



Everyone has a story

In every person's life, there are moments and events that make us exactly who we are. Moments of triumph, moments of tragedy, events of seeming insignificance when they take place, and events of huge import.

We all have our own unique story, and it is also a common story. A story of adversity and triumph, of fear and failure, of hardships, pitfalls, setbacks, challenges and adversities. It is also a story of, resilience, redemption, joy, passion and successes. And...it's a universal experience.

For some of us, there is an overwhelming sense that our particular circumstances are too much to bear. That we have had enough. That the limits of our tolerance have been reached. That maybe, it's checkout time. I have been there twice – and oh, so pleased that these times were overcome and that I have been able to find the gifts in those occasions, and in the choices I made to come back and be fully present, sharing ideas and enabling myself and others to find their own inner guidance and resilience.

We are all overcomers, and we are all overwhelmed at times, too. We all have public victories and our private battles. The good, the bad, and the ugly isn't handed out to just a handful of people – we all have our times. Mostly, we can deal with the ups and downs pretty well; but there are also times when it seems like it is just too much to bear.

There are many other times in our lives that we can feel that we don't understand what's going on. In a state of confusion, we ask ourselves - how could this possibly be? How did I end up here? What the hell is going on? Confusion mixed with emotional pain is a difficult place to be. We oscillate between confusion and denial — getting stuck and feeling like we are going around in circles, believing that that there is no possible way forward — no way out of this.

Feeling low, shooting yourself in the foot, hiding the pain, sinking into a state of despair, finding yourself in a situation that goes against all you want in life, is far more common than you think. If you can get stuck in life, you can also get unstuck.

This book comes from lived experience — not that I think my journey is anything particularly



special. We all have ‘things’ that happen to us in life. Every single one of us has a story: what has happened to us, what meaning we have given to each experience, and what we have done with those experiences.

My contention in this book is that it is not what happens to us during our life, but what we make of those circumstances — how we deal with the situations at the time, and the sense we make of those situations and our choices, often a long time later. We are not victims to our circumstances — things happen to all of us. It is how we find a way to deal with what happens to us — to find the gifts and lessons from those moments and events, AND then become a stronger, better, wiser person as a result.

I truly believe that we are not only the sum-total of our life experience, but more importantly what we have made of those life experiences — individually and collectively. It is often through the very depths of despair that we find our true essence. As a result of my own life experiences, and years of reflection and growth, I now live by two key messages – “we are never given anything in life that we cannot deal with” and “this too shall pass.”

However, this seems almost too glib. When your world is crashing around you, or you find that you have somehow fallen into a life and situation that you don’t want, it is really hard to just “pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again”! My hope for you, dear reader, is that this book and reflections may show you that there are ways to move forward, and to grow, flourish and contribute to your own life, the lives of those around you, and to the world.

The moments that stand out for us are times when there is high emotion attached — joy, fear, anger, resentments, regret, love. Remembering those life-changing or special moments can bring back the same emotions — you can feel them in your body, your physiology and neurological responses spring back into action at the memory of the event. These ‘after-shocks’ of traumatic moments, or even memories of wonderful emotions can then become a trigger in their own right. Anxiety, and post-traumatic stress can have us replaying incidents (whether we replay them properly or not). Sometimes the very fear of the replay — even before the replay happens — will trigger the same of awful responses. It is a cycle that seems impossible to break. Similarly, there are moments in our lives that bring us much joy — the first time we hold a brand-new baby, the memory of a most beautiful waterfall, falling about from laughter, the warm embrace of a loved person. Bringing back to mind (and body) all of



the sensations of these joyous and life-affirming moments can calm us, centre us and give us hope that there is more to life than drama.

Moments matter, whatever they are. How much better will it be for you if you can understand the gifts of those moments, and see with clarity how they have served you, how they shaped the person you are, and how they have enabled you to live your wonderful journey — a journey that is uniquely yours?

And then, imagine how you can use those moments — and the things you have learnt about yourself – to positively and usefully fuel the rest of your life.

Each of us is destined to experience life in different ways. Each of us can dig deep and find the gifts in every incident, every event. We can make the very best of our life — and our inevitable journey forward — when we find those gifts and can be truly grateful for those moments, those incidents, those things that have happened to us.

Why me, and why this book?

For over 30 years, I have had the absolute privilege to do work that I love, and that I hope makes a difference. I grew up in a regional area in New South Wales, Australia, with a passion for regional development and making the very best of our wonderful people and places. This led me into leadership roles in regional development and developing other leaders. Essentially, I see my role as enabling individuals, communities and regions have an extraordinary vision and achieve it. I do this at many levels – working with individuals as leaders; working with communities to bring their best and work together; working with boards and leaders of organisations (not for profits and businesses) so that they can find the very best in each other and work together toward a common vision with a clear strategy to achieve that vision.

So why, might you ask, am I writing a book about personal growth and finding a way forward? Well, in my leadership roles in communities, I am often asked to speak about women in leadership, or what I have done over my career, how I have made my way forward and so on. It is flattering, but I have become increasingly uncomfortable sharing the highlights, as though there is only a straight-line trajectory that connects one wonderful achievement to another. It is unrealistic to believe that life is like that. I am who I am because of a pretty interesting and



bumpy ride in life. I do what I do with passion and commitment because I have learnt what can work, how to develop my own vision, create the life I want, and move toward leaving the legacy I hope to leave. To quote the great Stephen Covey, we are all here “to live, to love, to learn and to leave a legacy”.

When I started really sharing some of what has happened in my life, I saw a profound shift in the audiences — a common recognition that all of us have a story to tell, and that we can only be who we are through the experiences we have lived, and what we have made of those experiences. I also saw the relief of many in the audience as they more honestly reflected on their own journeys. Yes, the themes in life are shared, for each of us they vary, but we each have our own story. And, I saw optimism, that there is a way to work through the things in life and come out stronger and wiser as a result. We all face different setbacks, different challenges, different adversities. It's not our place to judge how others should respond to theirs. Rather, we can only reflect on our own situation and find our own perspective for our own challenges.

When working with leadership course participants and business leaders, I often repeat that: ***“Our life is the sum total of our experiences, and more importantly, what we have made of them.”*** From each of the life events that happen to us, I am introducing and reinforcing the notions of reflection and reframing - the ability to go back in and rework/reframe, and learn from that past experience, and let go of unhelpful baggage and poisonous emotions. My hope is that each of them (and you) are able to look at major life moments and ask: "How did that serve me? What part of me do I owe to this experience? What can I be grateful for?" Or "What have I made of that? How can I let that emotion go? What have I learned from this experience that has helped me (or will help me) to grow and move forward?"

These questions have invariably helped me learn from numerous major events in life. I have only shared a few of those 'moments' of my life, but most happy to let you in on my timeline (I have included that at the back of the book.)

The sections in this book are illustrated by stories from my life and those close to me. They show that there is a way to discover the very essence of what is happening to you, to learn and grow from that, and then develop a way forward to serves you and enables you to contribute and serve others..



I want to introduce to some concepts — how life can present you with a major, unexpected solid gut punch — a Big Hit or a Big Hurt; or when slowly, stealthily, sneakily, life circumstances appear to blindside you and take you to a place you don't want to be. This is what I call the 'Slow Insipid Creep.'

The purpose of this book is to guide you back to those incidents which may still be holding you back and holding you locked in time. I hope to help you find a way to reframe them, be grateful, and use the gifts from those moments. I hope to teach you what has worked for me.

The book is divided in three sections:

- Get It (try and understand what is really happening to you)
- Get Over It (develop some practices that help you deal with a current circumstance or go back and learn from a past experience), and
- Get On With It (create the life you want to live, and move steadily towards it.)

This is not a harsh formula. It works. It is about embracing every moment or event that has shaped us. It is about changing those moments or events into moments that serve us, not moments that disable us.

Life is a journey forward - and why not make it the best life we possibly can?