



D DONNA HIGHFILL

WAYS TO SHINE

MOTIVATIONAL MESSAGES - BOOK ONE

DONNA HIGHFILL

Gratitude & Grief

There is a way to not only survive during times like these but thrive. To look at what matters and cut out what doesn't. To live cliches like "stop and smell the roses," and realize what incredible truth there is in that phrase.

Right now, we're scared. And when our brain is dealing with fear, it has little capacity to handle much else.

When change comes in an unexpected, frightening way, it can seem overwhelming. Work is different, family life is different, our daily schedules are different. In these times, energy can easily be sapped by fear.

We miss hugs, and kisses, and smiles that aren't hidden by masks. We miss going to concerts and movies and sporting events where large crowds come together in a beautiful, energetic way.

But even this situation can offer a gift – a time to appreciate each other, and to remember what really matters.

It's been proven that writing down 3 things a day for which we are grateful raises our happiness level.

So, today, think of one person for whom you are grateful. Then send them a quick note to let them know that you appreciate them. That action will make their day and make you happier. That's known as a win/win!

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it. – William Arthur Ward

Nature Can't Be Wrong

Having grown up in Southern California, I am always fascinated by the changing of the seasons. In the fall, trees drop their leaves without regret or a tendency we sometimes have to hoard our stuff. In the winter they stand there, majestic and bleak, patiently awaiting their awakening. And in Spring, they sprout buds without any fanfare or need for recognition.

There is something in the way that nature moves humbly into each season without judgment or concern. Of course, if trees could talk, I might hear differently.

I think the advantage comes from the fact that and the way that trees don't tell themselves scary stories, like "All of my leaves have fallen. I'll never get them back. Things will never be the same again." They don't double over. Stretching their branches in an attempt to pick those leaves up and put them back.

But sometimes we do tell ourselves scary stories; we anticipate the worst. We are sure that we've lost something forever, and those fearful stories keep us from recognizing the beauty to be found in even the darkest of days.

Perhaps now is a time to get quiet and observe how nature refuses to accept any season as eternal. Spring is here. I spent five minutes today looking at the buds on my crepe myrtle tree which a few weeks ago I was sure wouldn't make it. In those green, tiny buds, I found hope.

Leave your scary stories and pay attention to all of the ways that the earth rejuvenates itself and remember – we are made of the same stuff as the stars. We, too, will heal.

And the people sat still, and the earth healed and Spring came, flowers bloomed, brightening hope and beauty back into the world Jennifer Wagner

Unhealthy Times Can Make You Stronger

At the age of nine, I was in and out of hospitals and kept at home for most of a year due to illness. I used to stand at the window every morning, watching other kids laughing and lugging their books down the street and yearned to be one of them.

When I finally returned to school in the Spring, everything felt different. Some kids whispered when I walked in the classroom, looking shockingly pale and uncomfortable. I was put in a class that had none of my old friends and a teacher who made me go to the board to do math problems that my tutor had failed to prepare me for. I was devastated.

I went to the Principal and told him I wanted to go home. He told me that I seemed like a brave young girl, and that while this was going to be hard, he knew I was up to it. I told him that I would stay, but I wanted a different teacher. We negotiated, I told him that God had said I should have a better teacher, and he gave in.

But it was still the same – my old best friend had found a new best friend, and my work was a step behind everyone else's.

There were still many days when I wanted to go home, but I stayed. And I grew stronger. More resilient. More courageous. And more compassionate. I found new friends and caught up academically.

Right now, we are stretched beyond the imaginable, and most of us are being incredibly brave. But, if we're honest, we want to return to the familiar. We want our work routines, social interactions, and predictable holidays. But I believe we are brave. And I think we will come out of this stronger. More resilient. More courageous. And more compassionate.

Home might be where the heart is, but difficulty is where the growth is.

Life is not shutting us down, it is waking us up. This is not pulling us apart, it is pulling us together. This is our moment. I am not fearful. I am determined."

Dr. Amy Acton

Spin to Win

One of the first lessons a ballerina is taught is to find a focal spot when spinning, a place that eyes can find each time around to keep from getting dizzy. I had a friend who taught me this at a children's birthday party so I would quit falling down when being spun during Pin the Tail on the Donkey.

Work is not so different from ballet. When we're taking everything in, and trying to do it all, we spin out of control. We forget to do what's most important, our brain constantly focused on the latest ding of our phone or email on the computer.

And at the end of the day, we wonder why we didn't get more done. We can't confuse being busy with accomplishment.

So, every day, ask yourself:

- *What is the most important thing I will do today?*

Make that thing your focal point. And when emails start piling up, and Facebook dings with someone's family photo, and jabber lets you know a colleague has a question . . . find that touchstone.

Remember what's most important. Bring yourself back to the present. Then prioritize everything else accordingly.

Do what matters most, and the other dizzying tasks will take care of themselves.

Starve your Distractions.

Feed your focus.

Crisis and Caterpillars

Life is perception. That sounds ridiculous in light of life's struggles right now, but it's true. For some people, obstacles cloud their happiness and zap their souls. But then there are those who use obstacles to build their determination and reignite their hearts.

So many of us think that beauty comes only from happiness. Did you know that when caterpillars form the chrysalis around them, their bodies almost completely melt before morphing into a butterfly? It seems so cruel, and yet, from it, comes something spectacularly beautiful.

Hardships can hammer away at what needs to be shed and reveal the light within us.

So, if there are some days when you feel like you're melting down a little, think about how you might learn and change and morph during this period. Recognize how the entire world is experiencing something together and, for the first time in a long time, we're supporting each other. We're applauding doctors and nurses as they leave their shifts in New York City. Our hearts are breaking for people we don't even know. We're calling our loved ones more and valuing our micromoments.

My friend's granddaughter had a birthday party comprised of relatives driving by with signs and balloons, honking their horns and singing happy birthday from their cars. While the adults were worried that the experience would be disappointing for the child, she told her mom it was the best birthday EVER.

We don't have to say this is a situation we'd choose, but we can choose our reaction to it. We can be determined to come out the other side. And while we're coming together to find solutions, let's also seek the beautiful moments. Let's create those moments. Life is perception. Let's adjust ours.

***We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it
has gone through to achieve that beauty.***

Maya Angelou

Laughter Rules

I'll never forget the first time I made a group of people laugh. My dad, a Baptist minister, was asking the congregation to share things for which they were grateful. So, I raised my six-year-old hand, and Dad, hesitantly, called on me.

I stood and said, "I am grateful that I have a mom who sews Easter dresses for me and my sister, even though she hasn't made me one yet." The entire congregation laughed, and my mom got enough thread and material in the mail over the next couple of weeks to sew three new dresses. But, more importantly, I got to witness the transformational power of laughter.

I've been in love with laughter ever since. Laughter isn't just a reaction; it releases endorphins that dance right down our spines and makes us feel better. It strengthens our immune system, boosts our mood, diminishes pain, and protects us from the damaging effects of stress. Nothing works faster to bring our bodies back into balance. It inspires us, keeps us connected to others, and helps us stay alert.

Laughter even helps us live longer and improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow which protects us against cardiovascular problems.

So, next time you're stressing out, watch something funny. Laugh loud, and long, and share your laughter with others.

Because in that moment, you'll add a little light to this very tired world. To start your laughter, watch this (there is an ad, but it's worth it):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iFT3eXHLNo>

A day without laughter is a day wasted.

Charlie Chaplin

Controllables & Uncontrollables

Today I want you to remember something - you're simply the best.

You are living in a crisis while holding your family together. You're grieving the loss of the world you've known while finding new ways to build a better future. You are teaching your children and taking care of your parents and reaching out to friends and cleaning the house.

The morning routine you've followed for years is disrupted, and yet you wake up every morning and go to work in your living room. You are mentally tired some days, and yet you keep serving your customers. You go to the grocery store and are met with masks and gloves, and you smile at a stranger.

You are strong and brave and you amaze me.

Today, I want you to be kind to yourself. Sit down, pat yourself on the back, laugh like a maniac or cry like a baby, but give yourself a little time. Why? Because you deserve it.

Then try this little exercise:

- Take a pen and piece of paper and divide the page into "Controllables" and "Uncontrollables."
- List all of the things you fear. If you can't control the thing you fear, put it in the "Uncontrollable" column.
- If it's something you can impact, put it in the "Controllables" column.
- Once you write everything down, tear the page down the middle. Scrunch up the "Uncontrollables" column and throw it into the trash. You have to let the Uncontrollables go.

Then get to work on the Controllables.

And remind yourself that you are a force to be reckoned with, because despite all of your fears you will get through another day and positively impact others along the way.

You're simply the best.

You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think..

Christopher Robin

No Stopping Love

Yesterday, I spent WAY too much time yearning for what used to be. I wanted to go out to dinner with my son and have my daughter fly home for her birthday.

I wanted to hug my neighbor and go shopping with my sister. I was a bumner to be around.

Then my son called and we talked about the NFL draft (seriously, I love football), and my daughter and I planned a House Party for her birthday. We'll send her Georgetown Cupcakes (the best cupcakes EVER) and will receive the same selection to ourselves and we'll eat them together while playing virtual games.

And I will lose because I suck at games in general, and the kids will laugh and Neil will encourage me and the dog will grab a cupcake and we'll laugh again.

Love doesn't require that we be in the same room, or even in the same state. It doesn't require that we spend a lot of money or go to a certain event.

Love is the knowledge that we know each other, irritate each other, have seen each other cry and have been furious with each other. But, despite it all, we still want to hang out. Even if by video.

No matter what else is lost in this crazy experience, love can't be stopped. And that is a powerful revelation

**The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even heard,
but must be felt with the heart.**

Helen Keller

Can't Never Could

The only truly unreasonable act is to believe that this moment in time is as good as it's going to get.

Can you imagine if a baby were born and the parents said, "Well, this is all it can do. Eat. Drink. Sleep. This is as good as it gets." There would be no effort in teaching; there would be no cheering when attempting to walk; there would be no glory in the falling down and the getting back up.

Without the unreasonable person believing they can make things better, everything gets worse. Ideas deteriorate. We fall down and stay down. Nobody walks. Nobody runs. Nobody climbs mountains. Nobody tries.

As I child, my impatience created quite the quitter. I'd throw the Parcheesi board when losing, and yell "I can't do it" when tripping over a jump rope for the third time. One day, I threw quite the tantrum in front of my grandmother when my hopscotch rock kept bouncing out of the square. "I can't do it!" I cried. My grandmother calmly responded, "Can't never could." And she was right.

It is our time to believe that what we are facing today is not all there is – it is merely a message, a path to improvement, a time to learn. As we struggle through it, we will stumble and want to quit. But we won't, because we have friends and family cheering for us, refusing to accept that this is as good as it gets. That, my friends, is why the battle we're facing is a powerful thing. Because it will break down our current belief systems, shake them up, and rewire them in a way that will ignite our determination and transform the world.

So, like all of the babies in the world learning to walk, let's stand on our wobbly legs and keep trying together. Watch a baby attempt to walk and count how many times they fall before they walk. But notice – babies don't give up. Why? Because they know that crawling is not as good as it's going to get.

You may not be responsible for getting knocked down. But you're certainly responsible for getting back up.

Wally Amos

Grief, Fear & Courage

We are in a cycle of grief for so many reasons right now. And, in the process of grief, the hardest step is sometimes *acceptance*.

When my husband was first diagnosed with cancer, the two of us entered the area for his first chemo treatment with the look of consultants who had accidentally walked into the wrong room.

We entered an environment of masks and nurses, IV's and doctors, while holding our briefcases like armor. We were busy people. We had companies to run. We weren't supposed to be there.

By the fourth treatment, we put the briefcases down. We paid more attention to those around us and met people like the teacher who came in with no hair and a mask, then proceeded to tell us she had just left a workout and looked forward to getting to school once her morning chemo was complete.

By the sixth treatment, we began to feel the honor of being around the people in Massey Cancer Center. We were touched by their caring, amazed by their strength, and saved by their skills.

We were not in the wrong place physically; we were in the wrong place mentally. We needed to join these other warriors and recognize illness as the current state. Finally, we understood that this was a reality we needed to accept, face, and get through together.

Sometimes, we need to confront the toughest of our situations with courage and strength so we can plan how to get through it. Because without acceptance, we're stuck. And without action, we have only fear. But once we can face the truth about where we are, healing begins.

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.

C.S. Lewis

Find a Better Way

When I was young, I remember playing cowboys with my brother and his best friend. Each one of them got to be the town Sherriff at least once. When it was my turn, they told me girls couldn't be a Sherriff. That was the law.

That night I was heart-broken and a little furious when I asked my dad why I couldn't be the Sherriff. He said it sounded like a problem that I needed to fix.

The next day, I asked my dad who would give a Sherriff his job. He told me it would probably be a judge. I wasn't positive what a judge was, but I immediately asked my dad to be the judge of my brother's imaginary town. He accepted the offer. Then I asked him to give me the job as Sherriff for the day, which he did. In front of the boys.

That day, I became the Sherriff because I refused to accept that "this is how it's always been." And I found a sponsor who challenged me to change the game.

Right now, it's our time to find a better way. To respect our collective intelligence as a world team and refuse to do things just because they've always been done that way before. It's time for each one of us to constantly ask, "How can we make this better?"

It's our responsibility to strive, every single day, for improvement. Even if it requires more work. Even if it makes us uncomfortable. Even if we feel momentarily lost. Because in challenging ourselves, we become innovators, creators, builders, and difference-makers.

And isn't that what we're on this earth to be?

Innovation is seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.

Dr. Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

Remembering Our Heroes

To get through difficulties, it helps to tap into the very best part of ourselves by remembering those who were our heroes when we were young. I had two – my grandmother, and Pippi Longstocking. Even though one was real and the other fictional, they had a similar characteristic. They were both brave.

In spite of the fact that her mom had died and her dad was missing, Pippi set off on lone adventures around the world. My grandmother, also a world traveler and missionary, lost her husband at 53 years of age and had no income or driving ability. So, she learned how to drive, walked into a church, told them they needed her, and was hired.

When I was a young adult, Grand mom told me that she cried herself to sleep for a year after granddad died, but I never knew it. For me, she was the fun grandma who put my brother, sister and I in her backseat and honked the horn all the way to the ice cream store yelling, “Get out of our way – woohooo!” To me she was pure joy.

Today, look back at your childhood. Who were your heroes? And what characteristic did you most admire about them? Take a moment, look inward, and see if you can find that characteristic within yourself.

Then use that strength to help others right now. If you are compassionate, listen to people’s fears. If you are courageous, encourage others. If you are funny, make them laugh. Serve others with your strength and be the hero in your own story.

Be the kind of person your heroes would be proud of.

Maintaining Focus

Your mind has a job that it takes seriously – seeking out more of anything upon which you are focusing. If you spend your day thinking about how frightening a situation is, the brain will go on a Google-like search and help you notice every fearful story. Why? Because its job is to serve you. You throw a thought bone, and your brain chases it fiercely.

So, how do you keep things more positive during a time of unknowns? Here are two ideas to raise your levels of happiness:

1. End every day by writing down three points of gratitude. This has been a proven method to set our focus in a place that creates peace and joy.
2. Pay attention to what you're feeding your brain – are you watching news constantly? Listening to that Eeyore-like relative? Or are you watching a show that makes you laugh? And talking to that positive friend?

Saturday night, my husband and I watched “Singin’ in the Rain” With Gene Kelly. Guess what I woke up singing the next morning? A happy tune that made me smile.

Last night I watched a show about a serial killer. I did NOT wake up singing.

The brain's job is to confirm whatever bias you feed it. Wherever you place your focus, it delivers more of that to you.

You can keep in touch with current events, but don't ask your brain to find every single person who is sick and every statistic that confirms your fear. Instead, focus on gratitude. Ask your brain to find some happiness. To help you out, here's a little “Singin’ in the Rain”: <https://youtu.be/B0asbGJbLKc>



A Time to Dance

I was walking through my neighborhood this weekend and noticed a little girl dancing in her yard. She didn't know that anyone was watching, and I don't think she would have cared. There was no music, and no audience, but she had her arms thrown wide and was spinning in circles like Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music."

Then she started to do something that looked like a two-step, skipping around her patio. I stood and watched, along with a few birds on the house above her. I heard once that if you want to attract nature, you should whistle or sing or dance. It apparently works.

When she finished, she threw herself into the grass and rolled her way to the fence.

Her brief but buoyant moment made my soul a little lighter, and as I walked ahead, I realized that joy is still available, we just have to find it in the small things – and throw ourselves into it. Even if only for a moment.

In case you were wondering, I didn't go home and roll in the grass since we have a large puppy who likes to leave things there that I would NOT want to roll through, but I did put on some Christina Aguilera and danced my way around the house. I might have pulled a small ligament in my knee, but my soul totally appreciated it.

So, today, no matter what happens, I hope you give something joyful your temporary but full attention. And, if you decide to dance, feel free to send me a video. I'd love to see it. 😊

P.S. If you want to listen to one of my favorite songs, put your cursor on the picture below and ctrl+click.



Just the Stories, Ma'am

There was an old show called "Dragnet," in which detective Jack Webb was famous for wanting, "just the facts, ma'am." But the truth is that the brain doesn't stop at the facts. Instead, your left brain takes in the facts and ties them together in the form of a story. Our brains are literally hardwired for a good tale. It's like pixels coming together to form a picture – we can't see it until there is a pattern we can recognize.

There's a story at the heart of everything. What's amazing is the fact that a hundred people are experiencing the same thing right now, yet telling themselves a hundred different stories. And we all believe our story to be true. And when we accept our story as true, it becomes a belief. And once it is a belief, it impacts our actions.

So, now is the time to challenge yourself by asking:

- What is the story I am telling myself? Is it positive or negative? *E.g. This is the worst time in history vs. This is a great time to learn and improve our lives.*
- What are the actions resulting from my story? *E.g. I am exhausted before getting out of bed vs. I am reenergized thinking about building a better future.*
- How does the narrative change the way I'll deal with tomorrow? *E.g. I will eat too much junk food to handle my sadness vs. I will exercise so I'm ready to drive change.*

Remember - your brain believes your stories, and your heart accepts your beliefs, and your body reacts as if the story is actually happening. I realize that everything isn't roses and unicorns. But our stories can take us way beyond the facts, in both good and negative ways. Your story can give you hope or drag you down.

So, today, remember:

Your life is the live play based upon the stories you tell yourself. Make sure those stories are worthy of a life well-lived.

Breaking the Ties that Bind

In Jonathan Swift's Book, "Gulliver's Travels," there is a scene where Gulliver has washed ashore after a shipwreck and finds himself the prisoner of tiny people, less than 6 inches tall, who are inhabitants of the island country of Lilliput. He is tied down by ropes, and although substantially larger than the Lilliputians, he is still held captive. He is faced with a new, threatening situation that has him bound by fear.

We feel you, Gulliver. We're kind of there ourselves. So, how do we break out of the thoughts that tether us to inaction?

First, we find an idea upon which we can act. We make the uncontrollable a little more controllable. To do this, we each have to break the messages that prevent us from speaking up:

My manager won't like this idea.

I feel like people are going to find out I'm not worthy of this job.

I don't want to put myself out there.

A million other people have this idea.

The best idea in the universe means nothing if it's not put into action. Sometimes we have to just use our fear of failure to propel us forward. Take a chance, put the idea out there, start that blog, lose that weight, gain that intellect, get that degree. Or, just throw a single idea into a conversation to serve as kindling and start a conversational fire.

An idea or concept gains life when we move and make it a reality. So, this week, at least one time, say something not being said. Challenge conventional thinking. In a time of pulling back, play big.

Because I believe our deepest fear is not that our idea is too small, but that it could be an idea that changes everything.

If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said 'faster horses

. . .
-- Henry Ford

Good Morning,

At 21 years of age, I spent a summer with my sister and her husband, who were serving at Camp Pendleton, San Diego. Part of my “rent” included running every day with my brother-in-law, because that’s what Marines did during their time-off. Our run included 5 miles in foothills, and a one-mile sand mountain at the end of each run.

I would anticipate my brother-in-law getting home, throwing on his running gear, and telling me to get off the couch. I would sit there, thinking about the distance I was going to have to run, with my feet sinking an inch into sand every step of the last mile.

When I would try to tell him that I just couldn’t do it, my brother-in-law would say, “All you have to do is get off the couch and put on your running shoes.” Then, once outside, he would say, “All you have to do is put one foot in front of the other. Listen to your breath. Don’t think about the distance.” And, before I knew it, I was at the top of that sand mountain.

My greatest achievement was when I ran up the last mile with four Marines, and Brad looked at me and said, “Can you do it again?” I said yes, and all of us ran down the sand mountain to start again. I made it a second time to the top of that mountain. One Marine didn’t. I’m sure he was humiliated for this the rest of his life, but I was ecstatic.

Here’s the truth – right now, I’m tired. I think we all are. We’re trying to stay energized, but we’re looking down the road, exhausted by the sheer length of it. Maybe, just maybe, all we need to do is get out of bed and put on our clothes. Then go upstairs to the computer. Eat some lunch. Do good work. Push ourselves to exercise. Reach out to people we haven’t talked to in a while.

We can look at the beauty around us, spend time with those we love, and make a difference at work. Every day we must remind ourselves that our present has all the components of greatness in it.

Make incremental progress. change comes not by the yard, but by the inch.
Rick Pitino

My Friend Fear

I think maybe we have misunderstood *fear*. We assume it is a thing to overcome, an enemy of ours, a bully we need to avoid. What if *fear* is, in fact, a potential friend?

My first piano recital (one of one) immediately created in me an absolute fear of failure. I practiced my music for months. My piano teacher was very pleased with my progress, but the night I got in the car to go to a venue with red carpet and a baby grand piano felt terrifying. I told my mother I was sick. She told me I could get sick after the recital. I told her that I had two dollars in my wallet, and they were all hers if we turned the car around. She found that funny. I was deadly serious.

We walked into the small concert area and I saw other parents seated. I would have an audience. My heart pounded and I hated my mother instantly for making me do this. The first three students played their selections, and it went well. I was relaxing. Then Miss Holden announced, "And now, playing 'To a Wild Rose,' is Miss Donna Strother." I stood up, but my legs felt weak. I prayed that I would faint (something my sister did on command whenever she wanted to get out of church), but my body would not comply. There was no escape, so I sat on the bench and began to play. Before I knew it, it was over . . .with no mistakes. The crowd applauded, and fear dissolved into absolute joy.

Maybe *fear* is the catalyst to better performance. If my mom had allowed me to miss that recital, I would have gone back home with my *fear* intact, without an outlet through which it could release its energy. I would have taken fear home with me, believing that it was better to retreat rather than courageously surge ahead.

Fear is best when used to help you take a scary step forward, and worst when allowed to sit, swirling its stories and conjuring up monsters. So, the next time you feel *fear*, thank it for being there. Then take action and watch that fear turn into you very dearest friend.

**When a resolute young fellow steps up to the great bully, the world, and takes him boldly by the beard, he is often surprised to find it comes off in his hand, and that it was only tied on to scare away the timid adventurers.
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Change

*Change is not a feeling,
Nor is it a thought,
Change is a sudden shift
From an idea that we've been taught.*

*Our ideas next become beliefs
And we stamp them on our heart,
Until the day that our belief
Seems to be torn apart.*

*We fight the change because it hurts
To release what we have known,
And as we try it all seems worse -
Our fearfulness has grown.*

*But if we stay within the fear
And open rigid minds,
And listen to another's view -
Peace might be what we find.*

*The unknown is sometimes scary dark
And whispers, "Don't go there,"
But go, we must, together . . .
Why? Because we care.*

*So hold on to each other,
Because that's the only way
We'll make this change a journey
That leads to a better day.*

Donna

A woman with long blonde hair is sitting on the edge of a large, dark rock. She is wearing a dark, short-sleeved top and dark leggings. She is looking out over a vast, hazy valley. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent yellow filter. The text is centered in the lower half of the image.

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