

# Lost & Found

*“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.”*

*~ John Newton*

“Will you be all right?”

Those are the words that came after being delivered the message which would change my life.

I was only twenty-five when my dad passed away from complications due to Alzheimer’s disease. My daughter was only a year old. As the youngest child, I felt as if I was robbed somehow. My older brothers and sisters got more time with Dad than I had. My daughter would not know or remember her grandpa as her older cousins did. I felt even more cheated when my two sons were born. Dad won’t know them either, nor they him.

And yet, I really wasn’t sad at Dad’s passing. As the Alzheimer’s settle in deeper, Dad wasn’t the person we knew growing up. He couldn’t speak. He knew we were family but could not say our name. Three days after being in the nursing home, we said our good-byes to Dad. He died two days later. Dad went so fast that my oldest sister and I believe he asked God to take him home and God complied with his request. Dad was only sixty-two years old.

## **The Phone Call**

As with any loss of a close friend or relative, time goes on and you heal—maybe not completely, but you move on. I had to because of my own young family.

Times for my husband and I weren’t always easy financially. However, with the help of his parents watching the kids or picking them up from the sitter we were making it through those hardships. We still struggled, however, with money. With the third child on the way we made the decision I would stay home after the baby was born. For, if I went to work, it would only be to pay for the babysitter, and we did not want to have that kind of life.

Being a stay-at-home mom with a seven, five, and two-year-old had its blessings, but there were also challenges. Money was tight. So much so I was beginning to panic. I had been applying for jobs with good companies; however, the interviews came and went. In desperation, and after depleting all other avenues to get a short-term loan, I called the church asking to speak to the priest. I only needed to borrow fifty-dollars until payday, which was a few days away.

“No, I’m sorry,” said Father. “We don’t give out those types of loans.” There was nothing else left to do except to keep going with the job search in hopes that something would come along and soon.

The next afternoon the phone rang. It was a company representative from Northwest Airlines. I interviewed with one of their hiring managers a few weeks before. The woman asked which day was best for me to start, June 6th or May 31st, as the thirtieth was Memorial Day, a national holiday in the United States.

I could hardly believe what I was hearing! “The thirty-first!” I exclaimed. The details of my first day were ironed out and the call ended.

It was not soon after that I thought to myself how God answered my prayers. And here I believed it was the priest I spoke with the day before, but it wasn't. It was God who had been on the other end of the line!

### **The Shock**

Work was going well enough and I loved my job. Most of the people I worked with were wonderful and fun and from all different kinds of background. As my luck would have it, however, a few weeks into my position, chicken pox enters the picture. The disease first plaguing my daughter, who wanted “spots just like Betsy,” and then the boys quickly followed. The blessing there had been the chicken pox began with the babysitter's daughter and on most days the kids could still be dropped off so I could go to work. Luckily, I had a manager who understood and allowed me time off to stay home when the worst days hit.

And cue the busy-body. One of the people whose desk was near mine would have fits because of my absences when, after all, I had just started my job. She didn't worry me, but I quickly grew tired of her tiny, whiny voice.

Three years quickly passed by. My job was going great and I was even the editor and publisher of our monthly department newsletter! Everything was going really well. Until one Saturday morning in October, when personal tragedy came knocking.

As usual on the weekends, my husband and I, with the kids, packed up the laundry and headed over to my in-laws. They were kind enough to let us use their washer and dryer to save on laundromat costs. This particular Saturday morning was so beautiful. The sun was shining, the air crisp on this fine day.

As we walked into the house my father-in-law put his finger to his lips, and looking at the kids said, “Shhhh. Grandma's still sleeping. She had a hard night last night and I want her to sleep as long as she can.”

So, we went about our business. The kids watched cartoons or followed Grandpa out back to his “shop.” Because Edna was not feeling well, I decided to make lunch. And as it was a nice day, I thought to take a walk to the local farmer's market and pick up some fresh vegetables to cook up with the beef roast. My oldest son, who was seven years old at the time, went with me.

We picked up fresh potatoes, carrots, and onions. Oh, how good that roast was going to taste!

The time was nearing noon and lunch was ready. My father-in-law asked if I would go upstairs to wake Edna. Barely in the bedroom, I saw my mother-in-law and immediately knew she would

not be waking up. I walked over to her, pulled the covers up to her chin, straightened her hair, and leaned down to kiss her forehead. “Oh, sweetheart, you will definitely be missed,” I said.

## **The Grief**

I don't remember crying that afternoon. There were too many things to do. Phone calls had to be made—to my husband's six brothers and one sister, the many aunts and uncles, and the one to Edna's surviving sister. Looking back now, I am not certain I cried later that evening, as I lay curled up in a ball, on the spot where my mother-in-law took her last breath. I do remember two of my sisters-in-law trying to comfort me. Shock was beginning to settle into my body. I haven't confirmed the following for this writing, but I believe my brother-in-law took my three children back to his house, where we were living at the time. Today I do remember that I left my children alone, I was not there to comfort them on the day they lost their beloved grandmother—not being there for them is a painful memory.

Over the next few days the funeral arrangements were made, insurance companies notified, and death certificates ordered. I had no idea of what is involved when someone dies. But I quickly learned. My father-in-law was unable to think coherently those days after losing his wife. I helped do the bookwork. I also taught my father-in-law how to balance a checkbook. Edna always took care of those things. I could have taken off a month from my job to see to all the dealings of life after death. But alas, I had to go back after a week. At least I had that much time off.

When I returned to the airline that following Monday morning, Miss Busy-Body walked by my desk, saw that I was in, turned around, and said in her high-pitched snotty voice, “Did you have a nice vacation?”

“No,” I replied. “I buried my mother-in-law last week.”

That shut her up for not only the rest of the day, but for the entire week.

With Dad, we knew his death was coming, and what a blessing that was going to be so he wouldn't have to suffer any longer from the Alzheimer's disease that was shrinking his brain. With Edna, we had no idea she would not awaken from her sleep the next morning, after saying goodnight. The autopsy confirmed she died of a brain aneurysm.

I missed my mother-in-law terribly—still do. She was my rock. She helped me and my husband with the kids, floated us money between paychecks, and so much more. “I don't know what I'm going to do without her,” I wailed at the visitation the evening before her funeral, standing in front of nearly a hundred people, or so it seemed. The loss was deep, much deeper than when my dad passed away nearly ten years before. And I just couldn't get over the pain, which was eating away at me.

But life does go on. I soon moved into a different position at work, and away from Miss Busy Body. However, there was a replacement for her in my new department—one who was much worse.

Even though my work was going well, my grief was still holding me down, even after two years. That, and Miss Nemesis, who was now on my tail. She was in the department longer and, therefore, expected the better assignments—she did not want to be left behind on anything. And she made everyone know it! Miss Nemesis wasn't only on my case—there were others, too. I tried to plead with my boss and a few of my coworkers to do something about her. But they wouldn't have any part of what I was selling, even though knowing the havoc she was creating within the department.

I was beside myself with the grief from the loss of my mother-in-law and the different type of grief I was getting from Miss Nemesis. No one would help me. No one would do what I wanted them to do. No one. I felt so alone in my struggles—all of them.

## **The Awakening**

One sunny, spring weekend day, I took a walk to the local park. Alone. I needed to think. Finding myself on the bridge that connected the park and close to the downtown area, I looked down to the small rapids created by the water rushing over the rocks far below. I wondered—just only for a fleeting moment—what it would feel like to fall onto those rocks.

*What? What are you thinking? You have little ones at home!*

Someone was watching over me that day—I'm certain of it, I just don't know who. I straightened my back and began to walk back home. (Very few know this part of my story, but feel it is right to share it in this book.) I knew what needed to be done. It was time to wake up and to heal.

I began researching books on grief, on death and dying. I also searched personal development materials, how to make me a better person. I do not know where first hearing the words, "The only person you can change is yourself," but I certainly took them to heart and did my homework. I read articles on gratitude and how to be happy from the inside out. I prayed. I read biographies of famous people, such as Joan Rivers—which was very profound for me—when she lost her beloved Edgar from suicide and how she rose out of the ashes to live and survive.

I learned how to appreciate what I had and everything I've been through. The lessons of the tough times were now steering me in the direction of being happy every single day.

I don't know exactly when the grief of Edna's passing let up but I believe with all my heart, she was still helping me from Heaven. I was getting better—my life was getting better. My husband and I bought our first house, and I was up for a promotion at work!

And so was Miss Nemesis.

However, I got to the last stage of the process, she had not. When learning someone outside the department was awarded the position, Miss Nemesis turned to me and said, "Well, Peggy, I guess we're nothing but a couple of losers."

Quickly I snapped back, "Speak for yourself. I am not a loser!" and walked briskly away.

After that, I seemed to have gotten the respect of my coworkers on how I handled that situation. But it wasn't from the words I said. It was because I had changed from the inside out.

A few days later, the manager approached my desk and asked if I was still interested in the job. "Yes! Of course I am!"

"Well," he said, "it's yours." The person who was awarded the position turned it down because the money wasn't what she thought it would be. For me, it was a four-dollar an hour raise!

Learning how to help myself is just one miracle of many I will always remember.

## **The List**

Many years pass and I am in yet a different department at the airline. Instead of creating policy manuals I now write and develop training materials for all divisions across the company. I've learned all about desktop publishing using the most recent software available. I was more than computer literate, I was expert at finding glitches in both the software and hardware. My technical talents continued to develop. And my personal development continued to evolve. I was known as "Miss Sunshine," to a few.

I was happy, life and work were fantastic! My kids were doing well, now all out of high school, living their own lives.

Although knowing that life can take an unexpected turn or three, I created a list a few years before of what I wanted by the time I reached the age of fifty-five. I didn't want to commute eighty miles round-trip each day for work. I wanted to work from home, to sit at my kitchen table, drinking coffee, reading the morning paper, watching the sunrise, with my dog at my feet. And then retiring to the den to write. I wanted a business that would sustain me and my family and then some. I wanted to travel when we wanted and to have enough money to do so.

Two years into the apex of my working career as an instructional designer is when I heard those words, "Will you be all right?"

"I am going to be more than all right," I answered, walking out the door.

I was fifty-two years old. I was forty-nine when I wrote the list. Within three years I got what I wanted! *I got what I wanted!* I finally understood the power of writing words on paper! God, the angels and saints, and anyone else who runs this great big universe answered my prayers!

Just not how I intended, however. Northwest Airlines was to merge with Delta Airlines and my position was no longer needed. I was really happy and excited, for I got to choose the life I want to live!

But what do I do now?

## **The Transition**

With the cash payout and other benefits, I was able to take a bit of time to uncover what it was I wanted to do exactly. Since lists seemed to work for me, I wrote down what I liked to do and what I was good at. I knew I had the skills for desktop publishing and really enjoyed creating projects, but I also knew I did not want to go back into the corporate world. No longer did I want to have someone else be at the helm of my destiny.

But most of all, I wanted to write. I wanted to share my story and my poetry to let others who may be hurting know they were not alone in their thoughts or feelings.

I came across a woman who was hosting a telesummit that summer. She had several people who were experts in their field. One of them talked about how you could write a book in a weekend. The book didn't have to be *War and Peace*; just short and powerful enough to get you out there as the expert in your field. Her name? The only and only Donna Kozik, who is also featured in this book. The year was 2009, and just six months after being released from the corporate environment.

Through my search I found a person who had the same ideas as me—she did what I wanted to do. I read her posts online, signed up to listen to her speak on teleseminars, and eventually registered to become one of her certified Dream Coaches. Less than a year after leaving the airline, I was in California changing the trajectory of my life.

For the next year I studied under Marcia Wieder and her Dream University courses, learning how to coach individuals and groups, how to put on workshops for and speak to the masses, and the best of all, how to live an inspired life.

Between Donna and Marcia I learned how to dare to be bold and ask for what you want and need. Before meeting Marcia for the first time, but after I registered for the Dream Coach training, I asked if she would write a testimonial on the book I was writing, “fiftysomething: The Unknown, Dreams, and Paths.” She said yes!

Donna's program was mid-August that year. By mid-September I held a copy of that book in my hand! Although it took a month for me to press the print button, I did write that book in one weekend!

At the beginning of the year 2009 I was unsure of my future. But before the end of the year I transitioned into a published author who knew where she was going!

## **From Writer to Publisher**

During the first training with Marcia I knew I needed to have a process of my own to share of how I survived all the loss and sadness of my life up until that point. So, I wrote my second book, “Thrown into Transition: Now What Do I Do?” (Marcia wrote the Introduction for it!) This book explains the five steps that I took to go from victim to sur-thrivers. As I reflected on the process, I realized those steps could and did apply to any situation in which we find ourselves. I used them to move through the grief and pain of losing my mother-in-law. I used the steps to ultimately take myself off the bridge that one fateful day. I used them still when life gets out of hand and deals a sweeping blow.

And who knew as I wrote and spoke my words of experience that I would end up publishing the stories and words of others who want to be seen as expert in their field, or feel the excruciating pain of no longer being able to hold their words of wisdom inside.

*I got what I wanted!*

I learned how to self-publish by the best. As my friends and colleagues heard that I published myself on Amazon, they wanted me to help them do the same. However, they wanted me to do the work. Joining mastermind groups to help with marketing and other entrepreneurial tasks, I became known for what I do and am referred quite regularly.

One day while in the shower, I was struck with an idea. Well, it wasn't exactly as much of an idea as it was a declaration from the Heavens. "You need a name for your publishing business. Call it "Courageous Women Publications." It was a good thing I wasn't lathered in soap or shampoo, otherwise I would have fallen from the force of the unseen lightning bolt!

I now listen to those, what I call, Divine Downloads. I am called to share the warmth of my sunshine to light the way of lost souls and guide them along their path so they are never alone while on their journey.

I love and am proud of the work I do.

As in the words of my mother-in-law's favorite hymn, Amazing Grace, "I once was lost, but now am found."

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Peggy Lee is a multi-function entrepreneur. She assists people with whom she works to uncover and then share their words of wisdom with the world. Peggy Lee says, "When you open up to the world, the world opens up to you." She also says, "Writing means never having to be alone."