



My Journey

From being a chubby girl growing up in the factory town of Flint, Michigan, to becoming an author, public speaker, and acknowledged lifestyles and relationship expert and executive coach... has been quite a journey. I think you will see what I mean as you read.

I feel privileged and blessed to be able to do the work I do—to contribute to people living great lives and making bigger contributions in the lives around them. Perhaps I am most proud of my relationship—the deep partnership, intimate journey, and shared vision I have with my husband, Bob.

Looking back, I can see that my life has been a marvelous adventure of the heart, spirit, risk-taking, and consciousness. But it hasn't always seemed that way. Despite significant accomplishments from awards won to summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, and directorships of groundbreaking nationally funded demonstration projects, it still seemed like something was missing.

Early in my life, I sensed that there was something much bigger, something more than I saw in the world around me. I yearned for something more, but I didn't know how to go about getting it. I made many attempts to try to create something more, fill the emptiness, become satisfied—sometimes successfully, sometimes not. I didn't understand at the time that all of it—the stumbling and the successes, the ups and the downs—were all part of the adventure.

Flint is an infamous factory town where the norm seemed to be waiting for the day to be over, to kick back with a beer, or watch some TV, or snowmobile, or... to chase the tedium of the day away... then go back to the factory the next day. I wanted something more but didn't really know what that would be.

I figured out that I could study, so I became a good student. I was valedictorian of my high school class, held student government positions, won many awards, and spent my after-school hours in dance and music and volunteering. In short, I became an achiever, thinking that working hard, doing well, and achieving my goals would bring me what I was searching for.

But in my union town, achievement wasn't something that was honored—unless it was sports, and you were a boy. With everything I did to try to find something bigger in life, I was often ridiculed for my ideals and put down or attacked for standing out. Even though I was valedictorian, they wouldn't tell anyone—they didn't want to hurt the boys' feelings. So even achievement was treated as something wrong and didn't bring a sense of accomplishment, reward, or satisfaction. Every nasty thing said about me hurt me to the core, and, while I was brave and smiling on the surface, I also was hurting underneath. I used food or television to numb my pain. Although I was outgoing, popular, and well-known in my high school, I was also chubby, afraid of boys, avoided dating, and buried myself in my studies. I hadn't realized yet that even my pain and fear were part of the adventure of life.

I finished both my undergraduate and graduate studies summa cum laude and engaged fully in a wonderful career developing model programs for people with disabilities and families of children who were developmentally disabled. Those programs won multimillion-dollar grants, and in my twenties, I rose to national recognition in my fields.

While I was successful, serving, and doing good work, I still felt something was missing, and I kept trying to fill the gaps. I lost weight, got into a relationship with my college sweetheart, kept achieving, and worked more, but I still felt empty and like I was sleepwalking through my life.

I had major gains and losses. I kept working hard, going for the next goal, always keeping my game face on. Yet, every time I was afraid, hurt, or disappointed; every time I failed or made a mistake; every time someone dissed me or didn't like what I was doing; every time I was scared to death of failing, not living up to expectations, not doing the right thing, I felt it deeply and thought there was something wrong. I had the feeling, there must be more than this—which later became the title of my first best-selling book.

Luckily, in my work with people with conditions such as paraplegia, quadriplegia, blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, etc.—I was learning about the power of the human spirit and what really mattered. I loved learning sign language and seeing life anew from dramatically different perspectives.

I had thought a good life was being perfect, having perfect circumstances, a perfect body, and a perfect mind. If I could do/have that, then I'd be OK. Yet, I loved the people I was working with. I was uplifted by how they negotiated their lives and realized that many of them were much happier than I was. And yet, they didn't have perfect bodies, minds, or circumstances. What they did have, and what made me love them, were their struggles and their successes, their presence and their feelings—the raw pain, trembling fear, deep sadness, effervescent joy, the rage and pain of their struggles, and the raucous joy and celebration of successes.

Then I started to realize that this is the adventure of living, of consciousness. This. This up and down, back and forth, success and failure; all of it matters. All my feelings—fear, hurt, anger, sadness, and joy—mattered. This was all part of experiencing life, of learning and growing. All the time that I was looking for a life of more, trying to figure out what it was that I yearned for, I was learning what it was to live a life of even more meaning, fulfillment, and consciousness. It wasn't about being perfect, doing things right, and having wild success with no downside. It was risking humiliation, falling, and coming up short of my expectations. It led to greater enjoyment and building on my successes. For me, the adventure of my life and career is to do what feels right in my heart, even if my head might tell me it is foolish or futile. It means feeling everything—love and despair, joy and grief, anger and peace.

After six years of marriage to my college sweetheart, I had to face the hard truth that we were not on the same journey of engagement and consciousness. We

divorced, and I moved to Chicago and subsequently started my own personal growth business, coaching and leading seminars.

I met my current husband, Bob, and started on a completely new experience of intimacy. From our first date, we set a context for straight truth and accountability, exchanging both mutual appreciation and criticism. I discovered what it really means to be a woman in a relationship—the power of vulnerability, total honesty, and open-hearted living. Before I was with Bob, I had no idea that a relationship could be an ever-growing adventure of intimacy and discovery. I also had no idea that fighting could bring you closer, that hard truths are way more intimate than being nice, that rocking the boat is what makes the relationship an adventure, that I could be myself, all of me – the light and the dark, while being loved and continually falling even more deeply in love with my husband.

I discovered, and continue to explore, my full capacities including my spirituality and mysticism. I am a student of world religions and have traveled the world leading pilgrimages to sacred sites and studying with spiritual teachers every year and been willing to be led by spirit in my relationships, business, and daily life.

As a result of my journey and those sharing it with me, I have found vast resources within myself and others that continually surprise me. I understand things I should have no way of knowing. I am discovering how to live life differently from how I was taught. And through it all, I feel, I experience, and I keep taking steps. I keep growing and exploring, reaching and stretching. I expand, my life expands, and our business and service expand. I realized it's not about getting it right but continually emerging and transforming, becoming someone I've not been before.

My husband and I continued to stretch together and in partnership. We both pursued and received our doctoral degrees and used them to further our research into human potential. My investigations led me to a groundbreaking study that revealed the process of personal transformation that leads to a great life—the neuroscience of changing your life for the better, forever. My doctoral studies unleashed anew my academic fervor. I generally read three to five books a week, but now I may read even more with a greater sense of mission. Once again I revealed

in academic learning, studying, and researching. I had a reason to study, to serve, and help others learn what I had been learning. I dove into, studied, and researched a range of human empowerment philosophies and methods; Adlerian, Humanistic, and Developmental Psychology as well as Existential philosophy, neuroscience research, social science, and behavioral economics -all of which were woven into our next adventure of founding a graduate university.

We co-founded the Wright Foundation and the Wright Graduate University for the Realization of Human Potential, an accredited university that offered master's and doctorates in transformational leadership and coaching as well as graduate certificates in these as well as social and emotional intelligence. I served as President, Chief Academic Officer, and Professor of Transformational Education, as well as a coach, seminar leader, public speaker, and author.

We saw the impact of our work in our student's lives as they transformed in their relationships with themselves, their loved ones, their careers, their leadership and felt part of our mission to share our rich discoveries and curriculum with more people than we could serve directly.

We took a risk and put our work in more books; *The One Decision*, *The Soft Addiction Solution*, *Transformed!*, and *The Heart of the Fight*. I gave talks and keynotes at hundreds of companies and organizations from the largest and best known to public seminars. I studied with top speaking coaches and broadcast personalities who worked me over to the point of tears (I shed these with my husband afterward, of course.) I had always written good talks, but to be fully present, and enjoying being with an audience, was a transformational shift. The work turned me inside out from being a massive introvert to being able to spread our mission through publicity and media (Oprah Winfrey show, ABC's 20/20, Good Morning America, the Today show, and many more) and in over a thousand print, radio, and TV interviews.

Covid forced transformations in our services, where we quickly pivoted to delivering experiential trainings and services online all over the world. Our students were amazed that we were able to offer nourishing, experiential trainings on Zoom—from evening classes to weekend seminars, to weeklong intensive leadership trainings. However, the impact of Covid also affected our business model and enrollment, and like many schools, we were forced to shut down.

While I've been in mourning for what was, I'm excited about what my husband, Bob, and I are creating together. We've always felt that our couples work was, perhaps, our most significant contribution and are working to get our relationships curriculum and programs—as well as our personal, professional, and leadership development work, emotional intelligence curriculum, and women's empowerment programs—out more fully to the world. We've been blessed to see the powerful results in thousands of peoples' lives and want more people to be able to benefit. To that end, I am also developing online products, seminars, and curriculum on demand, for people to experience our proven approach worldwide.

It's not all work and no play—all this is mixed with biking and cross-country skiing in the Kettle Moraine, fun dates with my husband, full-out fights, romantic moments, crazy dancing, losing myself in books, spiritual travel, laugh fests, chanting, singing, and spiritual pursuits.

As in my youth, I am sometimes ridiculed, attacked, or ignored, but I am also loved, cared about, and respected. That is my continued adventure in living and contributing: to turn myself over and follow spirit to the best of my ability, to feel my feelings fully, to express my emotions and thoughts, to be real, vulnerable, constantly emerging—living a better life than what I grew up thinking life had to be—and to support others to fully live the adventure of life.

As we expand, our lives expand, and what we're able to offer to the world expands.

Forget perfect. Take risks. Fail. Emerge. And transform into someone you have not been before.

Live. Love. Lead. Expand. Repeat.

Join me for more of what's possible.

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