get the energy and
motivation to do the things? Necessary to embark
upon a new journey **Is it too late?***

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Many middle-aged women are discovering for the first time that they do not have what they want and are deciding to take charge of their own lives. They wonder if the damages of their socializations can ever be undone. Therapy can help but it will take a long time. Praying helps but you still need information and an action plan, and prayer requires a commitment on your part and a belief that God will do what you asked. Do you even believe that you can do it? Be of good cheer, anyone can succeed at any part of his or her life and become a powerful and empowered human being because success is, as you perceive it, and not how someone else does.

People who made it despite incredible odds can usually trace their success back to someone(s) who encouraged them. The impetus of this section is to stress the importance of developing a positive, nurturing and supportive environment but this starts with you and the first step is to believe in yourself, trust yourself and believe that you can have what you want.

PART II

MY INSPIRATION

WHERE IS MY MUSE?

*I am traveling on the lonely road alone and
I don't even know where I am going or who
I will meet along the way.*

*I come to the fork in the road and I can't decide which
Path to take. What I wouldn't give for someone
To walk this road with me.*

*Where is my muse, the one person who can
Take me by the hand and lead me to great heights?
This journey is getting too hard, maybe I would be better
off If I just went back to the beginning, at least there I will meet
People that I know. Maybe that life wasn't so bad, after all.
But, I have come too far to turn back now,
But it is still good to know
Where is my muse?*

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Inspirations can be found through many avenues; sometimes it comes by listening to the testimonies of others who have overcome extreme challenges. Most important people often attribute some of

their successes to people who have gone before. These people are not necessarily family but people who have done important things in their genre.

Encouragement and inspiration are available in books, television interviews of people overcoming incredible odds, classes taken, chosen activities and actively building a positive and nurturing support group. Your family is often a good place to start. Where did they come from in life? They may not be, in the eyes of society, as successful but they may have survived incredible odds. Just think of the knowledge, skills and abilities it must have taken to make it despite the odds. No one has to exist in a perpetual state of hopelessness and despair. However, to do this, make concerted efforts to gain information and use it to transform your life. From the Goals worksheet, select the goals that are important to you and make a plan. The first place to begin is to begin with yourself by believing that you can achieve your goals.

There cannot be enough emphasize on what individuals believe. They internalize and act upon the beliefs and the beliefs manifest themselves into action. Each person has the ability to impact society in a very small and a very large way. If you present yourself, as you want others to believe you to be and if you work hard at becoming that person, you will begin to see this reflected in the way others perceive you. This does not come easy but with practice you can do it. Associating with only positive people, reading positive literature,

spiritual and personal development books, the Bible, and anything that you can get your hands on that will help in the improvement of your mind and your thinking will make this possible. Like any other goal, you must believe that you can believe in yourself, and you have to make others believe in you.

While the man and woman travel down life's highway trying to seek answers, they may experience and do many hideous things to those they meet along the way, but many wonderful things will happen also. Each new experience strengthens and adds to their power as human beings; all we have to do is learn how to view each obstacle as a means to strengthen and provide tools to reach higher levels of reality.

Domestic Violence. The different role expectations sometimes lead to domestic violence. This section is not an attempt to justify the violence in any way because there are some mean and violent people and many theories are in place as possible explanations. The attempt here is to provide information on the effect of domestic violence on the psychological make up of the victim.

The Empowerment Section provides more information on domestic violence and it is important to include the relationship between the different role expectations in this discussion.

Men and women sometimes join bringing their own ideas of what they are supposed to be but are unsure. This can and often does cause disaster. The following poem speaks to domestic violence,

rape, incest and verbal abuse at the hands of men in a woman's life. Anger is a constant companion and hope is undeniably the answer but anger pushes hope aside.

WHAT GIVES YOU THE RIGHT?

*I have been told as long as I can remember that
I am supposed to be submissive to the man.
I struggle to live according to my socialization,
but what rights do you have to violate my inner
parts with your desires so uncontrolled,
your dreams and visions so unfocused?
Do your rights allow you all forms of abuses?
When you are socialized to protect me?
What rights do you have to lead me when
you don't know where you are going?
What gives you the right to think that
the world is your domain?
And where does it tell you that my body is
a part of this acquisition?
Does this entitle you to verbally and physically abuse
me while I am still to believe that you love me?*

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Unfortunately, this poem echoes the sentiments of far too many women in our society. Fortunately, there are many who have never

and may never experience abuse and oppression. However, this book is for those of you who have or know someone who has. What type of family life do you think a union of this reality would create?

I grew up hearing elders say, “Don’t do as I do, do as I say.” As a parent, this is a very powerful statement and perhaps the best advice you could give at a given situation, but looking farther down the line, you may have youth who express the following sentiment:

VOICE OF YOUTH

*I have been taught to be obedient, respectful and submissive
e to my parents. I struggle hard every day to live according
to these socializations, but what rights do you have as adults
and the ones to lead me, to violate my trust, my childhood
with your desires and dreams so uncontrolled and so unfocused.
How can you protect me when I see you as the perpetrators?*

They turn to their mothers seeking the answers, but meet only the mask that she has worn all of her life as she, too, asks the significant men in her life...

*Do your rights mean that the only rights I have left are to
feel the pains that you have left in the place of my pride?
What gives you the right my brother, my father,
my lover, my friend, what gives you the right?*

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No doubt, those who share these sentiments are filled with anger, resentment and hostility. It is very difficult to lead anyone else to a place of peace and tranquility when your own head is a battleground for the demons from your childhood, your environment and the resulting realities you have created by the imbalances and injustices in your own life.

Women and Anger. Many of you may not have suffered abuse, but what about the feeling of abandonment or rejection? Because of the confusion and transitions that are taking place within our present-day families, many people emerge from families with feelings of rage due to abandonment issues. One can feel abandoned by a parent, friend or lover and still live in the same house or vicinity to them. There is physical and emotional abandonment and they both wreck emotional havoc in our lives.

The following poem represents how I felt because of my father who was not a father to me in any sense of the word. When I finally confronted him at around twenty-one years of age, he blamed his absence on my mother. Luckily my mother was a strong and visible force in my life and I did not focus my rage on her.

For many years, rage was my constant companion until I finally decided to part ways with it.

THE RAGE OF SILENCE

*In silence, I watched my father race by my mother
and me as if we were nothing. With my heart in
my throat, volts of light were shooting from my
tear-swelled eyes that scorched my nose and lips as I
watched my father move down the road without ever
looking back until he finally disappeared.*

I faced abandonment IN SILENCE

*I served my mother for thirty unchallenged years
to the best of my ability. Though no matter how much
I gave; it never seemed to be enough to keep her from
choosing men over me. And like a good daughter,*

I shrouded my emotions in silence

I suffered with my feelings of rejection IN SILENCE

*I cried out to the dark until the river of my soul ran
thy and my body ached while the words of my perfect,
beautiful, educated husband rang out like thunder through
my being, (I never loved you) and every day as
my soul mate proved his words to be true, I let a little
more of my hopes, dreams and youth pass into a dark abyss
of self-pity with my sanity and self-esteem seemingly
trapped in a state of irretrievable silence.*

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If you have a similar reality, anger will be one of your truest and closest friends. If you have been on your journey for any length of time, anger will be there through your adulthood, helping decide whom you will marry, what types of jobs you will take, and will form a large portion of your reality base. This friend may be so carefully concealed until no one ever notices. Anger will be there when you raise your children and, if you are not careful, anger will pass onto your children and your children's children. The cycle of violence can be disrupted with information and a strong support group.

We see evidence of anger when our children are out of control and we hang our heads in shame, muttering to ourselves "Kids aren't the way they used to be. The family is falling apart. Boy! Those women need to stop working, stay at home and raise those children." Or equally we hear, "Fathers need to take more time with their children." How many times have you heard someone say, "The government needs to do something?" What do you think?

Poorly managed anger is at the root of many serious physical, social and emotional problems; from heart disease to neighborhood violence. It is important that we empower ourselves, understand our own and others' feelings and resolve conflict in a non-violent manner.

Recognize when you are feeling angry. What makes you angry? When is anger used as a cover-up for other emotions ... fear, stress, shame, fatigue, embarrassment?

Empathize. Try to see things from the other person's point of view. What are that person's feelings? Can you remember having a similar feeling? Learn to use "I" messages to express your feelings. ("I feel angry when ... I don't like it when ... I am hurt that...").

Think. Often our anger comes from how we look at things. Some experts say that our thoughts actually create our angry feelings, and no one can make us angry. How we think about a situation, how we interpret what someone says and how we handle our frustrations and disappointments are what stirs up our anger.

Hear what the other person is saying, where the other person is coming from. Check to see if you understand correctly. "I'm trying to understand what you are saying. You say..." Look into the other person's eyes to show that you are listening. This kind of active hearing works both when you are the angry person and when someone is angry with you. When people are hurt they want to be heard. Give feedback that you are hearing them.

Integrate respect and love with what you say about your anger. Sometimes people need to speak out their anger for a while, even if it seems disrespectful. Then they can learn and practice more

respectful and caring ways to express the anger. Words, after all, are safer than actions!

Notice your body's reaction as you get angry: increased heart rate, breathing harder and faster, headaches, stomach pains, tension in the neck, and pains in the chest. Learn to bring yourself under control and notice how you calm yourself. What works for you? Long walks, jogging, thinking about other ways to look at the situation, meditation, listening to music, doing artwork, or telling yourself "I'm OK."

Keep your attention on the present event and alternative solutions. Do not bring up old grudges and wounds. Keep your focus on the behavior that is causing the difficulty. Keep personalities out of it.

PART III

GETTING PAST THE PAIN

I consider myself a seasoned woman and have been told all my life, including now, that I am destined for greatness. I am strong, talented and have my whole future ahead of me. For a very long time, I could not understand how anyone could see that greatness in me when I could only see pain in the essence of my being. While searching for my inner peace, I couldn't take the time to look inside because when I did; I could only see darkness, sadness, and disappointments forged by the poverty, discrimination and my struggle to make it in a convoluted world. For many years, anger was my shield from the pain and frustrations created by the negative energies encountered in my travels. Anger, my shield, my partner, was there for me as I started my journey as a very young woman. Anger was there for my fore parents because of oppressive and abusive environments that they lived and struggled to survive in. The strength of their anger drove my fore parents. Hand in hand, anger led me through life's treacherous bends and curves and shielded me from the pains of my life. There came a time, several years ago, when I grew tired of my life mates and longed for something more. I had a vision of a better emotional life but I just did not know how to grasp it. I turned inward and listened to the quiet spirit.

HOPE ETERNAL

*In my spirit Hope silently whispered to me,
you are right; you deserve more than to live
your life through the eyes of Anger!*

*I see the light in your eyes that signal to me that
you are ready for me.*

*Come with me; allow the light into your life.
Learn how to look inside yourself and when
you do, you will find me there.*

*In the stillness of my spirit God said,
I am the you that you forgot the moment you were born.*

*I am the you that your parents, society, teachers,
and peer groups have taken so much
trouble to make you forget.*

*I am He who has always been with you,
just turn to Me listen to your heart.*

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Jacksonville, NC

I found that it was possible to rise above the pain to find inner peace. I look back on the experiences now and realize that I was on a spiritual journey. At the apex of that journey, I found God and it was at that point when I emerged. I emerged a truly healthy and empowered human being. As I continued my journey, weathering

all manner of storms, thunderstorms and hurricanes, there came a point in my life when I realized that these have only been challenges placed in my path to help me see my strengths. What a wonderful experience for me to look back over my journey and realize what I had become.

Becoming Aware. The following poem is a very powerful and meaningful piece written by my son about 13 years ago. I often told him of the struggles that I had to endure coming from an impoverished background in Arkansas, raised by my mother in the Deep South. Often, I have found, in speaking to some youth about past struggles, they sometimes find it boring. Consequently, it moved me when my son approached me with this poem as his interpretation of my life. It also alludes to the very point when I started to see my life in retrospect and realized that I have become:

STRONG AND MAJESTIC

From the backwoods of poverty with a narrow view of life,

I embraced the world with a virgin spirit.

*Unaware of the darkness or indifference, my light,
though bruised and battered, reached out yet again.*

*Aflame with hopes and dreams fort by tradition,
I felt my sanity slipping into the abyss of darkness
and ignorance, and all its mates disguised as security.*

There was an absence, a void.

Drawing upon the primal forces of love and light,

*I concentrated my very soul into a spark.
That spark, weak and sick from separation, struggled
and found its way back. The soul now complete,
struggles for a still unfamiliar plane -freedom. Through
many ugly and hostile planes of existence, the duality
of my soul depended on "God."*

*It WAS MY masculine strength and sense of justice
that protected you. It was the sisterhood founded in
the she-part of the Creator that nourished your spirit
and the creativity that flows with your life from the cup
of your femininity. And now, knowledgeable of the world,
yet isolated, separate, but in touch; an innocent in a
complicated world, destiny has washed over my body like the tide,
warm and wonderful, and it has revealed only but a glimpse
of infinite possibilities. Refreshed and cleansed, I am a
bust with passion and, once again, I have miraculously
given birth to a revelation. With pride, I rise victoriously to
new and untold challenges. Like a phoenix, beautiful
and blinding, I soar, on fire with passion;
for the woman is mystical, sentient, sensuous,
powerful and intelligent. I am a mother, lover, sister,
leader, healer, a fierce combatant and a loyal friend.
The wisdom of the ages, as well as the hopes of the future
rest within my Birth loins under control, awaiting the nourishment
of my bosom. I am woman, and like an unknown deity, I have
always been here. I am aware of the past, am in touch with*

the present, and I will mother the future

I AM WOMAN.

I can fly, but if I should fall, don't 'tear me, Help me.

For all my encompassing spirit will rise again,

In innocence, in excellence and in strength.

Written by Kenton Jones,

I traveled life's highways consumed with RAGE for years because I felt this strong sense of abandonment when my father neglected me; consequently, I allowed other people into my life that would abandon me in other ways. I allowed myself to believe that I really was not worth it anyway. I found plenty of people, both men and women, who shared this sentiment with me. My beliefs created my reality and I made choices and decisions based on these false realities. I faced all of these challenges on my journey, but now...

STRONG AND MAJESTIC, cont'd

*I awake to a new day amidst the stormy seas, navigating my way
through treacherous waves and reefs that men dare not*

sail alone; isolated because I captain my own ship.

Because I dared to survive to live to dream again.

Because my father was not a father to me.

*Because my mother, at the interference of men, allowed
me to call upon strength untold and I moved beyond her.*

Because my lovers wanted to run, free like stallions,

*dragging my love, my life, in addition, my child in the wake
of their trampled and withered wild oats.*

*Because I have survived the misogynist, homophobic
and self-hatred my brother has for his mother and
the creative, nurturing part of his soul that she was so
careful to cultivate. Because I used those dark seeds, that
gift of his anger and pain and all that man could throw
at me to find my way back.*

*No longer in silence, but in RAGE, my soul cries out WHY!
And as my eyes look toward the sky and revel in the
warmth of the morning Sun, I realize what I have become and*

Why Do You Fear Me?

Written by Kenton Jones,
Excerpt from "The Rage of Silence," the Play,
Summer 90, Dallas, TX

When you can look at life and those around you in the face and ask these powerful questions mentioned in the previous poem, you are starting to wake up! Life's challenges can sometimes render one powerless and when it does, it is hard to imagine anyone feeling fearful or intimidated by you. It is not you, per se; it is the power that resides within every one of us. Some people can see this and some even try to keep you from becoming aware of your own personal power. In fact, you may not even be aware that anyone is noticing you. Look around you, you will suddenly realize that you have been living in the shadows all of your life. When you realize this, you know it is time to peep your head outside of the spiritual

cave and fortress you have been in all of your life and start on your journey to self-discovery and personal and spiritual empowerment.

COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS

*I spent a lifetime lurking in the shadows in a world created
by racism, sexism, poverty, and the internalization of
these oppressions. Nurtured only by my fears and
insecurities, I built a fortress within the darkness.
In this dark world, pain was a constant companion.
Anger has been my constant companion and has
been with me through the ages.
Anger helped me build this fortress and was my
only and best friend in this dark world.
It was akin to two souls BOUND by my dark realities.
I wore self-confidence as a shield to prevent others
who share this world with me from knowing who
I really was. I learned to speak the language of happiness,
peace and contentment. But these words did not reflect
what I felt inside. But one day, I ventured beyond the
edges of darkness and beheld the light of truth.
This truth came to me through information, and thence
I started my journey into lightness. My sojourn into the
light was blinding. I retreated into the comfort of the shadows.
No longer satisfied with the limitations of this darkness,
I tucked my fears and insecurities deep within my soul
and ventured into the light once more.*

Once into a world of bright sunshine, I found hope.

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In your spirit, you know that you did not find Hope. Hope has always been there in the recesses of your mind, heart and soul. You were too blinded by your anger and its mates to see. All you had to do was open up your eyes to see beyond the shadows to find the goodness that waited for you. Reach out your arms and heart, take the hands of hope and allow yourself to be lead to a place of peace and serenity.

Live for the day when you can honestly say,

*I found myself! No longer can fear, pain and shame keep
me bound to a world of darkness and I celebrate the day
I rushed into the light exclaiming at the top of my voice,
from the depths of my soul,*

*WA TCH OUT WORLD, I HAVE COME
OUT OF THE SHADOWS!"*

© Dr. Pearlie M. Jones

Coming out of the shadows is a triumph; but once you enter the bright world of sunshine, will you be able to go forth and claim the promises of God? Is there something that still keeps you bound to that dark world that you fought so hard to escape? Once the excitement of the escape eludes you, you may still find yourself

with the harsh realities of not knowing what you have inside of you.

People tell you that you are special, that you have a lot going for yourself and you want to believe it but you just do not see it yet. Therefore, you look inside yourself and ask:

IS IT ME?

*I can't get beyond the fog to a place where there are no
more unseen strings that keep me from achieving my highest.*

I reach, but I cannot seem to touch.

I look but I can't seem to focus.

*When I try to push beyond my present reality,
there is something that I can't see and touch that tells
me endlessly that now is all that I will ever be. Is it me?*

What is it that tells me that I can do what I don't know how to do?

*Where do I get these notions that I am majestic,
strong and resourceful?*

*Who plants these seeds of greatness in me, and
stays just beyond my consciousness,*

Silently leading me beyond the fog? Is it me?

*God resonates in your spirit, I am the voice that
speaks to you in the stillness of the night.*

*I am the watcher while you sleep and your guide
as you go stumbling through life trying to find
your path; I AM the planter of these seeds of*

greatness in you. Look into your heart and find me there.

*You still ponder, What dark forces reside within me
that keep me from thinking, feeling, And making the right moves
so that I can claim the promises of God?*

Sadly you realize, IT IS ME!

Pearlie Jones © Jacksonville, NC

Excerpt from the Performance, Peace in the Midst of the Storm

Now that you are coming into your own, you are aware of your greatness and you have become fully aware that you have taken on awesome responsibilities. Some were given to you based on your gender and others you took on yourself trying to find love and acceptance. Now, you are no longer satisfied with trying to hold up the whole sky by yourself and you ask for support. While suffering from low self-esteem and all of the other emotional consequences of being in partnership with anger, you were too afraid to ask, “What about me?” You didn’t want to appear too selfish, so you went forth trying to hold up the whole sky; when you were actually expected to hold up just your part but because of your socialization you took on the whole sky while resting on a rocky foundation. You are well on your way to spiritual wellness when you can look yourself in the mirror and tell yourself that you need support and then be able take this request beyond yourself. Youth are asking the same question...

WHO'S WATCHING MY BACK?

*I rise each day to new and unfolding challenges ready
to go forth into this world being strong, invincible
and in control of my world and all it encompasses.
Centuries and more it seems, I have been charged with the
responsibility to keep the family and community together.
This has been pounded into my head as part of my truth
and reality as a woman. As a man, I've been told that I am
supposed to protect, take care of the home and maintain control
of my family. I have to be responsible for the religious values of
my family and teach my sons how to be men, but someone forgot to
tell me how this works. I stumble through life everyday pretending
to have all of the answers when silently I am wondering...*

Who's watching my back?

*As a young person, I am told to go out to be a lady but
they forgot to tell me what this entirely means.
I look to the TV and all I see is meaningless sex and violence.
I listen to the pop music and I hear women degraded.
I hear violence and I look to my community and I see apathy.
I then go back to my family and I get confusion.
I feel that I am standing alone, **Who's watching my back?**
I'm strong, I'm told and I mother the earth, I'm told.
I look around me and wonder where the father of this earth is?
I look to my sisters and brothers And I cry out in lonely
desperation...**Who's watching my back?***

*I'm trying to watch your back as I've been told that
this is my duty as a man. But where do I get to get the
strength to shoulder your pain and mine too?
I feel your pain but right now, I want to know...*

Who's watching my back?

*I believe that I have it made over the man.
I play my role well as the protector, caretaker and nurturer.
I listen to the rhetoric of my dear, sweet brothers
And fashioned myself into a collage of what I have
heard that they want. But, when I look around me,
the decent qualities that they said that they
wanted are not in demand. I still stand alone and I wonder to
myself... ***Who's watching my back?****

*Now, I have discovered that all alone, according to
the experts, I have been aiding and abetting
the demise of the male child I did this single-handily
because there was no man around to lend support.
I look into my heart and soul and
Ask myself, "Was I supposed to do this alone and after all,"*

Who's watching my back?

*I've been told that the Youth is the key to the future
that we have to inherit a world. That our present leaders
leave behind and that we are aiding and abetting the
demise of this society because of our wild and violent ways._
We aren't doing this single handily because many of
us can't see the safety net beneath us.*

*We look into our own souls and hearts and ask
ourselves, are we supposed to do this alone, and
after all, did we make the drugs, the sex and violence
that we see in the communities? Did we cause our parents hearts
to break because of their dreams unfulfilled, their visions blurred
by the pains of every day survival, as I look around me and see
the confusion that abounds, I ask you,*

Who's watching my back?

*I was so busy watching the backs of my brothers and hurting
sisters, I forgot to let them know that my back needed watching.*

I am asking you,

WHO'S WATCHING YOUR BACK?

Pearlie Jones, Jacksonville, NC, 2000

PART IV

THE ROAD TO PEACE

Eventually, the raging forces of the storm may propel us into its eye while the whirlwinds of life hurl around us. Sometimes this lull makes us think that the storm has passed, while in actuality, it has not. Without preparation, the raging storm still awaits us.

The one period in my life when I felt most connected to God and felt His eminent presence was during the time when everything in my life was in transition and chaos. During this stormy time, I turned to my heavenly Father for guidance and substance. I tried reaching out to others in the church community but felt more burdened than relieved. I remember one day walking through my house feeling sorry for myself, with my heart heavy and my soul crying out, “Why?” In the midst of all this pain, a sudden calm came over me and then I knew that from that moment on, it was God and me. From that precise moment, I started to live just one moment at a time and started really looking for the positive and good things in my life. Each morning when I got up, I would pray for the things that I wanted to happen that day and thanked my God for them. As I walked from one point to the other, I noticed that the sky was bluer, the grass was greener, and that people really responded once I opened my eyes and heart to them. I started taking joy in the smallest of miracles and one day, I just was not overwhelmed and depressed

any more. My financial situation was not any better, my marriage was not repaired, my child still exhibited behavioral problems and physically I was still alone. I felt, however, that I was not alone. When the time came for decisions to be made, I made them more prayerfully and carefully. This was an accelerated period of growth for me.

I awoke each day anxious to start the new day, excited like a young child anxiously awaiting Santa to bring ever hoped for toys. I relinquished my life to God and waited on Him for the first time in my life. I saw little miracles on every day of my journey. I prayed for what I needed, believed that I would get it and it was done. It was just that simple. I stopped whining and complaining to my friends and when they asked me the status of my situation, I replied, "I'm truly blessed." I felt God's presence in everything that I did and wherever I went; that was such an overwhelming feeling and one that I thought I would carry with me for the rest of my life.

I worked hard to get to this point and I had to let go of some truths imposed upon me by my socializations, my peers and replaced those that came to me through my own personal discoveries. I was not through growing and life's little lessons were not through with me yet. Each birthday brought its own unique challenges but having gone through such a spiritual void and re-emergence, I had a strong spiritual foundation. My challenge in later years became my lack of working on the spiritual foundation on a continuous basis, by becoming too relaxed when the storms abated.

BLESSINGS

*Some people spend an inordinate part of their youth
bemoaning their misfortunes, not aware of what they
possess in mind, body and spirit.
They complain about all of the things they do not have
and things they cannot control. They see the world
through glasses of the “have-nots” and allow themselves
to feel the aches and pains of deprivation.
They wallow in the afterglow of these feelings and
wear them like badges of honor.
In the face of death and when the real pains of loss
are realized then it becomes clear that they overlooked
all of God’s greatest blessings shielded under the
guise of their challenges and the ability to meet
them triumphantly.*

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Hope and Forgiveness. Not working on building a strong spiritual foundation will leave you emotionally defenseless and vulnerable. During this “down time,” negative energies and negative people are more likely to enter your space. These negative energies are akin to a virus. Once they get in, they slowly eroded your spiritual center. While the love of God, knowledge of His power, and love are still there; these energies can and will cause a spiritual void. This void allows those angry, petty and hostile feelings to move in and once

these negative feelings are in control, a complete change in attitude and thought patterns will occur. These changes often cause physical stresses that lead to many of the stress related diseases that invade our population today.

When negative energies move in, a complete spiritual re-awakening must take place. The first step in reclaiming this spiritual power is recognizing that there is always hope and that your heavenly Father is just a prayer away.

WHAT IS LIFE WITHOUT HOPE

In trying times like these, it is difficult to find something to hold on to or believe that there is a tomorrow. For many of us there will be a tomorrow, but the challenge is to find beauty in the world that shows us strife and shows it as a guide that points our path to the WAY. How terrible is it to wake each new day and in a sea of despair, not mindful of the beauty that surrounds us and the blessings that come with a new day? To live each day in this bottomless pit is akin to living without hope and what is the beauty in that?

Embrace each new day and awake to the promises of God and give praises for the challenges that come along the way, because there in the midst is HOPE.

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Excerpt from "Peace in the Midst of the Storm, the Performance." _

Do you feel that the key to peace of mind is merely for the asking? In addition, do you struggle for years with the demons that keep you up at night? You pray and pray but those dark thoughts continue to cloud your mind and prevent you from living a life free of guilt, shame and pain.

Forgiveness is the key. Our own personal healing comes when we are willing to forgive others. Many people actually know what it takes to find inner peace but they are not willing to do what it takes to achieve it. Why hold on to the hurts and pains from the past when they are clearly chains that keep you bound in spiritual darkness? The act of forgiving is not so much for the other person, as it is for you.

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, it is time you spend a little time with yourself in learning how to let go and find forgiveness within yourself for your wrongs and misdeeds as well as things done to you by other people.

- Do you harbor guilt, gripes, or grudges from past situations?
- Are you plagued by thoughts like, If only I had? or I wish I didn't
- Are you afraid of rejection, disapproval or abandonment?
- When personal problems arise, do you sometimes think, oh, no, not again?
- Are you ashamed of things you've done?
- Do you wish you could apologize to someone you have wronged and be forgiven?
- Do you wish you could set the record straight and finally be vindicated?

- Does thinking about the way you once were (beautiful, carefree, popular, athletic, etc.) leave you dissatisfied with who you are today?
 - Do you frequently feel disappointed by or bitter about, your relationships at work or life in general?
 - Are you fearful of the future?
 - Has life not lived up to your expectations?
-

I HAVE THE ANSWER

*Because He feeds the birds, because He planted the trees;
because He clothed the grass of the field, our heavenly Father,
can provide for you and me. Because He directs the wind and tells
it the way to blow, and He even controls the weather, and reminds
it, its time to snow. Because He made the mighty rivers, and
carved out the pathways for the tiny stream, then through his
enduring power, He will help us to achieve our dreams.
Because He placed the beauty, of the rainbow in the sky,
and He alone, scooped out the valleys, made them narrow
or wide because He loves us so, He'd already made a way for you
and I. He formed the great mountains, He peaked them low or
high; He made the little birdies, and gave them wings to fly.
He created the vast Oceans; on them He placed the many waves;
Because of His grace, He reaches down, rescues and saves.*

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It appears that many older people know how to take things in stride; to live life at its fullest, to weather the storms, yet exhibit an ultimate sense of peace and serenity despite incredible odds. The

next chance you have, take the time to talk to a senior citizen who has found that peace that you seek. It is so comforting to hear about the challenges they faced in their youth and to see the power of their faith today. Spend time with your older relatives and really listen to them. They can be a strong source of encouragement to you on your spiritual journey. Remember now, not all seniors have found their inner peace. Stay away from negative and mean spirited people of all ages. Spirit led seniors know that the answer to life's challenges rests with God.

THANKS FOR THE LESSONS, MOTHER

When I travel the roads you trod mother, my heart becomes heavy and my eyes misty. I think of the love, safety and security you provided me during the lean years when I know it must have been hard for you. I now know and understand the true depths of the despair you must have felt being poor, alone, uneducated and female. Despite the pain you suffered, you were able to teach me love of God, a strong sense of survival and compassion. Mother thank you for teaching me how to have faith when everything around me was falling apart.

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PART V

PATHS TO EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment comes from information that we have gathered on our journey. It is difficult to move forward until the past becomes just that, the past. This section makes a connection between history, negative and positive experiences. There are forces operating in society and culturally that impact the environment where we live, thrive and negotiate our survival and subsequent empowerment.

Information is power. Take a few minutes to reflect upon this phrase. The more information that you acquire on anything will put you in a power position. Have you ever been a part of something but not in the information loop? If you have found yourself on the outside, then you are familiar with the feelings that are associated with not being a part of things and the resulting insecurities. *Life is like that also.* The more you know about yourself, the more self-confident you become. Make yourself a student of life; amass knowledge about yourself, your challenges and how you affect the world that you impact. We all have impact, you know.

The Road to Inner Peace. Many women do not know what they want or if they even deserve the goodness in life because for so long they have believed that they could not have it; or they have delayed their own dreams for the sake of the family. It is advisable to work through the Exercises: Assist in Personal Growth and Development,

located in the Appendices, at the start of your journey. This will prevent you from fumbling around in the fog trying to find your path.

You may experience an array of feelings as you work through the exercises, and you may discover that you harbor negative feelings against individuals from your past because of things that they may have done to you. Additionally, you will come to a full understanding that you allowed yourself to step down because of some misplaced loyalty to a friend or a family member. This may create anger against you by you; so the first order is to forgive.

Learn To Forgive Yourself. This means forgive yourself for not being perfect, for the mistakes you have made in your life and for the bad choices that lead you to bad places and people. Look at all the relationships in your life, including family and friends. Are there people that you feel that you have hurt? Can you find it in your heart to ask them for their forgiveness? Do you find that this request for forgiveness comes hard for you because you, too, have been wronged and you do not understand WHY they cannot see that? Even if they will not or cannot forgive you, forgive yourself and move on. They may not be able to get past their pain to see yours, therefore, you have to take responsibility for your own pain and your own peace of mind.

Learn to Forgive Others. Do not be afraid to give the release they need to move on in their journey; you will find a sense of peace in doing this. Look inside your heart, find and acknowledge

areas where you might have failed a loved one. Remember, at the time of the deed, you might have been operating on limited information, a false reality base and you may have thought it was right. In retrospect, you can see that it was not but it is a wise person who can look himself or herself directly in the mirror and admit transgressions. So, give this individual closure and repair the bridge that prevents you from being close to loved ones. This will be painful and difficult but when it is all over, you will start to find a sense of peace. You cannot control what other people feel or what they believe. The goal is to clear the path to your glory using peace and truth, as you understand it. God will provide the words and the strength when it is time. Think long and hard before taking any action. No matter what they have done to you and how unfair it is to forgive them; for your own sake, you have to let go. Remember our past beliefs and how we remember the events all have influenced us; and how our decisions lead us to uncomfortable places.

When you find you are thinking bad about someone just go into your prayer mode. If you do this enough, you will automatically do it and it will become second nature. You will find that person will change towards you. They have their own special journey. We are not to judge them, just love them through God as one of his special children. It is ironic how the world seemingly changes when you change how you perceive things. Jesus describes this transformation.

The ultimate goal of spiritual strengthening is the re-programming of the thought processes. The brain is like a computer. If negative information goes in then the only output will be negative information. Therefore, what is put into your mind must be jealously guarded as you would your most precious gems. Reading inspirational books that motivate and inspire are excellent tools for the re-awakening of the innocence and godly power that lie within each person.

Our environment provides numerous stimuli both positive and negative. In all of our waking hours, we are continually receiving messages from the environment that affect our reality. Much of this information enters our psyche on a sub-conscious level. Nevertheless, over 90% of environmental things we can control. It is paramount that we become aware of our surroundings and what goes into our senses. We can control the type of people we are around, the type of entertainment; visual, auditory, and sensory information that we absorb. It takes courage and a strong commitment to one's own spiritual health to say no to garbage.

It is very easy to fall into the "poor me mentality" because it feels good to bemoan the injustices heaped upon you at times. This is one time where you can be the center of attention when you are venting your frustrations and most of the time you can find an audience. The bad thing about it is when you are no longer frustrated, your audience will constantly remind you of the

injustice and it will be difficult for you to take that high spiritual road again.

If you get off the path too often, you may appear as a hypocrite. How many times have you said something like that about a fellow Christian? It is very clear that to grow spiritually means that you have to persevere and stay on that spiritual journey even when the road gets rocky. In fact, the rocky road can be used as an impetus for change. You don't become strong without flexing your Christian muscles. So when trouble comes, this will be an excellent opportunity to test your resolve.

Spiritual friends must be developed and nurtured to prevent the inevitable loneliness, frustration and sometimes depression that will come. Do not make the mistake of thinking that since you are on an enlightened path, that your life is going to be smooth sailing. It is important that this inner circle of peers have the same philosophy as you because too much energy spent in disagreements over basic philosophical differences wastes precious time. It does not mean that either one is wrong; it means that the two realities are divergent and will cause friction and sometimes estrangement. The travelers on this road need consistency to be able to stay focused. Choose these people very carefully.

Discover your inner beauty and claim it. When you are feeling down on yourself, just think of the power you inherited from your

heavenly Father and know that He did not make junk. Allow yourself to feel the power that comes from knowing that you are a unique and special person, and before you know it, you will start to feel God's presence. Claim the value that God gave you at birth.

Close your eyes for a moment. Clear your mind and allow yourself to think about your anointing with power directly from your heavenly Father. How does that feel? Keep your eyes closed for a few moments more to allow the realization of your birthright to sink into the essence of your being.

That feels good. Now try to carry that feeling with you wherever you go. Whenever you are around negative people or in negative circumstances; go into that special place and allow yourself to feel the warming flow of God's love and imagine Him anointing you with your birthright. Do not allow anyone or anything to steal this from you because you are Beautiful.

Find the good in everything. Because we live in a convoluted world, bad things do happen to good people. It sometimes appears that when you try to do right, it is as if you walk around with a neon sign flashing, "dump on me!"

When it is your time to shoulder some pain, accept it graciously and learn how to see God's plan in it. Do not be so quick to think that God put the burden on you. A close and careful scrutiny of a situation will reveal that the occurrence is because of a recent or a

past decision. Humanity has free will to make good or bad decisions that affect our lives for the rest of our lives and our children's lives. So, think about short-term and long-term repercussions. Determine if it is caused by one of your choices if so, what have you learned from this situation?

Accept the things you cannot change. The serenity prayer really helps in making this a reality because it does absolutely no good to spend a lot of energy on things in your life that you cannot control. Learn to recognize those things that you do have control of and work on them. For example, if you are in a bad relationship, do not waste your time trying to change the other person. The only person that you can change is yourself and you know how hard it is to change.

Set long term and short-term goals. Reflect back on the Goals Worksheet and list your goals in the following categories; personal, financial, spiritual, educational, social and civic. Do not limit yourself. Allow yourself to believe that you have what you want. If you fail to plan your goals, then you plan to fail. Do you think you will ever know when you reach your destination if you do not know where you are going?

Refer to the Goals Worksheet located in the Workbook section to develop an action plan. From this action plan, develop your short term and long-term goals.

Do a good deed everyday. This can be a small gesture, like giving someone a sincere compliment, letting a shopper go ahead of you

at the super market or a huge one, like cutting an infirmed person's grass or organizing a clean up crew from the neighborhood to clean a house for a senior person. It does not matter what you do, but focus a portion of everyday thinking and doing something nice for someone else.

Many people already give sacrificially but is it because it is expected of you? If so, do something for someone who absolutely does not have any expectations from you and relish the feelings that you gain from a tiny act of kindness. What would happen if these tiny acts become contagious around your office or home? Awesome!

Anticipate well. We form our realities by what is believed. Make your life more positive and fun by expecting a miracle everyday. Instead of expecting the worse, expect the best from everyone you meet. Look for life's tiny miracles everyday and do not be amazed when you find them.

Be grateful. Gratitude opens your heart to joy, so be sure to appreciate all of your blessings, even the tiny ones. Find joy in even the smallest things in your daily journey. For instance, no matter how bad things are in your life, look at what you do have and be grateful for that. Attitude means a lot and a positive attitude will draw other people to you. No one wants to be around a complaining, ungrateful grouch.

Be Happy. You can solve most problems if they are perceived as challenges rather than obstacles. Do research, read books and talk to other people who have gone through your challenge and find new ways of doing things. Look at each obstacle as an opportunity to learn something new. Attack each challenge with optimism, honesty, tenacity, acceptance, and eventually you will be an overall happier person even during critical times of stress.

Be the change you want to see in the world. This is the order of the day. As you journey throughout your life, you will find many opportunities to make a difference in this world.

PART VI

SCENARIOS FROM REAL LIFE

Scenarios depict actual experiences; the names are fictitious to protect the identities. As mentioned under the Inspiration section, many people get motivated and inspired by listening to the journeys of others. It is hoped that one of these stories and their resulting discoveries will assist you in your journey.

Some of these individuals have just started on their journey but I felt that was significant too to demonstrate their struggles to change and the importance of finding others on this same journey.

The impact of internalized oppression. Cynthia Michelle was born in the late 40's and came to maturity in the 60's in an impoverished African American community in the Deep South. Her immediate family was poor and many did not finish high school because of poverty. She grew up in an environment with no African American professionals or Black History courses that taught her the strengths of her race.

Michelle did not receive any information or encouragement about what she would do beyond high school. In fact, her getting out of high school without being pregnant satisfied her mother's dreams and her mother was very proud of her. After that, she was on her own.

One day, when she was in the 7th or 8th grade, she announced to her Speech teacher that she wanted to be a Journalist. This respected teacher told her that her dreams were unrealistic because there were not any African American Journalists. Because of her age and her respect for her elders, Cynthia never spoke of this dream again. She did not give up on writing; however, she continued to write poetry and short stories that she never shared with anyone because she did not think they were any good. That one bit of advice from the teacher shut this young girl down for many years, but not forever.

Later in high school, her English teacher told her that she was very expressive, had a very vivid imagination and would do well in college. That planted another seed in her head, so her new goal was to go to college, but to do what, she did not know. Because of her poverty, lack of information and resources, and relying on her peers, she did not know how to even go about going to college. The high school Counselor never counseled her about her future or even acknowledged that she even had a future. Most of the information was given to children of Preachers and Teachers because they were products of the respected families in this rural community. Since Cynthia was poor, her life chances did not ensure her a bright and prosperous future due to her mother's educational completion of the eighth grade. Cynthia's reference group and her mother thought she should find a good man, get married and have children. This did not feel right to her and she wanted more. She dreamed of having beautiful clothes, a beautiful

home, but her mother and her extended family thought she was a dreamer. Eventually, she finished high school and relocated to Texas. After a series of minimum wage and dead end jobs, she landed a job where her boss recognized her intelligence and encouraged her to go to college. Her mentor helped her complete college applications, financial aid applications and actually took her under her wing.

Cynthia was very cynical, disbelieving and no matter how much she was told about her natural abilities, she did not believe it. However, she did not hear about her potential when she was very young and she did not even know that she had them. In the new environment, she blossomed and new opportunities opened up for her. She still did not know how to make things happen and no one really ever took the time to mentor her. She often felt guilty because she felt she was not using what natural gifts God gave her. Fear was her biggest reason for not getting the things she wanted out of life.

This one special woman looked beyond her naivety and saw her potential greatness. Soon Cynthia started to emulate her mentor's style of speech and did not want to leave her present job. This was the first time she learned that she did have skills. Her mentor did not let her settle for this job and encouraged her to quit her job and go to college.

Two colleges accepted Cynthia and she attended the one in her town. The first day she went on campus she felt like an ant in a

high ivory tower. In the first assembly, she looked at the other students and felt that, surely, they belonged there and, surely, she did not.

Cynthia survived that dreadful first day and started her classes. In her classes, she felt so inconsequential that when the teacher asked questions, even though she knew the answers, she would not speak up because she knew she would probably be wrong and she feared being wrong and ridiculed. Her only redeeming feature was her ability to write and express herself on paper, so she did well on essay tests. Even though she made good grades, she never thought she deserved them and would often become depressed when she got her papers back with an “A.”

One day a male instructor asked her to remain after class. He told her that she was pretty but she needed to dress to accentuate her features. He advised her to start wearing shorter dresses, learn how to wear her hair differently, come to the front of the classroom, stop hiding in the back behind other students and to speak up.

Even though she did not trust his motives, she did as he suggested. She bought a stylish wig, went to Sears and purchased some up to date clothing. She wore one outfit timidly on campus the following day. That day when she walked across campus, a group of young men whistled at her. She looked around to see if some *other* girl walked behind her. To her surprise, they were looking and gawking at her. This happened more than once. Slowly her

self-confidence started to rise and for the very first time in her short life, she felt beautiful.

The outlets Cynthia had were reading, playing with farm animals, and writing short stories. There were no other children who lived close to her, therefore, she had to find her own type of entertainment. She loved reading but her reading choices were the true confession magazines, etc. When her family finally purchased a second hand television, it became her other outlet. In the early fifties, there were not many programs on the air and the only images that she saw of blacks were negative and stereotypical such as Amos and Andy, the black person on The Jack Benny Show and the image of Aunt Jemima on the flour sacks.

College opened up a new reality for her and she met different types of people. It was a long time before she could really feel that she belonged in college environment because of the feedback she had received from her peers, family, the social milieu that she grew up in and the internalization of these negative oppressions. It would take years to deprogram these embedded thoughts. However, when she read the ideas of philosophers, theologians, social scientists and social workers, she was amazed to find that these educated people voiced some of her ideas. That gave her a strong sense of empowerment to know that she was not weird as some of her peers and family thought. She had a mind and something to say. It would take a little while longer for her to be able to vocalize this.

What forces do you see in this short story? It demonstrated most of what we have been talking about up to this point. Because there was no nurturing and support provided, no encouragement to her dreams; she delayed them into well into her life. She had no knowledge of the accomplishments of African Americans before her because her high school did not teach Black History. All that she heard about being black was negative. This was re-enforced by the myths and stereotypes from her race and as well as whites. She did not personally know anyone who had made it, so she had to keep bumping her head until she finally found her way out of the shackles of poverty, racism, economic deprivation, and sexism. This came to her through education.

The wider community perceived black women during this time as inferior but strong and nurturing to white children. These were not the roles that she wanted to claim but she didn't know how to break out of the cocoon. She continued to dream but her dreams were laughed at because she was the child of a poor uneducated single parent. All of these negatives became her master status that followed her throughout her life. No matter how she tried to move beyond it, it would raise its ugly head repeatedly.

These dynamics are not unique to just Black women. Society determines the social status of women in each culture and when courageous women dare to step out side of their roles, it is done at great personal and social risks. What are the risks? If you are the type of person who values being accepted and being a part of a

bigger group, then going against the norms will put you at odds with the group and you might face ridicule and exclusion from the group. There will come a time when you might have to go it alone until you find your new niche. This is a process and it will not come over night. Many people end up abandoning their plans to please loved ones and reference groups.

The self-esteem proponents and some religious leaders make it appear so easy; many try to make you believe that *all you have to do is believe it and you will achieve it*. It is imperative that you believe and amass information, but it is equally important for you to understand that the road to change is difficult. That's why so many people don't take it on.

It is important that you work especially hard at building your self-esteem and self-concept. You have to believe in yourself to be able to stand strong and true to your dreams. Every one of us is connected to each other and together we form a group . . . a society. When you change, things around you change. So, if you are married or in a relationship, it is important to share this journey with them; they may not like it, but they don't have to like it, just accept it.

Cynthia eventually made a decision to just back off from high school acquaintances and friends that she made before she started on her journey and even some extended family members. When she came home from college, often her uneducated family and high school friends avoided her. She moved to another level in her

journey and she quickly discovered that she did not belong in her previous reality. When she went around her family, she talked about what they wanted to talk about, and never interjected any of her opinions or experiences. Often they talked to her as if she did not know anything. If she spoke the same language as them, she was admonished for not speaking any better for a college student. If she used proper English, she was admonished for being a know it all. She just did not seem to fit in anywhere.

When this happens, it is time to stop and take a personal inventory of yourself. Look at the challenge, dissect it, and think of all of the ways this could have happened. If you are honest with yourself, most times you can trace it back to a decision that you made recently or far in the back. Every act or decision has consequences.

Cynthia did not trust herself enough to assert her newfound reality and she still relied too heavily on the approval of others to demand her new respect. People will believe of you what you tell them or what you lead them to believe. Cynthia made no effort to share her journey with others, and they did not see the change in her. Instead, she went around for years living two different realities often feeling hurt because no one really knew the real her.

Cynthia completed college and eventually entered into professional employment, but continued to flounder around for years in and out of jobs, relationships and two marriages. The self-confidence she garnered in her early years did not follow her through out the years. She did not continue her journey on a committed basis, so

she made bad decisions that led to unhealthy places and dead ends. After not finding the peace and contentment she sought, she decided to embark upon a new journey and that journey took her to new heights and exposed her to new people. What she found on this journey was exciting in some ways, fearful in others, but ultimately, she found that many of the decisions that she made was because of her lack of information and this made her angry with herself. Nonetheless, she continued on her path and eventually she learned how to find peace during the challenges in her life. The Journey continues. .

After reading the foregoing scenario, think about the questions below.

1. Did Cynthia give her family and friends the chance to know her when she hid behind the comfort zones of an earlier reality?
2. Do you think that Cynthia's bad decisions caused her to have difficulties in her life? Was it her fault that she could not make the right decisions to lead to her success initially?
3. Can you identify forces in her background that influenced her future, after reading the first part of this book?
4. Can you personally identify with aspects of this scenario?

Making Decisions for the Wrong Reasons. Marjorie married a man that she felt in her heart was not up to her level, but she wanted to be in a relationship. She needed a male figure for her son and she wanted to relocate. This man served as a way out for her. She thought that since she was a nice person, it would be all

right. He turned out to be a liar, a manipulator, misappropriated some of her money and was not even that good of a role model for her son.

Marjorie spent many Sundays in Church praying for him and bemoaning her ultimate betrayal. Eventually they divorced and she did not leave the marriage with the same credit standing because he ran her credit cards up, hid the statements and before she found out about it, they were already talking about reporting to the credit bureau.

Looking deeper into this scenario, who do you think was at fault? Ultimately, Marjorie's husband needed to be responsible for his own behavior but Marjorie's decision to marry him for the wrong reasons and to trust him played into her disappointment. He did not hold a gun to her head and he did not promise that he was a saint. Once when they were deep in argument, he broke down and cried saying, "Why did you marry me anyway?" This stumped her and then she knew that, ultimately, he did not change. She did not allow herself to see what was right there before her eyes, and she did not follow her own instincts because the signals were there.

Marjorie thought that her kindness, her display of trust and professions of love would transform him. He did not want to transform because he did not think anything was wrong with him. He thought she should change because that is what a woman is supposed to do, right? They both were wrong because they did not stop to analyze their motives. He wanted an educated and

professional woman. She had her wants but what they both wanted was not compatible and they were not honest with each other in the beginning.

Marjorie was so confident until this did not bother her for the short time she had to spend with him. She did not suffer emotionally but she did financially because he did not handle money well. In fact, on paydays he could not make it home with his entire paycheck. Marjorie did not want to be the type of woman who met her husband at his job demanding the paycheck. What would you do?

Men and women march to a different drummer and this means that men are encouraged to march to their own tunes while women are socialized to support them in the background. What happens when women decide to cut back on this support to pursue their own dreams; an imbalance occurs and this causes chaos in relationships.

Holding On To a Pipe Dream. Betty, 35 years old, worked for over 10 years to support her husband's budding career. While she stood behind him, she started to feel unfulfilled. Even though she was very kind to her husband, and did all the things women do to make a home run smoothly: she held down a full time job, raised the children and made sure the house was quiet and in order when he came home. Her husband treated her with the utmost disrespect but she still hung in there. Throughout his mistreatments, his many affairs, Betty felt that if she loved him more he would see how invaluable she was and he would change. Betty decided to find her

own destiny and slowly she started to change. This did not sit well with her husband, their relationship further deteriorated and they eventually divorced.

At first, she was devastated and fearful because she was not sure if she could do this by herself. For two years, she blossomed and her self-esteem and confidence rose to incredible heights, but deep in her heart she wanted to keep her family intact.

Her family thought that she was crazy for leaving a man with such a good job. She had material things but deep in her heart she longed for her family to be back intact because this is what she learned from her parents when she was growing up. In fact, her family still encourages her to try to bring her family back together. Therefore, when her husband started to wine and dine her, it did not take much for him to persuade her to give him another chance.

Betty did not tell her family about his physical and emotional violence. They only saw the picture that they both painted. Soon, Betty started to think that maybe it was not so bad after all so they remarried about one year later. It did not take long before he started the womanizing, verbal abuse, and intimidation; this time she was not that afraid of him because she got him in trouble during their first marriage. Therefore, he knew he could not get away with the physical abuse but he continued the verbal abuse.

Betty found and attended a Women's Support Group that encouraged her to set goals, make an action plan and work the

plan. She dropped out of the group for a month but when she came back to the group, she proudly announced that she is on the spiritual journey that the group leader spoke so much about. She said that until the group confronted her with the truth, she never looked inside herself; she always contributed all the blame on her husband.

Betty still faces challenges, but the greatest challenge exists within her. It is very difficult for her to identify her wants because she never had to think about them. She has challenges in problem solving because that, too, wasn't anything she ever learned to do. When challenges presented themselves, she just let them pass. Betty often presents herself as the happy, helpful person; but is finding it very difficult to maintain this image while traveling her path. So, the journey continues.

WORKBOOK SECTION

This section is designed to assist you with your self-discovery. If you will take the time to work through the exercise, you will notice a heightened sense of self-knowing and understanding.

The Personal Growth and Development Exercises will most definitely help you uncover the hidden messages that you learned from your youth, the environment, friends, family, broadcast and printed media. Some of this information will be astounding, and some will hit you in a negative sense. Please keep in mind that all experiences work to make you a powerful and spiritual human being.

Rules for Responsible Growth: Very simple reminders of how to bring together all of your emotional and cognitive resources. You probably already know this, but sometimes seeing them organized differently will stimulate a complete new understanding.

Goals Worksheet is a very powerful tool and a very difficult one to do. Individuals who do this exercise have trouble listing all of the things they want because they don't know what they want. This is an opportune time for you to visualize all of your lost dreams, hopes and material comforts that you would like to obtain. Have fun with this. You can have anything that you want.

Distorted Thinking can prevent you from having all of the things that you visualize. As you work through this list, I am sure you will find examples of ways of thinking that have held you captive, have fun breaking shackles of mental bondage.

Self-esteem Evaluation and Tips to Boost Self Esteem are powerful tools that work together. Once you have discovered, to your dismay, that you may need to work on your self-esteem after completing the evaluation, you will need tips on boosting it.

Beliefs and Relationships is a fact sheet that will help you identify your beliefs about your relationship with others. What

you believe and what you feel will affect all of the relationships in your life.

What is the Quality of My Relationships? Your beliefs about your relationships impact how you make friends and what type of people you allow in your life. You may find that you are dealing with the wrong type of people.

The Qualities that I would Like to Develop helps you identify what you want and what you expect from yourself and what you are willing to give to others in order to have a balanced life.

Steps at Resolving Anger this is a powerful fact sheet that merely provides you an idea of specific steps to deal with your anger. In working the various exercises, you perhaps have discovered that you do harbor some deep-seated anger and hostility. You cannot obtain the peace you seek until the anger is resolved and this is an on-going process.

Domestic Violence Information: This is an over-view of what domestic violence is and if you need more specific information, please visit or call your local domestic violence center, like the Women's Center. This information is important because it shows the different types of domestic violence because many people think that it only involves hitting or beating.

Exercises To Assist In Personal Growth And Development

PURCHASE A SPIRAL NOTEBOOK and take a few moments each day to record your comments to the questions below. When you record in your Personal Growth Journal, go to a quiet place with soft music in the background. This is your time, guard it jealously and allow yourself to expand. You have no limitations.

1. What do you want? Move through any uncomfortable feeling and write down exactly what you want. Be specific. This is the first question in any situation and the basic one in life. Are you willing to have everything you want? This may be one of the most difficult tasks you can initially undertake because many people do not know what they want or how even to identify their wants.
2. Do the following exercises until you feel restored:
 - Look at your list everyday, visualize your possession of them, and tell yourself that you can have what you want.
 - Be aware and conscious of your body, your feelings, your reactions and your experience from moment to moment.
 - Pay attention to other people around you; observe them and the surrounding events. Take the fear and mystery out of what you directly observe.

- Look at people, situations, events, and materials and see them for what they actually are, not for what you think they mean or have represented to you in the past.
 - Tell yourself and notice your reaction; “The world I see doesn’t mean anything,” then, “I give meaning to what I see.”
3. Write down all failures you have had with a bearing on purposes, goals, wants, dreams, relationships, etc. Select the purposes, goals, wants.
 4. Reclaim your dreams. It is never too late to dream. In fact, if you lose the ability to dream, hope is lost. Spend some time alone and think about some of the dreams from your youth. Of course, you will find that many are no longer important to you but there are still some cinders in your spirit waiting to be fueled to a burst of energy. Once you have decided to do this, miraculously, the way will come.
 5. Recover your life by recovering your purposes, objectives, intentions, and vision.
 6. Identify any events in your life wherein you felt stopped, diminished, or powerless. Did you as a result or incident shut yourself down and decide to be less than you are? Alternatively, did you decide to make others less so they could not overpower you?

7. Look at what it has cost you to shut down and realize the decisions you made as a result or shutting down and their impact on your life.
8. Who stopped you, forced you, or gave you substitutes for what you really wanted? What have you done to get even, shut down, and get what you want?
9. Write down any thoughts, fears, beliefs, and notions that have to do with you and others having exactly what you/they want.
10. Close your eyes and allow yourself to see, sense, feel yourself in your ideal scene. See yourself having what you want in detail. Allow yourself to “mock it up” in your imagination, envisioning your future experience. Make it real! Do this once or twice a day, as wanted.
11. Write down affirmative statements about your having what you want ten times a day for one week. If any doubts, fears, or misgivings come forth from you, simply write them out in the margin of the page. Then write the affirmative statement again and continue. Remember, you are creating a fresh, and these affirmations may be difficult to keep at first, but keep one.
12. Consider a specific conflict that you are presently experiencing. If you could change it, how would you do so? What is keeping you from having it that way?

13. Whom are you being loyal to in denying yourself the life you want? What are you afraid of losing or being neglected by?
14. List ten ways that you hold yourself back by using inner conflicts.
 - a. How do you control others by holding yourself back?
 - b. What has it cost you to be at war with yourself?
15. Commit to living as you choose. What does your heart tell you that you want?
16. Whom do you feel failed to help? Name them.
17. Whom do you feel you failed to help? Name them.
18. List everything you feel guilty about (include what you wouldn't want anyone to know)
19. Next to each guilt item, write down what you really are angry about, and give yourself permission to feel anger. Your feelings are always appropriate. Forgive yourself for all of it.
20. Observe and write down the ways in which you evoke guilt in others, and then tell them so that they are aware of your games and will support you in giving up guilt as a tool of manipulation and domination.
21. Write down your payoffs in using guilt on others as well as yourself. Observe what guilt costs.
22. Describe in writing what your life would be like without

guilt. Imagine a guiltless life. Picture it and allow yourself to experience it.

23. Write a description of the way your main relationship appears at this time. Describe the relationship or the lack of one in as much detail as possible.
24. Visualize the male and female relationship as both being you and let this relationship become a dialogue with yourself between your feminine and masculine energies. Have them make an agreement to love and take care of each other.
25. Write down your ideal intimate relationship and include everything you desire this relationship to be. Withhold nothing, tell the truth and express your deepest desires and needs.
26. List ten ways you deny your feminine nature. List ten fears you have about allowing yourself to fully express your feminine nature. Do this exercise for your masculine nature as well.
27. List the names of the men of who caused you fear and intimidation.. List the names of the women_ whom caused you fear and intimidation. Look to see if you have repressed your own self-expression and how.
28. Find a safe way to express and release your anger and hurt having to do with men and women (see the exercise on assertiveness).

29. List the feminine and masculine qualities that you are now expressing comfortably.
30. What feelings and emotions do you find difficult to pull up out of yourself and express? Give yourself permission to feel and express them more often until it is natural and easy for you.
- When, where and with who do you find it difficult to ask for what you want and do what you feel like doing?
 - Recall the times in your life when you shut down and made a conscious decision not to feel or express your feelings and needs. Give yourself permission to open up.
 - Visualize yourself as a whole person expressing both your feminine and masculine energies fully and easily with yourself, in your relationships, in your work, and in your self-expressions.

Rules for Responsible Growth

1. **Become aware of yourself.** Ultimately this includes not just being aware of your physical, and mental self, but also your emotions as well even of your unconscious drives and motivations. Ask yourself these questions, where am I going? Is it getting me what I want? If not, what is it getting it?
2. **Take responsibility for your situation:** This means that you must be willing to accept responsibility for the results of your behavior. In other words, if you are not getting what you want, it is probably your fault and only through your action (i.e., by experimenting with different behaviors) are you to bring about different results.
3. **Choose among the alternatives.** What general things do you really want to work on? What qualities do you want to manifest in your life? What specific behaviors do you want to try out?
4. **Look at the possible alternatives.** What other choices of behavior are open to you? What tentative models are more consistent with your values? What are the likely consequences of being more like this or that, of trying on certain new behavior? What is the best thing that could happen? What is the worst thing that could happen?
5. **Affirm your decision.** Using the power of fantasy and belief, imagine yourself manifesting this new behavior in

a variety of situations.

6. **Develop a plan of action.** Map out in detail the specific steps of your plan in the order that you will need them. Use the items listed in your goals worksheet to help you in developing your plan of action. Be very diligent in developing this plan and even more so in sticking to it. It may be difficult at first, but if you persevere, it will pay off.
7. **Act Now!** At some point, you must actually take the risk of “trying on” the new behavior.
8. **Evaluate the outcome.** Evaluate the results of your attempts. What happened? How did you feel? Were the results worth it? If you are willing to add this new behavior or attitude to your repertoire, you have become expanded, you have choices. You have grown.

Goals Worksheet

List 50 things that you would like to achieve, accomplish, or acquire during your lifetime. These things can be personal, financial, materials, etc. List them without regard to whether you think you can get them.

From this list, which ones do you think you can accomplish in 10 years, 5 years, 3 years, and one year.

- Ten year goals:
- Five year goals:
- Three year goals:
- One year goals:

Select the three most important one-year goals:

1. Look at your list. Why are your one-year goals important?
 - a. What are you doing now to work on these goals?
2. What will you have to do different? What habits, attitudes, or associations will you have to alter?
3. What can you do today to start on these goals?
4. Can you identify individuals who can help you?

Distorted Thinking

Most bad feelings come from distorted thinking

1. **Nothing thinking:** All of you look at things in absolute, black-and-white categories.
2. **Overgeneralization:** You view a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3. **Mental Filter:** You dwell on negatives and ignore the positives.
4. **Discounting the positives:** You insist that your accomplishments or positive qualities do not count.
5. **Jumping to conclusions:** You conclude things are bad without any definite evidence.
6. **Mind reading:** You assume that people are reacting negatively to you.
7. **Fortune telling:** You predict that things will turn out badly.
8. **Magnification or minimization:** You blow things way out of proportion or you shrink their importance.
9. **Emotional reasoning:** You reason from how you feel. “I feel like an idiot, so I must be one.” “Should” statements: You criticize yourself or other people with “should” “shouldn’t” “musts”, “ought,” and “have tos.”
10. **Labeling:** Instead of saying, “I made a mistake” you tell yourself, “I’m a jerk” or “a loser.”
11. **Blame:** You blame yourself for something you were not

entirely responsible for, or you blame other people and overlook ways that you contributed to a problem.

It was emphasized in the beginning of this book that your perception of events gives meaning to you and form your worldview or reality. Events have no meaning in and of themselves, and if you view events with a distorted view, negative feelings will evolve.

The cycle is thoughts – evokes feelings – evokes action – evokes habits. You cannot find the peace you seek as long as your thinking is distorted.

Feelings

Feelings are neither right nor wrong. They just are. How these feelings are expressed is a matter of individual responsibility.

You are encouraged to write down your bottled-up feelings caused by your distorted thinking. To be able to express the contained feelings is a matter of good mental health.

- In the above box, write the feelings you experience most often.
- Circle the feelings you express freely with your family and friends.
- Put a box around the remaining feelings. These you keep bottled inside.
- What do you think would happen if you were to express any of these feelings to another person?

Check Your Self-Esteem - Barksdale Self-Esteem Evaluation No. 69

(This is an EVALUATION, not a test)

This Self-Esteem Evaluation measures your current level of self-esteem, your Self-Esteem Index (SEI), and serves as a gauge of your progress in achieving sound self-esteem. It is important to clearly understand all statements and be completely honest in your scoring if you are to obtain a valid SEI. It is essential that you answer these statements according to how you actually feel or behave, instead of how you think you "should" feel or behave.

Score as follows (each score shows how true or the amount of time you believe that statement is true for you):

0 = not at all true for me

1 = somewhat true or true only part of the time

2 = fairly true or true about half the time

3 = mainly true or true most of the time

4 = true all the time

Scoring = 0 1 2 3 4 Not True True	Self-Esteem Statements
0 1 2 3 4	1. I don't feel anyone else is better than I am.
0 1 2 3 4	2. I am free of shame, blame, and guilt.
0 1 2 3 4	3. I am a happy, carefree person.
0 1 2 3 4	4. I have no need to prove I am as good as or better than others.

0 1 2 3 4	5. I do not have a strong need for people to pay attention to me or like what I do.
0 1 2 3 4	6. Losing does not upset me or make me feel "less than" others.
0 1 2 3 4	7. I feel warm and loving toward myself.
0 1 2 3 4	8. I do not feel others are better than I am because they can do things better, have more money, or are more popular.
0 1 2 3 4	9. I am at ease with strangers and make friends easily.
0 1 2 3 4	10. I speak up for my own ideas, likes, and dislikes.
0 1 2 3 4	11. I am not hurt by others' opinions or attitudes.
0 1 2 3 4	12. I do not need praise to feel good about myself.
0 1 2 3 4	13. I feel good about others' good luck and winning.
0 1 2 3 4	14. I do not find fault with my family, friends, or others.
0 1 2 3 4	15. I do not feel I must always please others.
0 1 2 3 4	16. I am open and honest, and not afraid of letting people see my real self.
0 1 2 3 4	17. I am friendly, thoughtful, and generous toward others.

0 1 2 3 4	18. I do not blame others for my problems and mistakes.
0 1 2 3 4	19. I enjoy being alone with myself.
0 1 2 3 4	20. I accept compliments and gifts without feeling uncomfortable or needing to give something in return.
0 1 2 3 4	21. I admit my mistakes and defeats without feeling ashamed or "less than."
0 1 2 3 4	22. I feel no need to defend what I think, say, or do.
0 1 2 3 4	23. I do not need others to agree with me or tell me I'm right. .
0 1 2 3 4	24. I do not brag about myself, what I have done, or what my family has or does. .
0 1 2 3 4	25. I do not feel "put down" when criticized by my friends or others. .

The possible range of your Self-Esteem Index is from 0 to 100. Sound self-esteem is indicated by an SEI of 95 or more. Good self-esteem is indicated by a score of 90 to 94. Experience shows that any score under 90 is a disadvantage, a score of 75 or less is a serious handicap, and an SEI of 50 or less indicates a really crippling lack of self-esteem. You can raise your self-esteem by working the Barksdale Self-Esteem Program.

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Tips To Help You Boost Your Self Esteem

1. Accept who you are -- your strengths and your weaknesses, your feelings and emotions. This doesn't mean we don't have to work on things.
2. Forgive yourself for mistakes, and, instead, see them as opportunities to learn and grow.
3. Take alone time, regularly, to read, play, garden, write... basically to nurture yourself. Develop your talents and abilities.
4. Trust your thoughts and intuitions. Do what makes you feel
5. happy and fulfilled.
6. Take pride in your achievements, big and small.
7. Set realistic goals for yourself.
8. Replace negative self-talk with positive, kind, loving statements. When something goes wrong, instead of blaming yourself, that you must have done something wrong or that there's something wrong with you, learn to accept that it may not have anything to do with you.
9. Don't depend on others to make you feel good. Know and reflect on **who you are** in the event of a rejection.
10. Exercise, eat right, and get plenty of sleep. Being exhausted and out of shape can leave you feeling more vulnerable to insecurity, anxiety, and self-dissatisfaction.

11. Surround yourself with positive, healthy people.
12. Get involved in projects which help other people or the environment: Habitat for Humanity, Literacy programs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters.
13. Seek counseling or self-help/support groups. You may find these very helpful and/or comforting.
14. Most importantly, make conscious, healthy choices. The "choice to choose" is the most important choice you will ever make. **Make choices that leave you better rather than worse off.** Make choices that synchronize your beliefs, values, and actions. Be honest.

Also, if you cannot control comparing yourself to others, why not try comparing yourself with **yourself**, instead? Alternatively, how about focusing on only the similarities with others? This shift in focus can help you realize that they have imperfections, too, just like everyone else, and that their flaws do not reflect your own self-worth or value as an individual.

Overall, this self-realization process (getting to know yourself better) may help you figure out what the real problems are behind your low self-esteem. Alice also hopes you will take steps to find assistance through support groups or therapy. Take care, and be gentle with yourself.

Beliefs And Relationships

What you believe about yourself as an individual affects your relationships with others. These beliefs guide your interactions and determine the depth of intimacy you will risk.

I believe in my family, I am

I believe in my friendships, I am

I believe in my workplace, I am

I believe in my spiritual realm, I am

I believe in my relationships, I am

What you believe about yourself will guide your thoughts, feelings, and actions in regards to yourself and others. This includes the positive or negative roles relationships play in your life.

Are the individuals in your relationships nurturing, promoting and caring or negative, critical and devaluing?

Gaining Insight Into Self-Talk

Complete The Unfinished Statements Below:

Example:

I tell myself I am.....*honest*

I tell myself I am.....*organized*

I tell myself I am.....*fat*

I tell myself I am....
I tell myself I am...
I tell myself I am
I feel fearful and say....
I look at other’s creativity and say...
I look at my own creativity and say...
I complete a difficult task and say....
I look at my limitations and say....
I look at my talents and say...
I am capable of doing. ...

What Is The Quality Of My Relationships?

List the 10 most significant relationships that influence your life in your day-to-day actions, in a positive way.	Place N or C depending on whether you find this relationship most often nurturing and positive (N) or Critical and devaluing (C)	Place M or R depending on whether in this relationship you most often wear a Mask (M), pretending to be someone you are not, or allow your (R) self to come forward	Note approximately how many hours per week you spend with each person.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Are you spending quality time with people who are nurturing, positive and caring? Do significant relationships reinforce you, and allow the real you to be present? Alternatively, are you spending more time with individuals who are critical and devaluing, people who ask you to wear a mask and who they want you to be instead of your real self?

The Quality That I Would Most Like To Develop Is: Self Care

My Affirmation is: What I Think, Feel, And Need Are Most Important TO Me

SELF-FIRST

Actions I will take to achieve:

1. Say what you think, feel and don't be concerned about how someone perceives you and/or what they do in response.
2. Don't overextend in relationships. Don't give more than someone is giving.
3. Don't put others before you.
4. Get rid of and/or set boundaries on emotionally and physically toxic relationships
5. Don't discount and/or second guess your own thoughts and feelings. You have them for a reason.
6. Don't let others negatively impact your life (career, activities, dreams, etc). Set boundaries.
7. Don't assume responsibility for other people's problems. Let them solve their own.
8. Set limits on the amount of garbage you listen to.
9. Dream about your future and what you want.
10. Don't discount your values and beliefs
11. Be Selfish

- 12) Watch and believe people's behaviors versus their words.
- 13) Rock the boat if necessary
- 14) Eat well; (6-8 oz. H₂O; exercise 3-5 times a week, etc)
- 15) Don't enter into one sided relationships and/or relationship with individuals who do not add to your life and/or emotionally and physically unavailable. (I.e. not there for you, alcoholic, unemployed, etc. or others who you feel you have to rescue).
- 16) Don't do things that you do not want to do because someone wants you to and/or to influence them etc.
- 17) Don't over explain and defend you thoughts and feelings just state them.
- 18) Stop being concerned about what others think or say about you. If they are talking about you they are giving someone else a break.
- 19) Don't settle for less than you want.

Format for setting goals for Life Plan out of Life Makeovers by Cheryl Richardson, 2000, Chapter 2.

Basic Steps To Resolving Anger

1. *Consider* the mistaken attitudes and convictions that predispose us to being excessively angry in the first place.
2. Once these mistakes have been corrected, we will be less likely to become extremely angry than we were in the past.
3. *Identify* factors from your childhood that prevent you from expressing your anger as appropriately as you otherwise might. Factors like fear and denial are impediments to the effective and appropriate management of your anger toward others. They can be removed so that your suppressed anger will not compound itself inside you.
4. *Learn* appropriate modes of expressing your legitimate anger at others so that you can begin to cope more effectively with anger-provoking situations as they arise in your personal relationships.
5. *Heal* the anger wounds that may have been left by the potentially devastating emotional impact of anger. If we do not complete this mopping up step, we will cling to the resentment of having been done wrong and will carry the festering residue of our anger and rage in our hearts. One of the most effective means of

giving ourselves immediate relief from anger in our personal relationships is to forgive others.

Ultimately, if we want to experience peace, we must rid ourselves of resentment, for resentment, it has been said, is the only acid that eats its own container. Better to love one's enemies and do well to those who hate you.

Domestic Violence Information

What is Abuse?

- **Physical** - includes pushing, shoving, slapping, hitting with fist, kicking, choking, grabbing, pinching, pulling hair, or threatening with weapons.
- **Sexual** - includes forced sex with the threat of violence, sex after violence has occurred, or the use of objects or damaging acts without the woman's consent.
- **Psychological/Emotional** - includes brainwashing, control of the woman's freedom to come and go when she chooses.
- **Destruction** of property or pets.

Why Women Stay

Situational Factors

- **Economic dependence.** How can she support herself and the children?
- **Fear** of greater physical danger to herself and her children if they try to leave.
- **Fear** of being hunted down and suffering a worse beating than before.
- **Survival.** Fear that her partner will follow her and kill her if she leaves, often based on real threats by her partner.

- **Fear** of emotional damage to the children.
- **Fear** of losing custody of the children, often based on her partner's remarks.
- **Lack** of alternative housing; she has nowhere else to go.
- **Lack** of job skills; she might not be able to get a job.
- **Social isolation** resulting in lack of support from family and friends.
- **Social isolation** resulting in lack of information about her alternatives.
- **Lack of understanding** from family, friends, police, ministers, etc.
- **Negative responses** from community, police, courts, social workers, etc.
- **Fear** of involvement in the court process; she may have had bad experiences before.
- **Fear** of the unknown. "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't."
- **Fear** and ambivalence over making formidable life changes.
- **"Acceptable violence"**. The violence escalates slowly over time. Living with constant abuse numbs the victim so that she is unable to recognize that she is involved in a set pattern of abuse.
- **Ties to the community**. The children would have to leave their school; she would have to leave all her

friends and neighbors behind, etc. For some women it would be like being in the Witness Protection program--she could never have any contact with her old life.

- **Ties** to her home and belongings.
- **Family pressure;** because Mom always said, "I told you it wouldn't work out." or "You made your bed, now you sleep in it".
- **Fear** of her abuser doing something to get her (report her to welfare, call her workplace, etc.)
- **Unable to use resources** because of how they are provided (language problems, disability, homophobia, etc.)
- **Time** needed to plan and prepare to leave.

Types of Domestic Abuse

- **Physical:** slapping, pushing, hitting, kicking, biting, etc.
- **Emotional:** name-calling, putting down, insults, etc.
- **Sexual:** being forced into sexual contact
- **Threats:** "If you...I'll kill you!"
- **Intimidation:** gestures, looks, smashing things
- **Isolation:** being kept from seeing or talking to others, not allowed to go out.

- **Economic:** being given an allowance, not allowed to have a job.

Warning Signs

- Shows guilt, ambivalence, and fear over living conditions.
- Feels isolated and untrusting of others, even though she may be involved in the community.
- Is emotionally and economically dependent.
- Has a poor self-concept (this may not have been true BEFORE the relationship).
- Has observed other women in her family being abused or may have been abused as a child.
- Feels angry, embarrassed, and ashamed.
- Is fearful of being insane.
- Has learned to feel helpless and feels powerless.
- Has unexplained injuries that may go untreated.

The abusive man:

- Shows extreme jealousy and wants to keep the woman isolated. Has an inability to cope with stress and shows a lack of impulse control. (This may not necessarily appear outside the home)

Final Check Up

Congratulations! You have worked your way to the end of this workbook. Now, take a few more minutes and complete the personal evaluations again. This will determine if this book has helped you.

If you really want to change and make your life more peaceful, reading this book once will not do the trick. Find time each day to work an exercise in this book; review it and really concentrate on your answers. No one will see this book unless you show it to him or her.

If you follow the guidelines in this book, your spiritual, personal, and emotional development will improve. You must remember that a wise person knows when to seek professional help. This book is merely a guide, not a cure-all. Nothing can take the place of professional assistance. If you cannot gain control of your thought life by yourself - there is no shame in seeking help.