



Entering the Thriver Zone

A Seven-Step Guide to Thriving After Abuse

Susan M. Omilian, JD

*Reclaiming the Lives of Women
Who Have Been Abused*



BUTTERFLY BLISS PRODUCTIONS LLC

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Entering the Thriver Zone: A Seven-Step Guide to Thriving After Abuse

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DEDICATION



Dedicated to my niece Maggie (1980 - 1999)

As Maggie's amazing life and tragic death have inspired me,
I hope that this book will inspire other women
to become the person they have always wanted to be.

Maggie would have been outraged by the way she died.
I call upon her every day to help me put down my mantle of grief,
dream my wildest dreams and not let my fears hold me back.

For me, this is Maggie's legacy!

~ Susan M. Omilian ~

Living well is the best revenge!

— GEORGE HERBERT

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*Grieve not
nor speak of me with tears, but laugh
and talk of me
as though I were beside you.
I loved you so.
'Twas Heaven here with you.*

— ISLA PASCHAL RICHARDSON
AND THE EPITAPH ON MAGGIE'S GRAVE

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR — MAGGIE’S STORY AND A NEW BEGINNING

In the early morning hours of October 18, 1999, I got a phone call from my sister.

“It’s Maggie,” she said, her voice trembling. “She’s been shot. She’s dead.”

I couldn’t believe it. Maggie, my brother’s nineteen-year-old stepdaughter, had been murdered at school by her ex-boyfriend who then killed himself. It was another senseless act of violence but this time, Maggie — our Maggie — was dead.

For years, I had worked as an attorney advocating for women’s rights, but Maggie’s death made working to end violence against women more personal and immediate for me. If this could happen to my family and to Maggie, it could happen to anyone. But what was I being called to do?

One morning it came to me. I was thinking about the power of the moment when a woman decides to leave the abuse. I realized that Maggie did not live beyond her moment, but suddenly I imagined myself working with other women who could transform their lives after abuse. After all, wasn’t getting on with one’s life the most exacting revenge against a man who had tried to bend that woman to his will?

By then I could see that for those of us who face a “life-altering event” such as abuse, the death of a loved one, divorce or the loss of a job, there is either a road to recovery that brings new vigor and purpose to our lives or a spiraling down into anger, depression and hopelessness.

I realized that I had stumbled onto a more productive path, one where I could:

- discover opportunity in what felt like loss
- focus on positive emotions to move me forward
- celebrate the life I had, living in the present, not past, and
- dare to create the life I so richly deserved

How could I work with women who had been abused so that they too could be similarly transformed? Slowly I envisioned a workshop, inspired by the quote, *“Living well is the best*

revenge.” Sure I wanted to avenge Maggie’s death, but with a lighter touch like an angel’s and without anger or recrimination. So I coined the name “My Avenging Angel,” and I saw the workshops as the critical “next step” for women to help them move beyond abuse and restore the positive energy in their lives. Now with this book, I want to send out the unique materials I have developed in the workshops to more women across this country and around the world. I want them to realize the amazing possibility of thriving after abuse.

Is this work easy? Hardly. I have heard so many stories from women of abuse, betrayal and dashed hopes that I wish I had a magic wand to simply wave away their pain and anguish. They have suffered greatly. At times, their self-esteem is low and they have little belief that their lives will ever get better. But they do have hope. Each time I give them the choice of reliving the abuse and the pain inflicted on them or reaching deep down inside to uncover their true heart’s desires, they do choose the latter. They set goals for themselves that are not only achievable, but also can spur them on to making bigger and better changes for themselves.

I can now see that the process of reconnecting to positive energy in one’s life is the movement from victim to survivor to thriver. I have traveled this journey myself since Maggie’s death and have taught it in a seven-step process to hundreds of women in the My Avenging Angel Workshops™. I have encouraged and challenged them to see that with this more positive perspective as a thriver, they can too regain their power and reclaim their lives.

But having a positive outlook on life is hard for survivors of abuse and loss. It really gets to us sometimes that everyone else seems to have an easier life, a more comfortable journey or a less challenging existence. But now I know that the truest measure of our lives is not what we have experienced, but what we have made of our experiences.

We don’t really know how good it can get once we get positive and focus our energies on our future, not the past. Whatever we might have imagined for ourselves is only a fraction of what we can have when we free ourselves to live well, be happy and create the life we want. Then living well is not only the best revenge; it is, in fact, the song of our soul and the fulfillment of all our dreams.

— Susan Omilian

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

YES, YOU ARE A WRITER!

You can do the writing exercises in this book that guide you through the Seven Steps to Thriving After Abuse. If you are afraid someone might see what you have written, write on a piece of paper and then destroy it. You don't have to keep what you write. Just get it out there for a while and let it shine!

WORKING FROM WRITING PROMPTS IS EASY!

When you see ✍️ throughout this book, it means it's time to write from a "writing prompt!" A writing prompt is simply a way into your writing. Let it take you where it will, even if what you write has nothing to do with the prompt. Keep writing. Don't stop! Don't worry about spelling, grammar or if what you wrote doesn't make any sense! If you like printable copies of the worksheets in this book, go to *thriversonline.com* and click on WORKSHEETS.

DECORATE YOUR OWN JOURNAL.

Before you start writing, buy yourself a composition book or notebook and decorate the cover! Use pictures from magazines or photos from your own life as well as stickers or glitter glue to bling it up! You deserve it!

INVITE A FRIEND TO JOIN YOU! FORM YOUR OWN THRIVER GROUP!

Get together with a group of your friends and THRIVE! Visit ThriveZone.com to learn how. Find more writing prompts and exercises there. You can work through this book by yourself or invite a friend or group of friends to do it with you. Writing, reading and sharing the experience with other women is a fabulous thing to do.

THERE ARE NO RULES!

You can't do this wrong! Don't worry—you can do it! Visit *thriversonline.com* to learn how. Find more writing prompts and exercises there.



Getting Started

SEVEN STEPS TO THRIVING AFTER ABUSE

No longer a victim, beyond a survivor, she is a thriver on the brink of a new life. She's a new breed of woman moving on after abuse, and she wants her revenge. Living well is her best revenge. She is pushing through her fears, finding positive energy and forging a new future for herself and her children.

Are you ready? Are you strong, courageous and bold enough to take this amazing journey to reclaim your life? Can you see yourself moving from victim to survivor to thriver and permanently breaking the cycle of violence and trauma in your life?

If you want to launch yourself into a new world of limitless possibilities, you are not alone. In the past, women subjected to trauma, violence and abuse had little recourse to leave an abusive relationship or move through the crisis of a sexual assault. Today so many more of us can stand on the edge of a new life that we barely dared to imagine and savor an abuse-free environment, cheering "I'm free!" But what about the next question: "Now what?"

I have an answer to that for you. If you are highly motivated to transform your life but don't know how, I have developed a motivational model using writing exercises and interactive activities to take you on a journey beyond abuse. It is a journey of spirit into the right-brain world of your imagination. There, unlimited creative possibilities lie, your wounded spirit can be revived and the dreams that you have long set aside for a better, more satisfying life can finally come true.

The idea of this journey to wholeness is the most innovative aspect of the work I have done for the last fifteen years with women who have been abused. Using a seven-step process that promotes growth and renewed self-confidence, I have seen women transform their lives and do amazing things. That same amazing transformation now awaits you! Take the journey to not just survive, but thrive after abuse.

CHOOSING YOUR PATH

I see two paths that women who may have experienced abuse can take on the journey to becoming a “thriver.”

#1 — FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE YET TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS VICTIMS OF ABUSE

Before my nineteen-year-old niece was murdered by her ex-boyfriend, Maggie never saw herself as a victim of abuse. He had never physically assaulted her, and she missed all the other warning signs that she was in a potentially dangerous relationship. Take a look at the list on the next page, *The Warning Signs of an Unhealthy, Abusive Relationship*. A list similar to this one was handed out on the college campus a week after Maggie was killed there. When Maggie’s friends saw it, they were shocked to realize that her ex-boyfriend had done everything on that list, including isolating her from her family and friends, except that he had never hit her or threatened her physically. No one saw how much danger she was in, not even Maggie. She didn’t realize that his abusive behavior could escalate to violence when she dared to leave him and he refused to accept the termination of their relationship and let her go. (For more about Maggie’s story, see Note from the Author.)

Since Maggie’s moment of realizing she was a victim of abuse was the moment of her death, she did not survive to move on to the healing part of her journey. Like Maggie, you may be a woman who has not yet thought of herself as an abused woman or a victim of violence. But if you recognize yourself somewhere on the pages of this book, it is my hope and desire that you will take action to leave an abusive relationship as soon as you safely can or deal with a sexual assault as you may not have in the past.

If you haven’t identified yourself as a victim before reading this book, you may need to spend more time in the “victim” stage of your journey, getting yourself safe and expressing a whole range of feelings with a counselor or therapist about how being a victim has been impacted your life.

For immediate crisis intervention services in your local community, call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE (7233)** or **800-787-3224 (TTY for the deaf)** and visit www.ndvh.org or the **National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-HOPE (4673)**, operated by the **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)** and visit www.rainn.org.

WARNING SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY, ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

He is controlling, possessive and overly demanding of her time and attention. He appears at times to be two different people: one, charming, loving and kind; the other, abusive, vicious and mean—like “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” He keeps her on edge, not knowing who he’ll be. He makes her feel bad about herself and will, at times, be sorry for his behavior, promising not to do it again. But he will do it again and then deny, minimize or blame others for his behavior. She will feel it is all her fault. If only she could please him more or be more compliant, he wouldn’t treat her this way.

EMOTIONAL

- He insults her, calls her names and belittles her in private and in public with her family and friends.
- He isolates her from family and friends, forbidding her to see them or limiting her access to them.
- He is jealous of her contact with others, particularly with other men. He exaggerates her relationships with other men, accusing her unfairly of having affairs outside of their relationship.
- He wants to know where she is at all times, calling or texting her to find out who she is with. He invades her privacy by checking her cell phone, viewing her email or monitoring her web pages.
- He refuses to accept when she ends the relationship and may stalk her long afterwards.

PHYSICAL

- He yells, screams and loses his temper easily, sometimes disproportionately over unimportant things.
- He destroys her things, kicks or breaks other property, making her fear that he could hurt her, too.
- He intimidates her, making her afraid of him by his looks, actions and gestures.
- He grabs her, kicks her, slaps her, punches her, strangles her or draws a gun or weapon and threatens to kill her. He harms her pets or threatens to hurt or harm her family or friends.
- He stalks her with unwanted phone calls, visits to her house or job and secretly monitors her actions.

ECONOMIC

- He controls her access to money, even her own money or money she has earned herself.
- He refuses to pay bills or let her know about family income, investments or property.
- He keeps her from getting or keeping a job, refuses to support their family or children.
- He makes all the big decisions, using male privilege to get his way and insisting on rigid gender roles.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- She feels like she is going crazy, that his view of the world is not reasonable, but she will have little chance of convincing him otherwise and he demands her absolute loyalty to his way of thinking.
- He says he can’t live without her or will kill himself if she leaves, so she fears ending the relationship.
- He pushes the relationship too far, too fast and is obsessed with her and wants her for himself.
- He has unrealistic expectations and demands, and she feels it is her fault he’s not happy.

SEXUAL

- He demands to have sex forcibly without her consent with him or with others.
- He withdraws sex from her or makes it conditional on her compliance to his demands.
- He calls her crude names, implying she is promiscuous and unfaithful sexually to him.

For more information on the Duluth Power and Control Wheel, see theduluthmodel.org.

SIGNS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

In a healthy relationship, the two people are on an equal footing and they respect, trust and support each other. They are honest with each other and take responsibility for their actions. They are good parents, sharing responsibility in raising their kids. They have an economic partnership in which the best interests of both are considered, and they communicate, negotiate and treat each other fairly.

Consult the Resources section of this book for information on how to contact needed services and support. In addition, you may want to explore the books and websites in the Resources section of this book regarding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder that some people may experience after being subjected to abuse and trauma. It is reported that 84 percent of women who are abused suffer PTSD, and between 22 to 35 percent of the women who visit emergency departments in the United States are there for symptoms related to ongoing abuse. More than one-half of women who are sexually assaulted may develop PTSD, also known as “rape trauma syndrome.” Not everyone who is abused or assaulted will experience PTSD, but its symptoms are easily recognizable, and there are counselors who can help you deal with its effects on your life.

#2 — FOR WOMEN SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT OR OTHER ABUSE

You are among the nearly one quarter of the women in the United States, more than 12 million, who will be abused by a current or former partner sometime during your lifetime. Hopefully, this book can help you find a journey beyond what you may have endured in your lifetime as a victim and a survivor of abuse and violence.

When I first worked on violence against women issues many years ago, there were few services to help women identify themselves as victims so that they can survive domestic violence or sexual assault. Most people today don’t realize that it wasn’t until the late 1960s and early 1970s that sexual assault crisis centers were established, and domestic violence programs did not appear until the 1980s. Before that, these crimes against women had no names and few services were available to victims. Today, a whole new generation of women and children will survive domestic violence and sexual assault because of a strong network of crisis intervention services in many communities across this country. Women will identify

themselves as victims and receive support to become survivors of abuse. But I believe there is another step for all of us beyond merely surviving, and that is becoming a thriver in spite of what we have experienced.

VICTIM  **SURVIVOR**  **THRIVER**

This is the critical next step beyond surviving abuse to that of becoming a “thriver.”

What is a thriver? Here’s a working definition I have developed and we’ll be using throughout this book.

A thriver is a happy, self-confident and productive individual who believes she has a prosperous life ahead of her. She is primed to follow her dreams, go back to school, find a new job, start her own business or write her story. She believes in herself and in her future so much that she will not return to an abusive relationship. She speaks knowledgeably and confidently about her experiences and is not stuck in her anger or need for revenge.

Living well is her best revenge!

Helping women to reach this critical “next step” on the journey beyond abuse is the goal of my work. Lora, a woman who attended one of my workshops several years ago, described her journey to surviving and beyond this way:

I had done a lot work before I met Susan, attempting to make the best of a bad situation, dressing up my existence and trying to make life choices that wouldn’t victimize me. I knew I was no longer a victim. I had learned how to manage not to be that, but I was always wearing my ‘survivor’ armor. The armor was heavy and it defined who I was and my limiting circumstances.

What a wonderful description of the “armor” or shell that we as survivors wear as a result of what we have endured. We are heavily burdened with low self-esteem, emotional fear, shame, guilt and hopelessness, the inevitable impacts of being abused and violated in our society today. Many of us are depressed, appear lost or are suffering from physical problems, and most are deeply afraid that their lives will never get any better. In this state of mind, we believe, like Lora, that the impacts of abuse and violence will forever define our lives as

limited and permanently damaged. Sometimes, this damage is evident by the looks of pain on our faces or in the way we carry our bodies or talk about the future. We live with the hope that someone, somewhere can make it all better. We'll even accept a "band-aid" approach, just so the pain, fear and disappointment will stop for some period of time.

Lora describes her state of mind coming into this work:

When I went to the first session of Susan's workshop, I didn't know what to expect. My expectations were of an open forum where each of us would tell our stories and grieve our sorry existences together with Susan's support. Luckily, that was not Susan's intention. Susan was simply asking me to remove my armor and consider a part of me untouched by the abuse. Could this part of me put the abuse aside and motivate me to search for my true passion? I knew this part of myself, not well, but I believed there was a center core that no one had disturbed. Susan encouraged me to invite that part out and talk awhile, dream awhile and grieve our years of separation. Listening to the experiences of others, as well, was key to opening this part of me.

I call opening up to that part of us that is untouched by the abuse, finding or making contact with the Thriver or the Happy Person Inside You.

MOVING BEYOND SURVIVOR TO A "LIFE-ALTERING" MOMENT

What might motivate you to take the journey to thriving? Are you really satisfied with merely surviving? Are you, like Lora, really good at surviving? Or are you willing to take the journey and find that "life-altering" moment?

Mine came with my niece Maggie's death, and it set me on my path to finding the work that I was destined to do in this lifetime. It finally answered the question I had been asking all my life: "Why am I here on this earth?" In fact, right after Maggie's death, it became very clear to me that everything I had ever done in my life had come to the moment of her death. Every skill I had learned, every experience I had had, every person I had ever met — it was all in preparation for her death and what I would be propelled to do as a result of it.

Suddenly, everything made sense. It was a "life-altering" moment!

I figured that if something this tragic didn't get me to my purpose in life, nothing else ever would. Most importantly, I came to see that my journey wasn't outside of me — something that

I had always been waiting for, such as a better job, more money or a meaningful relationship. It was a journey inside me, to find the person I was always meant to be. Ultimately, this terrible tragedy filled me with so much positive energy that it finally taught me to live in the present, not the past, and believe in myself completely. Finally, I found that this new, magnificent me saved me. But I didn't make this transformation simply to save myself. I wanted something really big to happen so that Maggie would not have died in vain. The "big thing" that did happen was that I was now in a position to help others, and I had been wanting to find myself in that kind of moment for a very long, long time.

The only question was if I would have the courage to go for it and let myself shine out to the whole world!

To find the inner wisdom and resources to begin this journey, I had to first realize that this is work I will never get done in this lifetime. In fact, I hope I never get it done. Every day, I happily embrace the new challenges in my life and work to find the courage not to be afraid as I take them on. Before Maggie's death, questions like "Why do bad things always happen to me?" haunted me. Now each day, I ask myself instead, "What have you accomplished today that is meaningful and helpful to another human being?"

Discovering the thriver spirit inside me was a surprise. I had never seen myself as spiritual before Maggie's death. But with her death, I was able to strip away that which is false and limiting about me. I touched the essence of what I am and who I am meant to be in this lifetime, and that discovery has given me great joy. As crazy as it may sound, with Maggie's death I was given a gift. It was a wake-up call for me to stop focusing on what was missing in my life and find something good to hold onto. What I realized in this transformation is that I am on a spiritual journey. It is leading me to do meaningful work and find a community of like-minded individuals who have a similar life purpose.

Today, my personal Mission Statement reflects that feeling. It reads:

I am a woman of power whose mission in life is to be a catalyst for change for victims of violence against women. Today I celebrate my life by building a community of strong, independent, productive women who have survived abuse and are thriving in well-being, love and joy.

This is my life, who I truly am, and, for the first time, I am happy. I am thriving! I am living

the life I had always imagined I would.

It is a true gift indeed that has come from a loss of great, tragic proportions!

WHERE ARE YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY?

So where are you on your life's journey? What do you need to do in order to make a similar transformation and find the thriver inside you? Where are you stuck?

If you have found this book, you are probably close to transformation, but you may need some help to create a new, wonderful life for yourself and your children. Lora did it, and here's how she describes her transformation.

I am bigger than my former story. The center core [the thriver] that Susan helped me to discover knows this to be true. It motivates me to forgive myself, forgive those who have abused me and excuse myself from the 'survivor' life course for something more rewarding, more authentic and definitely more satisfying.

HOW DO YOU RATE?

Let's say that you are in transformation now, even if it doesn't feel like you are. The first thing we need to determine is what is holding you back from moving forward to the place you were born to discover and live in for the rest of your life. It's time to survey the thoughts and beliefs you have that are influencing your life right now as well as your future plans.

It is always good at times to review not only what you are thinking and feeling, but also your hopes and dreams. The survey on the next page is designed to do so. Take a quick moment to review it and then write your answers in your journal or notebook. Yes, do it quickly! Don't think about your answers too much. Let them come from your heart, not your head.

Go for it now! Let's see what you can learn about yourself today, and then we'll review what it means for your future!

SURVEY FOR JOURNEY TO THRIVING

Always feel this way	Sometimes feel this way	Never feel this way
-------------------------	----------------------------	------------------------

I'm too busy for quiet time to think about where I'm going.

There is no way I can create the life I want right now.

There are some voices inside my head that are very critical of me, and I'll never get them to quiet down.

Sometimes I feel there's a happy person inside of me who wants to get out.

My biggest fear is that I'll never get my life together.

Bad things always seem to happen to me.

I'll never figure out who I am or what I want to be when I grow up.

I don't take any big risks. Life is too scary.

Abuse has always been in my life. I can't do much about it.

It's hard to find other people who have gone through what I have and want to change their lives.

Taking time for me is a selfish thing to do.

If I could change one thing about my life, I'd ...

If I had \$10 million and all the time to do whatever I wanted, I'd ...

REVIEW YOUR RESULTS

Let's look at what you came up with on the survey. Was any particular statement difficult for you to answer? Which statements were easiest to answer?

In what areas did you mark that you "always feel this way?" Any surprises?

Write about that now in your journal or notebook.

Look at your "sometimes" responses. Are they in areas that you feel you might be able to move into the "always" category? What would be your barriers to doing so?

Write about that now in your journal or notebook.

Now let's review your answer to "If I had \$10 million and all the time to do whatever I wanted to do, I'd..." Did anything surprise you there? How possible is that dream for you? What are your obstacles, besides time and money?

Write about that now in your journal or notebook.

LOOK AT YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT YOURSELF

Have you noticed that the statements on this survey are all limiting beliefs about yourself and the impact of abuse on your life? What the survey actually measures is your self-esteem, how you feel about yourself as a person. Our self-esteem rises and falls with the experiences we face in life. This survey can help you identify the areas that you might want to work on. For example:

If you checked any of these in the "always" or "sometimes" box —

I'm too busy for quiet time to think about where I'm going.

Taking time for me is a selfish thing to do.

It's hard to find other people who've gone through what I have and want to change their lives.

— you may have some limiting beliefs about taking time for yourself and finding others to support you on your journey. Try some affirmations like "I'm worth it!" and "Taking care of myself is not selfish!" See more on affirmations at the end of this chapter and in Step 2, Quiet the Inner Critic.

Let's look at another group on the list —

*There is no way I can create the life I want right now.
My biggest fear is that I'll never get my life together.
I'll never figure out who I am or what I want to be when I grow up.
I don't take any big risks. Life is too scary.*

If you put any of these in the “always” or “sometimes” category, I'd say that you have hit on the limiting beliefs that are hardest for you to move from. But as you go through this book, you'll find exercises to help you build positive energy, quiet your fears and discover a rich, rewarding future. Look at Step 4, Get Positive Energy; Step 6, Overcome Fears, and Step 7, Set New Goals.

If the survey indicated that you “always” or “sometimes” feel that —

*Abuse has always been in my life. There's not much I can do about it.
Bad things always seem to happen to me.*

— think about how your experiences have limited you in the past and how you now want to find opportunity in those experiences to grow and change.

Can you find opportunity in loss? Yes, I believe you can and you'll find out how to do so later in this book.

If you've marked “always” or “sometimes” for —

*There are some voices inside my head that are very critical of me,
and I'll never get them to quiet down.*

— check out Step 2, Quiet the Inner Critic. You can quiet the chatter and learn to use affirmations to knock out the negative self-talk in your life with the positive!

If you checked off this one as “never” —

Sometimes I feel there's a happy person inside of me who wants to get out.

— be sure to review Step 4, Connect with the Happy Person Inside. Even if you answered “sometimes” or “always” to this one, we will be connecting with the Happy Person Inside in that chapter, so get ready for some fun!

By filling out this survey, you now have a good idea of what exercises to pay close attention to as you go through this book. But I do suggest that you go through all the exercises in this book, as we'll touch on these areas many times in the book and you'll have many opportunities to work on what you need to do to move forward and thrive!

MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

Now let's look at the last two statements that you filled out on the survey.

First, **"If I could change one thing about my life, I'd..."**

Did writing about this give you any new insight into what may stand in the way of you moving on? For example, if you wrote —

I was so young when I had my kids. They've never appreciated me.

— I'd say that is a pretty limiting statement. First of all, right now you can't do much about the fact that you had your kids when you did. And second, you don't really have any control over whether your kids appreciate you or not. They may appreciate you more in the future, or they may not ever do so. All you can do is be the best mother you know how to be and let it go at that. What I've learned about a limiting statement like this is that all things happen for a reason. You may not know the reason right now that you had this experience (and you may never know), but you can learn and grow from it. See it as a gift, and seize the opportunity to think positive! Maybe when you get your life moving, your children will admire and appreciate you for that. Shifting your attitude about these things can make all the difference in your life.

If you wrote something like —

I regret not finishing school so I could get a good job and feel better about myself.

— talk about an opportunity knocking at your door! Who says you can't go back to school now? What is holding you back? When we get to Step 7, Set New Goals, we'll work more on that!

Second (my favorite): **If I had \$10 million and all the time to do whatever I wanted to do, I'd...** I hope your answer to that was big! If there was ever a time in your life to think big, this is it!

Later in the book when we set new goals, we'll revisit what you wrote here, but for now, just notice if you wrote about any of the following:

- Did you use any of the money to help others and provide for your family and loved ones?
- Did you bring up some dream that you had long ago forgotten about and might want to think about again?
- Did you have fun with the idea that without the limitations that we usually use as excuses (no money, no time), you could do anything?

Hold on to this unlimited belief that anything is possible! There is much more in this book that will give you the feeling of limitless possibilities and bring you to a place where some of those possibilities can grow into realities. Savor the thought that you are on the brink of a new life and anything can happen. Let's finish with a list of unlimited beliefs for yourself. Let's see how they feel for you.

- I can create a new life for myself and avenge the abuse I have experienced.
- I can discover my inner wisdom and lower the negative voices in my life.
- I can tap into my truest desires and uncover my inner strengths.
- I can conquer my fears and embrace change.
- I can find meaningful work that I love and live the creative, active life that I long to lead.

These are actually more like "affirmations" — things you want to affirm that are true and possible in your life. Check off any that feel right for you and write an affirmation below about what you want to achieve for yourself in the course of reading this book. Then hold onto this good stuff! We'll use it all later in this book to help you on your glorious journey from victim to survivor to thriver!

MY AFFIRMATIONS: Write some now!

Living well is the best revenge!

After all, isn't getting on with one's life the most exacting revenge against those who have beaten us down and told us we are nothing?

But it is hard to face our stories! Can't you just hear the chatter — Why didn't you leave sooner? How could you be with such a man? What were you thinking? Then too, as a formerly abused woman, you may face costly ongoing legal battles with your abusive ex-partner on

such issues as property division, child custody and child support. You may have substance abuse issues in your life as a result of the abuse or have little or no education or no job or a low-paying job and little financial backing or support from your family or friends. Your culture or religion may judge you about leaving a partner or marriage, even if your partner is abusive to you.

Yes, those voices keeping you down can be loud and convincing. *This is too hard, you may tell yourself. It's not going to work. I am a victim and will always be one. I don't deserve any better.*

You do have another voice inside you to listen to, however. That voice—strong, confident and untouched by all that has ever happen to you—is telling you to take the journey. Who says you can't find positive energy in life, follow your dreams, push through your fears and embrace the thriver spirit inside you?

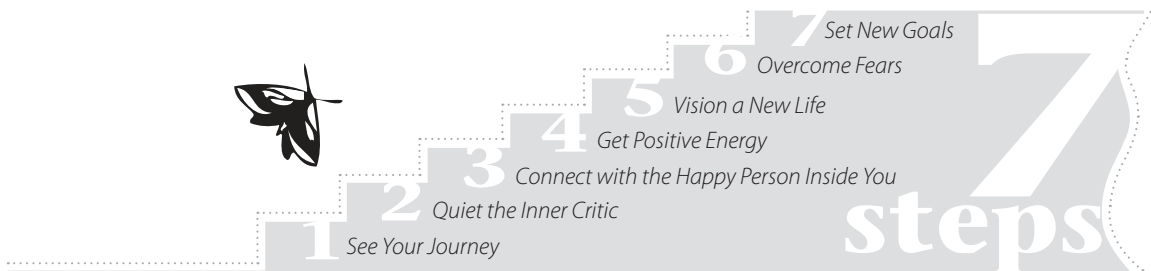
Over the years, I have worked with hundreds of women who describe themselves as survivors of abuse. Each time I have given them the choice of reliving the abuse and the pain inflicted on them or reaching deep down inside to uncover their true heart's desires, they choose the latter. They have set goals for themselves that they have not only achieved but also have spurred them on to making bigger and better changes for themselves and their children. They have done, in many cases, what they have thought was unimaginable! They have reclaimed their lives after abuse and permanently broken the cycle of violence.

This book, with its “seven-step” format for thriving after abuse, offers you a chance to find the same “life-altering” experience that can bring new vigor and energy to your life. You can check out some of the women who share their thriver success stories later in this book. I hope these stories give you the inspiration and motivation you need to take the journey to wholeness, healing and recovery.

Finally, you may fear the possibility that you will return to an abusive relationship. Will you see the warning signs of abuse the next time around? Will a healthy, happy relationship ever come your way? That's a real fear! But don't worry! You can overcome all these obstacles and learn much, much more in this book about the journey to becoming a thriver.

So let's explore the seven steps we can use to make this amazing, transformational journey to find freedom, peace, wonder and joy in our lives!

SEVEN STEPS ON THE JOURNEY TO THRIVING AFTER ABUSE



STEP 1: You'll see your journey by beginning with a writing exercise about your favorite fairy tales. These stories can help you see that in everyone's life there is a struggle of some kind (e.g., a loss of a job, divorce, illness, abuse, violence). That struggle can be overcome by a life-altering event (e.g., Cinderella meets the fairy godmother, Sleeping Beauty wakes up) that sets us on the road to the happy ending. No matter how many times I do this exercise with women, they always tell me they believe in the happy ending. It will be our work, then, to get you there... to the Happy Ending!

STEP 2: You'll quiet the Inner Critic, that negative voice in your head from childhood that becomes overprotective and too rigid for you as an adult. For abused women, that voice tells us we're no good, stupid, can't do anything right, and it can also be the voice of the abuser. With an interactive exercise, we will tune into the voice of our Inner Critic, learn to respond to it and create affirmations to help quiet its chatter and reduce its potency to sabotage or derail us on the way to our Happy Ending!

STEP 3: You'll connect with the Happy Person Inside You, a part of you that has probably been trounced down by the abuse in your life. She is the cheerleader inside who loves you, supports you and guides you with great wisdom if only you would listen.

STEP 4: You'll get the positive energy going again in your life by working with the energy of the Happy Person Inside you and shifting your focus to express gratitude for all the good things in your life — past, present and future!

STEP 5: You'll vision a new life for you and your children, beginning with focusing on what you are passionate about and what dreams and desires you may have given up on

in your life. You'll look at what drives you to find the work you love, such as the search for meaningful work, the need to help others or make the world a better place. Then you'll work on manifesting what you desire. You can do it!

STEP 6: You'll overcome your fears and limiting beliefs, such as "Abuse has always been a part of my life. I can't do anything about it," or "Bad things always happen to me," or "There is no way I can create the life I want right now." You'll explore peak experiences in your life and identify positive patterns so you can repeat them again.

STEP 7: You'll set new short-term and long-term goals that will reflect the new, positive energy in your life and allow you to thrive, not merely survive the abuse. We'll look at dreams deferred, like going to law school, traveling around the world, writing a book, and we'll define simple, easy steps so you can attain goals without any more delay.

SEVEN STEPS GET RESULTS

Women who take the journey from victim to survivor to thriver are less likely to return to an abusive relationship or suffer the long-term physical and psychological consequences of the abuse they have experienced. It makes sense! Using the Seven Steps to Thriving After Abuse outlined in this book can produce significant, tangible changes in your life as it has in the lives of many other women—a noticeable change in attitude about the abuse and your belief in your ability to transform to your life.

Many women I have worked with have indicated in the survey that you filled out earlier that:

Abuse has always been in my life. I can't do much about it.

My biggest fear is that I'll never get my life together.

I'll never figure out who I am or what I want to be when I grow up.

There is no way I can create the life I want right now.

But after working with me on the seven-step approach, they report a shift in these attitudes and also in the belief that taking time for themselves is not a selfish thing to do. They are grateful to have finally found a group of women who have experienced abuse in the past and now want to move on with their lives.

Actually, I have seen all of these new unlimited beliefs be strengthened as women continue to work with me in a strong community of like-minded women and through it, the well-being and financial stability of these women has been greatly increased. Most importantly the women I have worked with have not returned to an abusive relationship, and several have entered new, healthy relationships, some for the first time in their lives.

These women have done amazing things! They have been spurred on to start their own businesses, return to school to get advanced degrees in law and medicine, get new jobs at higher pay that more closely matches to their skills and talents, resume singing careers and become first-time homeowners.

What these courageous journeys have taught me is that the truest measure of our lives is not what we have experienced but what we have made of our experiences. We don't really know how good it can get once we get positive and focus our energies on our future, not the past. Whatever we might have imagined for ourselves is only a fraction of what we can have when we free ourselves to live well, be happy and create the life we want.

Then living well is, in fact, our greatest revenge.

TAKE THE JOURNEY

Just as it may take a woman up to seven times to leave an abusive relationship, it may also take several tries for you to reclaim your life after abuse. Each time, the greatest barrier that may keep you from moving on is that you don't feel positive about yourself and your future life.

The seven-step approach in this book can help you take this journey as someone who has been abused or violated in her life. Others may also find this book and its approach of value, including:

Family, friends and coworkers of women who have been abused: Often the family, friends and loved ones of women who have been abused want to help, but they don't know how. This book is not only a way for them to learn about and understand the recovery process, but also would be a great gift idea for a friend or family member to show them that they care.

Staff of shelters and crisis centers: According to the National Coalition on Domestic Violence, there are 2,000 domestic violence shelters in the United States and 1,000 sexual assault crisis centers. In these programs, there are hundreds of advocate and counselors who

work with thousands of women who are survivors of abuse or sexual assault every year. These workers routinely look for new approaches to help these women move beyond the violence, and many of the techniques in this book could be easily adapted for use in group or individual counseling sessions.

Counselors and therapists who work with these women: According to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, there are more than 50,000 marriage and family therapists treating individuals, couples and families nationwide. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, has 153,000 members. The American Psychological Association (APA), with more than 150,000 members, is the largest association of psychologists. Many of these marriage and family therapists, social workers and psychologists provide individual and group therapy for women who have experienced abuse, trauma or violence. While this book is not intended to be a substitute for therapy, it does provide therapists with practical exercises and creative techniques to help patients set new goals for their lives and heal from past trauma and abuse.

Attorneys, doctors and other professional caregivers: These professionals are always looking for resources and materials to share with clients and patients. This book is a way to help women move beyond traumatic divorces, custody battles and illnesses or physical injuries either caused by the abuser or the stress of the situation. Other caregivers who could use the book are clergy, child welfare workers, school counselors and nurses.

Whether you are taking the journey yourself or helping another to do so, let's embrace this amazing, life-affirming process now and create a brilliant new future for ourselves and our children.

Take the journey today. Transformation awaits!

***Just when the caterpillar thought the world was
over, it became a butterfly.***

— PROVERB





*Take the first step in
faith. You don't have to
see the whole staircase,
just take the first step.*

— MARTIN LUTHER KING