

# Keeping It Together When Life Throws You *Curves*



*A Major League Wife's Guide to  
Overcoming Challenges with Faith and Fortitude*

Jennie Ritchie

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Cover design by Casey Hooper  
Front Cover Artwork by Kayson Langford

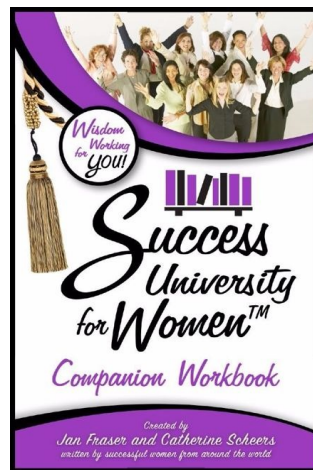
First Edition: October 2015

# **Disclaimer**

This book is designed to share encouraging insights in the face of life's challenges. The purpose of this manuscript is to educate, motivate, inspire and support. The author shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information contained in this book

## **Dedication**

*This book is dedicated to people everywhere who are facing life's curves with patience, courage, and faith. May you be blessed with the peace and strength you need to meet each new day.*



As a huge thank you for putting your faith in this book, I'd love to offer you a free copy of the companion workbook to the acclaimed best-seller, *Success University for Women*. Inside you'll find rewarding exercises to help you get the most out of life!

**Visit this link to grab your free workbook:** <http://eepurl.com/bHluoT>

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## *Introduction*

It was February 1995. I was 25 years old. I had a four-month old daughter, a full-time teaching job, and a new home under construction. And I was doing it all by myself. Well, the building contractor and me. My husband, Wally, was in Florida for baseball Spring Training with the Pittsburgh Pirates while I was in Utah.

Each day, I would awaken at 5 AM, get myself and our daughter ready, drop her off at the sitter, and go to work. After school, I would pick her up, drive 20 minutes to our home construction site, and meet with the contractor to review the progress on the house. After meeting with him, I would do the critical daily errands, get back to our apartment, feed, bathe, and get our daughter to bed, grade papers, and plan my math lessons before dropping exhausted into bed myself. The next day I would wake up and do it all over again.

What was I thinking?

I married a professional baseball player.

Maybe I was thinking life was going to be an easy road.... no issues... no stress or problems, but life doesn't always turn out the way we think it will.

Life throws things at us, like my husband, Wally, threw curveballs at hitters during his baseball career. Like hitters, we can sometimes see the curves coming and hit them like we've practiced. Other times, they surprise us, knocking us to the ground when we try to swing.

Growing up, I did not foresee the curves that would come my way and the learning and stretching that life would require. If I had known, I may not have stepped up to the plate. Before Wally and I were married, my father-in-law tried to warn me about the struggles inherent in marrying a professional baseball player and in baseball life. Although he meant well, it was a journey Wally and I would have to travel together.

As I look back on my life's experiences, it is clear that we've had some curves thrown our way. Many of our curves have centered on Wally's baseball career and the 25-year ride it's taken us on.... and continues to take us on even at this point in our lives. We've lived in countless cities, driven thousands of miles, endured many critics, and appreciated a lot of adventures, some fun, some not so fun.

Through my experiences, and observing others, I've learned strategic approaches for overcoming the curves of life. Because we usually can't control our challenges, our reaction and choices either make them tougher or easier to bear. I'm sharing techniques that have worked for me in order to help you

manage your next curveball more successfully.

Have you ever thought that you aren't where you're "supposed" to be at this point in your life? Or you've had to deal with some trials in life that you never thought you would or could have? If so, then we're in the same boat. Life has thrown us some curves.

Have you faced or are you facing any of these curves in your life?...

- A career change
- Moving to a new city
- A scary health diagnosis
- The pain of losing a loved one
- Financial loss or downturn
- Relationship struggles
- Accidents or natural disasters
- Aging parents
- .....or a host of other problems/issues?

Everywhere, people are tackling tough situations. Truth is, I almost didn't finish this book because I kept meeting people who were facing all kinds of challenges, and I wanted to include each one in this book.

We've all had life's curves thrown at us. Most of the curves you'll read about in this book are major challenges, but we deal with smaller curves on a daily basis, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, crammed schedules, body/image/self-worth issues, social media drama, minor miscommunications, and the list goes on!

Sometimes it feels like we're facing curveball after curveball.

In 2011, Wally and I had rewarding jobs. I was teaching middle school and he was the city manager of Santa Clara, our town in southern Utah. I thought we had seen the last curve from baseball. Our family of five lived, worked, and went to school within a three-mile radius. Our home was in a great neighborhood with friends who knew us, knew our story and would drop anything if we needed help. Wally enjoyed coaching the pitchers at our local high school. Life was stable. It had been 12 years since we had moved our family for baseball.... and then came the curve.

That fall, Wally got the opportunity to coach Division 1 baseball for a university in northern Utah. The university made it clear that the job might only last six months, as the head coach's contract was ending and they weren't sure his

contract would be renewed. Knowing this, we took a gamble. We were standing in the batter's box, the pitch was thrown, and we swung. Baseball had affected our lives once again. Only this time, it didn't just affect me and Wally. During all those years of traveling around the country for baseball, we didn't have any children. Now we had Megan, a high school junior, Ryan, a freshman, and Rachel, a third grader.

We took a leap of faith. We told our kids that if the job didn't work out after six months we would return to our home. Good plan. But we had to eat our words as I resigned my teaching job on May 1st and we were notified on May 24th that the head coach was losing his. When the head coach lost his job, Wally and the other assistants lost theirs too. By that time, I was the only one with a job, and try as I might to return to teaching in our town, no positions were available. We had uprooted our family to follow my husband's dream, and now we were stuck.

We ended up living in northern Utah for a total of 18 months before we were able to move back home. Throughout this book, I will give you glimpses into that journey by relating some of the struggles and blessings we faced during that time and how we got through them.

I am a faithful Christian. I have a strong belief in God and my faith has sustained me during challenging times. Every difficulty I have faced has brought lessons, benefits, or blessings. This one was no different. It was during this specific trial that I felt even more closely connected to God. I learned to lean on Him, trust Him, and go forth with faith even though I could not see the road ahead. We saw some of the blessings from this experience right away, while several surfaced over time. These blessings came to us as individuals and to our family as a whole. One of the biggest benefits of our move to northern Utah was God's inspiration, encouraging me to write this book.

Throughout this book, I hope you laugh, cry, and look at the curves in your life with a fresh perspective. In this book you'll find support, encouragement, strength and ideas for facing your curves. I will show you specific ways that you can better 'Keep It Together' through the challenges of life. With support, through our faith, we are better prepared to face the curves of life, or at least get back up when we swing hard and miss.

If you're not facing challenges in your life right now, this book will give you insight into how you can support those who are struggling, as well as the preparation to handle your curves when they appear. All of the stories contained herein are true, but some names have been changed to protect privacy. For reference, a glossary of baseball terms is contained in the appendix and scriptures have been taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible and

the Book of Mormon.

We all have our own spiritual place, and it is not my intent to exclude anyone from gaining the strength this book will give you. Peace and encouragement are here for you. I challenge you to keep your heart and mind open while you read. Through your own spiritual connection, you will find messages to strengthen your soul and heal your heart. Whether your faith is in yourself, in the universal love of God, or another place of personal peace, I extend my welcome in love.

I'm excited to embark on this journey with you. I am confident that you'll gain strength from the stories contained in these pages so you'll be able to say "If he or she can face that, I can face this. Bring it on."

Now that you know what you'll find, the best (and only) place to start is at the beginning, the beginning of our life in professional baseball...

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennie".

**Jennie Ritchie, October 2015**

# 1

## We Can't Choose the Pitch

### *Curves Are Scary*

#### **From the field...**

*It all started in the spring of 1989. At 18 years old, I was a baby by most standards. We were married the previous November, as all major life events needed to be planned for the baseball off-season (for definitions of this and other baseball terms, see Appendix). We got engaged during the All-Star break, the 3-day vacation in the middle of July for any player not voted onto the All-Star team. We both flew home to California for the purpose of getting engaged, so not a huge surprise when Wally popped the question... although I still cried!! Three months later we began our first baseball season together.*

*Wally was drafted by the Philadelphia Phillies in June of 1985 and played in the minor leagues until 1987 when he got called up to the major leagues for the first time. We had met at this point but weren't dating. He played in the majors the rest of the 1987 season and started the 1988 season there as well. At the end of that season, he was sent back to the AAA team in Maine. That's when I joined the team.*

*So here we were. The 1985 Toyota hatchback packed to the gills, driving to Florida for my first initiation into baseball life. Luckily we had honeymooned in beautiful Cabo San Lucas, because driving through Texas on Interstate 10 was not my idea of romantic. Still, we were together, embarking on our first baseball adventure as a married couple.*

*A memory we still laugh about is going through New Orleans late one afternoon. As I had never been there, I was anxious to see some of the city. I asked my new husband if we could get off the freeway and take some photos. He promptly got off the freeway, parked on a nearby street, rolled down the windows, and with a smile on his face said "go ahead and take your picture". It wasn't exactly what I had in mind, but I took them anyway. I still have those pictures and every now and then we retell the story and laugh all over again.*

*When Wally was single, he lived at the team complex. Now that he had a wife, he had to find different accommodations. When we got to Florida, we arrived at the small one bedroom apartment that a church friend helped us find. I had not grown up in a mansion by any means, but I was not prepared for this. It was old,*

*dirty, and run-down, but these weren't the only challenges; it had cockroaches. Florida is a humid, wet place, which is especially appealing to cockroaches.*

*Even with all that, the most difficult issue was not having a telephone. This was before cell phones and since we were only in Florida for five weeks, there was no reason to pay to have a phone line installed. In order to call home, we had to walk across the street to the 7-Eleven store and use the pay phone. Wally was gone most of the day at Spring Training and I was left by myself in a new city, no friends and no convenient way to communicate with our family. This was my stormy introduction to life in baseball.*

~~~~~

Curves come in all shapes and sizes and they are scary because no one expects them. For the most part, there is no way to prepare for the curves that we will face in life. When a player steps up to bat, he never knows which pitch is coming. Life can seem to be making positive headway and all of a sudden we're hit with an unexpected curve.

In everyday life, we are all in different places going through various challenges. We're facing trials from simple misunderstandings to volatile family situations to health problems. Some may be minor curves; some might be major. It would be helpful if we could predict the pitcher's next pitch, but we know life doesn't work that way.

# All Curves are Different

Friends of ours, a family in our hometown baseball community, faced the biggest curve of their lives when their son sustained a brain injury while out with friends riding an off-road vehicle. The first-responders on the scene saved his life, but he was in a coma for three months. At the time of the accident, this young man was a football and baseball standout. Now he was fighting for his life in a hospital room. His friends camped out at the hospital; others held fundraisers and special fasts. Though weeks went by with no change, little by little, his family and medical personnel started to see limited responsiveness.

Doctors began therapy and after a period of time he started to see out of one eye and roll himself over. Due to the help of his parents, doctors, and therapists, along with his determination to regain mobility, speech, and other brain functions, his family brought him home six months after the accident. His accident rocked our community, but also brought it together because everyone was pulling for him. Neither he nor his family could have known this curve would come his way.

Besides the fact we can't see the curves coming, they affect us all differently. What one person can get through with only minor scrapes and bruises might be the last straw for another. Not only that, but what you might be able to handle better at one point in your life comes at another point and knocks you flat on your back. We experience many emotions when faced with struggles we don't understand, including fear, pain, anger, grief, embarrassment, jealousy, and disappointment. It can be an emotional roller coaster.

Recently, I discovered the entire contents of my folder on our desktop computer had somehow been deleted. My whole collection of school, home, church, and personal documents, including my holiday card address list was gone. Thankfully, two weeks prior, I had uploaded this manuscript to a safe online site. What a blessing that this book and my family photos were safely stored in another location. We never know what we might face, or how it will affect us. We are as different as our challenges, and we react uniquely when they come.

# No One is Immune

I know I'm not alone. We're all facing curves in our lives, big and small. Besides our own challenges, every day we hear of people we know, or strangers going through difficult times. The scriptures are also replete with stories of faithful men and women who suffered tribulation: Job, Esther, Jonah, Paul, and Stephen just to name a few. Good people face difficult challenges. Sometimes life doesn't seem fair. In fact, while I was writing this book, over the course of only two days, I found out that...

- one of my old colleagues was going through financial troubles and challenges with her children
- my friend adopted her niece and nephew because her alcoholic sister couldn't care for them, and as a result her own daughter moved out
- an old friend passed away
- an acquaintance's son had died from a drug overdose and two other teens committed suicide
- a friend asked me to write a letter that she could use in court to prove that she was a stable mother because her husband wanted to show that she was volatile in order to gain custody of the children
- a friend's daughter was getting bullied by neighbor children
- other friends were splitting up and heading for divorce

I couldn't stop thinking about these people and what they were going through. The truth is that everyone seems to be going through some sort of curve! Is it because we are sharing more with each other through social media and other channels to gain support and help that we know much more about each other? Or are people simply bearing more now than in the past? Thinking about all the challenges that people are facing can be overwhelming and scary, but it also can remind us that we are not alone in our burdens and sometimes offer perspective on what we're going through.

# The Outcome is Uncertain

Even though unseen benefits or blessings may surface after we withstand the curves, another frightening aspect is facing them without the ability to see the other side.

When our oldest daughter, Megan, was rear-ended while driving in California, we weren't sure what challenges we would face. Helping her handle the medical issues, insurance red tape, and car repairs long-distance seemed like a daunting task. But, in the end, there were positives that came out of it. The minivan was totaled, but we got to keep the car and still received a settlement from the insurance company, which allowed us to get another car. So what looked like a curve at first, turned out to be a blessing.

There are many unknowns when facing a curve, such as what will be required of us, where we will find the strength, and how it will play out in the end. Most of us like a plan, a path, a happy ending, and when hit with a curve, we don't always know whether or not it's all going to work out, and if so, how. That is SCARY. Curves are also scary because they come with questions that we cannot answer: Why me? Why this? Why now? They can also force us to be patient or make tough decisions.

Looking back at that first Spring Training in Florida with the cockroaches, I can see that I asked for a curveball. I chose to marry a professional baseball player, and face the curves, along with the joys, that accompanied my choice. I didn't know what they would be and I definitely wasn't prepared for everything that came my way, but I chose to be where I was. Unfortunately, we don't always choose our curves, like my friend, Paige, didn't choose the biggest curve of her life.

Paige was 28 years old and 7 ½ months pregnant with her third child when she found the lump in her breast. It took her two weeks to get to the doctor to have it checked out. The doctors suggested she see a surgeon. She didn't. One night, she had terrible pain in her breast and a lot of anxiety which, to her, was a sign. She went to see a surgeon and discovered she had Stage 3 breast cancer. She knows that the pain which pushed her to the surgeon was a miraculous blessing because cancer doesn't hurt.

In the beginning, her husband really wanted to know the numbers. What was her "numerical" chance of surviving? The doctor left it up to Paige, and she didn't want to know. She needed surgery to check her lymph nodes, but had to have the surgery before she gave birth. They performed the surgery two weeks

before she was due, but the anesthesia from surgery put her into labor. She stayed in the hospital overnight and gave birth to her son the next day. Luckily, doctors found that the cancer had metastasized into the tissue; no vital organs were affected.

Doctors couldn't perform her mastectomy until the tumor had shrunk, so she began chemotherapy when her baby was 10 days old. She had chemotherapy, her first mastectomy, then the hysterectomy, and more chemotherapy. The chemo after her hysterectomy was too strong, causing myopathy in her hands and feet, extreme weakness, and heart palpitations.

Following radiation treatments she had her second mastectomy and reconstruction, which was the most painful part of the entire ordeal. The doctors inserted expanders to stretch her skin, but her skin was burned so badly from radiation that it stopped stretching and literally broke. The cavity in her chest got infected, so the doctors left it open for an entire week. Her doctors ended up taking a six inch strip of skin on her back to put on her chest and had to reattach nerves and blood vessels in the process.

She will tell you that what got her through was her devout faith, the support of her family, and learning to lean on others for help. She had no choice. She needed help with cooking, cleaning and caring for her children. Friends and neighbors rallied around her in an incredible way, and serving her and her family was a blessing for all.

During a visit to the doctor after radiation, she pressured him to divulge his initial estimate of her survival. 6%!! In the beginning, based on her age and the aggressiveness of the cancer, the doctors had given her a 6% chance of survival. She and her husband were in shock. It was a good thing they didn't know in the beginning. They might have been planning a funeral. But her story doesn't end there.

She and her husband had been foster parents for seven years, and even continued this work after her cancer. They didn't usually get babies, but one night they got a phone call about a drug baby that was to be returned to her natural parents. Placement staff pray about which family to call and a male staff member said he felt prompted to call her. They stopped by the NICU and held the little girl. Both Paige and her husband had a special feeling that she would be theirs.

The birth mother left town and failed to return for the second visit. Usually birth mothers don't meet with adoptive parents, but in this case, she wanted to meet them. When it came time to sign the papers to forfeit her right as a mother, she said that she couldn't even take care of herself, let alone a baby. Paige and her husband were blessed with the baby she was physically unable to carry.

Paige is a faithful person and she strongly believes that life's trials happen for a reason. Even though it was scary and there was no way to see from the beginning how it would end, she is now on the other side and believes there was a reason she went through cancer. There were lessons she needed to learn. It caused her to re-prioritize her life and choose her family's needs over her career. She kept a journal through the entire experience and knows that every interaction and conversation with others brought her closer to the Lord. She also believes that they wouldn't have welcomed their new daughter if not for her cancer. She has been an amazing blessing to those around her, especially other cancer patients. She is a walking, breathing miracle.

My friend didn't have a choice about whether or not she was going to fight cancer. She couldn't have prepared for it or altered its course. And, when faced with the curve, she could not be sure of the outcome. She chose to have faith and a positive outlook instead of being bitter or worrying. The same goes for us when we're facing our curves. If you can't yet see a blessing on the other side of your curve, have patience and press on with determination. If there is a blessing, it may appear over time.

# You Make the Choice

Even though people cannot choose their curves, they do have 100% choice over their response, their focus and their actions. Their decisions determine how they will survive the curve.

While in Spring Training all those years ago, it took me a few weeks to realize my response to the situation was terrible. I was feeling sorry for myself and only focusing on myself and my challenges. I've since realized that focusing on my own problems not only makes them look insurmountable, but it also appears that every little thing is going wrong. The world looks more bleak and depressing. When I chose to change my response and my outlook to start focusing on what was going right, I escaped my pity party. I had a loving husband, a brand new city and an exciting adventure.

Over time, I noticed my challenges diminishing, which wasn't the case at all. Nothing about my situation had changed. I was still living in an apartment with cockroaches and a telephone at the gas station across the street, but that wasn't what I was focusing on. It was as if I changed the lens on my life's camera.

Changing my actions helped as well. Instead of sulking in our apartment, I met some older ladies from our church and started driving them on their errands and to doctor visits. I had time and a car; a perfect combination for getting outside myself.

How we respond and what we choose to focus on make it easier for us to survive the curves of life. A benefit I could not have foreseen that came during this time, and the struggles that followed throughout our baseball life, was how our challenges strengthened our relationship and our commitment to each other. We were all we had, so we made the choice to see the blessings hidden in our curves.

# Have Faith and Hope

I once met a young man from Alaska who survived a challenging childhood. His mother and stepfather were addicted to drugs and usually too drunk or high to be considered parents. During his early years, there were times when life on the streets was better than life at home. At the age of seven, he was responsible for the safety of his six-year old brother and four-year old sister. When the situation at home became intolerable, he took his siblings away for short periods of time and they either lived with friends in a nearby trailer park, or, at times, in a blue 12-seater van.

After his aunt reported to social workers that her sister was not taking proper care of the children, his mother went to jail, lost her parenting rights, and he and his siblings were placed in the system as wards of the state. The only time he ever saw his mother after that was in a room with cameras and social workers standing outside the door.

From that point, he lived with his grandfather, then his grandmother, and finally legally adopted by his aunt and uncle at the age of 15. While he currently leads a spiritual life, he admits that he had no idea what faith was when he was young. He knew about God but he didn't know Him and often wondered if He was there. Although he wasn't sure they would survive, he was strong for his siblings and continually told them they would be all right. Confusion and anger plagued him into his teen years, although he is now able to look back with perspective and realize the experience made him a stronger person. Undoubtedly, the Lord protected him during the rough times and blessed him to land in a solid, supportive family.

Since we can't see the other side of life's curves, we don't always know if anything good can or will come from our struggle while we're going through it. Sometimes it just takes faith. Faith in the Lord, faith in the universe, faith in yourself. If we can't muster faith, then even a glimmer of hope can give us the strength to make it through.

At the end of the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indiana is faced with a treacherous path as he has to retrieve the Holy Grail in order to save his father's life. Nearing the end, he comes to a deep canyon that somehow he must cross and he tells himself it's a "leap of faith." Indiana cannot rely on his skill to face this challenge. Feeling the urgency of the task, he determines to close his eyes and take a step into what appears to be certain doom. Miraculously, his foot lands on a thin bridge across the canyon that was previously camouflaged. The

path was uncertain, but by taking a step of faith, it became clear.

Likewise, in the Old Testament, the Israelites suffered mighty afflictions during their 40-year sojourn in the wilderness. Nearing the end, God instructed Joshua to have the Ark of the Covenant carried into the river Jordan and when the bearers put their feet into the river, the waters "rose up upon an heap" and allowed the ark, as well as the children of Israel, to pass through on dry ground. They were blessed in and through their challenges. Have faith and hope when you're facing life's curves. God will bless you with strength as you lean on Him during your times of trial.

# Look Up

We live near a national park that attracts millions of visitors from around the world each year. Our family loves the outdoors and we go hiking in the park every chance we get. If you hike, you know that it's important to focus on the path in front of you to avoid tripping on rocks or other debris, especially if you are unfamiliar with the terrain.

However, if you spend the whole time looking down at the path, it can seem difficult and laborious. You also miss the true beauty of the experience, which lies in the gorgeous rocks and scenery above you. While hiking, I continually remind my family members to "look up" so they can see the beauty around them.

We should follow the same advice when facing the curves in our lives. If we keep our eyes down on the path, we focus on the obstacles of the trail which can make it seem more challenging to navigate. When we look up, it is easier to see the beauty of the rocks, the blue sky, and our blessings. We are more likely to remember and rely on the Lord when our eyes are heavenward.

'Looking up' changes our focus from our problems to the fact that somehow, somehow, we can overcome.



Curves are scary because even though we all face them, we can't see them coming and often don't know how they will play out. In some instances, we can rely on our skill, creativity, and ingenuity to deal with life's curves. But other times, we have to close our eyes, release it from our control, and proceed with faith and hope. We can't choose whether or not we'll face challenges in our lives, what they will be, or when they will come. We can step squarely into the batter's box, choose our focus and response, then face the curveball head on.

*"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." ~ John 14:7*

# The Game Stretches Us

## Flexibility is Required

### From the field:

*That drive to Florida (the one without any great photos of New Orleans) in the spring of 1989 was the last cross-country drive Wally and I would make together. Every year after that, I was either in college, or teaching school, and I couldn't drop everything and travel east at the start of Spring Training. Each ensuing year, Wally would fly to Florida for Spring Training, and either my mother or sister would drive four days across the country with me, from Utah to Florida. That's love.*

*During the 1989 and 1990 seasons, Wally played on the Phillies AAA team , which was located in Scranton, Pennsylvania. 1991 would have been our third year in Scranton. By then, I knew where we should live, where to grocery shop, and how to easily navigate around town. I was looking forward to the new season with excitement; returning to the familiar city, my friends, and the community.*

*When my sister and I arrived at our apartment in Scranton, Wally was on the road. I decided that this year I would really try to make our house feel like a home. Instead of feeling like we were living out of boxes for four months, I wanted to feel settled in, so my sister and I worked for two days to set up our new apartment. Luckily, I had learned through the previous two years that we only needed a few possessions and was better at bringing only the minimum.*

*Our second night in Scranton, Wally arrived home and it was great to see him after being separated for over two months. In the morning, he did an "appearance" (where players go to an event, visit with fans, and sign baseball cards and other memorabilia) while I took my sister to the airport. It seemed like any other day. After I dropped my sister off at the airport, I headed back home, only to see the team trainer that had taken Wally to the appearance that morning... but Wally was not in the car. I thought that strange and followed him to the stadium to see what happened to Wally. He told me that Wally had been "called up" to the major leagues!*

*Wally had played two years in the major leagues before we were married, in 1987 and part of 1988. That's the dream.... get to the majors. Unfortunately,*

after being there, he had been sent back to AAA at the end of the 1988 season. And now, he was getting another chance!! Unfortunately, a catcher and an outfielder on the major league team had been in a car accident the night before and were hospitalized. On a whim, the team decided to carry an extra pitcher on the West Coast trip, and Wally got the call. In professional sports, it seems that one man's downfall is often another man's shot. Luck and opportunity worked in our favor this time.

I was ecstatic! Not only would this be my first trip to the major leagues, but the team was departing that day for the west coast. Wally and I are both originally from southern California and the team was heading west to play the Dodgers, Padres, and Giants. We immediately called our families to share the news. That year, the Phillies' wives weren't allowed to fly to or between cities with the team, but we could fly back to Philadelphia at the end of the trip, so that's what I did. I was nearly 21 years old, and married to a major league baseball player. It was an exciting time for me that also seemed surreal.

When we returned from the west coast, we had to figure out our next step. In baseball, there are no guarantees. Today we were in the majors, tomorrow we could be sent down. You could never be too sure or plan too far in advance. All our belongings were in the apartment in Scranton, but we were in Philadelphia. So much for my plan to make our house a home. This was the beginning of my flexibility training. Little did I know that baseball would stretch me farther than I ever thought possible. We first found a place to stay; a hotel would do for now. The only option was to proceed moment by moment. There was no looking down the road, just managing with what we had at the time. Of course, we were thrilled to be there and willing to work around any physical inconvenience.

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We decided that if we were still on the team after the next road trip, we would get an apartment. After the next road trip, we would get a telephone. After the next one, our belongings from Scranton, and so it went. With the call up came the challenge of learning a new town, a much bigger one this time, new people, and how to be a "big-league" wife. Wally ended up staying the rest of the year in the majors, and the next season as well. So much for "settling in" in Scranton. Obviously, it would have been silly of me to want to stay in Scranton, just because that was the plan and where I was comfortable. The major leagues provided so many new adventures for us and success for Wally. It was definitely

*a time of uncertainty, but one that turned out to be incredible.*

My mom put me in gymnastics and dance classes when I was younger. I kept dancing through high school and college, eventually graduating with a minor in dance. Flexibility is essential for these activities. Any dancer knows that the more you stretch, the more flexible you become. Conversely, if you've never stretched, you could be in a lot of pain if you have to bend down to touch your toes.

The definition of flexibility is the ability to bend without breaking. When faced with life's curves, people may feel like they're going to break. The key to keeping it together is to be able to bend, but not break.

Often we want to stay with what we know. Sometimes when life throws us the unexpected curve, our gut reaction is to freak out, run and hide, or just sit down and cry. All of these are natural reactions and completely understandable. We may want to have a meltdown when what we thought was going to happen doesn't. But, some of our best experiences happen when life doesn't go according to plan.

# Be Open to Possibilities

Throughout my teaching career, I've had to be flexible. With all the moving we've done, I have taught at more than eight junior high and high schools in California and Utah. I've taught math, dance, science, marketing, keyboarding, and various computer classes. No two years were the same. Some were better than others, but if you do it right, teaching is rewarding despite the challenges. It is a great profession, especially for working moms.

One of the biggest struggles throughout my teaching career was my inability to "leave work at work". Most nights, I brought work home, and many Saturdays I would sit in my classroom working on grades or planning lessons.

With the hope of returning to southern Utah after Wally lost his college coaching job (If you're not sure what I'm referring to, please go back to the beginning of the book and read the Introduction.), I kept my eyes open for any type of employment. Through my job search, I found a position as a high-school presenter for a business college. I would be working with the schools, but would not have any students, grades, or lesson plans to manage. This was the 7 AM – 4 PM job I had long envied....no work at home. I interviewed, and was offered the position.

Though already employed, my passion for teaching compelled me to explore classroom openings in southern Utah. When I interviewed and was not offered a teaching position, I took the college job, which allowed us to return home. I knew that teaching was a better choice for my family, with the vacations, hours, benefits, *etc.* However, I was excited about the new challenge and the idea of leaving work at work. Because of my occupation change, I didn't take a single teaching item when I packed up my classroom. I wasn't a teacher anymore.

We moved back into our Santa Clara home on a Saturday, and the following Monday a principal called to offer me a teaching job. I was shocked; I didn't know what to say. That wasn't the plan. Well, I guess it was, even though it turned out differently than I thought.

I doubt it was a coincidence; I believe I was blessed. Having the non-teaching job lined up allowed me to physically and mentally finish a difficult school year. However, the Lord knew a teaching job was the better option for me and my family. Luckily, I had practiced enough stretching during our baseball years that I was able to bend when the opportunity came. I signed my contract later that week.

We don't always know why plans change, or life doesn't work out like we

thought it was going to, we just know it happens. Perhaps, the traveling that I was going to have to do with the college was going to be an issue. Maybe summers would have been difficult, or other unknowns... I can't say. All I know is that it turned out for the best, but required flexibility, just like the rest of life. I was grateful the college was understanding and let me out of my contract.

In the movie "*While You Were Sleeping*," Sandra Bullock's character says, "Life doesn't always work out the way you planned". That is the truth. We have to be open to different possibilities that come and be willing to adapt. A different path may turn out to be a better option in the long run.

# Practice Bending

If you've never had to stretch, you don't know how far you can go. The more we practice flexibility by "going with the flow," the more flexible we become and the better prepared we are when we have to bend. If we practice stretching in the smaller areas of life we will be better prepared when we need to be flexible on bigger issues. Bending is uncomfortable, but we are better equipped to handle changes when we have been stretching ourselves and increasing our flexibility.

Increased flexibility can result from a variety of scenarios...

I was disappointed on the first Mother's Day that my daughter, Megan, and I couldn't be together. She had moved back to southern Utah and couldn't travel home to celebrate. Going crazy trying to get her home didn't make sense, because we can have Mother's Day any day of the year! Who says it has to be the second Sunday in May? I missed her, but realized it wasn't a big deal. I had to be flexible. We talked on the phone and hung out the next time we were together.

Another example has been my bedtime. I know my body and I know I do much better when I'm rested. I am better able to tackle the day and meet any curves with a clear head. However, one of my priorities has always been to stay connected to my children, especially my teens. I feel thankful that my teenagers want to talk to me, want to share what is going on in their lives (okay, okay... my daughter more than my son) but they usually want to chat well after my "desired" bedtime. I've learned that if I want my kids to open up to me about what's going on in their life, it's usually not on my schedule. It's on theirs. Which, of course, happens to be no earlier than 11 PM, or after they come home from a date or a hang-out.

I have really enjoyed these after-hours chats and in hindsight, I am grateful that I was able to bend. If my bedtime had been too rigid, I would have missed the discussions that brought me closer to my older children. Of course, sometimes I can't open my eyes the next day, but the sacrifice was well worth the cost. Practice bending in small ways when life requires it. That way, when the time comes that requires more flexibility, you won't feel like you're going to break.

# Roll with the Pitches

After moving back to Santa Clara and securing my teaching position, the next task was getting Megan ready to move to California. As long as I can remember, she has had a dream of moving to California to pursue her education and play college volleyball. A year before she graduated high school, we connected with a fantastic coach at a junior college in Costa Mesa, California, and Megan was sold! She's a beach girl at heart and the thought of being so close to our favorite Newport location was more than appealing. We encouraged her because we knew that this was the one time in her life where she could do exactly what she wanted to do where she wanted to do it.

I planned to take her to California after Father's Day, so she could arrive in time for orientation, but still get to spend the day with Wally. However, she had been applying for jobs in Orange County and landed an interview with a successful retail store on the Friday before Father's Day. I wasn't thrilled because this meant we needed to leave earlier than anticipated. We packed the van, strapped her bike on top and headed south for the familiar six-and-a-half hour drive. Upon arriving, we met Wally's parents, his sister, and some good friends at a restaurant to celebrate Megan's arrival. After dinner, we were concerned when the "check engine" light came on in the car. Megan's interview was at noon the following day, so we dropped into bed, vowing to check the oil in the morning. We were sure that the car was merely hot from the drive through the blazing desert heat.

Morning came, and we felt better, but the car didn't. After calling our mechanic in Utah, we decided to rent a car instead of risking trouble on the hour-long drive to Orange County. Besides being behind schedule, I was so worried about getting on the road, that I hadn't checked the gas gauge in the rental. Yep, less than a quarter tank. We had to get off the freeway and stop for gas.

As the minutes ticked by, I became more worried about her being late, blowing her first impression, and not getting hired. We were both stressing out, and try as I might to bite my tongue, it wasn't working! She attempted to call, but kept getting passed around from person to person. Meanwhile, I'm driving 80 mph down the freeway, zigging and zagging through traffic like a madwoman. When the car clock hit noon (the scheduled interview time), we were almost to the freeway exit. Trying not to say anything, I imagined a roomful of suits tapping their pens on the desk and glancing at the clock. At 12:10, we frantically pulled into the parking lot. Stress was high in the car that day. She had been

looking at her phone scouring her emails for any information that could help her when all of a sudden, she got very quiet.

Sitting there in the rental car passenger seat, hair curled, wearing her black 'interview' suit and heels, she said, "Mom, I'm going to tell you something. Um...the website shows that I never scheduled an interview".

I was ready to blow a gasket. At this moment, sitting in the parking lot of an upscale Orange County mall, looking at my soon-to-be college freshman daughter, I had a choice. You'll be happy to know I made the right one. I turned to her and said, "At least we're not late!" With that, she burst out laughing. I repeated the phrase (to convince myself), smiled, and pulled into the parking garage. I parked the car, got out, and told her I needed a minute to myself.

Leaving her in the parked car, I walked up the stairs into the sunlight, sat down and took a deep breath. Many thoughts flashed through my mind. Yes, I had just come down to California four days earlier than I needed to for an interview my daughter never scheduled. I definitely could have used that time at home to unpack from the move. And, for the icing on the cake, I just needlessly rented a car and spent over an hour driving like a stressed-out idiot from LA to Orange County. On the other hand, in the overall scheme of our existence, this was a minor glitch; we were safe and together. The website showed that the soonest available interview was five days away, so she still had a shot at the job, and when presented with the choice to rip my daughter's head off or take a deep breath, I had chosen the latter. What was done was done, and couldn't be changed. I had to accept it and move forward.

One of my mom's expressions, "it is what it is", was perfect at this moment. You know as well as I do that this is how life works sometimes. Maybe Megan and I had this experience so we so we could have one more laugh together before she started her college adventure. Who knows? We're playing the game of life and sometimes we get a pitch we're not expecting. I know you have these days too. You feel frustration, disappointment, and anger. We have to be able to bend. Megan and I decided to make the best of the situation by enjoying ourselves. We went to our favorite little beach spot so I could write this story sitting in the Newport Beach sun, and then she bought me dinner.

# Resist Rigidity

If our lives are overly rigid, we may be too brittle to bend when the curves come. We can have a routine and a strategy, along with the awareness that life doesn't always go according to our plan.

If you are someone who is tied to your routine, don't get discouraged. I have a sister and a lot of great friends who work well with their routines. If you can't see yourself becoming Gumby®, it's okay. You don't have to. Bend where you can when life requires it. Our kids are usually great examples of this. They can often be much more flexible than we are. Cereal for dinner, they say no problem!!

Sometimes flexibility is required when viewing other people, their choices, and their lives.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has an extensive worldwide missionary program. Many people, young and old, take the opportunity of serving missions of all types: proselyting, service, and humanitarian. Young men serve for two years, young ladies for 18 months and it varies for older people. Because service is optional, the decision to serve is a personal choice. Parents and church leaders can encourage service, but they cannot make that decision. For some, it is difficult when those close to them decide not to serve, or when circumstances force missionaries to come home before finishing the entire service period.

Disappointment can develop when other people make choices we don't agree with, choose a path different from our own, or don't follow our advice. Apply love and understanding in these situations. People are people, they're not perfect. In this and other aspects of life, concern for the individual should take precedence over the letter of the law. Be flexible. The key is trusting in the Lord and resisting rigidity. The Lord loves all and so should we.

## Have Enough Faith to be Flexible

My friend Lindy was raised in a great family. She was a feisty teenager with a mind of her own. She grew up dancing and loves it with all her heart. At age 21, she went to Venezuela on a religious mission for 18 months. Some of the areas she lived in were only two hours from the Amazon. If you are invited for a meal in this third world country, the local people serving and preparing the food are sacrificing a meal they would otherwise eat. Survival was more of an issue than sanitation and many villages did not have adequate sewage irrigation systems.

With six months remaining on her mission, she contracted a parasite from eating spoiled food. She didn't want to offend those that were feeding her, so she went ahead and ate the meal, knowing she would probably get sick. She had terrible gastrointestinal issues, but stayed to finish her mission, trying to get by with a bomb pill and eating fruit to cleanse her body. She had no way of knowing how it would affect her entire future.

After returning home, she had terrible gastrointestinal issues, was in and out of the ER and was then diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome, but struggled because she couldn't afford health insurance. She had to quit college because of her health problems and inability to concentrate. Finally, two years later and with symptoms growing worse, she was able to save enough money to see a specialist on international parasites and learned she had been suffering with a parasite the entire time. It took her another year to repair her intestines by turning to herbs, high fiber vegetable diets, and hydrotherapy. Her holistic healer and herbologist warned her that parasites damage every organ and that some unrepairable damage might prevent her from having children.

Unbeknownst to her, the extreme metabolic changes caused irreversible neurological damage. The parasite had eaten the lining of her stomach and gut, which is where most of our serotonin is produced. Serotonin is what gives us our feeling of well-being and happiness. Besides her other issues, this fun-loving dancer was now exhausted and depressed.

Despite the physical hardships and many questions she was still trying to answer, she and her boyfriend decided to get married, knowing they may never have children. He was extremely supportive and they had faith they would endure these challenges together.

Miraculously, they were blessed with two sons. When her first baby was 9 months old, she started having seizures, anywhere from 20-100 a day. Some were large, others were small. She could barely function, let alone take care of her son. Doctors had no idea what was causing the seizures. She underwent a battery of tests, but the only determination they could make is that she did not have epilepsy.

About 1 out of 26 people suffer with seizures. Of people that suffer with non-epileptic seizures, about 70% of cases are due to car injuries, Traumatic Brain Injury or stress to the brain. The other 30% are usually due to a metabolic change, as Lindy experienced. During the first year of her seizures, because of lack of oxygen to the brain, she started having memory problems. Doctors could not find a medication that could help, so they resorted to giving her medication for epilepsy, which sedates the brain. Luckily, the number of seizures decreased.

Over the last seven years, they have spent upwards of \$30,000 trying to find

help from medical and holistic sources. There is much confusion surrounding her illness because there are so many different manifestations and unanswered questions. Lindy considers life and her health issues her university, as she was never able to graduate from college. She is always studying information on her condition and her goal is to be as knowledgeable as possible regarding new studies and findings. All of this, in addition to time, has helped her accept her situation. As a result, she has been a resource and a support to others who are going through all types of chronic illness. Her faith in God has definitely grown stronger through her challenges.

I met her about a year ago and we felt a strong connection right away. In the beginning, I had no idea what she had been through. Lindy doesn't run around telling the world what happened to her. Her positive attitude and strong faith are examples to me and many others. She said, "I have literally felt strengthened. When my body was extremely weak, I asked for strength beyond my own body's capacity. Heaven intervened and strengthened me by the power of God through my faith in Him."

Since then, she has been dealing with seizures and chronic illness for 10 years. She can read her body and knows when a seizure is close. She tries to function as normally as possible, and for the most part, she does. She could not carry a cell phone for a long time as she would never remember where she put the phone. Getting her driver's license reinstated two years ago has been a huge benefit. She started keeping a seizure journal (to recognize triggers) as well as a gratitude journal and practicing meditation. She has also gone through counseling to deal with the anxiety that came from fear of seizing in front of people. Facing those fears, she returned to dancing and is now teaching fitness classes. She studied for three months to memorize 30 minutes of choreography for her fitness classes. Despite the struggle, she pushes forward because the fitness instruction gives her a sense of independence and normalcy.

This was not the plan she mapped out for her life. Every day she has to be flexible. She may wake up tomorrow morning and only be able to get her oldest dressed and off to school. She rarely schedules events in advance because she never knows if she's going to have a good day or a bad one. Also, she often needs to rely on others to help her and her sons during the day when her husband is at work.

Lindy called me one day and asked me to come over right away. Her speech was slow and hesitant. I rushed over and found her boys playing outside with the neighbors, and she lying on the couch. She had experienced a seizure but was able to call me. We visited for about an hour, telling each other stories of our lives. By the time I left, she was sitting up and talking normally, back to herself

again. Seeing what she had to deal with on a daily basis was astonishing. Her whole life needs to be flexible. If she can do it, so can we.

When I asked her about her feelings, she said "I don't blame God for sicknesses or illnesses in this world. I believe illness is a part of our human experience. I believe the ironies, unfairness and imperfections in this world are part of life and our learning path. Life cannot be sweet without knowing bitter." Her message to you, "We're all just extraordinary people living ordinary lives. Don't Give Up!"



Life doesn't always turn out the way we plan. Bending and stretching are what we have to do to cope with and get through the curves. Life is a growing, learning process. Whether it's a small situation or a big challenge, we can navigate the curves more successfully if we are flexible. The game isn't without bruises, but will go smoother if we can take each pitch as it comes.

*"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. " ~ 1 Philippians 4:13*



**Author's Note:** When this book was in the proof stage, Lindy tested positive for Lyme disease. It lay dormant from the time she was bitten by a tick at age 16 until she was pregnant with her first child. The parasites she contracted compromised her immune system, triggering the dormant Lyme bacteria to activate. Her seizures were 'lyme seizures'. Lindy underwent treatment, including Vitamin C iv therapy, a natural alternative for treating Lyme. After suffering with Lyme seizures for 8 years, she is now seizure free; recovering daily, and feeling more energetic. Thankfully, she is healing. Unfortunately, Lyme disease is often misunderstood and underdiagnosed. Most sufferers can be misdiagnosed for many years before finding relief.

# 3

## You Have to Play Your Own Game

### *It's Okay to be You*

#### **From the field...**

*Being a "big league" wife was an unforgettable experience. It is a different dynamic than, say, when Wally worked in an office job. Then, I wasn't really involved in his job, other than asking him how work was going and attending the office holiday party. There is some truth to the statement I make that "we" played baseball. Even though Wally was actually the one pitching on the field, we each played our individual roles. His role involved more work, mine involved more play (and moving our belongings around the country).*

*About a month after Wally was called up to the majors, he was injured when a batter charged the mound and spiked him across the ribs with his metal cleats after Wally hit him with a pitch. A bench-clearing brawl ensued, with Wally and the batter scuffling at the bottom of the pile. Since Wally spent his entire major league career as a relief pitcher, he was rarely involved in the on-field fights. By the time he and the other relief pitchers ran in from the bullpen, the fights were usually winding down. This particular night, the Phillies were playing in Atlanta, and I was at home in New Jersey. I don't know what I thought screaming at the TV set would do, but it sure made me feel better.*

*Luckily, I already had my plane ticket to meet Wally in Cincinnati, the team's next stop. Wally wasn't seriously hurt, but his bruised ribs forced him onto the 15-day Disabled List. When he came off the DL, his place on the team seemed to have solidified. "We" stayed in the big leagues for the remainder of that 1991 season and most of the 1992 season as well.*

*Even though Wally had been in the majors before, he was still one of the younger players and I was one of the youngest wives, having turned 21 that summer. The players' girlfriends and wives are a unique group of people, made up of veterans and rookies, just like the players. During the games, we sat in a special family section shielded by the screen behind home plate. This was mainly for our protection, as we weren't always paying 100% attention to the game and could have been hit by a wild pitch or hit ball. While most of the wives were friendly, I was a bit intimidated by some of the veteran wives and connected mainly with the other rookie wives. I learned about major-league "wife" etiquette*

from those who had been there longer than I. There were certain do's and don'ts, for example... **Do** pay attention when your husband is playing. **Don't** dress like you normally would for a baseball game. **Do** get to be friends with the great ushers and stadium staff. **Don't** get too friendly with fans... especially ones that have had too much to drink.

Players' wives have much in common, making it easy to relate to each other. I really enjoyed meeting the couples we played with and I remain friends with some of the wives to this day. We had some great experiences together, from organizing a fundraiser to raise money and awareness of Lou Gehrig's disease, to a bachelorette party for one of the "soon-to-be" wives in the stadium sky box. Our husbands had intense pressure to perform on the field; we felt it as well which is why we formed such a strong bond.

The mascot for the Phillies is a large green fuzzy creature with a bullhorn nose and big googly eyes, called the Phillie Phanatic. The Phanatic was energetic, acrobatic and greatly entertaining; a super mascot. Besides doing gymnastics, walking on railings, and driving around on his four-wheeler, the Phanatic would dance on the top of the Phillies dugout during the 7<sup>th</sup> inning stretch at every home game. Sometimes he would dance alone, but more often, he would pull a fan (pre-arranged) out of the crowd to dance with him. After watching this happen for a while, I decided that I wanted to dance with him. My only hang-up was that it probably wasn't an appropriate activity for a "wife". As much as I wanted to fulfill my "wife" role, and not bring embarrassment to Wally, I also really wanted to dance on that dugout. I talked with Wally about it and he was all for it. So, I pre-arranged my dancing slot for an upcoming home game. On my appointed day, at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, stadium staff came to the family section to get me for my big dancing moment. I hadn't told any of the other wives...it just didn't seem like an appropriate activity for a player's wife. I was escorted to the side of the dugout, and after the crowd sang "Take Me Out to the Ball Game", the Phanatic reached down and pulled me up onto the dugout. I remember thinking how big the dugout was when I was actually standing on it! We danced all around and had a great time.

As it happened, someone running the stadium cameras must have found out that I was married to Wally. Anyone who looked up to the Panavision screen at that moment saw the screen split; showing me on the left dancing with the Phanatic. and Wally on the right warming up the right fielder. So much for anonymity.

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Looking back on that experience, I'm glad I felt like I could be myself. As it turned out, all the wives thought it was cool that I would dance with the Phanatic. The worry was all in my mind. It was okay for me to be me. It was okay for me to dance my dance, sing my song, play my game. It's okay for you too. Whether the situation is real or perceived, how often have you, consciously or subconsciously, changed your appearance, your outfit, your language, your plan, your goals, because of another player? We have to allow ourselves the freedom to be who we are. I once heard someone say, "If you're not living what you're singing, it's all just noise."

# Give Yourself Permission

God divinely created people as individuals. Everyone has a different physical and emotional make-up and unique characteristics, needs, and fears. Each person is special, valuable, and worthwhile in his or her own right and in the sight of God. Give yourself permission to be you. It's okay for you to be who you are. It's okay for you to look the way you look and fear what you fear. It's okay for you to be happy or sad. When my cousin and his wife lost their son, they learned to give themselves permission to grieve in their own way.

After being married for two years, my cousin Ted and his wife, Abby, had a gorgeous, bright-eyed boy named Maxwell Judah, or "Maxie". Ted and Abby were best friends before they started dating. And, since Ted always wanted to marry his best friend, he flew to Israel and proposed to Abby at the end of a professional tour she was giving. They were married in Costa Rica and began their life together with a bright outlook on the future.

They were thrilled to add Maxie to their family; the three of them did everything together. He was an adorable little boy with an infectious smile and a personality that melted everyone around him. There was no way they could have known they would have him on this earth for less than 10 months.

On a horrific July day, Abby received word that Maxie had stopped breathing while napping at day care. The devastated family gathered at the hospital, but he never regained consciousness. They said goodbye to their beloved Maxie and their lives changed forever. They felt cheated. Anger and sadness enveloped them, along with an emptiness that will never go away.

To keep his memory alive, Ted and Abby, along with supportive friends and family, created a forest in Israel which they call "Maxie's Forest". They raise money through Team Maxie marathons, fundraising events, and contributions to plant trees in his forest. Ted had Maxie's birth date tattooed on his forearm. Abby created a wall hanging with the words "The sun still shines when you're not here but never as bright and never ever the same", and frequently blogs about her experience. She connects with others going through similar challenges and lifts them despite her own, devastating pain.

Since Maxie's passing, they have been blessed with three other children, two boys and a girl. These little ones have brought them joy, but they still miss their Maxie more than words can say. Daily, triggers jolt them back to their sweet Maxie and the fact that he's gone. More than once, people have told them that they shouldn't still be sad, that they need to "get over it".

How can one person tell another the way he should grieve? Or for how long? It's impossible. Ted and Abby had to give themselves permission to grieve in their own way. We must give ourselves permission to face our challenges however we can. As individuals, we handle challenges uniquely. We each have to play our own game.

The following is one of Abby's blog posts, entitled ***Time, Dates and Anniversaries:***

*"In the really early days of my grief, I would stare at the clock. The minutes went by like hours, the days like years. I had all of the time in the world - to sit in my own personal hell, rotting from the inside out, starting with my heart and moving out to all of my extremities. Time was killing me. I would get through the days by creating markers - Time for a certain show, Time for Ted to get home from work, Time for a visit with some kind friend.... Time for things I had tried to plan in advance.... Time was marked that year by anniversaries and empty holidays - Maxie's first birthday without him, Halloween - would have been his second, Thanksgiving, skipping every other holiday that he didn't get to celebrate with us. Time was also marked by how long it had been since the last time I was with him - nothing to look forward to except more empty days and nightmares all night. It was no way to live and yet, that was our life. We were clinging to this hope - the little boy growing (BIG) inside of me... trying to keep our fears at bay-not doing a great job most of the time.*

*And then a whole year had passed. THE LONGEST YEAR OF MY LIFE - and somehow, also the shortest. I still can't believe that happened....that I got through that whole first year. Even if I barely left the house, I am amazed at my strength. I can't believe how our marriage survived - because it was hard...but I am proud that we gave each other the space to do whatever we needed to do for ourselves..... Oh my Lord - I cannot believe people get through these things. I can tell you and tell you and tell you how hard this was and you will never understand. Complete hell.*

*And, then little Mo was born, only two days after the anniversary of his brother's passing. What a gift he is! He is the most special person in my life. We are obsessed. Time passes so much quicker with him here....but time is still always ticking away and being counted in ways I never would have thought of.*

*I've been counting down to THIS day since the day Mo was born. Today Mo is nine and a half months. He is currently taking the nap during which his brother stopped breathing. I believe he will wake up from his nap - I believe it with all of my heart. And, then, I believe he will turn ten months old, and then a year old. I believe we will have a party for him - and watch him smash cake in his face. I believe we will feel overwhelming joy watching him grow up while we*

*continue to shove down intense and enormous amounts of pain every day - while we count down the days until we get to be with Maxie again.*

*It has been almost two years since the last time I kissed and hugged and sang to my lovely boy....and time is what keeps tripping me up. Has it only been that long? It feels like another lifetime. I miss him so intently - it still feels like it could swallow me up alive and kill me. Can it be that it has been THAT long? It feels like I was holding him yesterday, my nose buried deep in his neck -trying to smell up all of his sweetness."*

# Everyone is Different

For Ted and Abby, keeping it together can't mean being "all better". But it can mean eventually being able to leave the house and find joy in their relationship, their other children, family and friends. Do you think they can or would want to change the way they feel because other people believe they should grieve differently? That's absurd. Maxie's death was a devastating curve that they may spend their whole lives getting through. It's okay. No one has the right to tell them they should grieve for their little boy in a different way. They have to be themselves, and that has to be okay.

People's experience, perspective, and upbringing all affect the way they view life, and in turn how they handle life's curves. Individual people cope with challenges in different ways.

When a spouse is unfaithful, some choose to divorce, while others stay in the marriage. Someone who had an oppressive childhood may be able to shake those chains, while others carry the baggage for life. When disappointment or frustration arises, one might lash out in anger, while another may become overwhelmed or depressed. A person who was wronged may be able to forgive his offender while another may not. Who can say how another should handle their challenge? Everyone is different.

Often, when looking from the outside, we can't understand someone's response to a challenge. We think they should have handled the situation differently. But that doesn't matter. We must give people their space and withhold judgement. We can pray - for their strength and comfort and for ourselves that we'll know how to help them. Overall, we have to realize that everyone is different, and that others are doing the best they can. And we must ask them to recognize the same truth about us.

We have to play our own game and allow others to do the same. We must give ourselves, and others, permission to handle challenges in our own way. As individuals, we handle challenges uniquely and that's okay. We have to play our game. I'm okay being me, they are okay being them, and you're okay being you. Stop reading and say out loud, "It's okay to be me." Say it again.

My chance to dance with the Phanatic cannot compare with the intense grief of losing Maxie, but in both of these situations, we had to realize that it's okay to be who we are. We all have to play our own game. We have a finite amount of energy. If we spend that energy changing who we are to please others or to conform to some societal "norm", we won't have the energy to face our curves.

*"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life... Don't let the noise of others opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."* – Steve Jobs

Justin Osmond knows how it feels to play his own game. At age two, Justin was diagnosed with a 90% hearing loss. Although growing up with a hearing loss was difficult, it was heightened by the fact that Justin was born into a musical family. His father, Merrill Osmond, is one of the famous singing Osmonds. As a young child, Justin recalls wearing a box on his chest attached to cumbersome hearing aids and the resulting ridicule he endured because he was different. Justin worked through years of intense speech and listening therapy to overcome his challenge and now gives motivational speeches to audiences of all ages, encouraging others to overcome their difficulties. Over time, Justin realized that his disability did not define him.

Justin's mission is to bring the gift of hearing to thousands of deaf children and adults around the world through the Olive Osmond Hearing Fund, which he runs. He raises awareness of the hearing-impaired as he speaks to groups worldwide and through his book, *Hearing With My Heart*. While Justin's difference is clear, many of us have less visible differences and disabilities that we struggle with. His successful example of turning a disability into ability through helping others shows us what is possible, regardless of our challenge.

# Listen to the Right Messages

What messages are we listening to? We're constantly told by the media and others around us we're not thin enough, fit enough, tall enough, rich enough, emotionally stable enough, and the list goes on. From my experience teaching middle school, I see this as one of the most destructive issues facing young people today. There are not enough voices telling them that they're okay. We need to encourage our youth during these developing years to accept and appreciate themselves. Of course we want them to rise to face their challenges and accomplish all they can, understanding that they are worthwhile just the way they are. At every stage of our lives, we need to realize and help each other recognize that we're okay.

When Wally was in the major leagues, we never listened to the news or read the sports page, especially the day after he pitched. The critics were everywhere. The critics were in the stands, the newsroom, or at home in their recliners! Do you have critics in your life? People are often willing to tell us what we should do, or what they think is the best choice for us and our family. Be aware of the messages you are receiving. It's sad but true that there are people in our lives who we may be better off without. You can get the opinions of others, but in the end you're the one at the plate. You have to remember that they aren't playing your game.

Instead, listen to the people who are cheering you on, those that help you face your curves and move forward in life. These are people who are willing to support and encourage you whether or not they can relate to what you're going through. If at all possible, find people who have gone through similar curves to yours and have emerged successfully. Lean on them, gain strength from them and their victory. I have a friend who makes my curves seem easier to bear; she makes me laugh. Sometimes humor helps, so we laugh together... and we cry as well. Feeling supported is what makes it work. Make sure that you are listening to messages that will help you keep it together.

# You Can Choose to Change

Some changes are thrust upon us, but as we travel through life, there are times when we feel our own need to change. This feeling doesn't come from any outside pressure, but from a realization within us or inspiration from God. If you know you need to make a change in your life's direction, habits or attitude, that's playing your own game. You can change, especially with His help. He changes our hearts. I know, because I've had to change.

When my older daughter was growing up, there was a period of time where I was constantly upset with her and correcting her. Even though she is an amazing girl, I could only see the negative. I turned every minor exploit into a punitive lecture opportunity. After a few months, I started to notice my behavior and became worried about the pattern. Our positive interactions were becoming fewer and fewer. I knew I needed to make a change. After exploring possible reasons, I realized that I had become so worried about how she would grow up that I was overlooking our relationship in the present. I was panicked that each silly act might be permanent and needed to be stopped immediately. Instead, I needed to see her for the fun-loving girl she was and enjoy every moment with her.

Over time, I was able to focus more on the positive and repair our relationship. Though it may be necessary to help us face our challenges in a stronger way, change is not usually comfortable or easy. We can become more humble, patient, and faithful and less selfish, demanding, and prideful. The Lord will give you strength to become the person you need to be to face your curves. If change seems overwhelming, set small goals for yourself, baby steps. Head in the direction that feels right for you. Seek the support you need.

Truthfully, we must have a desire to change before we can do so. If we see a need, but we are unwilling to change, then we have to fully let go of guilt and honestly say, "it's okay to be me", until we have that desire. One of those areas for me is being organized. I have friends who seem organized 100% of the time. I'm not. For them, dinners are planned well in advance, kitchen counters are clean, and there are no paper piles waiting for attention. At times, I can accomplish some of these tasks, but I'm not going to receive the Organized Mother of the Year Award anytime soon.

There were times when I used to compare myself to my more organized friends and get down on myself. Then I realized an important fact for me; organization is great, but I shouldn't guilt myself over it. I have to be okay with

the truth. I know I could improve in that area, but since organization doesn't come naturally to me, it would take quite a bit of work and that's not where I want to focus my energy. We all have to play our own game, remembering that we have the power to change what we want to.

# Disregard Those Who Doubt

There are many situations in our lives when we have to look around and be okay with who we are and what we're doing regardless of the opinions of others. This is difficult when others, especially those close to us, don't agree with or don't understand our reactions and choices.

With the curves baseball has thrown us, I know our families and close friends haven't always agreed with the choices we've made. This may sound harsh but, in reality, their opinion didn't matter because it wasn't their curve. We were the ones up to bat. When it's your turn at the plate, you make the best decision you can at the time, and that's what we have always tried to do. We had to stand on our own two feet and be okay with our decisions. It doesn't mean we always made the right choice, but it was our choice, nonetheless.

This was especially apparent when we moved to northern Utah for Wally's opportunity to coach Division I baseball.

Some family members made it clear from the beginning that they did not agree with our decision to relocate our family for a job that could be short-lived. After Wally lost his job at the college, one family member in particular would make seemingly harmless, but hurtful, comments about how we had made a mistake. I know he didn't mean to upset us, but because our family's situation was uncertain at the time, it was like pouring salt in our wound. I understand that it is hard to watch others make decisions you think are wrong, especially when those "others" are loved ones, but his words troubled me.

I endured these comments for about six months before I realized that he hadn't made the choice to move, we had. He had been looking from the outside in, and couldn't see the blessings that had come from taking that leap of faith. I started to reflect on all the positive effects of our move north. Individually, and as a family, God had truly blessed us in many ways, but not all blessings were evident from the outside. I typed an itemized list of the benefits of our move, and sent it to him. I made it clear that I meant no disrespect, but he had not seen the situation from my perspective. He never said another word.



Perhaps you have people in your life that doubt you. I encourage you to take a deep breath and remember that you're okay. Whatever you are going through,

you are handling it the best way you can; playing the game to the best of your ability. Theodore Roosevelt said, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." If you want to work on changing some aspects of your life, go for it. Otherwise, be comfortable with who you are and where you are going. Feeling better about yourself allows you to swing confidently at the next curve life throws.

*"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." ~ Isaiah 12:2*

## 4

### Take a Moment to Enjoy the Game

#### *Stop and Smell the Roses*

*Playing in the major leagues was an incredible experience— one we'll never be able to duplicate. Meanwhile, Wally's family was experiencing a curve of their own.*

#### **From the field:**

*When Wally was 16 years old, his parents adopted his little brother, Alan. Despite their age differences, Wally and Alan developed a special bond. Alan had many health challenges – some known at the time of adoption and others not until years later. When he was born, his esophagus was not connected to his stomach, which required the first of many surgeries. Alan had many medical needs in his young life. He had a stomach feeding tube and a spinal "halo" resulting from doctors fusing his vertebrae.*

*Because of all they have done, I consider Wally's parents, Jon and Judy, heavenly angels in disguise. Although Wally's mom was back and forth to Children's Hospital in Los Angeles on a weekly basis, she also learned to care for many of Alan's needs at home. In her eyes, she was only doing what motherhood required; you can relate if you have children with special needs or health challenges.*

*When Alan was eight years old, we got an urgent call from the hospital. Wally was playing in the minor leagues at the time and on the road in Iowa. His dad told him to get on a plane immediately and go directly to the hospital in California. Alan had an infection and the doctors didn't expect him to live through the night. Thankfully he recovered, but as a result of the situation, the doctors discovered he was HIV positive. He either contracted the virus from infected blood via his birth mother or a blood transfusion after his birth. In 1981 they weren't testing blood for HIV.*

*How he contracted the virus wasn't important. He was infected; a fact and family and friends would have to learn to live with. It definitely brought a new dimension to his care. Initially, though people were afraid of the diagnosis, his parents educated others and continued to love and care for their sick little boy. Although he had been ill nearly all his life, this new development made us realize*

*we wouldn't have him forever. Anyone with a family member who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness knows this feeling. Whenever Wally and I were in town, we would look forward to our time with Alan. He loved GhostBusters, WWF wrestling, chocolate kisses, and Legos. I have fond memories sitting with Alan on the floor for hours putting together a massive Lego ship or spacecraft. Wally's dad still displays some of these masterpieces.*

*One lesson I learned during this time is the importance of taking time to enjoy life's special moments. Our life is so fast-paced. There is always somewhere to be, a call to return, a checklist to power through, and the rat race to run. What I learned from little Alan is that we need to put those things to the side for a few hours, or even a few minutes, and enjoy life's moments.*

*Alan loved coming to Wally's games when the Phillies played at Dodger Stadium. While waiting for Wally after a game one night, Alan, his sister Amy, and Wally's folks were joined in an elevator by Vin Scully, the voice of the Los Angeles Dodgers. They started talking to Vin and told him they were Wally's family. Vin graciously recalled his first memory of Wally and they all enjoyed the brief visit. Alan thought meeting Vin was awesome and frequently spoke of the experience.*

*To our sadness, Alan's virus developed into full-blown AIDS and we lost him three days after Christmas in 1992, shortly before his 12th birthday. Wally's parents are grateful to the Lord that they had him as long as they did and they have faith they will see him again. He taught us all and we look back with wonderful fondness on the years we spent with him. He was a blessing to many and will live in our hearts and memories forever.*

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Often those who are terminally ill describe a drastic change in their priorities. Answers vary when people are asked what they would change in their lives if they had six months left to live. The question makes them stop and think. What would they stop doing? What would they start doing? Tim McGraw's song "Live Like You Were Dying" asks the same question. What would you do? Would you take more time with your family to make sure your relationships were intact? Most people would answer, "Yes!" When faced with life-threatening illness, people often realize that the aspects of life that seemed important aren't. For many, priorities change, they find the Lord and gratitude flows for all they have.

Instead of waiting for curves to change our perspective, let's make a

conscious effort now to enjoy the moments we have. Let's take the chance to appreciate life more often and enjoy the game we're playing.

We have a favorite vacation spot near Newport Beach, California called Balboa Island. Wally's family has been vacationing there for years and it has become a favorite of mine and our family. The island is a wonderful place for strolling along the boardwalk and smelling roses. Many island homeowners have planted beautiful rose bushes and I lean over to smell every one. Some are so fragrant that they take my breath away. When I happen upon one of these, I stop, close my eyes and breathe in deeply, hoping to capture the scent and hold onto it forever. I know you can relate, which is why I hope you'll forgive a brief departure from our baseball theme in this chapter.

## Notice the Roses

Strolling, stopping, smelling and savoring a rose is a process that one can practice at any time in their life, even if they're not on a peaceful island surrounded by rosebushes. Smelling roses resembles slowing down and pausing for activities that bring joy. Taking time to smell the roses is not only something people should do; it's an absolute necessity for their health, their sanity, and the quality of their lives.

Opportunities to smell roses often arrive when we have other, seemingly more important items to accomplish. The dishes are calling because they're in plain sight, but more valuable duties, like taking time for our kids or ourselves, aren't screaming for attention. A friend of mine read a book to her grandson and crossed "mop kitchen floor" off her list. We often hear the phrase "living in the moment". It's another way of saying not to miss the roses right in front of you.

One day, my daughter, Rachel, wanted me to go outside to make a snowman with her. I love my daughter but I HATE being cold!! Making a snowman was not how I wanted to spend my afternoon. After a few minutes of pleading, I gave in, got bundled up, and headed outside to make the snowman. I couldn't ever remember making a successful snowman in my life. Being from southern California, I was not versed in the snowman arts. However, some friends taught Rachel, and she started teaching me. We teamed up, and made a great snowman. He had a face, wore a hat, and sported a sign that said "Arnold the Park Ranger". It was a great afternoon and, even though it was the middle of winter, we were smelling roses.

Late one night, at the end of a long day, I realized I needed some last-minute groceries. The grocery store was not where I wanted to go but we were low on food; I dragged myself into the car and prepared to leave. My two older kids jumped in the car with me and we headed to the store. Megan was wearing mismatched socks, no shoes and a blanket around her in lieu of a coat. For some reason, Ryan got the beat-boxing (making a musical beat with your mouth) working and Megan started rapping to the beat about the store. I was pushing the cart of groceries with my beat-boxing kids rocking out behind me. I could have been embarrassed and told them to behave appropriately but, instead, I started laughing and dancing down the aisle to the beat.

People started staring... and smiling. We were a sight to see. A man in the checkout line said the famous phrase, "I'll have what they're having." We had a great time together as my stress melted away to laughter. It was one of those

unplanned moments to enjoy. I was able to relax, laugh and have fun. Little did I know those grocery aisles were lined with roses.

My stepdad and his new wife live on the other side of our town, and I don't take as many opportunities to visit as I should. One day, I took the time to stop and see them because I was concerned about my stepdad's deteriorating health. I had a long to-do list I was anxious to tackle so I only planned a brief stop. When I got there, I sat and chatted and, as I did so, my to-do list magically started to melt away. Before I realized it, I had been on the couch for nearly an hour, when his wife invited me to stay for dinner. I hesitated, knowing how much I had to get done before leaving town the next day, but I quickly pushed the thought aside and accepted the dinner invite. We had a lovely time together and I was so glad I stayed. That's how roses are; after you smell them, you're usually glad you did.

It is not only recognizing these moments when they come along that's important, but being willing to give yourself permission to enjoy them. When we take the chance to smell a rose, we also see the beauty in the world, and the good in life.

My stepdad fell, broke his hip, and now lives in a care facility. Despite the attempts of skilled doctors and therapists, he will never walk again. Before his fall, he was diagnosed with early signs of dementia, and his time in the care facility has only added to his confusion. Sadly, he has trouble remembering simple facts from day to day, moment to moment. I know many of you are dealing with the curve of caring for your aging parents, or will face it in the future. Elder care is an emotional, physical, and logistical struggle that takes a toll on us. I am grateful I took time to "smell the roses" with my parents and can rely on those loving memories to get me through tougher times.

Smelling roses makes it easier to see the "bigger picture", see what is truly important, enjoy the moment, and really live. Enjoying life's moments helps us realize that whatever we're going through isn't permanent, that "this too shall pass". We often feel rejuvenated, renewed, and encouraged because we know we will survive the curve.

It seems reasonable that the more we lean over to smell roses, the more we look for them. The roses in our lives calm us, feel good to our senses, and bring us joy. That's why we're here. We are on this earth to be happy. "Men are that they might have joy"<sup>1</sup>

# Curves Hide Roses

Sometimes we can't even see a rose, let alone smell one. Whether the challenge we're facing is big or small, a hectic day, or a life-changing situation, we can easily see it as all-encompassing. Life's curves can block out roses. Uncertainty clouds our vision and keeps us from seeing our blessings and enjoying special moments. Smelling roses removes the cloud and allows us to see the beauty in the world.

Unfortunately, when people are facing curves in their lives, they may not realize roses will help. Why? Because when people are facing challenges, logic tells them to keep their head down, focus on the situation, and simply plow through. The solution is counter-intuitive; when we're going through the curves it's difficult to smell the roses, but that's when we need to the most. Whether the curve is a long to-do list, a demanding job, a health issue, or relationship problem, smelling roses can help us navigate it more smoothly.

Adam Bender, of Lexington, Kentucky, is a young man who found the roses in spite of his curves. Adam was born with a malignant tumor in his left thigh. During his first year of life, doctors tried many types of treatment, including chemotherapy, but the tumor remained. Amputation was the only hope of saving his life. For his parents, losing their son's leg was better than losing their son. Determined to be treated as other children, Adam refused to rely on a wheelchair. After he learned to walk and run, his parents couldn't hold him back from playing sports: soccer, baseball, football and wrestling. He was taught to focus on his ability instead of his disability.

He gained notoriety at the age of eight while playing youth baseball and is an example of overcoming to young people everywhere. He has never thought, "I can't do this." Now wrestling successfully in high school, he continues to shine and show others how to smell the roses. His mother is quoted as saying, "I honestly feel like this is God's plan. I was guided through this because there is a certain plan for my boy, and I think he's living part of it right now. He's very inspirational to people. I just don't think that his life was meant to be with two legs."

# Find Your Roses

My mom has fond memories of traveling to Cincinnati to watch the Reds play baseball when she was growing up. My grandpa didn't have the five sons he had hoped for. Instead, he had three girls, my mom was the baby. She and her dad would drive from Dayton to Cincinnati to watch the games. They would always get a hot dog and a scorecard and my grandpa would help her keep score. For them, going to a baseball game was smelling roses... spending special time together.

Seeing life through the eyes of a child is another way to smell roses. Children often see wonder and excitement in the everyday experiences as adults view as ordinary and mundane. One day I took our friends' two children to the grocery store, a new experience for them. What I saw as just another grocery store trip was total awesomeness for these little girls. Their excitement at biting into a deli chicken leg, pushing the button to move the conveyor belt, and riding in a cart that looked like a car, smelled like roses to me. When I saw the experience through their eyes, my perspective changed. If we can appreciate life as a child does, our outlook will become more fresh, joyful and exciting.

This is where knowing yourself, and what your "roses" are, becomes so important. Your rose might be sitting down with a cup of tea and your favorite magazine, walking your dog, doing yoga, calling a friend, working on a puzzle, or going to the park with the kids. Does meditation, music or a good book help you smell the roses in life? Find out what helps you slow down, feel gratitude, and see the bigger picture, then commit to practicing your smelling.

Watching the sunset has a special way of calming me because it reminds me of God's goodness and love. Recently, at the end of another hectic day, I was rushing to check a few last minute items off my list. Amidst the panic I glanced to my left and, through two rooftops, saw the setting sun. I pulled my car to the side of the road and watched until the sun disappeared below the horizon. In that hectic moment, I was given an answer to a prayer I hadn't even offered. I was able to forget the rat race for a few moments, relax, and enjoy the beauty. I also had the chance to express my gratitude to God for another day of life and all that is good in my world. It was calming and invigorating at the same time. I felt alive.

The sunset may not be your "rose", but find what moves you, breathe in the beautiful fragrance, and feel renewed and strengthened.

## **Roses Don't Smell Themselves**

When my tasking, double-tasking and multi-tasking makes me want to scream, or pull the covers over my head, that's a signal I need to pause and breathe. When I taught fitness classes, I devoted a segment of the class to breathing and stretching. Whatever you're going through, deliberate, focused breathing brings your heart rate down, clears your mind, and forces you to slow down, if even for a moment.

Take a deep breath right now. Deeply inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Repeat. Fill up your lungs. Close your eyes if you'd like. You can think of a positive aspect of your life, or transport yourself to a situation or place that brings you joy. Pause and Breathe. These are action words, they don't happen by themselves. Pausing and breathing takes intentional effort and focus on our part to consciously slow down. When I have a challenging day at work, I often eat my lunch outside in the sunshine, rather than in the teacher lunchroom. That small amount of time gives me the chance to pause, breathe, and refocus on my roses. You may have to force yourself to pause and breathe during your day as well.

In May, 2011, my friend, Michelle, had a reasonable handle on her busy life. A single mom, she taught sixth grade and was raising her three kids, ages 17, 15 and 11. Life wasn't perfect, but she was keeping it together. That all changed the moment her youngest, Abby, collapsed at school after running a lap in physical education class. Her teacher and others at the school performed CPR on Abby until medical professionals arrived. She was rushed to the hospital and then taken by Life Flight to Salt Lake City where doctors determined she had a rare condition called restrictive, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. The news that she needed a heart transplant was a shock, considering she had lived an active life, running and playing soccer, with no previous sign of trouble. Michelle and her family's world turned upside-down. Pause and breathe was their only choice.

Michelle and Abby spent the next several months living away from home, either in the hospital or in a nearby rental her family arranged, waiting for a new heart. In her book *Abby's Miracle*, Michelle describes the challenges they went through waiting for Abby's new heart, suffering "survivor guilt" (knowing that someone had to die for Abby to live), the touch and go anxiety of the transplant, and learning to live a new life full of medications and restrictions. Despite the difficulties, they found roses amidst the curves: the fact that Abby was alive, the way Michelle's employer accommodated her lengthy absence, the rallying support of the community, and their new ability to appreciate the little joys of life. Through the support of their family and friends, and their strong faith in God, they survived, learned, and kept moving forward. Abby's condition forced

them to pause and breathe. They are making the choice to enjoy and live their lives.

When we Pause and Breathe, we more fully Enjoy and Live. We must intentionally Pause, Breathe, Enjoy, and Live.

By repeating this process daily, and even hourly, we not only will be able to find more roses in our lives, but see the importance of taking time to smell them.

# Become a Rose Smeller

My friend, Melanie, was an amazing example of someone who stopped and smelled roses. I met her years ago, when I was looking for help to hem a dress. She was an expert seamstress and, as a single mom, used that skill to support her and her son. She had a naturally calm personality that soothed others. She took walks, saw the beauty around her, and took time to connect with nature, herself, and close friends.

Her slower pace of life had a calming effect on me, encouraging me to slow down and smell more roses. When I had surgery, I knew Melanie was one person who wouldn't be too busy to sit with me while I recuperated. Sure enough, she came over and visited often. I also loved her ability to enjoy the moment and look for the good around her even though she had challenges. She never dwelt on the negative in her life, only the positive.

While in her 40s, she was diagnosed with Stage 4 Metastatic breast cancer. The doctor told her there was no cure and "little hope" of her survival. She recalled, "When you get the news that you're going to die, you develop faith that the Lord knows best. You learn to trust Him." She proceeded to get every aspect of her life in order, *i.e.* spiritual, financial, family.

After her diagnosis, her doctor didn't help her choose a treatment route. She started on a series of agonizing chemotherapy treatments that came with harsh side effects and seemed to have no effect on the cancer. Finally, after enduring great discomfort, she knew she needed a different treatment plan... her own. She gave her body three months to recover and then started on a chemotherapy pill; the first treatment in a year and a half that seemed to work. She often said that the most important thing we can do is listen to our own body and make the best choices for our own health. Just before she started chemo, Melanie met and married an old friend. At the time of her wedding, the doctors had given her a year to live.

Her doctor instructed her not to "overexert" herself. This included not going on walks, playing volleyball, or even picking up her new grandson, activities she dearly loved. She listened to this medical advice for a period of time, but wasn't happy because it made her focus on her illness and stop living life. This period of her life was difficult and confusing because everyone suggested a different remedy, a new drink, or herb oil. She was having a tough time seeing the roses, let alone smelling them. What would you do if your doctor kept telling you that you were going to die? Maybe you would do what she did -- switch doctors!

She decided to see a new oncologist, who was much more positive and hopeful. This doctor told her just the opposite; go live your life. Pick up your grandson, use your muscles, and get stronger. This resonated with her heart and she started living again.

Unfortunately, in addition to the health challenges she was dealing with, her marriage turned toxic. Her husband became distant and disturbed. She was riding an emotional roller coaster and it took a toll on her health, like poison in her veins. Even in this tough situation, she forced herself to smell the roses. As scary as it was to be back on her own again, she knew her health took priority. She trusted in God and He gave her the courage to get out of her marriage, which prolonged her life.

To our sadness, she passed away from cancer before I finished this book. I cherish her memory and example of making a conscious decision to enjoy life's moments. Even at the end of her life, she was grateful to the Lord for each day she had with her family and friends. She wanted me to encourage you to do the same, to live for today and find joy wherever you can.



Stopping to smell roses is not optional; it is crucial to our health, well-being, and quality of life. Commit today that whatever curves life is throwing at you, you will take time regularly to Pause, Breathe, Enjoy, and Live. Take a walk. Make a Snowman. Watch the Sunset. Make and take opportunities to smell roses in every way you can.

*"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." ~ John 14:27*

## ***KJ***

Over the last couple of years, our high school community has tragically lost more than 4 students. The death that hit the Snow Canyon High School baseball family the hardest was that of 16-year old KJ Harrison.

KJ was the youngest of six children, with five older sisters who loved him like crazy. Together, with their parents, Kreg and Brooke, they had a very close knit family. KJ was a fun-loving kid with a great sense of humor. He was kind-hearted, loved by many, and a friend to all. He was no respecter of persons and

always found the good in people. In his obituary, Brooke wrote that he had a "comfortable ease" about him. He was never interested in getting the glory, but supported others, and cheered them on.

KJ found joy in living life to the fullest. He created this quote: "Fear brings down confidence in the Almighty God". He constantly talked about the mission he knew he was born to fulfill. There seemed to be a force nudging him along in life, as if he was living for a greater purpose. He didn't hold anything back; he wasn't afraid of life, or death.

KJ had a talent for baseball at an early age. He attacked the sport like he attacked life, constantly giving 100%. True to his personality he was a great teammate, always concerned with the success of the team, doing whatever was needed to help earn the victory.

As a high school sophomore, KJ played on the varsity team that won their region in 2012. However, because of an issue with a player's paperwork they were forced to forfeit four of their victories. Against the odds, the team won a play-in game and ended up deep in the state championship. KJ had a big hit in a "must win" game.

KJ was quoted in the Deseret News, May 12, 2012:

*"I had a chance to come through before and left men in scoring position," Harrison said. "I knew it would come down to some of us in the bottom of the lineup needing to come through for us to win. And I knew I was going to have another chance to come through."*

*"Riley was throwing a great game and I just hung in there, battled and tried to put it in play. I just wanted to put the ball in play, hit it square and try to put it in play hard, keep it out of the air and keep it off the ground. I knew the pressure was going to be on every one of us, and every person on our team came through and contributed today."*

*"It's a relief, it feels great, it's the biggest thrill I've had by far," Harrison said of his huge, clutch base hit."<sup>2</sup>*

In the Cinderella story of the season, they ended up winning the State 3A Tournament; a great moment for KJ and the rest of the team.

His summer scout expedition was scheduled for early June, just two weeks after school ended. KJ had been looking forward to the trip to Havasupi Falls for over two years. He traveled with great friends and capable leaders to Arizona for a week of hiking, camping, and swimming.

On the third day of the trip, KJ and three other boys were swimming in pools just below the falls, with no sign of danger. They took a lunch break, headed to

the next set of falls and began swimming as before. There was no way they could have known underneath the water was a deadly whirlpool vortex.

KJ was the first one into the water. At 5'10", he should have been safe, but without warning the whirlpool began to pull him under. Two of the boys were clinging to rocks under the falls, while another was starting into the water when KJ went down. His friends did everything they could, short of losing their own lives, to save him. They were able to pull him out, but after performing CPR for over an hour, in addition to using Epi pens and a defibrillator, they admitted he was gone.

In the midst of the tragedy, those present witnessed sacred and special moments they will never forget. One miracle after another surrounded KJ's passing. KJ's baseball coach happened to be in the area with another scout troop, and he, along with other leaders, were unwilling to leave KJ's body at the bottom of the falls overnight. Though the task was treacherous and difficult, they maneuvered his body up the cliff in the dark. Life Flight helicopters transported the entire group of boys along with KJ's body, out of the canyon the next morning.

Meanwhile that evening, Brooke and Kreg received conflicting phone calls about KJ's condition. As soon as they received the terrible news of his death, word spread on social media and their front yard began overflowing with teens. Brooke, Kreg and their entire family were in absolute shock, but Brooke set about comforting KJ's friends. This wasn't supposed to happen. Just over a month before, he was playing in the state baseball championships, and now he was gone.

Messages to KJ and condolences to the Harrison family began flooding in. Nearly the entire high school student body attended a candlelight vigil to remember him. Miraculously, while Kreg was on his way to buy a burial plot in the city cemetery, he got a call about an available plot in the Pinto pioneer cemetery where many of the Harrison ancestors were buried. They were able to bury KJ in a peaceful place surrounded by family.

Thankfully, Brooke and Kreg met and spoke with the other scouts immediately upon their return from the trip. They were able to thank the boys for their assistance and allow them to release feelings of responsibility for the accident. Brooke and Kreg's ability to let go of any blame, even toward God, helped free the boys from guilt and prevent them from second-guessing themselves, an initial step in the boys' healing process. As time progressed, Brooke and Kreg talked to each of the boys individually about their experiences on the trip. In the end, Brooke and Kreg knew they couldn't have changed the outcome.

A ripple effect resulted from KJ's passing... the memories collected, the attachment Brooke and Kreg have with KJ's friends and the pledge those friends made to live better after losing him. Brooke and Kreg have maintained their commitment to support KJ's friends, celebrating their lives, as KJ would have wanted.

The girls' high school soccer team won their first championship on KJ's birthday. It was for him. At the end of their victory, they remained on the field and sang "Happy Birthday" to KJ. Throughout the 2013 baseball season, the baseball team had KJ's spirit with them - his name and number, "KJ 6", were stitched on the side of their hats. KJ's jersey hung in the dugout, Kreg helped as an assistant coach and he and Brooke attended every game.

When the team won the state championship the next year, the odds were again stacked against them. As players piled onto the field to congratulate their teammates, they held up KJ's jersey and everyone knew KJ was there with them. They'd done it for him. Usually a team fields 9 players, but the team motto during the state tournament was "We play 10". It was said in the huddles and sewn on their bags. KJ was part of the team, he was in their hearts and on their minds.

Brooke and Kreg have each handled their loss in different ways. Kreg remembers not breathing for two days, consumed with the worry of getting KJ's body home. The loss is still hard for him to accept. It's not logical that his only son is gone; so many events they'll never share. Kreg was there when they won the state championship without KJ. An artist by profession, Kreg created a memorial to the entire team, which stands at the field and includes a bronze-sculpted print of KJ's cleat. Spending time at the field was definitely hard, but therapeutic for him as well. It helped him feel connected to KJ by supporting his teammates.

Their home and community are filled with triggers that remind them of KJ (photos, a shirt, a hat, a baseball glove). Kreg makes a conscious choice to see these as positive memories, rather than painful reminders. He needed space, and time, to be alone in peace. When he can, he works by himself, in nature, and if possible, near KJ's grave.

Brooke found comfort and peace differently than Kreg. Acceptance came easier for her. In a way, it was like losing a limb, Brooke describes: "You go on without it, but there's a constant reminder that it's gone." She cries, and then wipes her tears, gaining courage from KJ's memory. She continues to enjoy interaction with others, even when it's tough. Both she and Kreg have each, in their own way, been sources of comfort for others experiencing loss.

Interestingly enough, Brooke is grateful KJ was able to play in the falls on his

scout trip. He was truly looking forward to it and she's glad he got the chance. Brooke's knowledge that "he died living life" also brings her peace. She wouldn't have wanted to hold him back. She realizes her gratitude and peace are tender mercies from God.

Brooke believes an idea shared by a friend: that we all have to learn the same lessons in life. Lessons like perseverance, hope, patience, tolerance, love, forgiveness, and the ability to push onward through struggles.... we simply have to travel different paths of learning.

Because of her constant choice not to be overwhelmingly sad or bitter; Brooke feels sustained, blessed with "continual peace". This allows her to see and feel the Lord's tender mercies in her life and recognize the blessings she receives. Without this view, she knows the sustaining would be lost and she would only see mountains and mountains of grief.

Her therapy has included reading and listening to everything she can find. The following are some of the quotes that have strengthened her:

*"Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow."*<sup>3</sup>

The Harrison family faced a horrific curve, but through their courage and faith, they are each receiving strength and carrying on with their lives. May they continue to be blessed with peace and comfort, as well as each of you. Let's win this one for KJ. He would have wanted it that way.

# 5

## You Make the Plays You make

### *Could've, Would've, Should've*

#### **From the field...**

*The 1992 baseball season started out great for Wally. He went to major league Spring Training camp with the Phillies, and was having a great year. We felt positive that Wally's position on the team was stable. When the end of July arrived, Wally had pitched in 40 games and had an ERA of 3.00, the lowest of any reliever on the Phillies staff. We felt like life was going our way. But in baseball, and in life, that can change in an instant... and it did.*

*One night, after a game in Philadelphia, Wally was told he was being sent back to AAA. We packed up our belongings and headed north to Scranton to finish the last month of the AAA season. Of course, we were happy to see friends and teammates, but the demotion to AAA was tough to take. Even though Wally did well for the SWB Red Barons, pitching in 15 games and ending with a 2.70 ERA he was not recalled by the Phillies in September.*

*As we headed into the winter, Wally was still under contract with the Phillies. The Phillies wanted to keep him on the roster, but he wasn't sure he wanted to stay. The Phillies traded for another left-handed relief pitcher during the off-season, and Wally spoke with his agent about the best course of action. After weighing the options, Wally decided to ask for his release so he could become a free agent. We figured Wally had a good chance to be picked up by another team and possibly return to the majors.*

*Unfortunately, that was not the case. July 28, 1992, was the last game he ever pitched in the major leagues. What made it worse was the Phillies went to the World Series the next year (1993). If we had stuck with the team one more year in AAA, Wally might have been recalled, and in the bullpen for the World Series.*

*We're human...we make choices we'll regret. That's part of this life. Some choices are life-altering, some less so, but we have to live with the consequences either way.*

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I call these experiences the "could've, would've, should've's," you might call it 20/20 hindsight. They are situations in life that we wish had gone differently; the ones we look back on and say, "If I had it to do over again..." Whatever the name, we all have them. This was the biggest one in Wally's baseball career. He could've played in the World Series. He would've had a shot at getting called back up. We should've stayed with the Phillies... and so on. We'll never know what could've, would've, or should've happened with Wally's career, because we made the choice to leave the Phillies. Given the information we had at the time, we made what we thought was the best decision. We can look back on the experience and wish we had done it differently, but all the looking back and longing won't change the past.

To a degree, the could've, would've, should've's can be beneficial as they help individuals learn from life's experiences. However, sometimes, when people dwell on them, and beat themselves up for decisions they've made in the past, their mind and soul can become poisoned, which leads to fear, anger, anxiety, bitterness, depression, and resentment. These negative feelings can make a person doubt their value, their intelligence, and their faith. Toxic thoughts can also make one doubt God. A person can start to second guess every decision until, at the extreme, he is incapable of making decisions for fear he'll make the wrong choice.

# Avoid Dwelling on the Past

We're human and imperfect. All we can do is make the best decision we can at the time with the information we have, along with careful study and prayer. If our resolution turns out wrong, or badly, we have to take responsibility for that choice, learn from it and grow as individuals. You may never get over it, but you learn to live through it and it becomes a part of who you are. Because many of the curves we've faced in life were no fault of our own, there is nothing we could have done to change the situation. Whether the curve comes as a result of our own choice, mistakes we've made, or other people's choices, it is in the past.

I once met a woman whose teenage son was involved in an auto accident where a young father was killed. The teen's truck collided with the minivan on the freeway, smashing the drivers' side. Words cannot describe the sorrow her son felt at causing the man's death and depriving his four children of a father. Although he wished he had died instead, at that point there was nothing he could do to change the outcome. Every time he thought of his own father, or was spending time with friends, he felt guilty for enjoying his life. Besides his own guilt, he was attacked and judged by those in his school and community. Everyone in both families was devastated by unspeakable grief.

Thankfully, over time, the victim's wife was able to forgive the teen and he was able to forgive himself as well. As a result of the experience, the teen developed a greater awareness of others' suffering and a willingness to see life from another's viewpoint before jumping to conclusions or judging others. Instead of dwelling on the past, he moved forward with increased compassion and love, better able to relate to those around him.

Whether we struggle from past choices, mistakes, or accidents, there is no going back. We can ask for help from others outside the situation, seek forgiveness, and lean on the Lord for help to keep moving, but we have to realize that we cannot change the past. These situations happen to us on a day to day basis in varying degrees. Often, without thinking, we say words we regret. We get stressed or angry with family members or co-workers. We act in ways we shouldn't. The past is full of situations that we cannot change and there is nothing productive in wishing it was different.

## See the Positive

If you read the introduction to this book, you know that Wally and I built a home on acres in a peaceful place called Dammeron Valley. We researched house plans, contractors, and materials, and couldn't wait to get started. It was 2900 square feet (not including an unfinished basement) of blood, sweat, and love. Our contractor installed beautiful custom cedar woodwork throughout the house: trim on each interior door frame, a chair rail, wainscoting and a gorgeous staircase. We also had a loft, a pellet stove, and a HUGE laundry/craft/mud room. This wasn't just any home. It was our dream home.

We ended up living in the house for only two years. At that point baseball threw us new curves and we made the decision to sell our home. It was one of the hardest decisions we've ever made. Because of the timing, we had to sell the home for an extremely low price, which hurt us financially. Leaving that house was painful, and our hearts still hurt when we drive by. Years later, the property was on the market for almost three times what we sold it for. Nevertheless, we did what we thought was best at the time. We made the decision and there was no going back.

If we can see positives from our decisions, they feel less like blunders. Some family members disagreed with our decision to leave our home, pull our kids out of school, and relocate to northern Utah for Wally's job. It looked even more like a mistake when he lost the job six months later and we moved three more times in that 17-month period. Thankfully, we were able to see positives, like our kids gaining a fresh perspective on possessions, a greater appreciation for family, and Megan moving out and living with friends, which prepared us for her year at college.

Try as we might, sometimes we can't see any positives from a choice or accident, as with Wally's decision to leave the Phillies, or losing someone close to us. But, being able to see, or make, something positive come out of apparent mistakes can help us keep it together. Thankfully, looking back, there were positives that came out of selling our dream home. We ended up in California where Wally got his education, which may not have happened if we had stayed in Utah. If we choose to focus on the positives that we can see, it helps us be grateful for the blessings we have been given.

If we are only looking backward with regret, we may see past choices only as mistakes. We can remember and learn from the past, but to cope with the curves, focus forward on the present and future.

## **Don't Be a Victim**

David and Leslee Henson had gone out for their usual morning walk near the golf course in their neighborhood. Dave was an avid golfer, and also loved biking, running, and fishing, as did Leslee. They competed in marathons and triathlons together with their children. They moved to Santa Clara because of the beauty, the warmer climate, and the chance to live closer to their daughter.

Their morning walk started like any other. However, as they were walking near the golf course entrance, a distracted driver came speeding down the road. Her car hit another car, forcing it onto the sidewalk. Dave tried to get Leslee out of the way, but they were both struck. Dave died at the scene from massive traumatic injuries. Leslee was in critical condition and was Life-Flighted to UVRMC in Provo, Utah. She had fractures in her neck and back along with a separated shoulder. She also sustained massive head injuries; her brain was bleeding in three different places.

Doctors pieced her scalp together using approximately 5000 stitches and staples. Leslee knows it was a miracle she lived. She attributes her survival to the power of prayer, divinely guided doctors, and miracles from God. They suffered a horrific tragedy; one that not only affected friends and neighbors but people throughout the community and the state of Utah. Leslee had a long and arduous recovery ahead, and had to face it all without her high school sweetheart and spouse of 38 years.

David Henson was 57 years old when he was killed. He led an active life and had many friends and family, including 10 grandchildren. He touched many people throughout his life and all were devastated by his passing. Leslee and her family had a choice. They could become victims, painfully angry and bitter at the woman that ended Dave's vibrant life. They could poison themselves with questions they would never be able to answer, growing angry at the unfairness of the senseless tragedy. What if we hadn't moved to Santa Clara? What if we hadn't gone for a walk that morning? What if we had left 5 minutes earlier? What if the driver hadn't been distracted?

But that's not what Dave would have wanted. Some days are tough, but knowing that she can't change the circumstances, Leslee makes the choice to be happy, more charitable, and to forgive. Leslee, her children, family, and friends have found a positive focus to help them move forward with healing and hope.

One month to the day after the accident that claimed her husband's life, Leslee Henson was standing on the stage of a local high school auditorium sharing their story with students. Her message to them: don't drive distracted. The sight of Leslee on stage with a shaved head and a neck brace, a monstrous

scar across her forehead, her arm in a sling, and multiple lacerations on her legs affected everyone in the audience. Her appearance sent a strong message to those high school students. Since then, Leslee has spoken to many groups to raise awareness of the consequences of distracted driving.

Leslee has also met with state legislature members, highway patrolmen throughout the state, city officials, and police officers. Through their efforts, thousands of people have signed pledge cards promising to "Park your Phone before you Drive". Dave's friends hosted a 5K run and golf tournament fundraiser to help with this urgent cause. They have created YouTube videos, erected billboards, and created a blog at [stopthetextsstopthewrecks.blogspot.com](http://stopthetextsstopthewrecks.blogspot.com). Signs are posted throughout the city to remind drivers not to text, especially at local high school parking lot exits. Leslee has also been heavily involved in urging lawmakers to toughen consequences for distracted drivers. Because of her efforts, a bill was passed that tightened the law on cell phone use in cars. It is now against the law to manipulate the keypad of your phone while driving. The Henson family is now working towards making Utah a "Hands Free" state.

Instead of looking back, Leslee, her family, and friends are leading a monumental effort to ensure that something positive comes from their tragedy. In addition to her beneficial work in the community and government, Leslee recognizes greater humility within herself, a change in her perspective, and more compassion for others who are suffering.

Leslee said, "Don't think that I don't have rough days, but I know I can't change the circumstances that I have been faced with. I also think that by choosing to surround myself with people who are cheerful has been key to facing my trials." The other key has been her faith. Leslee has definitely grown closer to the Lord through this trial. The Savior has been a huge presence in her life. But more than anything, she has seen His hand in others who have served her by helping her get back on her feet.

When faced with curves, it is easy to become a victim by blaming ourselves, others, or God. This is a trap that keeps our focus in the past and prevents us from moving forward. For many of the people in this book, the ability to release themselves and others from blame has allowed their healing to progress.

# Move Forward

I read a story of an upper middle-class couple who moved their family to the west coast for employment. Their 15-year old son was a friendly, positive, and an outstanding student but wasn't excited about the move. When he arrived, he did his best to make friends, but the new city never felt like home. He accepted an invitation to attend summer camp with kids from school. While there, his friends asked him to hold the video camera while they sought revenge on a bully, an act that went too far. The victim pressed charges against the boys and the teens ended up spending 20 days in a juvenile detention center.

It was a horrific time for the family. They moved their son across the country only to have him convicted in a life-altering felony act, which was later reduced to a misdemeanor. Regardless of how they felt, they couldn't change what had happened. They couldn't turn back time. Thankfully, the teen was able to get past the incident and move forward with a successful and productive life.

We can go crazy asking ourselves questions like...

- What if we hadn't moved across the country?
- What if people didn't have cancer?
- What if a high school dropout had stayed in school?
- What if my child didn't have Autism?
- What if I had married someone different?
- What if, what if, what if...

As we know, we cannot change the past, asking "What If" will not bring peace. By dwelling on the pain, hurt, and sadness of past choices and experiences, we face the curve again and again. If we look back with regret, it's nearly impossible to look forward with hope.

Leslee Henson was able to forgive the woman who took her husband's life, which is often the first step to our own healing. Besides forgiving others, we have to be willing to forgive ourselves. If we have wronged another, we can apologize and do everything we can to make it right. We're the only ones who can forgive ourselves. We have to realize we're only human, ask the Lord for forgiveness, and then move forward with life.



Instead of looking back at the past with regret or remorse, use your energy to move forward in life. Refuse to let mistakes, thoughts, or regrets paralyze you. Moving on despite the hardships we face can be a lifelong battle, but worth every effort. Realize what's done is done, find a positive focal point, and proceed at your own pace. I know you can and I have faith you will.

*"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not until thine own understanding." ~ Proverbs 3:5*

# 6

## See the Good in the Game

### *Attitude Makes the Difference*

#### **From the field...**

*After seeking our release from the Phillies in the winter of 1992, our team-hopping years began. In 1993, Wally went to Spring Training in Florida with the Dodgers. Unfortunately, by the end of March he was one of too many pitchers and they released him a week before Spring Training ended. That's a tough time to find a job. He came home for a month, was picked up by the Detroit Tigers and played the remainder of the season on their AAA team, the Toledo Mud Hens. We had a great time in Toledo. We made a lot of friends, both on the team and in the community. One of Toledo's claims to fame is being Klinger's home town (Jamie Farr's character on the hit TV show M\*A\*S\*H). Wally pitched well that year and was selected to play in the AAA All-Star Game in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We were disappointed when the Tigers failed to call him up at the end of the season, and he was a free agent again, looking for a team.*

*As usual, I returned to the west before Wally finished playing, this time to start my first teaching job. I graduated the previous spring from Brigham Young University with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Math Education and a minor in Dance Education. I was excited about the accomplishment and looked forward to starting my teaching career.*

*Because I got married young, we wanted to wait for a few years to have children. With all of our moving around, and me trying to finish college, waiting to have children seemed like the best decision. After three years of marriage, we decided the time was right to start a family. One year went by and then another without a pregnancy. Of course, all the traveling and time spent apart were roadblocks, but we didn't understand why we weren't getting pregnant. At the slightest sign, I would run to the store for an in-home test, which was always negative. People wondered why we didn't have children. Some had the nerve to ask. My students would say, "Mrs. Ritchie, why don't you have kids?" I came up with a witty answer, but my heart ached. I prayed that we would get pregnant. Our close friends knew that we were struggling and tried to lend support.*

*Unfortunately, I was having trouble focusing on other aspects of life. Everywhere I looked, someone was pregnant, or having a baby, or holding a*

*baby! If you've been through this experience, you can relate to what I was feeling. We had been married five years and didn't have any children. I was so focused on not being able to get pregnant, that I was forgetting how blessed I was to be married to a wonderful man who loved me. My attitude was in the toilet. I was grumpy and irritated with Wally. He didn't know what to do, or how to help me. There was nothing he could have done, because it was me. Looking back, I can clearly see that I was letting my situation determine my attitude, instead of determining my own attitude.*

*We decided to seek medical help to make sure getting pregnant was possible for us. During the winter of 1993, we began the process but Wally was picked up by the Chicago White Sox and headed to Florida for Spring Training in February 1994, before we could get any answers. He was glad to have a job and I tried to be happy for him even though I had to stay in Utah to finish the school year. White Sox Spring Training camp was especially exciting that year because there was a celebrity in camp; even more than the usual big leaguers. 1994 was the year Michael Jordan played baseball for the White Sox.*

*One morning, I woke up feeling nauseated. I tried not to freak out during my school day, but my mind was racing. Could I be pregnant? After school I went to the store and bought yet another pregnancy test. Sure enough, this one had a little pink "plus" sign... I was pregnant! We were finally going to have a baby! I was elated, relieved, and thankful.*

*Problem: Wally had just left for Spring Training, 2000 miles away. This was too big to tell him over the phone - I had to tell him in person. I wanted to shout the news from the rooftops, but I kept the secret until I made sure the baby was healthy and had the chance to tell Wally. My mother was my only confidante. I planned a trip to Florida during a school vacation, carefully placed the pregnancy test wand (the plus sign was still visible) into a greeting card, and got on a plane.*

*I arrived during game time and waited to see Wally. After we embraced, I gave him the card and watched his jaw drop when he opened it. It was one of the greatest moments of our marriage. I was so glad I waited to tell him in person.*

*My prayer of having a child was answered, just not necessarily in the time frame I wanted. I have faith that God knows us, that there is a plan for our lives, but that our time frame doesn't always coincide with His. In this instance, I was taught patience, humility, and a lesson on attitude. We were blessed with our daughter, Megan, in November of that year, just prior to our six year wedding anniversary.*

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Different people have different outlooks on life. Some tend to see events in a positive light, while others naturally tend toward a negative attitude. Many factors shape our attitude including our upbringing, environment, and life experiences. Our attitude is one part of our personality that we have complete control over. If we want, we can change it.

Moving around the country during our baseball years was challenging. In the first five years of our marriage, we moved 15 times. We lived in Scranton and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Toledo, Ohio; Salinas, California and other California cities, Florida and Utah. During the season, I was often alone as the teams played about half their games on the road. When Wally wasn't on the road, he left for the ballpark about 2 PM each day, which left me the rest of the day on my own.

When we moved to a new town, I had two options; sit in our apartment by myself or get out and look around. By now you might guess I did the latter. When we arrived in a new town, I got in the car and started driving, looking for landmarks and key places I needed to go - ballpark, church, grocery store, mall. Wally thought it was funny, some people thought I was crazy, but I was proactive, facing the curves head on. Even though we never knew how long we'd live in a city, I also took the opportunity to get to know people. No one would have faulted me for staying inside my cocoon. But I made the experience more enjoyable and interesting for myself by getting out, and getting to know the city and the people who lived there.

### **It's Up to You**

*"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, the education, the money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I*

*react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our Attitude."*<sup>1</sup>

— [Charles R. Swindoll](#)

When faced with life's curves, we make a choice. Either we determine our attitude or we let it be determined by our challenges. We have 100% choice. In my classroom and in my home, I have often thought, "These kids are making me so mad!" If I am honest with myself, however, I know it's not true. I cannot be a victim in this situation. I have to take responsibility for my own attitude. I am actually making myself mad! I am letting their actions determine my outlook, allowing myself to lose my patience and my temper. No one can make us react in a certain way. We permit it to happen.

When I asked my stepdad about his experience navigating Navy boot camp in his early days, he responded, "Boot camp wasn't that bad. It depends on your attitude going in." Isn't that how it is with everything? It depends on your attitude going in; relationships, yard work, a new assignment or challenge. We can look for the good instead of focusing on the curve. Let's be honest with ourselves about what choice we are making. Are we choosing our attitude, or are we letting our curve choose it?

Our good friends, Scott and Nanette, were married for four years when they were finally able to get pregnant. They were overjoyed to find out they were expecting twins. Sadly, joy quickly turned to panic when Nanette went into labor at 24 weeks and gave birth to two 1 ½ pound babies, a boy, and a girl. Their son lived for 10 hours... and they only got to hold him after he passed away.

They were shattered. They had gone from the highest of joys to devastating sadness and their daughter was fighting for her life. The year was 1990 and without the today's NICU technology, it was a miracle she lived. When she was four months old, they were able to bring her home from the hospital. Because she was premature, her brain was damaged. She had grade three and four brain bleeds and was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. She was blind and would be severely disabled her whole life. She never walked, talked, or fed herself, but they loved her through her disabilities and did all they could for her.

In 1993, they adopted a healthy newborn baby boy and in the summer of 1995, Nanette became pregnant again, with twins. By November, there were definite signs of problems. She moved in with family members living closer to the hospital, until she was forced to stay in the hospital for the remainder of her pregnancy. Although doctors attempted to delay the birth, twin boys were born at 26 weeks, each weighing only two pounds. The situation was identical to what they had faced before; breathing machines, oxygen, ventilators, and monitors covering these two little bodies. It was heartbreaking to realize that these two little boys would face the same struggles as their daughter. Scott remembers telling his father, "I just can't do this." To which his dad replied "You don't have

a choice."

This set of twins was also diagnosed with cerebral palsy, one severely and the other moderately. Their entire family cherished the time with these children, but taking care of three disabled children and a busy three year old was more than a full time job. They had four children in diapers. Where "normal" families strapped their kids into carseats to travel to Grandma's, it took them an hour just to load the car with breathing machines, feeding tubes, and oxygen for their children. They carried their children everywhere they went. Nothing was "normal" for this family.

Although times were tough during these years, they were blessed through the generosity of others. However, they eventually stopped praying for miraculous healing and instead started praying that their children would be comforted and that they as parents would understand how to ease their suffering.

Naturally, they compared their lives to others and wondered, "Why us?" Jealousy crept in as they watched other children who could run, jump, and play, while their children were struggling. They would've given anything to hear their kids speak, see them kick a ball, and gobble down their lunch. Because their daughter couldn't communicate verbally, she resorted to hitting and pounding herself, which became more violent and difficult to handle as she got older. Watching their children suffer in the bodies they had been given was heart-wrenching.

People would remind Nanette about the adage that 'one won't be given more than one can handle'. That was tough to swallow until she realized that it was only true if she relied on the Lord. By herself, the challenges were definitely more than she could handle. Relying on her own strength would never be enough. They had to face each challenge with faith, fortitude, and sometimes humor. Despite their deep pain, they both realized that being negative and bitter would accomplish nothing. They clung to each other for support, and tried to maintain a positive attitude.

When their children passed away they naturally felt a huge void in their lives. At the same time, Scott and Nanette were thankful to see their childrens' suffering end. Their daughter lived to be 14, while one of the twins passed away at age five. Two of their five children are grown and living today. Raising their handicapped children was definitely a trial for them, but as Scott reminisces, it brought heaven into their home. He is not afraid of dying because he knows he'll get to see his children again and their bodies will be perfect.

The local newspaper once ran an article on their family and Nanette was quoted as saying: "We have angels in our home and they teach us a lot. They have the perfect, golden path. I just hope they put a good word in for me."

This family has survived incredible challenges in their life, but to meet them, you'd never know it. Scott and Nanette are positive, faithful people who don't dwell on their struggles. They've made the choice to be happy and live fulfilling and productive lives. They look forward to the future with a positive and grateful heart. No matter the curve, follow their example by choosing to believe you determine your attitude.

### **Teaching Today's Teens**

We not only need to practice choosing our attitude, we need to show and teach our children and teens, by example, that they must take responsibility for their own happiness.

In my classroom, I have a poster that reads "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference". Many kids in today's world have a negative attitude and trouble seeing the positive in their lives. Why? Perhaps today's youth lack role models with positive attitudes or they are overly dependent on social media. Social media can cause drama and make kids feel left out of the party others seem to be having. It is also an avenue for bullying. Today's kids often expect and are given more material possessions than earlier generations, but usually focus on what they don't have. I once heard that "happiness is our ability to be thankful". Our society as a whole lacks gratitude; let us embed it in our children.

Knowing they will undoubtedly face disappointment in life, we must also help our children become more resilient, able to bounce back and recover when faced with setbacks. As we develop and model resiliency for our children, they will be better equipped to keep it together when life doesn't go their way. We need to help our children discover their own source of happiness, instead of relying on others to "make" them happy. They need to know that struggles are necessary, misery is optional.

# Rain Has to Fall Sometimes

Unfortunately, after my 3rd child, Rachel, was born, I had trouble seeing the positive in my life. Prior to this period, I had always been one of the happiest people I knew! In fact, one of the school secretaries nicknamed me "Peppy" because I always tried to be happy and positive. Unfortunately, she gave me that name more to mock than compliment me. But after Rachel was born in October 2002, I went through the darkest period of my life. We moved to Southern California to give baseball another attempt, but Wally only played one season. We stayed because he went back to school to pursue a Masters Degree. I was teaching at a prestigious high school in Irvine, California.

My six weeks of paid maternity leave allowed me to stay home with Rachel until the end of December. Having three children was uncharted territory and I was doing my best to get some sleep, nurse my baby, and keep my head above water. Returning to teach in January was one of the toughest trials I've ever endured. I was teaching full-time and dropping my six-week old baby off at the sitter. I started to feel terrible and stopped caring about life. I didn't know what was wrong with me. Every day I wanted to stay in bed and pull the covers over my head.

Since I worked at a high school, I asked our counseling staff about seeing a physician to get medication to cure whatever I was experiencing. I now know that I was depressed. I can vividly remember myself one Saturday morning, sitting frozen on the stairs in our home. I sat there because I felt like I couldn't move. I was so overwhelmed, so worn out, so dazed that I couldn't even bring myself to go up or down the stairs.

That was it. I knew I had to make a change. I approached my school administration and told them I wasn't going to survive much longer. They were unbelievably supportive, allowing me decrease my class load to part time in the middle of the school year. Thankfully, I started to get back into life and felt more like myself. Before this experience I really didn't understand depression. I just thought people could "snap out of it" when they were feeling down. This experience helped me understand, to a small degree, what people suffering from clinical depression or other disorders endure. Even though I had so much good in my life, it was hard for me to see any positive.

That being said, there are people around us that are going through incredibly tough curves, curves that make it difficult, if not impossible, to have a positive outlook. To people drowning in grief or financial challenges, those with a

debilitating/chronic illness or pain, and others suffering from clinical depression, I applaud you for getting up each morning and facing another day. If you haven't already, I urge you to seek professional help so you can see the positives in your life. They are there. I'm sure I speak for many readers when I tell you we love you, we pray for you, and we know you are doing the absolute best you can.

This life is challenging. We are all playing our own game and facing our own curves. When hard days come, give yourself permission to be temporarily miserable and then use one of the tactics discussed in this book to see the brighter side of life. Realistically, I know we're not going to be happy all the time, but most of us have the choice to make. We can determine our outlook on life. And we can be an example for our children by how we live and how we teach them to find sources of happiness for themselves.

# Look Around You

While Wally was coaching, we traveled to the Dominican Republic with the college baseball team during a Thanksgiving holiday. The team traveled to the DR to play games against the major-league affiliate teams, provide youth baseball training, and deliver donated items to schools and orphanages. The trip was unforgettable. I was deeply affected by seeing happy people, especially children, with virtually no material possessions.

Our visit to the orphanage was an emotional experience for me. In addition to the orphans, we met other children that lived in small shanties with their families near the orphanage. Hundreds of baseball jerseys had been donated in Utah to distribute to these children. Imagine a team of college baseball players handing out baseball jerseys to and playing games with a couple hundred Dominican children. The kids were grateful and happy.

I wanted to communicate with four girls standing to the side of the field, so I asked one of our players to translate. After talking with them and looking around, I couldn't keep my composure any longer. My emotions overcame me and I started crying like a baby. I was grateful to God for giving me this experience, but at the same time I felt badly for the kids. From my viewpoint, their impoverished lives looked so difficult; they were smiling and having fun because they didn't see it that way.

If you've visited a country like the Dominican, you understand. They have a happy attitude despite their meager circumstances. That's all they've known. I was amazed at the stark contrast to what I see in America, where many people seem to have everything and yet struggle to find happiness. I contacted an American volunteer at the orphanage and sent some Christmas packages for these four girls, filled with basic items. I included my photo with the girls so the volunteer could correctly distribute the gifts. I hope my presents helped in some way. However, my gifts to them will never compare with what they gave me... they corrected my vision.

After our visit to the DR, I saw life much clearer. Both Scott and Nanette and the children in the Dominican have learned that you see what you're looking for. We usually can't change the curve, but we can change how we view it, which in turn changes our outlook on life. When a player is up to bat, the more accurately he can see the pitch, the better chance he has of hitting it. What can we do when we're having trouble seeing the positives in our lives? We can change what we're looking for by focusing on the positive and taking our eyes off our own

problems.

Instead of only seeing the negatives from your challenges, try to find the positive. Jack Canfield says, "Are you 100% sure that nothing good can come from this?" We can thank God for our blessings and ask Him to help change our focus. More than once, He has given me the strength to see the positive, which has redirected my attitude. During times when I struggle to find the positive, I have to repeat phrases like these to myself:

*"This isn't as bad as it looks, because....."*

*"This is just a moment in time... temporary, not permanent"*

*"This too shall pass"*

*"We can figure out a way to get through this"*

Even if I may not believe myself all the time, saying these words helps me see the pitch for what it really is, a challenge that somehow I know I will get through. When we see more clearly, it's easier to keep it together. We can choose what we're looking for and what we see.



In her book, *Focused*, World Champion and Olympic Medalist Noelle Pikus Pace states: "No matter how we are mistreated, no matter what obstacles, pains, or sorrows we face, no matter what tomorrow brings, we can always choose a reaction that gets us moving forward... It is up to me to choose my path. It is up to me to forgive, to be positive, and to press on along the course that will lead me to the (person) I want to be."

If you struggle in this area, take these suggestions to heart. Realize you have the power to determine your attitude and commit to make a change, if necessary, to move toward a happier life.

*"My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things (of this world) grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory, rest in your mind forever." ~ Moroni 9:25 (Book of Mormon)*

# 7

## We Can't Control the Game

### *Control is a Myth*

#### **From the field....**

*In baseball, as in life, there are many aspects we don't control. Wally could control how much he practiced and prepared for the games, but he couldn't control the umpires. He could control his reactions to batters or bad calls, but he couldn't control his coaches, teammates, or team owners. He could control his actions on the field and choose which pitch to throw, but he couldn't control what the hitter did with the pitch. When Wally played for the Phillies, he started having shoulder pain and ended up needing arthroscopic surgery to remove bone chips. He couldn't control the physical consequences of pitching. He also learned quickly that he had no control over unruly fans or the media. And, as you have read, he couldn't control when he got called up to the majors, sent down to the minors, or when he got released.*

*As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 6, Wally was in Spring Training with the Chicago White Sox when I found out I was pregnant. Once again, there were too many pitchers at the end of Spring Training that year and he was left looking for a job. After coming home for a month, he was picked up by the Cincinnati Reds. Unfortunately, the only option they gave him was pitching for their AA team in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The location wasn't the tough part, Chattanooga is gorgeous with its lush green scenery and inviting southern folk. The hard part was being back in AA. He hadn't played on a AA team since 1986, eight years earlier. Wally turned 29 during the season, making him the oldest player on the team. Most of his teammates were between the ages of 20 and 24. He was more like a father figure than a teammate. And, he was back to riding buses.*

*In the major leagues, you fly on chartered planes with relaxed rules and the scent of freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies wafting through the cabin. In AAA you fly commercial. There are no cookies, but you're on a plane. In AA, you ride buses. Wally had a good attitude, but I could tell it was tough. This wasn't where he wanted to be, but he wanted to play. He had no control over his situation; he had to go where he could get a job. He stayed in Chattanooga for the entire season, but lost the chance to get called up at the end because the major league*

*season ended earlier than usual. The players went on strike in August when they couldn't settle on their collective bargaining agreement with team owners.*

*In November, Megan was born, and we became first time parents. We felt extremely blessed. Wally was picked up by the Pittsburgh Pirates and went to minor league Spring Training with them in the spring of 1995. Because the team owners had now locked out the major league players, they couldn't field teams. In an effort to begin the season on time, owners tried to form teams of "replacement players". Every day, team representatives came to the minor leaguers offering them incentives to play as replacement players, basically asking them to cross the picket lines. Wally, being a former major-leaguer, would not accept their offer. When the effects of the lockout pushed him to the point of no longer enjoying the game, Wally decided to leave spring training.*

*In a way, Wally made the decision to leave professional baseball by coming home that spring. In another way, the choice was made for him because he was never able to find another job that year, or ever again with a professional team. Wally couldn't control the timing of the lockout, but he could control his own actions in light of it.*

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Our lives follow the same pattern. As much as we like to think we have control over other people or our situation, we don't. Control is a MYTH. Events happen in our lives, curves come our way that we don't understand, have no control over, and yet have to handle. One of the greatest skills we can develop in this life is the ability to recognize and come to grips with what we can and cannot control. Often this comes with experience and maturity.

# Out of Our Hands

Allstate Insurance Company created a poignant TV commercial called "Good Life Anthem" in which a young girl explains that, "There are man-eating sharks in every ocean, but we still swim. Every second, somewhere in the world, lightning strikes, but we still play in the rain. Poisonous snakes can be found in 49 of the 50 states, but we still go looking for adventure. A car can crash. A house can crumble, but we still drive and love coming home. Because I think deep down we know all the bad things that can happen in life can't stop us from making our lives good."

We cannot control which curves come our way or foresee the struggles we will face. We also cannot enjoy life if we're living in fear.

Health challenges are one of the main areas that make us feel out of control. Besides our family and friends, many of us are having health challenges of our own, varying from minor aches and pains to life-threatening conditions. We know that cancer and other illnesses, including mental illness, do not discriminate. Anyone can be stricken, anywhere, at any time of life. When illness strikes, we would give anything to change the pitch, but it is out of our control. What can we do in these situations? We can throw our hands up and be angry at the Lord, or at the world. We can ask "why" until we are blue in the face, but we may never get an answer. Or, we can have the wisdom to see what is out of our control and focus on what we CAN do. We can get the best medical care available, help our loved ones feel as comfortable as possible, pray and think positively for them.

Just before this book was published, we lost a dear friend of ours. She was 39 years old, happily married, and a mother of four children ages 9 through 18. She was a wonderful friend, neighbor, sister, daughter, and wife. She passed away suddenly and we are all still reeling from the loss. As her friend, I know that other friends and family would do anything in the world to have her back with us. Unfortunately, we don't have that option. All we can do is pick up the pieces and try to keep living the best we can.

We also have no control over horrific natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Seeing pictures of the devastation that nature can cause, knowing the lives that are lost, and those that have to be reconstructed, is heart-wrenching. Many heavy hearts and prayers are sent to those across the globe suffering from these challenges. When our health challenges, natural disasters, and busy day-to-day lives feel out of our control, it is natural to become anxious,

stressed, and feel helpless. Knowing we have no way to change the curve or control it, our only choice for keeping it together is moving forward and hitting it head-on.

# Children Choose Their Own Course

People laugh about getting married and transforming their mate into the ideal spouse, because they know it's a lie. We better like that person for who they are, because chances are, they're not changing. Sometimes we marry a person and then they change – either right after the wedding or years down the road – but their behavior is beyond our control. We can pray for them, support them and commit to stay, but we must realize we can't change them.

Many people have suffered abuse of every kind, been deceived by their spouse, or lived in fear. The other side of not being able to control others is not letting ourselves be controlled by others. If you are in a situation where another person is controlling you, please know that you have a choice and they have no right to manipulate you.

When our children are small, we decide what they eat, when they bathe, and usually when they sleep. This pattern gives another illusion of control. However, when they have that first tantrum in the grocery store, it is painfully clear to us (and everyone else in line) that we have absolutely no control over them, their personalities, or behavior. As our children grow, our love and concern for them makes us want to protect and make decisions for them. We have to realize that they are going to fall down, they are going to struggle and they are going to make choices we don't agree with. Against our wishes, our daughter bought an airline ticket to attend a friend's special event. We gave our opinion and she did exactly the opposite. What could we do? She was living her life and we had no control over that.

We can teach our children, but we can't control them or their behavior. We have to resist the temptation to feel responsible or guilty for our children's wrong choices. My friend, Marie, learned firsthand that she could not control the actions of her family.

Her oldest son started having problems with drugs in high school. It began with marijuana and then progressed to harder drugs. He became a totally different person, driven by addiction. Marie and her husband were able to get him into a recovery facility, which cost over \$10,000 to walk in the door, besides the cost of ongoing care. Because he was over 18 years of age, they couldn't force him to stay. He remained there for three months and successfully graduated from the program. But, after leaving the facility, he got discouraged when he couldn't find a job. He returned home and immediately hooked up with his old friends and drug scene. All the effort and money went down the drain as he

returned to the drugs.

Marie felt her son was lost. He would come home for a few days at a time, but often they had no idea if he was dead or alive. Family and friends sacrificed to reach out to help him, but he couldn't live without the drugs. He had no idea the violent and disturbed person he had become. He had lost control of himself at that point. The drugs were controlling him. Marie felt embarrassed and sad, like a failure.

She hated to face those who judged her and her husband because of what their son was doing, or what others felt they should've been doing for him. They were blessed with many supportive friends and family, but no one truly knows how it feels to live with an addict unless they've been through it. One of the hardest things she ever had to do, out of concern for the rest of the family, was tell her son to leave.

One night, he was at their house, high on drugs. Marie and her husband called the police and watched them take their son to jail again, knowing it was his third strike. He had reached rock bottom. He went to drug court, which, miraculously began his road back to a drug-free life.

He has been clean and sober for 3 years now and is working hard to stay that way. He got married and he and his wife have twin boys. Marie recognizes that if she could have seen the end, it would have made the middle much easier to bear. Unfortunately, we have to face our curves without seeing the other side.

The Lord helped her realize that she was powerless to change the situation. She had to press on in faith, controlling what she could. Her son was the only one who could control himself and his life. She never stopped praying during this difficult time. However, instead of praying that the challenge would be lifted, she prayed that the Lord would teach her what she needed to do.

While Marie's son was struggling with drugs, her middle daughter, Emily, began to show signs of an eating disorder. Emily, a runner, started counting calories and watching everything she ate. Food was one area over which Emily had complete control; she started eating less and less. She tried to continue exercising, but her body became too weak. Emily couldn't concentrate in school and began to fall behind. She was 17 years old, and weighed less than 80 pounds.

As much as Marie wanted to force Emily to eat, there was no way she could. Emily turned into a different person, just as her brother had. She would say hurtful words, but Marie refused to internalize her attacks, knowing it wasn't her daughter talking. Marie felt horrible because there was nothing to do but watch her beautiful daughter waste away.

One night, Marie and her husband put Emily in the car, without telling her

where they were going, and checked her into the hospital. She weighed 70 pounds and was very weak. Marie remembers sitting by the hospital bed all night waiting for Emily's heart to give out. They were tube-feeding her and the re-feeding syndrome was shocking the body. Miraculously, she lived. Marie and her husband checked Emily into what would be the first of many facilities for children with eating disorders and tried to hold onto their faith.

Emily is strong-willed and would always put on weight while at a facility, but after leaving, would again become gaunt and thin. Marie and her family have endured many emotional peaks and valleys through this process. Emily is a strong girl and many have faith that she will improve, although she'll battle this disease the rest of her life.

Through these challenges, Marie learned about her relationship with God. Instead of blaming God or withdrawing from Him, she learned to patiently lean on Him for support. Her faith was the one factor she could control, and miraculously, it never wavered. Even when Emily felt abandoned by God and lost faith, Marie was her source of strength.

Today, Emily hangs on because her mother does. Marie knows that faith isn't praying one day and getting what you want. She expresses her belief that faith is being "constant to Him, regardless of what is happening".

We cannot choose for others, nor should we condemn ourselves for their actions. We fool ourselves into thinking that we have control over other people or their decisions when in reality, the only one we have control over is ourselves.

# No Power Over Others

If we can't control the people who are closest to us, we know we certainly can't control other people in our lives. Friends, neighbors, colleagues, and strangers can make decisions that leave us confused and hurt. Maybe you've lain awake at night wondering how a co-worker could throw you under the bus, or a friend could say what she did about you. Sarah, a friend of mine, lived on a small cul-de-sac and was close friends with the neighbor across the street. During a difficult pregnancy, the neighbor wanted to be her sole support, to the point of excluding others from helping or visiting her.

Sarah couldn't understand why no one came to see her, and later found out that her neighbor had told everyone she didn't want to be disturbed and to leave her alone. She confronted the neighbor after she had her baby and the neighbor was extremely offended. Unfortunately, the neighbor worked with Sarah's husband. The neighbor started telling lies about them to everyone at the company, which made the atmosphere at work extremely difficult. The situation also affected them financially as company decisions were made based on the neighbor's lies. Sarah was living a nightmare completely out of her control.

Sarah felt betrayed, but she knew that the hurt, anger, and bitterness would be a canker to her soul. In order to stay positive and be her best for the family, she made the choice to control what she could: her reaction. The process took time, but with God's help, she forgave the neighbor, let the hurt go, and moved forward with her life.

Some situations in life are simply out of our control. Recognizing this may not make the curves easier to face, but can relax our minds and bring us peace. Realizing what we can and can't control is an important part of keeping it together through the curves of life. Focusing on what we can control is helpful in these challenging times.

# Control What You Can

Although many areas of life are out of our control, there are parts of our situation that we CAN control, such as: how we spend our time, who we spend time with, and the quality of our connection with the Lord. Earlier in this book I wrote that, in most cases, we have control over 1) our attitude and our happiness, 2) our choice of reactions to the curve and 3) what we focus on, have faith in, and put energy toward. We can do what we can with what we have. We can control our thoughts, words and actions.

The good news is we can control our thoughts. Unfortunately, most of the time we don't. Instead of filling our mind with positive power that will propel us through the curve, we let our mind naturally slip into negative thoughts and worry. Worry is useless, accomplishing nothing. When a batter is on deck waiting for his 'at bat', worrying does him no good. He has no idea if a curveball is even coming his way. The pitch could be an easy fastball, but he won't know until the ball is thrown. We often worry about problems that never happen. We've all experienced how over-analyzing and worrying can cause anxiety and drag us down fast. The more we dwell on the negative, the more hopeless our situation can seem. Don't waste your valuable energy.

In an article entitled, "Science of Stress: 5 Things Worrying is doing to your Body",<sup>1</sup> author Emma Haak writes, "Unfortunately, because so many of us are chronically stressed, our fight-or-flight response never shuts off and our cortisol levels remain elevated, potentially increasing the risk for depression, hypertension, and possibly some cancers." She also adds that stress and worry can contribute to upset stomach, memory loss, heart, and fertility problems. These are issues we'd like to avoid!

When my daughter is worrying about a situation, I ask her if she can do anything about it. If she can't, I advise her to stop worrying. She has no control, and therefore, can't change the situation. We can use our energy and brainpower to creatively consider possible solutions and courses of action instead of worrying. Stay productive during challenging times by helping someone else or a cause. In this mindset, we stay open to potential guidance and inspiration.

The opposite of worrying is feeling peace and calm. The Psalmist states, "Be still and know that I am God".<sup>2</sup> Instead of worrying, be still. Be calm. Ask the Lord to help you quiet your mental chatter.

Remember this powerful verse: "Instead of looking at God and telling Him how big my problems are, I'm gonna look at my problems and tell them how big

my God is." He wants us to be happy and at peace. If there are changes you can make in your life to help yourself, you have that power. Control your thoughts and steer clear of worry. Use your powerful mind to focus on what you CAN control; put your thoughts to work in a positive direction.

We also have complete control over our words and actions. No one else can control what we say and do. We can speak well of others instead of gossiping or badmouthing them. We can take our focus off our own challenges and help someone else. Invariably, losing control of our words and actions makes a situation worse. Best advice for navigating the curves with less bumps and bruises: use your strength and energy to streamline your thoughts, words and actions toward positive results.

# Determine the Difference

I'm a planner and I like to have all my little ducks in a row. Can you relate? We plan our meals, weekly events, and vacations. This organizing makes us feel like we're in control of life. We're faking ourselves out. Despite all the planning we do, life happens. Dinner is going to burn; milk is going to spill.

If your kids are young right now, consider how many dinners you survive without spilt milk. You can take every precaution. You can pour a tiny amount in the cup, get a plastic tablecloth, move the milk away from the edge and remind them ten times to be careful. But try as you might, the milk is going to spill. Often, when one cup spills, the rest go over as well. Obviously we can't control the milk. In fact, it seems easier to expect the milk to spill in the first place. That way, we don't freak out when it does.

Our life is like the milk. The more we realize we're not in control, the more pressure is taken off our shoulders. This is important and necessary because we can't control the milk, and we can't control most of the curves we face in life. The wisdom is controlling what we can and letting the rest go. We must learn to determine the difference.

You have likely heard what most people refer to as the Serenity Prayer, originally written by American theologian [Reinhold Niebuhr](#):

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.*

We put so much energy into trying to control the areas of our lives we cannot control, that we don't have time to enjoy ourselves! Perhaps this isn't one of your struggles. If it is, you know that trying to control people and situations around you is a burdensome energy drain. What's worse, you may not realize you're doing it. Trying to control what we cannot affects our health and well-being. The only way we can truly find peace is to give up the need to control and understand that control is a myth. We have to use my mom's mantra "it is what it is", and let go of the need to control.

# Give it to The Lord

The biggest blessing for me, which I gained through the experience that prompted me to write this book, was the long overdue realization that I am not in charge. I was used to overseeing everything – my classroom, our house, and the family calendar, schedule, and meals. I relied on my ingenuity and planning to take care of our lives, and I was pretty good at it! However, through the journey of moving our family for Wally's coaching job, we faced curves I couldn't plan for. I had been faking myself out all along. I finally realized I wasn't in charge of our lives.

I had to humble myself, give up my need for control and look to God for strength. He knew me, He knew what I needed and He would take care of me. The only time I started to panic was when I thought I had to figure everything out. Only I couldn't this time. There were too many questions, too much uncertainty. I couldn't make a plan because I didn't know what the plan was. Peace replaced panic when I took the burden of control off my shoulders and laid it at His feet. My attitude changed from "my will" to "Thy will be done." I wasn't in charge, and I knew it. I had to seek inspiration and trust Him and He blessed me with a calmness I have never known before. Leaning on Him was the only way I survived each day. Releasing control of my life to God was one of the toughest decisions I've ever made; I had to have unconditional trust. He gave me the strength to persevere and I was blessed beyond measure. He's promised to do the same for you.

Michael McLean, a singer/songwriter, wrote a song entitled "Which Part is Mine", in which he asks, "Which part is mine, which part is yours (meaning the Lord's)?" In other words, is today the day that we let go and let God handle it? The day that we realize we can't solve a problem, and hand it to Him? Or is today the day that the "tough get going"? Maybe it's both. We do everything we can and lean on Him to help us survive the curves.

Dalton and Mykelle, a young couple living in our community, survived a situation completely out of their control. They were married in the fall of 2011 and by the spring of 2013, were awaiting the arrival of their first child. Mykelle was 33 ½ weeks along in her pregnancy and everything seemed to be going fine. One Sunday night, they were preparing for bed and as Mykelle knelt to pray she realized that she hadn't felt the baby move in a while.

She hadn't been paying attention, but she became concerned as the baby was usually more active at night. She spent the next 30 minutes poking and prodding

her belly in vain, trying to get her baby to move. Mykelle called her mom and headed to the hospital. She knew something was wrong. The following is an excerpt from her blog.

The nurse started monitoring my belly for what seemed like five minutes, and we couldn't hear anything. She finally stopped and said that she wasn't able to find a heartbeat and that she was going to call my doctor and have him come do an ultrasound. I almost wasn't surprised to hear her say that. The whole time I could tell something was wrong, and I had a feeling we weren't going to get good news." The doctor came and performed the ultra sound which confirmed their fears. He told them that their baby had no heartbeat. She continues, *"We all sat there and cried. I never imagined this would be happening to me. I felt like it wasn't my life, like it couldn't be real... we felt that everything was in God's hands.... We knew that everything happens for a reason..."*

They called to let the rest of their family know about the situation. After hours of medication and waiting, Mykelle gave birth to their baby girl.

*"She (their baby, Havyn) was 4lbs, 12oz, and 20" long. She had dark hair, big hands, and long skinny feet. She looked just like her daddy. She was definitely her daddy's little girl! All I could do was cry. It was such a bittersweet moment. I was so happy that that part was over with, but all I wanted was to hear my baby cry. It was so quiet and peaceful, and I just looked at my husband and he was just crying. It was so hard to watch him look at our baby girl."*

When Havyn was born, they were able to see that the umbilical cord was wrapped around her ankle twice, her right thigh and her neck twice.

*"We were all somewhat relieved to know that we had an answer to what had happened. It was also comforting knowing that it was one of those 'freak accidents' and that there was nothing we did that caused it and there was nothing we could have done to prevent it. We knew that she was perfect and that she was in a much better place. I knew she was being taken care of..."*

Although they were comforted knowing they had no control over the situation, it didn't make the next morning any easier.

Mykelle concludes, *"The next morning was probably one of the hardest times in my life. We had to get ready to check out of the hospital, and it was a moment I was dreading. We spent a few more hours with her which was so nice. It was hard knowing that it would be the last time I would get to hold her. We just held her and cried and cried, then it was time for us to go. Our nurse wheeled her down the hall while we went the other way. We walked down the hall just holding each other, crying.*

*I felt like my heart was being wheeled down the hall away from me. It was the hardest thing I have ever had to do, but I am so grateful for the time we had*

*physically with her. I am so grateful that I was able to hold her and be with her for those few hours. I am grateful for our knowledge that we WILL see Havyn again and that she will forever be a part of our family! I am grateful that Heavenly Father trusted us to bring her into this world and give her a body. I know that she is our little angel and that she will be watching over us and taking care of us....."*



We all have family members, people around us, and situations in life that we cannot control. I encourage you to take a look at your life, let go of what you can't control, and don't waste your energy worrying. As we learn to control what we can, have faith, and trust God, we will feel encouraged, strengthened, and better able to bear the curves we're thrown.

*"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." ~ Mathew 11:28*

# 8

## The Game's Not Perfect

### *Accepting Our Imperfect Lives*

#### **From the field....**

*When Wally came home early from Spring Training in 1995, it looked like we were through with baseball for good. He got a job building homes with a contractor friend, I was teaching school and we moved into the dream house we built on our land outside of town. We had a dog and a daughter, and it seemed like the perfect time for us to settle down to our post-baseball life. What I didn't realize was you can take the pitcher out of baseball, but you can't take baseball out of the pitcher.*

*When we went to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY recently, I read a quote by Jim Bouton which read, "You see, you spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball; and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time." That explains my husband perfectly.*

*After almost two years of life without baseball, Wally started to get the "itch" to play again. Though coaching at our local high school, he felt he could still pitch and wanted to get back on the mound. Seeing past teammates still playing in the majors fueled the fire. Out of curiosity, Wally asked his former agent to contact teams in the hopes that one would give a 32-year old pitcher a shot in the minor leagues. Nope. Nada. Zilch. Nobody wanted to take another chance on Wally Ritchie and it hurt. Wally hated the way he left professional baseball during the spring of the lockout and wanted a chance to show the world (and himself) that he still had it.*

*He finally received word that an independent team in Salinas, California was interested in signing him. Independent teams lack a major league affiliate, but players sign hoping to make a splash and catch the eye of a professional team. It was the only shot Wally had to play again. I really wanted him to be able to chase his dream, but what would happen to the "normal" life I had been enjoying? I was pregnant with our second child and teaching school. The post-baseball life looked pretty good!*

*Over the years, players' wives we'd known had given their husbands an ultimatum; choose me or baseball. That usually either ended in divorce, or in the husband believing he might have made it if it hadn't been for the old ball and*

*chain. When we got married, I committed to support him no matter what. He knew I was behind him all the way, although it wasn't always the easy choice.*

*Wally quit his job and headed to northern California to play independent baseball while I stayed in Utah to finish the school year, later joining him in Salinas for the rest of the season. Uncertain about the future, we returned to Utah, sold our dream home, and moved into a small, older apartment with shag carpet. Wally went back to construction work and I stayed home with our two children.*

*During the off-season, Wally negotiated a baseball job with another independent team, the Mission Viejo Vigilantes in Orange County, California. Wally's parents lived an hour away, so they agreed to let us live with them for the summer. Without a spare room, Wally and I slept on the hide-a-bed sofa in the den and our children in the living room; our three-year-old daughter on the couch and our one-year-old son in a portable crib. It was not ideal, but it was only temporary.*

*Near the end of the season, Wally got and accepted an offer to pitch in Taiwan. It was only for six weeks, so the kids and I stayed with my in-laws. Unfortunately, Taiwan was a bad experience for him, and the last place he'd ever play. When Wally returned to California he was blessed with an opportunity to pursue his education, and he jumped at the chance. I landed a high school teaching job.*

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*What started out as a three month visit turned into two years at Wally's folks; we pulled out the hide-a-bed sofa every night. Wally's family was great and we made it work, but it was definitely not the perfect situation. During the seven years we lived in California, Wally received both his bachelors and masters degrees and our third child, Rachel, was born. We enjoyed the time we spent there, and are grateful for the blessings and family connections we gained during that period of our lives.*

The perfect situation. What is it? Where is it? Have you experienced it? Does it exist?

In baseball, there is an event called a perfect game. It's when a pitcher, or combination of pitchers, does not allow anyone on base during the entire nine innings. They cannot walk or hit a batter or allow a batter to get a hit or reach

base on an error. The pitching and fielding have to be perfect. Since the year 1900, there have been 21 perfect major leagues games, and that's out of hundreds of thousands played. Needless to say, it's rare. Every game's not perfect.

Why do we become flustered when life doesn't go perfectly? In addition to being flexible, enjoying the game, and knowing what we can and can't control, we have to recognize that life will rarely, if ever, be perfect. Nobody told me my life was going to be perfect. Did someone tell you? Where do we get this idea? The times in our lives when everything runs according to a perfect plan are rare, but we can still find good and see the blessings we have.

# Beyond the Blueprint

Through the grace of God, my friend managed to see the blessings that came after her husband had a debilitating stroke.

My friend never could have imagined the nightmare she'd live through after she confronted her husband with an ultimatum: come clean or she would share her concerns with his boss, her family and the church. She knew something was wrong. Occasionally during their 10-year marriage, he confessed that he had been using recreational drugs, but assured her it was under control. He was the breadwinner and she, a stay-at-home mother of their two children ages eight and two, was pregnant with their third child. She had no idea he was a meth addict until, two days after she confronted him, he had a stroke at the age of 35.

He was in critical condition when she arrived at the hospital. Unfortunately, he wasn't really able to talk; he was only lucid for a few moments before being trached and placed into a medically-induced coma. At a critical time when she desperately needed answers, he couldn't provide them. In fact, later she discovered that while her husband could speak, he told a nurse that his wife had no knowledge of his addiction.

She remembers standing in the hospital that day, with many telling her to leave him, when she realized that no matter what he had done, he could repent and come back to the Lord. At that crucial moment, she recognized that if God could forgive him, how could she not?

Since that time, life has been a struggle for both of them. He was in five different hospitals over eight months before he was able to come home. He learned to walk and talk again, but lost much of his memory and will never again be able to work. Although he has paid a price for his choices, the stroke prevented many meth withdrawal symptoms, allowing his body to partially heal.

She is essentially a single parent, taking care of her husband and children. She returned to school to get her degree so she could support her family. If not for his stroke, she knows they would surely be divorced. Her life definitely hasn't turned out the way she envisioned and it's certainly not perfect, but she's not bitter. As difficult as it's been, she's glad she stayed with him and kept their family together. She has grown personally and believes the stroke was a blessing from God that her husband needed in order to change.

My friend's story is one of incredible faith and strength in the face of an imperfect situation. Most of us are not thrown that kind of curve, but we all have to face the truth that life doesn't usually follow our pre-determined blueprint.

What usually happens when we plan on that 'perfect' job, 'perfect' marriage, or 'perfect' child, and it doesn't turn out that way? We've all looked forward to something we thought would be amazing, only to find out it didn't meet our expectations. The event could have been as simple as a meal or a night out, or as complex as a cross-country move. We've felt let down, and sometimes a little cheated. This can make us angry or bitter, blaming others, ourselves, or the event. Sometimes situations don't turn out like we think they will. That's just life. No one promised us it would be perfect. We must acknowledge we are living an imperfect life, and be prepared to take it as it comes.

# Avoid Disappointment

Living with expectations of perfection not only causes disappointment, but a host of other issues. This phenomenon is referred to as 'option overload'.

Consider a menu at a family restaurant. Because we have so many options to choose from, we expect our selection to be perfect. When the meal arrives at our table, we look around at the other tasty dishes and wonder if we made the right choice. It's easy to be disappointed and second-guess ourselves thinking we might have been better off ordering something different. When doubt creeps in, we have difficulty enjoying our food! The solution? Make a decision. Order your meal and enjoy it when it comes. If you think you would have liked another dish better, order it next time.

You may face disappointment due to 'option overload' in many different circumstances. Have you ever built a home and had to pick out faucets or tile? How about when you are trying to choose which spring flowers to buy or plan a vacation? An example is the family pictures we recently survived. Unfortunately, because I thought they could be perfect, I stressed out about the many different locations and outfit combinations we could wear. My family will tell you they endured weeks of torture. I still doubted our clothing choices as we were pulling up to the shoot location. That's crazy! We made our choice and the photos turned out beautifully. When decisions have to be made, make them to the best of your ability and then keep moving forward. Thankfully, we learn from every decision. Maybe next time we'll wear khakis.

# Enjoy the here and now

*"Yesterday is the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present." — Bil Keane*

People often go through life thinking that their perfect situation is right around the corner. They create curves in their own life by thinking: "When I \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank - graduate from college, land a great job, buy my dream house, marry a model, have a baby) then I will finally \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank - get out of debt, be able to relax, be happy, have a great life)". That's the fairytale associated with a "perfect" life. Chances are, life is never going to be as perfect as people want, and if they are waiting for that moment, they may miss the happiness and fulfillment that is available right in front of them.

I have some dear friends whose lives didn't go according to a perfect plan; two sisters that were single and successful in their careers. When the opportunity to marry didn't arrive, they changed their plan and developed successful careers. They made the most of their lives each and every day, reaching out to those around them, and being great sisters and aunts. They lived lives of happiness and gratitude even though their hope of marriage had not materialized. The older sister was introduced to a widower with four teenagers at home. They were recently married and then blessed with a baby girl. Even though this route wasn't her plan, in the meantime, she chose to enjoy every moment life gave her.

If we are always looking down the road for the perfect situation, we have a great excuse for NOT feeling happy and grateful for each day we have right now. When our happiness is contingent on a perfect situation we hope will arise, we tend to miss the joy right in front of us. Enjoy each moment you are given. Give gratitude to the Lord for your day, your life, your blessings. The more we appreciate what we have, the easier it becomes to see the good in our lives, even though they may be far from perfect.

# Just Do It

Often, people are so worried about completing a task perfectly that they don't do it at all! There has never been a perfect soccer mom, a perfect missionary, or a perfect chef. Everyone burns dinner sometime. If there's a part of your life you want to improve, follow Nike® and just do it! Get out there and try. You may not be perfect, but try anyway. If a pitcher waited to go out on the mound until he could throw a perfect game, he would never set foot on the field!

We have plenty of memorabilia from Wally's baseball career: pictures, signed baseballs, baseball cards, jerseys, bats, hats, *etc.* After Wally retired from pro ball, I kept these items boxed up waiting for our large "perfect" home with the extra room to display them. That home never came, so almost 20 years after Wally pitched in the majors, I decided enough was enough. Wally left town for a week and we went to work! With the help of the kids, I got the memorabilia out of the boxes and onto the walls. The room looked super! Wally came home and was amazed at what we now call the "man cave". Is it perfect? No. Is it great? Yes. If I had waited for the perfect situation, it never would have happened.

Too often we wait until the perfect time to step out and accomplish a task, only to realize that the perfect time never comes. Have you wanted to take a college class, go on a mission trip, or conduct a fundraiser, but the timing never seems right? Go for it. Don't let the fear of perfection, or waiting for the perfect time, paralyze you. Take the necessary steps to accomplish the tasks you have set for yourself – you'll be glad you took action!

# Accept Your Own Imperfections

Nobody's perfect. Unfortunately, many tie their feeling of worth to their evening meal, project, or presentation. If it turns out great, they feel great. If it doesn't, they feel like failures. Whether it's consciously or unconsciously, people place an unrealistic pressure of perfection on themselves.

This has happened to all of us, on a small or large scale. We spend countless hours planning the perfect birthday party or neighborhood event and feel like failures if it doesn't turn out the way we hoped. You will feel much better if you take a step back, breathe in deeply, and applaud yourself for the effort. At these times we have to remember that our worth is not tied to a birthday party like a bunch of balloons.

We have to accept the fact we are imperfect people living imperfect lives. Our Savior was the only perfect person that ever walked the Earth. The Lord doesn't expect perfection from us. So why do we expect it from ourselves? He wants us to follow His example and be obedient out of love for Him. We often fall short because, on our own, we are flawed; He loves us anyway. Seeing ourselves through His eyes, and focusing on how much He loves us, can help us love ourselves despite our imperfections.

Who cares if the roast you were going to have for dinner burned and your family ate cereal? Don't beat yourself up! It ended up being the "perfect" dinner because instead of getting angry, you all laughed around the table and made a great memory! Be willing to forgive yourself. What we would often forgive or excuse in someone else, we won't forgive in ourselves, like an untidy house for example. All we can do is our best.

We are worthwhile because we get out of bed and live another day in our less-than-perfect lives. Recognize and pat yourself on the back when life goes well so you can bottle that feeling and drink it when you're feeling less than perfect. We have to gauge ourselves on effort and improvement, not perfection. Realize you're doing your best to navigate life's curves with the tools you've got.

## Realize Others Aren't Perfect

Similarly, since we can't expect perfection from ourselves, what makes us think we can expect it from others? Our spouses and kids aren't perfect; they don't clean the toilet and fold the towels like we do. Our neighbors and colleagues aren't perfect; they make dumb comments and don't follow through on what they're supposed to. Are we holding others to a standard of perfection

they can never achieve? Expecting perfection from others is as slippery a slope as expecting it from ourselves. We have to live with the fact that everyone makes mistakes.

Thankfully, we are all children of a God that loves us no matter what. He doesn't just love us when we're perfect. He loves us all the time. We need to follow His example and love others despite their imperfections. As Luke teaches in the New Testament, "*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceives not the beam that is in thine own eye*"?<sup>1</sup> We're not perfect and neither are others in our life.

We can encourage others, but with too much pressure to perform perfectly, they may become overwhelmed and want to give up.

Our natural tendency to compare ourselves to others hurts, because we compare our weaknesses to their strengths, and we never come out even. From the outside, anyone's life can look perfect, especially on social media. It's true we have genuinely positive relationships on social media, however, it can appear that all our friends are having the time of their lives: traveling every weekend, getting roses from their husband all the time, and smiling at their kids non-stop! If you let it, social media can make you feel like your life stinks.

Hopefully, you've realized that you can't believe everything you see online, or most of what we see in real-life! When we go out the door to work or church, we put our 'perfect' face on, and see others that way too. Don't fall into the trap of believing that other people's lives are perfect. Some may not wear them on their sleeve, but we know that everyone has challenges. Enjoy the moments you're having and focus on the good in your life.



Life is rarely going to be perfect, yet we have to live it. Don't set your expectations impossibly high. We create our own curves by expecting perfection from ourselves, our families, and others or waiting for everything to be perfect before we act. I can assure you the game won't be perfect. Play it anyway.

*"Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" ~ Psalms 144:15*

# Stand Your Ground

## When You Can't Be Flexible

### **From the field....**

*Getting married as young as I did, and to a professional baseball player, many people wondered why I continued to attend college and told me I'd never graduate. There were challenges to attending college, such as the schedule. Wally would fly to Spring Training at the beginning of February or March, while I drove 2000 miles east with my mom or my sister in April, after the spring semester ended. Then, I would drive back to Utah to start the fall semester in August, where Wally joined me after the season ended in mid to late September. In fact, we never drove cross-country together after the first drive to Florida following our wedding. Wally made the last drive with a buddy in the fall of 1994 because I was six months pregnant and had flown back early to start my second year high school teaching.*

*Truthfully, I almost didn't graduate from college. After completing my student teaching, I elected to take my last two courses via online study. Botany was my final course required for graduation. I worked on the course at the Vero Beach (Florida) library the year Wally was in Spring Training with the LA Dodgers. I had already been given two extensions on my completion date and the deadline was closing fast. In the end, I had to fly to Utah to take the final exam so I could complete it by the date required for graduation. I barely made it.*

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Now, years later, I'm so thankful that I persisted and graduated. What made me push through to graduate when I was married to a professional baseball player? I had a goal. I always knew I would graduate from college and I wasn't going to let anything stand in the way of accomplishing that goal. When Wally was in the major leagues, it seemed unlikely that I would ever have to use my degree. As we know, life throws us curves; I have had to work in order to help support our family. In those early years of marriage, we never could have known

what we'd face down the road and I am grateful I got my teaching degree. It has been a huge blessing in our lives, then and now.

# Achieving Your Goals

As flexible as we need to be to handle the curves life throws us, there are some fields where we can't afford to be flexible. One of those areas is in achieving the goals we set for ourselves. Many doubted I would graduate, but I knew I needed to and I was proud of myself for the accomplishment. When we know where we're going, we will get there if we keep our eye on the goal and don't let the curves throw us off course.

Wally faced a similar situation with his educational goals. During his playing years, he took a few semesters of college, but the courses were piecemeal. After retiring from baseball, he attended college while working full time. Upon receiving his bachelor's degree in Business Management, he immediately pursued and graduated with his MBA in Finance and Leadership. It was a difficult road, but well worth it. His degree has not only supported our family financially, but has also given him the sense of accomplishment he needed after leaving baseball.

Life's curves can make accomplishing goals more challenging. Don't let that stop you. You might need to find a new plan, set up a different timetable, or adjust your goal slightly, but hold on to it! People have graduated from college at 85, 90 and 95 years old! Perhaps you set a goal to become an RN, but because of life's circumstances, you became an LPN instead. Congratulations for accomplishing your degree! We're the only one who can give up on our goals. Stay focused.

# Maintain Your Values

Because of our religious beliefs we don't drink alcohol, which set Wally apart from most of his teammates. Most of the other players would go out for a drink after the game, or have a drink on the road trip flights. Being in baseball, Wally was used to having alcohol around, but he made an early commitment not to drink and always stood by that decision. If he went out with the guys, they all knew he would be having a Sprite or a Coke. Now and then, he would endure some gentle ribbing about not drinking, but most of the time, the other players were supportive.

In addition to soda, beer was available in the players' clubhouse after the games. In the Phillies' clubhouse, the beer cups were bigger than the soda cups. One night, Wally took a beer cup and filled it up with soda. From the outside, it looked like he was drinking beer. The team's first baseman, John Kruk, came over to Wally and looked in the cup to see what he was drinking. After looking in the cup, he looked at Wally and said, "Just making sure." John is a great guy and one of Wally's favorite former teammates. Whether he was looking out for him, or checking up on him, Wally showed that he was true to his commitments.

Standing true to our morals and values is another area we can't be flexible in. People won't always agree with the decisions we make, or the reasons we make them, but we must stand by them. We live in a time when societal values are cloudy. Although most people seem to want to do the right thing, there is no longer an overall consensus of what is "right" and "wrong". Honesty appears to be overrated and some people don't worry about hurting others if it helps them get ahead. Unfortunately, I see this in teaching. For some students, the "right" seems to be what benefits them at the moment. We need to teach our children by word and deed to decide where they stand, and stick by those decisions when faced with challenges. Standing by our commitments builds character, especially in circumstances when our values are questioned.

There are times we have to stand strong for our faith, whatever it may be. If our faith is questioned, do we have the courage to stand firm on what we believe? We can't be flexible in this area, so the Lord gives us strength to remain steady. We may have to stand alone, but we won't be alone. I encourage you to maintain your faith and values. Stand by them, even when facing the curves.

In her candid book, *The Hiding Place*, Cornelia (Corrie) Ten Boom relates her family's story of living as Christians in Holland during World War II. As faithful Christians, they wanted to help Jews, and began assisting in underground

efforts to smuggle Jews out of Holland. They were discovered and Corrie, her sister Betsie, and their father were taken to Nazi concentration camps. Corrie and Betsie were taken to the infamous Ravensbruck camp, where they maintained their faith, even though they suffered terribly. Miraculously, Corrie and her sister smuggled a Bible into the camp and read it to the other prisoners at night. She related a time when the lice infestation was so extreme in their sleeping quarters that the guards wouldn't come near their room. This became a blessing because the prisoners were then free to read their Bible and share the Lord's word with each other. Though her father and sister eventually died from overwork, malnutrition, and cruelty, Corrie never lost her faith.

Later in her life, after speaking to a group on forgiveness, Corrie was approached by a man who had been a guard at Ravensbruck. She remembered him and his cruelty, but he didn't remember her. He had since become a Christian and was seeking her forgiveness. In that difficult moment, the Lord gave her the incredible strength to forgive him. The Lord strengthens us and helps us follow Him even when it requires great commitment.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

# You Matter

We are each special people, but that can be hard to remember when life's curves are beating us down. Our self-esteem often suffers when we are facing challenges, either at our own hand, or because of others. We can begin to doubt ourselves, our decisions, and our worth.

Even through the curves of life, you have to remember that you are a valuable and worthwhile person. You need to take care of yourself, preserving your mental, emotional, and physical health at all costs. This is an area we CANNOT be flexible on.

One of my friends is an amazing example of taking care of her physical health, no matter the odds. She grew up Southern Baptist and has always had a strong faith in God. Unfortunately, cancer has taken many of her precious family members. Her older brother was in his late teens and serving in the Army when he developed a cancerous tumor in his neck. As a young girl, she watched him go from 240 pounds down to 88 pounds when he passed away at age 19. She lost many females in her family to cancer, including her mom, who received a late diagnosis of leukemia, and passed away at the early age of 56. She decided she was not going to be another victim. She went for genetic testing at age 42 and found out she was BRCA (Breast Cancer Gene) positive. The results did not guarantee she had cancer, but she wasn't taking any chances.

At age 43, she opted to undergo a hysterectomy and a double mastectomy. The doctor AND her family tried to dissuade her, but she wanted to live to see her grandkids and was absolutely sure of her decision. When they operated, the doctor found cancer at the chest wall. She would not have known until it was too late. Her insistence on taking care of herself saved her life. Her strength comes from her faith and knowledge that "it is what it is". She couldn't change her family genetics, so she made the best of it. She believes that, "if you dwell on the negative and let that encompass your life, you may as well stop living." She swam in high school and college and remembers a funny story about trying to adjust to her "swim breasts" after her mastectomy. She got up out of the pool, and sure enough, she was wearing them around her waist. Her positive attitude and perspective gives us strength to face the curves we have, and make sure we are making ourselves a priority.

My sister-in-law met a man who seemed wonderful. He was fun, attentive, understanding, and loving. He had some problems but treated her well when they were dating and she loved his two kids. Their relationship progressed and they

made plans to marry, but her happiness was short-lived. On their honeymoon he told her that he did not love her and felt it was a mistake to marry her.

His family found out by mistake that they were married, because he said he wouldn't tell them until she'd lost 50 pounds. He became verbally, and then physically abusive. He was addicted to sex and porn. She tried harder and harder to please him, but nothing she did seemed good enough. She could never be thin or perfect enough for him. He would weigh and measure her daily and chart the results. His abuse made her feel stupid and helpless, that everything was her fault. One time he didn't speak to her for two weeks because she ordered a medium-sized dessert instead of a small-sized.

As her family, we could see his cruelty was destroying her, but we had no idea what was truly going on. She was emotionally and physically beaten down. She wanted to leave, but was afraid for the children. She thought the situation might get better after he got a new job, but it didn't. After two years of marriage, she knew she had to leave to preserve her own life. She left him and, after going through therapy, is making progress. Understandably, she still struggles with lingering effects of his abuse, but, as a family, we are proud of her for taking care of herself and ending a toxic, abusive marriage.

Preserving our own mental, emotional and physical health is an area we CANNOT be flexible on. Seek out those who support you, and can help you face your curves. We know ourselves best. We cannot let others make the final decisions in these important areas of our lives. If you're unsure of a diagnosis, get a second opinion. If you are in an abusive relationship, depressed, or just finding it hard to look in the mirror each day, get help. Make yourself a priority, by preserving your self-worth.

# Raising Children

Those of us with children have learned over time that there is no manual for raising kids. Wally and I have often felt like we're failing as parents. But in reality, we have had a lot of successes with our kids and that is due in large part to our faith and our church. We've included the Lord in our parenting, and our church has wonderful guidelines and programs to help families stay close and help our youth maintain morals in these challenging times.

When Megan was younger, older ladies told me that she would be grown and gone before I knew it, so I should appreciate the time I had with her. To my surprise, I discovered they were exactly right. Along the way, Wally and I realized that we needed to parent with some flexibility. Sometimes we needed to alter our original tactics to handle a certain situation. Other times we needed to love when we felt like freaking out, or bend the rules when the circumstance required.

That being said, we tried not to let the opinions of others overshadow what we thought was the right choice. Megan would say that so-and-so was letting their kids do this or that, which was a great reason to let HER do it. This statement was usually following by intense begging. Wally and I tried hard to resist that "peer" pressure.

Though we might not be perfect, how we raise our kids is our decision. Peer pressure can be a powerful influence on kids and parents, but in the end, it's our responsibility to decide the best route for our children. The media would also love to be in charge of raising our kids. Make decisions about how you want to raise your kids, and then stay with it. Research shows that the more time parents spend with their children, the less chance they will fall into dangerous paths. It's not a guarantee, but why not put the odds in our favor?

# Support A Loving Mate

Unfortunately, I know there are many readers who are single, or currently enduring difficult relationships. You probably didn't see these curves coming your way, but you are trying to move forward despite the circumstances. I applaud you for making the best of the situation.

For those of you in positive relationships, I encourage you to stand firm in one last area - Supporting your loving mate. Unfortunately, life's curves bring stress, create tension, change people, and hurt relationships. Spouses that were once loving and wonderful can become worried or depressed when challenges arise. It's during these times that people may be tempted to complain to others about their spouse, or seek comfort in another's arms. I encourage you to be patient, continue communicating with your spouse, support them, and do everything in your power to keep the relationship intact.

Through our 27 years of marriage, Wally and I have each had our own issues, struggled through low moments, and been difficult to live with. However, we made a commitment to each other and God that we would stick together for better or worse. One of the ways to get through challenges is by remembering times in our relationship when we were especially close and connected to each other. Those times remind us of the love we share and help us stay committed to each other. Every day is not lined with roses, but if we remember the goodness in our loving spouse, we can keep our relationship together and make it through the curves we are facing.



There's no doubt we have to be flexible to overcome the challenges of life, but in some areas we cannot be flexible. We need to stay true to our goals and commitments. True to ourselves. True to our faith. No matter what others may say, don't doubt yourself, how you're raising your children, or how you are supporting your loving mate. Remember your value and take care of yourself by preserving your emotional, mental, and physical health.

*"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." ~ John 16:33*

# 10

## You Have the Strength to Face the Curve

### *You're Stronger Than You Think*

#### **From the field.....**

*I was seven months pregnant when Wally took the job with the Independent Salinas Peppers team in 1997. I had an active two-year-old, was teaching high school full-time, and lived 20 minutes outside the city. It was an exciting, but challenging, time. It's also a blur. I was worn out, on my own, and felt as big as a house.*

*Our son was due the first part of June, and school ended just before Memorial Day, so as luck would have it, I made it to the end of the school year without giving birth. As I got closer to my due date, I tried to cover all my bases, including making arrangements with one friend to take Megan when I went into labor, another friend to drive me to the hospital if I couldn't make it there myself and someone else to watch the dog!*

*One night, I felt sure that I was having contractions. I dropped Megan off and drove the 20 minutes into town to the hospital, only to find it was false labor. The scenario repeated itself two days later. I don't know if it was nerves, paranoia, or indigestion, but the baby wasn't due until the following week and I was praying he would hold off until Wally's scheduled arrival.*

*After the second false labor, friends in town invited me to stay with them until Wally arrived. I accepted their offer. I was fine until Wally arrived on Sunday. We celebrated my birthday on Monday and our son was born on Tuesday.*

*Wally stayed with me for two days, drove to the Las Vegas Airport, met my mom to exchange the car keys, and flew back to CA to rejoin his baseball team. Thankfully, my mom stayed with me for a week and I'll never forget her first order of business. "Jennie, your two-year-old needs a bed time." I had been so worn out after work that it was pretty much a free-for-all when it came to Megan's bedtime. I had to get strong on that one.*

*When my mom left, I was on my own again. That first night, I was standing in front of the stove cooking spaghetti, talking to my friend on the phone when I heard my daughter screaming from the bedroom. She had climbed up the front of the dresser and pulled it over on herself. If you had painted me that scenario in my preparent life, I would have laughed and said, "There's no way I can handle*

that." But when the situation is in front of you, somehow you muster the strength to face it. Luckily, my daughter was fine, emerging with only minor bruises and a tear-stained face.

*After I recovered from childbirth, it was time to pack our belongings for the summer and join Wally in California. Packing was a slow process with a newborn and a two-year-old. I asked my friend to watch Megan for a couple of hours so I could load the remaining items into the car and tidy the house. Shortly before I was done, my friend called with news that Megan had fallen into a cactus and she was working to extract the quills from Megan's tiny hands (thank goodness it wasn't her whole body). Luckily I only had to drive two hours by myself as my mom planned to join me in Las Vegas. Here I was, car loaded with everything we'd need for the summer, a two-week-old baby, and a two-year-old with hands full of nearly invisible, painful cactus quills. At that moment I didn't want to be strong. I wanted to sit down on the curb and cry.*

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Being strong doesn't mean we can't show emotion, or lean on others. Being strong is facing our curves with resolve. It's a power we have deep within us as individuals. We don't need it all the time. In fact, often we don't even realize it's there until we're faced with a challenge. When life is going smoothly, we usually don't need to be strong.

### **People Don't View Themselves as Strong**

We don't ask for life's curves. We stand in the batter's box and have to face the pitch we're thrown. A friend who lost her spouse to cancer admitted she was tired of people telling her how strong she was. Although others meant well, she didn't want to be strong, she just wanted her husband back. We often share her feelings when we face challenges in our lives; we don't want to be the poster child for "strong".

Strength isn't a trait we notice in ourselves. Usually we see it in others or they see it in us. Shortly after a friend lost her unborn baby, I told her I knew she was a strong person. She replied, "I don't feel strong". She didn't ask for this curve, but had to be strong for her husband and four other children who needed her.

In Chapter 3, I wrote of my cousin, Ted, and his wife, Abby, who lost their baby at 10 months. People comment that she is such a strong person, but she doesn't see herself that way. Naturally, it hurts when people hint that a reason she

lost her son was so she could somehow become a stronger person. That's crazy.

Her writing and sharing is a resource, blessing, and source of strength to those who have endured similar tragedies, but she never asked for the nightmare of her child's death. I disagree when people say that the main reason we have to endure the curves of life is to become stronger. However, I believe as we continue to put one foot in front of the other, not only does our capacity to face the curves increase, but our ability to help others along the road as well.

My mom always thought she'd have a fairy tale marriage. She married a handsome man with whom she shared a common faith and the relationship seemed destined for success. Sadly, when I was five years old, their growing differences became overwhelming; she was forced to leave with me and my younger sister.

Now, this shy girl from Ohio was on her own in California with two little ones to support. She felt alone and scared. She found a job, rented a small home, and started to piece her life back together. She had to face tough curves like sending her girls to day care, finding ways to meet decent men, and working hard to make ends meet. She definitely didn't go through divorce merely to become a stronger person. In fact, if you ask her, she didn't see herself as strong, she was simply doing what had to be done.

People have lost their homes and all their possessions in the devastating Midwest tornados, tsunamis in Japan and the Philippines, and other natural disasters. Somehow those people rebuild their lives. Are they feeling strong? No. Do they have to be? Yes, probably more than they ever thought they could. They don't have a choice, they know they have to feed their family tomorrow. When facing struggles as these, we often draw on invisible, hidden reservoirs of strength to press onward and accomplish what is required.

# Personal Insights

For Wally, leaving baseball was one of the hardest struggles he has ever faced. It was his first real love and will be a part of him forever. In reality, he was unprepared for the strength it would take to move on from the game. Once, after Wally stopped playing, we sought counseling to resolve some family issues. One of the best results from the counseling was Wally's realization he still needed baseball in his life. He started coaching our high school team and found it fulfilling. Through our curves, we discover methods that help us move forward.

*Trial No. 5 by Carol Lynn Pearson (used with permission)*

*Carefully they let  
Out on the table  
Trials One, Two, Three, Four, Five and Six.*

*"Choose one," they said.  
"Oh, any," she cried with horror,  
Born of the best Halloween,  
"Any, but Number Five.  
It would kill me.  
I promise I would not survive!"*

*They thanked her graciously,  
Escorted her out,  
Then gift-wrapped, addressed  
And labeled "Special Delivery"  
Trial Number Five,  
Sent with love from  
Those whose assignment it is  
To make sure you know  
That you can go  
Through Trials One, Two, Three and Four  
Ninety-Nine or Five  
And incredibly --  
Come out alive!"*

This poem is true because we will survive challenges we never dreamed we could. We don't necessarily want to be strong, but (like it or not) we are stronger than we think. I received this poem from a friend who thought her "Trial No. 5" was cancer. However, she learned that losing a breast paled in comparison to losing a beloved family member. Her cancer and resulting mastectomy were of little importance in the wake of a tragic death of a family member. My friend is a positive person, and miraculously, has remained so. I look at her as a true example of strength in the midst of trials... of all numbers.

# Find your Strength

My cousin posted his experience with challenges on social media. He wrote, *"Life is tough all around for a lot of people. I try never to compare one life to another. It's all about perspective, all about environment. But, whenever I hear someone on the edge of giving up I have to bite my tongue, but what I really want to do is to tell them about my life. NOT for sympathy, not at all. I'm not looking for sympathy. I want to show them that you can survive just about anything. As long as you come out the other side alive and kicking, you've made it. As much as I hate a cliché, what doesn't kill you really does make you stronger. If you hear someone about to give up, tell them about your life. Maybe they'll see they can survive after all."*

- *I was born prematurely to a 15-year-old mother, my birth mother pursued a termination but backed out at the last minute and put me up for adoption.*
- *When I was six months old I nearly died from pneumonia.*
- *My father died suddenly when I was seven.*
- *From age seven all through high school I was severely bullied (physically) at school.*
- *When I was 13 I was sent to a reform school because I refused to go to school due to the bullying. I spent 7 months living with addicts and gang members. I still have trouble talking about some of the things that I saw and that happened to me there. Maybe one day. It was a nightmare from start to finish.*
- *When I was 21 I was hospitalized for severe Depression and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, after an episode that left me nearly unable to speak*
- *I was in a three year relationship in my early 20's with a physically-abusive, cheat of a man.*
- *Followed by a 1 1/2 year relationship with a man whose psychological abuse was worse than any punch.*
- *When I was a cab driver I was pulled from my car, beaten up and robbed. Twice.*
- *When I was in my mid-20's my OCD was so bad I had to leave a job because I couldn't function.*
- *When I was 29 my mother had a stroke and I found her on the floor. Dealing with the hospitals and nursing homes was a nightmare. I still see*

*her lying on the floor sometimes when I close my eyes. She had been there for seven hours. If I had been late, she wouldn't have survived.*

- In my early 30's I spent nearly two years unemployed. There was a point when I didn't eat more than a few pieces of candy for six days.*
- In 2012 after a very long struggle against dementia and a degenerative brain disease my mother (my constant support and the most important person in my life) passed away."*

He continues, *"That's just a sampling. There are things I left out that I'm not ready to talk about. Oh yes, things are a lot better now in a lot of ways, but I still carry the scars. But you know what? I'm still here. I'm still loving and compassionate. I'm still able to have compassion for others when people who have been through a lot less have lost their spark and their empathy. If I can do it, so can you. Don't give up. Ever. It hurts sometimes, I know. Everyone has moments when they don't think they can go on - don't think they will make it through another crisis. You can and you must! Life is too short and too precious to give up on. I made it. So can you. So WILL you!"*

He is the first to admit that his strength comes from stubbornness. He simply refused to give up. He was going to make it; there was no other option.

Determine to persist through your curve. You may not know how or when you will get through a challenge, but the act of 'deciding' to overcome arises from a place of strength, and fortifies you in the process. Each of the major curves we face can be a turning point in the road of life.

If we recognize and acknowledge times when we are strong beyond our capacity, that awareness acts as a spring board to conquer the next situation we face. Tell yourself, "If I can get through that, I can get through this." Sometimes the strength required is merely to hang on, put one foot in front of the other, fix a meal, and wake up tomorrow. We have to celebrate the little victories. It's like building those flexibility muscles, only now it's our "ability to be strong" muscles.

Look back upon past challenges to remind yourself what you've been through, then tell yourself out loud "I am strong." You may have to say it more than once. The more you say it the more you'll believe it.

What other means can we use when we need to keep it together, but don't possibly know how? Previously, I've suggested we can take a deep breath, look for the positive, see the situation in a different light, get outside ourselves, and call upon others or the Lord for strength. Hearing what others have survived also fortifies me; I know that if they can get through their challenge, I can get through

mine.

During Wally's playing years, there were times when he was not 100% physically; days he didn't feel strong. Sometimes it was a pulled muscle, other times it was arm fatigue, or the three floating bone chips in his elbow. Though he didn't feel 100%, he ran out on the field every night his team needed him to get the job done. Even when we don't feel strong enough to face our curves, we know we must face them. Others need us and the Lord needs us. During times when we don't think we can, somehow we muster the strength to get out there and play our game.

Understandably, there are times when our strength is completely spent and we feel we'll break if another trial is piled on our shoulders. We may ask ourselves, "Why do I have to be the strong one?", but the real question is, "What's the alternative?" Usually, there isn't one. Since giving up is not an option, we don't have many choices when we're going through curves. We can be strong, we can pretend to look strong, or we can temporarily fall apart. Honestly, I know we've all experienced these reactions. Sometimes we need to have our cry, and we should. Then we wipe our eyes, look up, and realize we're stronger than we think.

Whenever I consider strong individuals, my mind invariably turns to the Christian pioneers that crossed the plains in early American history. We hear stories of people leaving worldly possessions behind, losing spouses and children to starvation, and battling nature's elements. I cannot begin to imagine the pain of watching my child starve or losing a limb to frostbite. Through their faith, they pressed on despite challenges because there was no other choice. They kept moving and their faith was strong enough to carry them through incredible hardship.

### **Strong Doesn't Look the Same for All**

While we were living in northern Utah, I was visiting one of my friends in southern Utah when, referring to our constant moves, she said, "I don't know how you've done it. I could never do that." She's not the first person to tell me that and you've probably heard it too. I usually take it as a compliment, but I know it's not true. She's had hard trials in her life as well, and if she was in my place, she would find a way to overcome.

How do I know that?

Because I wasn't accomplishing anything out of the ordinary. I was doing what needed to be done at the moment for myself, my marriage, and my family. When others see us as strong, their faith can lift and build us up. When someone comments on how well you seem to be handling a challenge, don't dismiss it. Thank

them, give glory to the Lord, and recognize it as a signal you're being visibly blessed with the strength you need.

There are times in our lives when we need the strength to stay in a tough situation and make it work - a marriage, a job, a living situation. Other times, we need the strength to step out on our own or change our life's course. Both of these paths require strength and we must refrain from passing judgement on how others handle their curves. Strong isn't the same for all.

An element which gives me strength to get through a curve might not encourage you. When facing challenges, some people prefer to be alone, others like to be social, some people increase their work hours, while others engage in physical activity, read, or listen to music. Know yourself. Learn what strengthens you and then use it to navigate the curves you face, allowing others the same right. If you have a strong shoulder, lend it to another who may be facing challenges beyond what they think they can handle.

# He Multiplies Us

During my second year in education, I taught Mark, a great kid from a good family who always wanted to make honorable choices. After graduation, he served a 2-year religious mission in the Philippines before beginning college, where he met and married his wife, Janelle. He was studying civil engineering when the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. Ever the protector, he immediately enlisted in the Army. He and Janelle had one child at the time.

While finishing college, he participated in the ROTC program and joined the National Guard, which meant a four-month separation for boot camp and two to three weeks of training each year. Being in the ROTC program as a college student, he was non-deployable. After graduation, he began Officer Training, starting with a two-month stint followed by a six-month period. Janelle and their four children visited Mark in Oklahoma during his second training period. Upon arriving, she discovered they were allowed to stay. She knew it was best for their family to be together, so even though they only had enough clothing to last for a visit, they found a little apartment and remained. Mark was only able to see them on Sundays, but it was worth it.

In 2009, they began rigorous preparations for Mark's first deployment to Iraq as an Army engineer. While Mark was preparing on the military side, they both had to undergo mental and emotional preparations, including planning for the possibility he wouldn't return. Before he left, Janelle moved in with family for support. As it turned out, the military leadership scheduled 900 men for deployment but only needed 700. Two days before he was supposed to leave, he was given the option and chose to stay home. It was an emotional roller coaster. While home, he returned to his job as a civil engineer on the Army base nearby and helped Janelle care for their five children.

Four years later, in 2013, Mark was ordered to Afghanistan; this time he deployed. He and Janelle had been renting a home for three years and the weekend before Mark was shipped overseas, their landlord announced that he was selling the house; it was nothing personal, just business. Janelle knew they needed their neighborhood, church, and support system to get through this challenging time so after Mark left, she showed the house to prospective buyers for four months, even though the landlord rarely gave her the notice he promised before arriving.

Janelle's practice of home-schooling their children proved an additional blessing during this time of emotional upheaval. Besides helping, as she says, to

"circle the wagons for strength", home-schooling made it possible for the children to communicate with Mark on his schedule.

Their sixth child was nearly a year old when Mark left. She was a challenging baby, needing to be held constantly, and requiring frequent emergency room visits. The baby had a terrible habit of shoving objects up her nose. One time, doctors had to create suction with oxygen tubes to remove a piece of bark she had lodged up her nose. Another time, the baby tripped over a toy and broke her nose wide open. She also had a cold at the time and the doctors couldn't do anything to help because of the swelling. All Janelle could do was hold her and try to comfort her.

Janelle was in survival mode, taking life moment by moment. She couldn't handle more than that. She needed someone to take care of her, but all she had was people to care for. She was emotionally stretched and feeling overwhelmed - like she was falling apart.

During these crazy times, Janelle knew the Lord was taking care of her and watching over her. She prayed fervently, and constantly felt the Lord's strengthening hand supporting her. He reassured her that she could only do what she could do and that everything would be all right. One night, her baby was sick and she was without help. Janelle gently took the baby in her arms and cried to the Lord, "Can this be enough?" He let her know that it was enough and that He was there to help and comfort her.

After four months of uncertainty in their rental home, Janelle decided to move their family back to the familiar town where they went to college. With Mark still away, their extended families helped with the move. The change was an answer to prayer, an undeniable blessing, and the Lord's plan for them.

Overall, Mark's deployment lasted a year, after which he joined them in their new home. Upon his return, Janelle's relief was indescribable. She was grateful he was there to support her, help her take care of the family and....make some dinners! Though their children are still transitioning to having dad home, Janelle describes Mark's return as "flipping the switch from darkness to light."

Thankfully, Mark and Janelle maintained positive communication during his deployments. They made their relationship a priority and it has stayed strong, despite their time apart and the challenges they have faced. The military has become more family-friendly over the years, but the lifestyle creates such stress on relationships that many couples have separated or divorced. Mark continues to serve in the engineer unit of the Utah National Guard and has since started a civil engineering business. Janelle often reflects on how the Lord multiplied her ability to handle her curve. Although she is a strong woman and never would have given up, she knows that relying on the Lord made the difference.

I honestly don't know how Wally and I have survived many of the curves we've faced. Like Janelle, I strongly believe I was given strength beyond my natural capacity. My only explanation is that faith and reliance on the Lord lifts and sustains us during times of challenge. We can consider it as Him multiplying our strength; we bring the five loaves and two fishes and He does the rest. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, suffered every pain and sorrow we'll experience. He can empathize with us. Through His Atonement, He sustains us during times of trial if we humble ourselves and call on Him in faith. Those times when others have asked me "how did you get through that?", my only answer has been that I didn't do it alone.

My friend said this about being strengthened by the Lord during difficult times:

*"When I have prayed the prayer...Lord please apply the strengthening power of the Atonement in my life as I am doing all I physically, mentally and spiritually can. Then I wait and throughout the day it happens. Energy my body didn't have comes. Hope comes that I didn't have. Peace comes about worries I've had. We are not required to go through this life with only sheer will power to do good when all our might and strength is spent. The Lord, through His Atonement, carries the rest."*

After her volleyball season ended, we gave our daughter, Megan, the option to move back to southern Utah during the winter of her senior year and graduate high school with her friends. It was the right decision, but a tough one, knowing that she would never truly live under our roof again as she was attending college in California soon after graduation. At the time, Wally was working for a friend in southern Utah, living with my stepdad and his wife. Each Monday morning Wally would wake up early to make the four-hour drive south and return to us on Friday evening. If the weather was bad, he would travel Sunday night.

On a cold, snowy, Sunday night in January, Wally and Megan packed their belongings in the truck; he was going for the week, she was moving permanently. As they pulled out of the garage, I stood there smiling and waving, but they knew I was crying. I held it together until the garage door touched down and then went into my room, collapsed to my knees, and tried to pray amidst the sobs. Our circumstances were uncertain, the three of us were on our own again, and now, our oldest daughter, the life of our party, was moving on in her life. After I had my prayer and my cry, I got up and wiped my eyes, opened the bedroom door, and faced the rest of the night.

This is my advice to you: when you have to keep going but don't know how, have your cry, dry your eyes, then pick yourself up and face what lies ahead.



Strength is required to face the curves. Call upon it to overcome the trials in your life. Whatever your belief system, I know you'll agree we face curves that seem beyond our capacity to handle. When you don't feel strong, when you don't want to be strong, believe you can and will be blessed with the ability to survive the challenges you face. Take courage and remember, you're stronger than you think.

*"Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" ~ Isaiah 48:10*

# 11

## You Can't Win the Game by Yourself

### *We Have to Help Each Other Through Life*

#### **From the field....**

*Wally's opportunity to coach college baseball in the fall of 2011 was ideal; he wanted to get back into the game and they urgently needed a pitching coach. We took a risk, knowing the job could be short-lived; the head coach's contract was ending. While it was an exciting position for Wally, it was an adjustment for me and the kids.*

*During our early years of baseball traveling, we didn't have children, so change and uncertainty were new to them. We had lived in our cozy Santa Clara home for eight years and the kids were used to stability. Over time, we made friends in the new city, including the other coaches and their families; bonds we will always treasure. Mostly, we spent time together as a family, which in the long run turned out to be one of the biggest benefits for us.*

*When the season ended in May, we were informed that the head coach's contract would not be renewed and the new head coach planned to bring his own assistants which meant Wally was out of a job. This difficult curve brought fear and uncertainty to our family. I remember asking the kids to trust us. We told them, "You will always have a roof over your heads and food in your mouths."*

*I had my teaching job, but with Wally unemployed, we didn't know what our next step would be. Should we stay in northern Utah, keep my job, and hope Wally could find one? I applied for jobs in southern Utah but received no response. We decided to store our belongings and then figure out where to live. People invited us to stay in their homes temporarily, but with five of us it was awkward. The idea of having nowhere to live was difficult to handle, especially for Wally. Moving day came, and we were grateful for people who helped us pack, clean, and move our things into storage. We had one more day in the house, but nothing to sleep on, so we stayed in a hotel that night.*

*I vividly remember laying my head down on the pillow at midnight, turning to face the wall so Wally wouldn't see me cry, and feeling a silent tear roll down my cheek. We had left our stable jobs, home, and neighborhood in Santa Clara to make what we thought was the right move for our family. Now, we didn't know*

where we were going to live the next day. I felt forgotten. In that moment of despair, I remembered receiving phone messages during the day, but in the chaos had failed to check them.

In what I believe was a direct answer to a desperate prayer, one of the messages was from a young mother who lived down the street from us. We were basically strangers. Nine months earlier while bathing her baby, she discovered a strange lump in his abdomen which led doctors to a cancerous tumor in his back (the lump she discovered was nothing more than relaxed muscle). Her baby was less than a year old at the time. Doctors attacked the cancer with chemotherapy and following their instructions, she had kept him sequestered, only taking him to close family members and the hospital. During the six months we lived in our home, I once introduced myself while she was out strolling her baby. Thankfully, medical professionals were able to rid his little body of cancer, so she and the baby were traveling with her husband while he worked out of state for the summer.

Her message to me that day was an invitation to move into her empty home. My tears of despair were instantly replaced with tears of gratitude. Hope was not lost; the Lord had not forgotten us. I shouldn't have doubted, because over time I've learned that prayers are answered, usually through the goodness of others.

This sweet young mother had heard from a neighbor that we needed a place to stay and had already made the necessary arrangements. As I write this, I am still amazed she let virtual strangers live in her home while she was away. I contacted her the next morning and accepted the generous offer. Later that day, we had a roof, albeit temporary, over our heads, and a prayer of gratitude in our hearts.

I have no idea what we would have done without the incredible generosity of this young mother. I eventually asked her why she let us stay and I will never forget her answer. When her baby was sick, many people brought food, prayed for them, and helped in any way they could. She realized that material possessions were secondary, that family was key, and that she couldn't have endured her baby's cancer without the help of doctors, nurses, family, and friends. She wanted to help us because so many people were there for her when she needed it. She was "paying it forward".

With basically all our possessions in storage, we kept nothing more than clothing, some food, a bin of important papers, and a post office box. Lacking a permanent address, we had to apply for a waiver from the state athletic association so Megan could try out for the high school volleyball team. School started during this time; our kids were strong through it all. It was nearly three

*weeks until we made the decision to stay in northern Utah and move to a new rental home. There we met more wonderful neighbors who welcomed us with open arms and supported us for nine months, until we were able to return to our home in Santa Clara at the end of the school year.*

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Simply put, we need other people in order to survive our curves. We cannot navigate this journey on our own. People may help us in small ways, like brightening our day or giving us a ride, or big ways, like letting us move into their home. Others are usually willing to help if they are able and know we are in need.

# Ask for Help

Wally has never won a baseball game by himself. He's never even tried. It's impossible.

Not only did he need the other players, but the coaches, the trainers, the announcers, the clubhouse guys, those who meticulously prepare the field, and so on. Many, many people are needed for a team to win a game and our lives are no different.

Stephanie Abrams Hosford discovered how badly she needed help from others during a challenging time in her life. In her book, *Bald, Fat and Crazy*, my high school friend relates the struggle of discovering she had breast cancer two days before finding out she was finally pregnant, all while in the midst of adopting a baby from China. While some recommended she abort the pregnancy, she chose to rely on her supportive family and skilled medical professionals. She and the fetus were able to weather the storm of chemotherapy and Stephanie gave birth to a healthy baby girl just after the adoption was final. Her baby was a testimony that she made the right decision, and leaned on the right people.

The only way we can get through this game of life is with the support of others. We're here to help each other and it's easier when we remember we have something in common; we're ALL going through challenges. No one is exempt from the curves of life. We need others and they need us. There's a reason we're not on this earth alone. No one is an island.

Most of us struggle with asking for help, and accepting when help is offered. Were you raised to believe that you need to be independent, instead of seeking help? We often feel we should face curves on our own. Put that myth to rest. The people who help us today may need help tomorrow. At some point in our lives, we all need help. It is OK to admit this fact and let others know we're struggling, either a little or a lot. Acknowledging we need help doesn't make us look weak as much as it makes us appear real. Other people are near so you can ask for help when you need it. By accepting help, you are allowing others to serve and feel love in their heart. If you struggle with this, start by asking others for help in small areas of your life. You know people who want to help you.

# Blessed Through Others

When our older daughter returned to southern Utah during the second semester of her senior year, my son no longer had a ride to high school on those cold winter mornings. Ryan had his license, but no car; one more challenge of Wally working out of town during the week. My younger daughter was afraid to be left alone, so I needed to leave for my job at the last possible minute. The task of driving my son to school made our already chaotic mornings even tougher.

I searched in vain for a solution to simplify our morning struggle. One night I was at church and the prompting came, "Ask for help." I felt embarrassed and brushed away the thought, but when it came again, I acted. One of the gentlemen at church had a teenage son who drove to school, so I asked if his son could take Ryan. He said it would be no problem. Giving my son a ride to school was a small act to him, but it was a ton of bricks lifted off my shoulders.

I walked out of the church, got into my truck, and began to cry. It was another reminder I wasn't alone. The Lord knew my need and created an opportunity where I could find help, but I had to ask. There are times when we receive help, and other times when we are the helpers. Both roles are necessary for us to grow and see blessings in our lives, no matter how small or big the need.

I read a story about a college student who lost her funding after her mother committed suicide because the support was tied to her mother's income. The student sent an online plea for help and over 800 strangers donated as little as \$5. She was able to continue her college education.

# Lean on the Right People

An important part of learning to lean on others is making sure we are leaning on the right people; people who care and have our best interest at heart. The other day I had a challenge at school, and knew if I went home I would take my frustration out on my family - and it wasn't their fault at all! Luckily, I went next door to my friend's classroom and started chatting. Before long, we were laughing, and my challenge was forgotten.

I met a woman who learned firsthand about leaning on the wrong person. Joni was in her mid-thirties and content with life. She was active in her church, had a strong family, and a rewarding job. When a former high school friend returned to town, with her family, she and Joni began to reconnect. Her friend was experiencing a challenge; Joni reached out to help her.

Simultaneously, Joni's life started falling apart around her. She quit her job because co-workers began to question her every move. She also needed major surgery and her son started facing serious issues. Because of her son's problems, Joni sensed judgement from people at church, which disconnected her from the congregation. She felt redundant and alone. She started leaning on her high school friend, who was sweet, fun, and intelligent.

Regrettably, Joni's friend, dissatisfied in her marriage, started having affairs. Joni remembers going out with her and making herself scarce when her friend met up with the men. Joni justified the situation because she enjoyed her friend's company and liked spending time with her. Joni knew her friends' actions were wrong, but became numb in the midst of her own curves; she desensitized herself to what was happening. Joni was caught in the middle. She needed a friend but realized this relationship was carrying her down the wrong road.

During this time, Joni was in the habit of taking daily walks and as she walked, she prayed. She knew she needed a change and the Lord blessed her with a nagging impression to return to college. When she did, Joni had a new life purpose and less free time, which allowed her to make a break from the complicated friendship. Looking back, Joni recognizes that though she never did anything she regrets, the relationship cost her part of her soul. She is grateful the Lord continued to watch over her during this time, never losing her testimony of Him, His Atonement, and the power of prayer. She knows that no matter where you are, if you call on Him, He'll be there.

In addition to leaning on the Lord, make sure you are leaning on others who move you in a forward direction. Surround yourselves with people who fill your

bucket. A children's book entitled "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" encourages us to lift others in a positive way. We take turns getting our buckets filled, and then filling others' buckets. Load your lives with 'bucket fillers', especially during the curves of life.

When you are experiencing curves that others don't understand, try to be patient while they learn. Friends want to support you, but perhaps don't know what to say, or how to help. If they are true friends, you can help them by telling them what you need. When my cousins' baby passed away, I like many others, had no idea what to say. I loved them and over time, they taught me what to say, what to do. Some people have lost friends through their curves, but gained new friends who related to and supported them.

Have you ever felt completely alone? You may be surrounded by people but feel there is no one to turn to. The dark curve you're facing can look even darker when you feel lonely or abandoned. As isolated as you may feel, I assure you that you're not alone. Whatever you're going through, our Savior knows your pain. He is with us when no one else can be. He has cried for us and cries our tears with us. Call on Him in those lonely hours; you will feel His support and love.

I encourage you to seek people who have borne curves similar to yours, and emerged successfully. Lean on them, feel encouraged and gain strength. Then, when you're ready, you can use lessons you've learned to lift others. I have a friend who makes my curves seem easier to bear because she makes me laugh when I feel like crying. Lean on the right people for support through your challenges.

# Keep Your Eyes Open

When Wally was pitching in the major leagues, he didn't win every game. Some nights he pitched decently, but the team lost. Other nights (thankfully these were rare), the team lost due to his pitching. Being a relief pitcher, he entered the game in tense situations. As a young wife, I learned to handle these circumstances; it required change on my part.

When Wally pitched for the Phillies, we had a 30-minute drive home each night to our apartment in New Jersey, over the Walt Whitman Bridge. My nature has always been positive, peppy, and cheery, so on the nights Wally pitched badly, I thought I was supposed to cheer him up! As we started driving over the bridge, I began trying to get his mind off the game, telling him about my day, my conversations with other wives, or how our family was doing in the west. I thought by making conversation, he would forget all about that bad pitch or inning. This continued for a while, until Wally helped me see that I wasn't helping him at all.

He didn't need a peppy person talking about random topics. He needed time to process and work through it himself. As a professional athlete, Wally was tough on himself, needing to employ his own methods for overcoming the demons. No amount of outside "cheering" from me could speed up the process or make it unnecessary. I learned to support Wally when and how he needed it.

In some situations, people need time to process, heal, and work matters out on their own. You may have one friend who needs time alone after discovering he or she has a terminal illness, while another may want someone to talk to. Everyone is different. Whatever the situation, we need to be mindful of them and sensitive to their needs. In addition to praying for comfort for those who are suffering, we can pray for inspiration to know how to lift their burdens.

I wrote about my close friend, the mother of four children that recently passed away. We didn't know what to do for her family, but we wanted to help. Other neighbors found ways to help by bringing meals and re-constructing their front yard. We stopped by their house the night after the funeral for a short visit with her husband, Jeff, and the kids. Wally didn't want to intrude during Jeff's time of devastating grief but he soon realized Jeff needed a friend. For the first few months after his wife passed away, Wally saw Jeff nearly every night. Sometimes more people were at the house, otherwise it was just them playing pool, talking and hanging out. Wally told Jeff, "I'm going to keep

coming over until you tell me to stop." It was exactly what Jeff needed.

At some point, people facing crippling challenges will need you. Simply knowing you are available for support could be the greatest comfort of all; then make sure you're truly there when they need you. If you are the one struggling, as soon as you feel able, ask someone close to you to have lunch, or come over for a visit. They'll be glad you called.



We are on this earth to help each other; everyone is going through challenges. We need help in small and big ways as we navigate the curves of life. The Lord knows us and what we're going through, and blesses us through other people. You can make your load lighter by asking for needed help, then graciously accepting it. You can also be available for others when they need you. Seek to discover how to assist the people in your life, be an answer to their prayer. When we help each other through life's challenges, we win the game together.

*"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." ~ Psalms 34:19*



# Learning From the Game

## Perspective is Key

### From the field...

The following is my personal journal entry from May 26, 2013:

*"Everyone in my house is excited, and relieved. Today is the last Sunday of May and on Saturday, June 1st, we are moving back to our home that we left nearly 18 months ago. We're not just moving back to our home, we're moving back to our lives, our neighborhood, friends, familiar grocery store and streets. We're moving back to people that know our story and our faults and love us just the same.*

*I realize that at this moment, it is hard to remember the tough times. Just like it's hard to remember the labor pains after you have the baby. I have to think to remember Rachel crying every day for the first six months and Ryan not hanging out with ANYONE for the first four months. It's hard to remember the aching... why did we do this to our family? We went back on our word, after telling them we would return in six months if Dad's job didn't work out.*

*However, I can recall certain memories, like the time we didn't know where we were moving the next day, not having a place to live, or knowing how we'd make it financially. I can remember the nights I slept alone, my pillow wet with tears of loneliness, tears that only came in the darkness of my room. I was overwhelmed, wondering how I would get up the next day and be strong for my children. Wow. It's hard to remember the pain because we have the benefit of time, something to look forward to, and gratitude for the blessing of being able to go home."*

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Life's curves are scary because we can't see beforehand how they will turn out. The unknown can be our greatest foe. After emerging on the other side of the curve, our fear is often replaced by understanding, gratitude, or a greater awareness of personal growth. This process is a gift called perspective. After

returning to our home, we were able to look back and realize how much we had learned.

# See the Bigger Picture

1989, our first year together in baseball, was also the first year the Phillies AAA team was established in northeastern Pennsylvania. Recently, we returned to attend the 25th reunion celebration of the Scranton Wilkes-Barre Red Barons. While touring the newly reconstructed stadium, we visited the upper deck luxury boxes. From the higher vantage point, we could see the entire field and beyond. The luxury box view is different from the batter's box view. It provides a different perspective.

When facing life's curves, our viewpoint is limited, because we're focused on the challenge coming at us. From the luxury box, however, we can see the bigger picture. We can see the gorgeous blue sky and the manicured grass, smell the delicious aromas, and hear the sounds of the stadium. We can see all the others involved in the game, including players in the dugouts and bullpens. We know the "at bat" will end, the game will finish, and the stadium will empty.

When one looks at the bigger picture, the curves look smaller, less daunting. Perhaps this view is like seeing the world from God's perspective. He's looking at our challenge from the stadium press box and knows it will end. We can lean on His knowledge when we doubt the outcome. As we mature, and successfully navigate the challenges we face, we gain life skills and perspective.

Maintaining a luxury box perspective while standing in the batter's box helps us face our curves more successfully. Seeing the bigger picture while we're going through the curves allows us to view them in a different light, find solutions we cannot see from the batter's box, and realize the curve won't end us.

After running away from their father in the stage production of Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael are on the roof with chimney sweeps when Jane looks down and says, "Troubles never look so bad when you look at them from higher up." Looking at the world from a higher viewpoint gave Jane a different perspective.

Perspective is how we see our life. Our perspective can be affected by upbringing, experiences, challenges, relationships, and successes. It also depends on where we're looking from. Have you ever looked at someone else's life from the outside and felt like you could see a solution or a path they could not? Has another person ever tried to share insight with you about your curve? We can often see what others can't and vice versa because our perspective is different than theirs. Remain open so you can receive help from others who are looking at your curves from a different standpoint.

My daughter had a tough experience when she disappointed someone who had faith in her. She felt awful about letting them down. As I watched the situation unfold, I was able to share my perspective that, compared to people starving, friends losing their children, or others having their lives destroyed by addiction, her curve was not the end of the world. It was an experience she had to work through, but my viewpoint helped her see it from a different angle.

It is important to keep the challenges of life, big or small, in perspective. For example, maybe our child is struggling with a schoolteacher, or we have a misunderstanding with a friend. If we can pull back and look around at others facing trials, we often realize that our personal challenges are less significant than we thought. Gaining perspective can be a painstaking process, but one way to help us face the curves still ahead.

One year when my son, Ryan, went to scout camp, I had a terrible feeling that he would have an accident and die at camp. It sounds crazy, and I can't explain where it was coming from, but I was extremely concerned; I couldn't get it out of my mind. I reluctantly let him go and waited for word. In fact, I didn't even empty his bedroom trash on my usual Saturday rounds. I waited and prayed. He was due to come home Sunday afternoon and by Sunday morning we hadn't received any bad news. We were sitting in church when my phone rang. It was Ryan. He said, "Mom, I think I sprained my ankle." I was thrilled! He was alive!

When he made it home with his ankle the size of a grapefruit I gladly took him to the urgent care for x-rays. I was so happy that he hadn't died that the sprained ankle seemed like the minor injury it was. Looking back, I realize that thinking he was going to die was actually a blessing. If he had come home with a sprained ankle any other time, taking him to the hospital on Sunday night would have been a major inconvenience, knowing I would be exhausted at work the next day. What changed? My view of the situation. I was so glad that my son was alive that the ankle was no problem at all. I was thankful for the lesson I learned that weekend.

Our daughter Rachel also had a perspective-changing experience while living in northern Utah. To end the school year, a special Daddy-Daughter dance party was held at her elementary school. It was scheduled mid-week, and, with Wally working in southern Utah, he couldn't attend. She was disappointed and feeling sorry for herself. I went with her to take pictures and be available in case she wanted to leave. When the party started, we noticed a daughter dancing with her father, who was in a wheelchair with an oxygen tank attached. Her self-pity changed to gratitude upon realizing that even though her father couldn't attend the party, he was healthy enough to walk and run with her. Gratitude can change our viewpoint.

The passage of time also helps us gain perspective. Our neighborhood in Santa Clara is filled with many homes that are larger and nicer than ours. As our kids grew up, they often mentioned their desires to have a two-story house or pool, like some of our neighbors. Through our experience of moving, their perspective changed! Now, we joke that our kids would have lived in a cardboard box if it meant moving back to our friends and neighbors. Since moving back home, there hasn't been any talk of a bigger house or pool.

Once, Rachel and I encountered a fierce storm while driving on the highway. You know the kind: black and menacing skies stretching as far as the eye can see with rain coming down hard. It was so frightening, we had to slow down. We rode silently as fear quieted our usual chatter. After a while, the skies began to clear and a small patch of blue was visible on the horizon. The rain slowed, then stopped, and the dark clouds disappeared. With a maturity beyond her ten years, Rachel related the storm to our challenges moving away from home - how it was dark and frightening, and the scary part was not knowing if or how we would get through.

That's how it feels when we're going through the curves. Thankfully, bit by bit, the dark clouds part, the rain stops, and brighter days return. As time passes, we look behind us and acknowledge the curve wasn't the end. We made it through. Time and gratitude are blessings that help us see our curves from a different perspective.

# Learn Through the Curves

Every night Wally walked to the mound, he expected it to be great; but it wasn't always. Sometimes he was the goat, like the night in San Francisco when he came in to pitch the tenth inning of a tie game against the Giants. He got Willie McGee out, then faced Will Clark. He had two strikes on him, but the next pitch was an inside fast ball and Will took it into the upper deck. Walk off home run. With one pitch, Wally lost the game, and got chewed out by his manager. He's also been the hero, like the night in Houston when the Phillies faced the Astros. Wally came in to pitch with bases loaded, nobody out. He retired all three batters he faced without allowing any runs to score. The Phillies won the game. How did he recover after tough outings? The same way as the good ones – he learned what he could from them and put his uniform on again the next day.

We are not major league baseball players, but it's the same for us. Sometimes we're the goat, sometimes the hero. Sometimes we make the right play, other times we don't. We know we will face curves that we have no idea how to hit. But we can find joy in our lives despite the challenges. Curves are scary and difficult. That is the game of life; we still have to live it. We don't know why good people encounter challenging times. All we know for certain is we have to keep playing with patience and determination.

One of the vital tools for overcoming our challenges is remembering that we are worthwhile and have value. We are all children of God and worthy of His blessings. We are individuals with unique needs. Just as we need to remember who we are, we can't be someone we're not. And we can't judge another for who she is because we're not in her place. The more we can be authentic with ourselves and others, the better we can concentrate on keeping it together instead of keeping up a façade.

Faith helps many of us get through the challenges we face. If you are ever in a situation where you lack faith, have hope. Hope is a willingness to see light. If there's a glimmer of hope, all is not lost. Hope is a gift we can give another. It's a positive feeling that helps us look forward, rather than down. Hope that prayers will be answered. Hope that you can carry on, take another step and see tomorrow.

The following is a thank you note I wrote the night we returned to live in our home:

*Thank you, Lord, for preparing a way for us to get home. Thank you for*

*allowing us to experience this journey so we could learn the lessons we needed to learn. Thank you for providing for us every step of the way. Thank you for allowing me to see Your hand in my life every day – to give You the credit when little things went right and big things too. Thank you for teaching my children gratitude and perspective and that life's not about things – it's about family and faith. Thank you for allowing us to make new friends, be examples of Thy love to those we met, and be instruments in Thy hand. Thank you for increasing my faith and trust in Thee. We are not visiting .... We Are Home.*

I can Keep It Together and you can Keep It Together... but it may look different. That's the way it is. We have to find what works for us, knowing it may change from curve to curve. It may be finding help or faith, taking our eyes off ourselves, or another approach. We should applaud our successes, big and small.

# A True Champion

It wasn't until my younger daughter's fifth grade graduation program that I heard of Mattie Stepanek and began to learn about this young boy's amazing life. Mattie J.T. Stepanek was born in 1990 with a rare form of muscular dystrophy, a neuromuscular disease his mother, Jeni, also lives with. Because Jeni has the adult-onset form of the disease, she unknowingly passed it on to her children before she was diagnosed. Mattie's three siblings died from complications of the disease in early childhood.

Even though Mattie had many health challenges throughout his short life, he felt that his life had a special purpose. At the age of 3, shortly after his brother passed away, he started writing poetry. Mattie was an exceptional boy and felt strongly he needed to share a message of peace and hope with the world. He wanted people to think about their actions. Mattie was very bright and penned seven books — six of them containing collections of his "Heartsongs" poetry and one, his final book, entitled "Just Peace: A Message of Hope", containing a mix of essays, communications, and poetry. He admits that he always saw the glass half full, despite his physical condition.

At an early age, Mattie developed his personal life philosophy: "Remember to play after every storm. You go through many hard things in life but if you are confident, you'll get through it. You always have to remember to celebrate because that's what charges you up to get through another life storm."<sup>1</sup> Mattie made the most of life, becoming a best-selling author and earning his black belt in karate. As the National Goodwill Ambassador for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, he continued to share his message and touch lives around the country. During the final years of his life, he relied on a ventilator and wheelchair to support his breathing and mobility. Mattie's positive attitude and conviction to his cause affected people around the world, from TV personalities to firefighters and celebrities.

Mattie wanted to meet Oprah so she could share his message of hope and peace with the world. He succeeded, becoming a frequent guest on her show and a close personal friend of Oprah's. She helped share his message and acknowledges him as an angel in her life. When Mattie was experiencing dire medical circumstances in his final years, she was one who sent prayer requests and his life was miraculously prolonged. Mattie was also able to meet and correspond with former president Jimmy Carter, a hero of his. When Mattie

passed away in 2004, at the age of 13, President Carter delivered the eulogy at his funeral.

He had every reason to be bitter, and yet he was faithful, always hoping for peace and a better world. He touched countless lives and is lovingly remembered by many. Despite her physical limitations and being on her own, his mother, Jeni, wrote the incredible story of their lives in her best-selling book, *Messenger*, and runs Mattie's foundation, continuing to share his message of peace. Below is one of Mattie's poems.

*On Being a Champion*

A champion is a winner,

A hero...

Someone who never gives up

Even when the going gets rough.

A champion is a member of

A winning team...

Someone who overcomes challenges

Even when it requires creative solutions

A champion is an optimist,

A hopeful spirit...

Someone who plays the game,

Even when the game is called life...

Especially when the game is called life.

There can be a champion in each of us,

If we live as a winner,

If we live as a member of the team,

If we live with a hopeful spirit,

For life.

September, 1999 © Matthew Joseph Thaddeus Stepanek

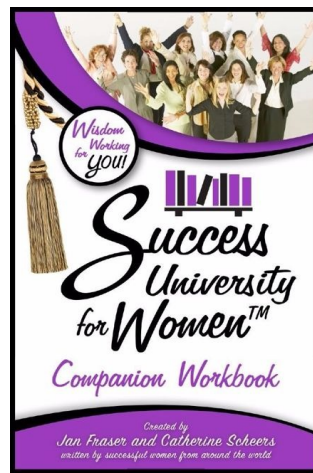
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We stand at the plate and face curves in life, but it is up to us how we face them. Let's face them like Mattie, with hope. Let's work to see positives that can come through challenges, do the best we can with what we have, and learn from every experience. Through the sharing of stories and personal experiences, I hope you've realized that everyone is going through challenges and with the help of others and the Lord, you will get through them. Although life rarely proceeds

according to plan, we have the strength to face our curves successfully. In your own way, each and every day, I have faith that you can and will Keep It Together.

*"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience hope..." ~ Romans 5:2-4*



Don't forget to grab your free gift, your free copy of the companion workbook to the acclaimed best-seller, *Success University for Women*.

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# Acknowledgements

I would like to recognize my husband, Wally, for his constant love and support. I want to give special thanks to my mother, Jan, for her constant encouragement and faith in me when I wasn't so sure. Without her, this book would still be a dream.

Special thanks as well to Rosemarie Nodine Swallow and Angela Daugherty, my editors and friends who gave me hours of their time, expertise, and wisdom.

Special thanks to Nancy Murphy whose experience and wisdom made this book infinitely better. I also want to thank my dear friends who read chapters and gave me honest and helpful feedback.

Mostly, I want to thank the people who were willing to selflessly share their stories with you to give you hope, strength, and the courage to face your curves.

## About the Author

Jennie Ritchie is a successful teacher, speaker and writer. She received her BA degree in Math/Dance Education and has taught middle and high school for 18 years in California and Utah.

Jennie is active in her church and has spoken to youth and women's' groups nationwide on topics such as self-esteem, goal-setting, and overcoming challenges.

Her husband, Wally, pitched for the Philadelphia Phillies during the 1987-88 and 1991-92 seasons. Wally and Jennie, along with their three children reside in southern Utah, where she teaches 7th grade math.

Having contributed chapters for two anthologies: *You're Never to Old to Dream, Dare, Dance* and *Success University for Women*, this is her first stand-alone work.

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Now that you feel stronger, you can strengthen  
others by sharing what you have overcome!  
Share your victories on my website...  
I can't wait to hear from you!

**Visit [www.jennieritchie.com](http://www.jennieritchie.com) today to:**  
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**Would you like to be featured in the next book?**

You can submit your encouraging story of overcoming for Jennie's next book,  
visit here: <http://www.jennieritchie.com/contact/>

## **Appendix**

### ***Ten Life Lessons I Learned From Baseball***

1. Many players play years in the minors and never get a shot in the majors.  
Appreciate every game you get to play
2. You will face setbacks.
3. You have to play your game. You can't play anyone else's.
4. You usually don't get to pick where you play or who you play with.
5. No matter how tonight goes, you get to suit up again tomorrow.
6. It's impossible to win the game on your own.
7. It's important to remember what you enjoy about the game.
8. Many aspects are out of your control.
9. Win some, Lose some....Sometimes Hero, Sometimes Goat
10. You are drafted on your potential; we're all "diamonds in the rough". We're never a finished product, we're always learning, practicing, and getting better.

## ***Glossary of Baseball Terms***

When a player is drafted by a major league baseball team (either out of high school or college), he will more than likely play years in the minor leagues before getting called up to the majors, with many players never playing a day in the majors. Every June, approximately 1200 players are drafted, which means the same number of players won't have positions the following year.

Each major league team has roughly 5-6 minor league teams throughout the country. A newly drafted player usually begins on a Rookie or A ball team and then proceeds to make his way to AA, AAA (all considered the minor leagues), and eventually the major leagues. Players can be called up to the next level, sent down to a lower level or released (let go) at any time.

**All-Star Game:** A game held mid-season, consisting of fan-chosen players from all Major League teams in a league or region.

**At Bat :** When the player is up to bat; his turn to hit

**Bench-Clearing Brawl :** A fight in which all players on both teams leave their dugouts, bullpens, or benches and charge the playing area in order to fight one another or try to break up a fight.

**Big Leagues:** A nickname for Major League Baseball

**Bullpen:** The area used by [pitchers](#) and [catchers](#) to warm up before [taking the mound](#) when play has already begun.

**Clubhouse:** A private area inside a baseball stadium where players gather to prepare for a game, socialize, and conduct most team functions before, during and after a game.

**Dugout:** The [dugout](#) is where a team's bench is located. Active players who are not on the field watch the play from the dugout. A dugout is the area being slightly depressed below field level, as is common in professional baseball.

**ERA (Earned Run Average):** The average number of [earned runs](#) allowed by a [pitcher](#) per nine [innings](#) pitched

**Free Agent:** A sports player who is not bound by a contract and so is eligible to join any team.

**Lockout:** The major league owners prevented the players from reporting to spring training in 1995 after players went on strike the previous fall.

**Off-Season:** The time of year that professional baseball is not played, usually October-February

**On Deck:** The next [batter](#) due to bat after the current batter.

**Philly Phanatic:** The mascot for the Philadelphia Phillies

**Relief Pitcher:** A relief pitcher or reliever is a [pitcher](#) brought in the game as a substitute for (i.e., "to relieve") another pitcher.

**Spring Training:** Work-outs and exhibition games that precede the regular season. It serves allows management to evaluate players for final roster spots and prepares players for the upcoming season.

**Trade:** When a player's contract is sold or traded to another team in exchange for other players and/or money. The player must move to play for the new team

**Walk Off Home Run:** A game-ending [home run](#) by the home team

**Winter Ball:** Baseball played during the Major League Off-Season, usually in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic or South America.

**Most terms taken from the Glossary of Baseball at [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)**

## ***Additional Scriptures***

### **:: Old Testament**

***Psalms 9:1*** "I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart;"

***Psalms 25:1*** "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me."

***Psalms 37:7*** "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him"

***Psalms 59:16*** "But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou has been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble."

***Psalms 71:16*** "I will go in the strength of the Lord God"

***Psalms 119:50*** "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me."

***Psalms 121:2*** "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

***Proverbs 3:26*** "For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken."

### **:: New Testament**

***Matthew 9:22*** "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole."

***Luke 21:36*** "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man."

***Romans 15:13*** "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

***2 Corinthians 12:9*** "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest up on me."

***2 Thessalonians 1:4*** "...We glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure"

***1 John 3: 24*** "And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in

him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."

**1 John 4:18** "Perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

**Hebrews 3:6** "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

**Hebrews 6:19** "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast"

### **:: Book of Mormon**

**2 Nephi 31:20** "Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life."

**Alma 37:37** "Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and He will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day."

**Ether 12:12,27** "For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith. And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness... that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them." (Book of Mormon)

"And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." – **The Lord's word to Latter-Day Saint prophet, Joseph Smith, while in prison in Missouri, March 1839.**

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## ***Resources***

[www.missingmaxie.blogspot.com](http://www.missingmaxie.blogspot.com)

[www.mattieonline.com](http://www.mattieonline.com)

# Footnotes

**Take a Moment to Enjoy the Game** [1](#), 2 Nephi 2:25 (Book of Mormon) [2](#).  
Hollis, Randy. "Scorching Snow Canyon Dumps Juan Diego." *Deseret News*  
[Salt Lake City] 12 May 2012

[3](#), [Mary Anne Radmacher](#)

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## We Can't Control the Game

[1](#), Oprah Magazine, February 2013 Issue [2](#), Psalms 46:10, King James Version

## The Game's Not Perfect

[1](#), Luke 6:41, King James Version

# Stand Your Ground

[1.](#) Guideposts Magazine Classics, November 1972

# Learning From the Game

[1.](http://www.mda.org/about/bio/mattie-jt-stepanek) <http://www.mda.org/about/bio/mattie-jt-stepanek>