

DON'T GIVE UP!!!

Let me tell you some of my history, and perhaps you will begin to understand that I have learned first hand how important it is to not give-up! I never graduated from college! I left after a semester and a half because of a sprained ankle and the inability to make it from class to class on time, on crutches in the snow. I got a job and worked my way up from secretary to supervisor in my department of mortgage banking.

I left that job after several years and got a job as an executive secretary in a plastics injection molding company. From there I went on to be a legal secretary, basically functioning as a paralegal without the compensatory salary.

Unhappy and frustrated, I went back into mortgage banking. I was fired from that job for the first time in my life because I refused to do something illegal. That led to one and half years on unemployment and then working as a manager at Outpost Natural Foods. Can you begin to see that I have been all over the board when it comes to jobs? I didn't mention that I was a baker at one time and many times a waitress and bartender.

I enjoyed Outpost and it led me to my interest in martial arts, specifically Tai Chi, which then led to many other aspects of self improvement.

I helped to incorporate the Tai Chi Center of Milwaukee, and organized seminars for our Tai Chi instructor. He told someone in San Francisco of my success and I was invited there to do a seminar on how to organize seminars. That began a seven year stint of traveling nationwide doing seminars (who have ever thought???)

Traveling so much was burning me out, so I decided to stay here in Milwaukee and do seminars. I soon found out that in this conservative city, self improvement was not a

big money maker! So I went corporate with time management seminars.

Here I am today, 15 years into the Center for Creative Learning - doing seminars for the general public and the business world. 25 years of teaching seminars, 25 years of self-employment. 25 years of ups and downs and every imaginable challenge.

In 1984, my father died. In 1985, I got divorced. In 1986 I remarried. In 1989, when my daughter was 3, I bought an office building and got a divorce. A year later, my mother committed suicide. If anyone could ever hit the top of the stress test scores, I had certainly rung the bell, if not gone over the top. Then a year later, I found out the building had underground heating oil tanks that had not been drained and had contaminated the soil under the building's parking lot. Forced to give up the building in foreclosure or lose everything I had ever gained, I filed bankruptcy and gave it all up.

Today I am a tenant in that same building. My daughter is now 11, beautiful and smart. I have remarried to a wonderful man, who brought with him a son, age 13. I am happier than I have ever been.

And yet, yesterday, I paid the business bills for the month and wondered once again where the money was coming from for the rest of the month. How would I meet payroll?

Every year I settle in more to the realization that it isn't any different anywhere else. Some businesses have more zeroes at the end of their bills and their income. They all go through cycles of prosperity and lack. We are accustomed to hearing that General Motors lost 2 million last quarter, yet the cars are still being made and they continue on.

Life is a series of changes and challenges, highs and lows. It is a process that never

ends until we die. And some believe it continues on even after death.

To give in to the lows, to believe that is the way it will always be, to not love ourselves and the learning process, is a big mistake. I told you that my mother committed suicide. She was divorced, living alone on social security and her sewing business. She was scared about her ability to pay the bills and take care of herself. Her house was paid for, she had only taxes to pay and the utilities. Yet she was afraid. So afraid she quit. The next day Manpower called with a job for her - she wasn't there to answer the phone. It is important to remember, as cliché as it sounds, it is true, This Too Shall Pass - and it's even true about the good times. They too shall pass, sometimes to even better things and sometimes to the lows again.

I have also noticed that as time goes on, our ability to handle the lows grows stronger as we are refined in our faith and our skills. It is dependent on one thing however, that we live in gratitude. Gratitude for life itself. Gratitude for the challenges and the learning that comes with them. Gratitude for the friends and family and people around us that give us support and encouragement.

My friend Scott is blind. He has a life full of challenge. One of his greatest supporters is his grandmother. A wonderful woman of 83, who works at Jewel foods as a demonstrator of food products. I know where Scott gets his independence and his determination and ability to ride out the hard times. He wasn't always blind, he lost his sight in his twenties. Today he has rebuilt a life as a computer programmer. He lives alone. He didn't give up.

Colonel Sanders didn't give up and made a fortune on his chicken recipe in his sixties. Abraham Lincoln didn't give up and made it to president. Thomas Edison didn't give up and eventually created the light bulb. Yet if you read the first part of their life histories, you

wouldn't have given them a loan for \$10, cause they didn't seem to have much to how for their lives.

Many of the great women we respect today led lives of poverty, abuse, and other challenges - Anne Frank, Nazi Germany - Harriet Beecher Stowe, writer and abolitionist, fought slavery and racism - Claire Boothe Luce, diplomat and politician, grew up in a time when women were considered very "unequal" - Oprah Winfrey, television star, millionaire, champion of many causes, grew up in poverty and suffered abuse as child, yet she didn't give up, look where her determination has taken her! And there are many, not so famous, who have lived through challenges and obstacles to simply do life well and with love. Their names do not carry instant recognition, however their legacy keeps the world together and harbors us in the storm.

Today, I can't get a new credit card. I couldn't get a loan for my computer. The bankruptcy still follows me - yet it hasn't stopped me. Everytime I look at the checkbook and see the balance close to zero, I don't quit. I have graduated over 5,000 people from the programs at the Center. I have been fortunate enough to touch the lives of millions of people over the last 25 years. I am not a millionaire. I don't travel to exotic places to do speeches. I do it quietly in the Midwest, often only several people at a time. And I make a difference. I make a difference to my daughter, because I'm there when she comes home from school. I take her with me often when I speak or teach, and she sees what it can mean to be a business woman and touch other people's lives. Somedays we don't have extra money to go to McDonalds, and someday we can go on great vacations. All days, we have love, courage and persistence, and the joy of knowing that we can contribute to the world and each other.

Once upon a time there was a woman who was widowed, left with four small children and no life insurance to help pay the bills. Every night she would get on her knees and ask

God to save her, specifically she asked to win a lottery or a sweepstakes so she could take care of her children. She was running out of money and patience. After a few months, she got angry at God for not coming through. She raged at him and then she heard a loud voice saying "OK you can win the lottery!" She was overjoyed, her problems were over. Every day she waited for the news that she had in fact won a lottery. Every day she was disappointed. Finally, one night, she got angry at God again. "You said I would win the lottery, yet I haven't gotten any money!" She heard another loud voice, this one was firm, and the voice said "You have to buy a ticket!"

You can't wait for someone, God, Prince Charming, Mom or Dad, anyone to save you. You have to take action to make your life different. You have to buy the ticket by learning a skill, being willing to do the simple jobs, the jobs no one else wants (you would be amazed how many envelopes I've stuffed and toilets I've cleaned in my days). Taking action, some action, opens the door to opportunity and possibility. Sitting at home feeling sorry for yourself and waiting for the savior never works.

Another once upon a time, a man was in his home, watching the flood waters rise. The water reached his porch and a boat went by. "Get in," said the people in the boat, "We have room for you." "No, thank you," the man replied. "God will save me." The waters continued to rise. The man was forced to the second floor of the house, and he saw another boat go by outside. They called to him, telling him they had room, please come with us.

The man said "No, God will save me." And the water continued to rise, forcing the man to the roof of the house. As he sat on the very top of his roof, a helicopter came by. They lowered a rope ladder and urged the man to climb up and get to safety. He said, "No, I know God will save me." Several hours later, the man had drowned. As he stood before St. Peter, he asked why God did not save him. St. Peter looked sternly at the man and said, "God

sent you two rowboats and a helicopter, why did you not save yourself??"

Kee your eyes open for the opportunities and the possibilities. Watch for the rowboats and the helicopters. Remember that when we are at our lowest lows, we have to take action. It is easier to help someone who will take action, than to get apathy moving. When the help comes, let yourself receive and be supported. Many of you have been fortunate enough to have people who care, in your families and here at Interfaith. Love yourself enough to take in their love and assistance because we can't do it alone. Together we can do almost anything, including weather the most difficult of times and celebrate the most joyous.

Buy a ticket. Ride the roller coaster of life, and instead of hanging on with white knuckles, throw your hands up into the air, thank God for the adventure and enjoy the ride!!!!!!!