



# Living in the Thriver Zone

A Celebration of Living Well as the Best Revenge

Susan M. Omilian JD

*Reclaiming the Lives of Women  
Who Have Been Abused*



**Butterfly Bliss Productions LLC**

West Hartford, CT

## **Living in the Thriver Zone: A Celebration of Living Well as the Best Revenge**

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## DEDICATION



**Dedicated to my niece Maggie (1980 - 1999)**

**...and all the women inspired by her story  
whose lives have been made better.**

I also dedicated this book to my niece,  
Lindsey and her daughter, my grandniece Josie.

They are the future of women in our family  
and the holders of the hope that we can create a world  
where women are truly treated as equals  
and with love and respect.

*The truest measure of our lives is not what we have experienced,  
but what we have made of our experiences.*

~ Susan M. Omilian ~

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*Then, living well is not  
only the best revenge;  
it is, in fact, the song of our souls and  
the fulfillment of all of our dreams.*

– SUSAN M. OMILIAN JD

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR – LIVING WELL IS OUR BEST REVENGE

On October 18, 1999, Maggie, my brother's nineteen-year-old stepdaughter, was murdered on a college campus by her ex-boyfriend, who then killed himself.

Shock, guilt and a cry for revenge welled up inside me, but what was I to do? I couldn't save Maggie. No one had seen the danger she was in after she ended the relationship, not even Maggie herself. He had never physically assaulted or threatened her, and she didn't know he had a gun.

Although I had worked as an attorney and advocate for women for many years, I too had missed the warning signs in the relationship. My long-standing work to end violence against women became more personal and immediate. I was determined to turn Maggie's tragic death into an opportunity to help other women move on with their lives after abuse as Maggie could not.

In the two decades since Maggie's death, I have worked with hundreds of women who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse and helped them take the journey from victim to survivor to thriver. These women long to move beyond the abuse, violence and trauma in their lives, but they don't know how to make that happen. This is the work I was born to do, and now I do it in Maggie's memory.

The women I have worked with over the years have done remarkable things! They have gone back to school, gotten new, better jobs, started singing again, bought their first homes and most of all, many have found new healthy, loving relationships. They have entered the Thriver Zone and learned how to stay there so they can regain their power and find purpose in living the fabulous life ahead of them in the Thriver Zone. I am so proud of them! But having a positive outlook on life is hard for survivors of abuse and loss. It really gets to us sometimes that every-one 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.

I hope that this book, the third in *The Thriver Zone Series™* following *Entering the Thriver Zone: A Seven-Step Guide to Thriving After Abuse* and *Staying in the Thriver Zone: A Road Map to Manifest a Life of Power and Purpose*, will provide you with all you need to find the life of peace, joy and freedom you have always dreamed of as a thriver!

—Susan M. Omilian JD

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

### **YES, YOU ARE A WRITER!**

You can do the writing exercises in this book that will take you through *Living in the Thriver Zone: A Celebration of Living Well as the Best Revenge*. 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 makes any sense! If you like printable copies of the worksheets in this book, go to [www.ThriverZone.com](http://www.ThriverZone.com) and click on RESOURCES.

### **DECORATE YOUR OWN JOURNAL.**

Before you start writing, buy yourself a journal 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! It's your Thriver Zone Journal to write in and keep.

### **INVITE A FRIEND TO JOIN YOU! FORM A THRIVER GROUP!**

Get together with a group of your friends and THRIVE! Visit [ThriverZone.com](http://ThriverZone.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 [ThriverZone.com](http://ThriverZone.com) to learn how. You will also find more writing prompts and exercises there. ENJOY!



# Getting Started

LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE AS A THRIVER

*Thriving. That's fighting.*

*Surviving is barely getting by.*

— JILLIAN MICHAELS

**T**wenty years ago when my nineteen-year-old niece Maggie was killed by her ex-boyfriend, I vowed to work with women to help them take the journey from victim to survivor to thriver as Maggie could not. For twenty years prior to Maggie's senseless death, I was involved in advocating for women's rights and ending violence against women. I represented abused women in divorce cases, founded a sexual assault crisis center and worked on defining sexual harassment in the workplace as a legal cause of action.

So in the last forty years, I have heard a lot of stories from women who have been victims of violence. They have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse as well as other horrific acts of abuse and trauma. I have learned how these experiences have impacted their lives and that the impact has been compounded over the years. They have told me how these experiences have derailed them financially, socially and emotionally so that, in many cases, they struggle daily to make a living, feed their children or even dream of having an easier, happier life. Some have told me that they have hardly lived without violence and trauma at any time in their lives, so these impacts have been life-long and overwhelming.

You, too, may be one of these women who has been victimized, traumatized and suffered horribly. But if you are reading this book, you may have at some point courageously taken the first step on the journey beyond abuse. You have broken the silence and spoken up about what happened to you so you could get help.



### 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](http://theduluthmodel.org).

However, if you are still in crisis or have safety concerns, 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](http://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](http://www.rainn.org).

*If you are not sure if you are in an abuse relationship, take a look at the Warning Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship on the previous page.*

## FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR

Even after you have reported the incidents to law enforcement or told your therapist, counselor, advocate or someone you trust so you could get help, you may still be dealing with fear for your own personal safety or that of your children. Most of all, you may just want the abuse to stop and maybe prosecute the offender or file for divorce. But you may also have some of these goals or needs as a survivor of abuse to:

- address impacts of abuse on you or your children
- stabilize your life and that of your children financially, emotionally and socially
- break the cycle of violence in your lives
- have peace, freedom and joy in your life every day

Your desire to address these impacts and stabilize your life may be strong as you move from victim to survivor, but one question I have found often remains. Yes, you may feel safer and more able to cope with daily life despite the immediate concerns above. Yet a part of you – maybe something deep inside – wonders, “Will I be okay? Will I ever feel normal again?” and, most pertinent for our work together here, “I have survived so far, but what’s next?”

These questions are frequently asked of me by women who come into the two-day *My Avenging Angel Workshops™* that I have conducted since 2001 in memory of my niece Maggie. (For more about the workshop program, see *Resources*.) In fact, Jenny, one of the *Thrivers Success Stories* in Part Four of this book, asked me that exact question – would she ever be okay again?

Here’s how Lora, one of the women from my workshop, described her state of mind when she attended the first workshop session.

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## Living in the Thriver Zone

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*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 you as a survivor may wear as result of what you have endured. As a survivor, you may be heavily burdened with low self-esteem, emotional fear, shame, guilt and hopelessness – the inevitable impacts of being abused and violated in our society today. Those impacts may also include being depressed, appearing lost or suffering from health problems as a result of the assault. But most of you, like Jenny, will probably be deeply worried that your lives will never get any better. In this state of mind, you might believe, like Lora, that the impacts of abuse and violence will forever define your life 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 how her work with me changed her perception of this part of her journey.

*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.*

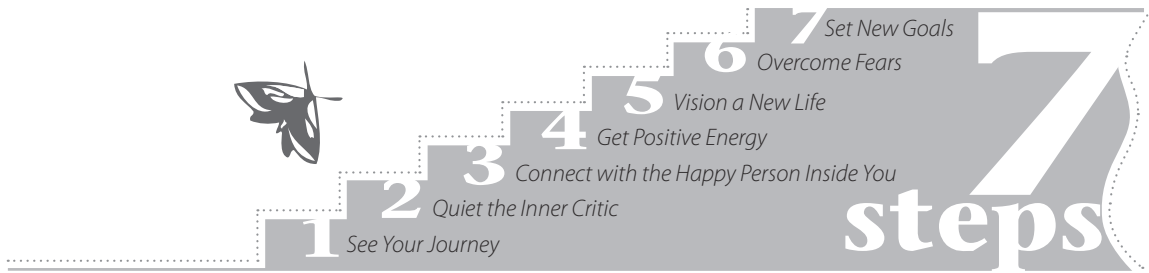
*Could this part of me put the abuse aside and motivate me to search for my true passion? I knew this part of myself, not well, but I believed there was a center core that no one had disturbed. Susan encouraged me to invite that part out and talk awhile, dream awhile and grieve our years of separation. Listening to the experiences of others as well was key to opening this part of me.*

I call opening up to the part of us that is untouched by the abuse as "finding or making contact with the Happy Person Inside You." We'll explore that part of us later in Part Three of

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this book as one of the *Seven Steps to Thriving After Abuse* that I have developed as part of my motivational model. We'll focus specifically on *Step Three: Connect with the Happy Person Inside You*, which many women who come to this work find particularly helpful on their journey.

## SEVEN STEPS ON THE JOURNEY TO THRIVING AFTER ABUSE



(See my book *Entering the Thriver Zone: A Seven Step Guide to Thriving After Abuse* for more on the Seven Steps with the exercises and work sheets to go with them.)

For now, let me say that in working with hundreds of women since 2001 who have come to my workshops, attended a training or read my books, I have helped them see that they may have lost contact with their Happy Person Inside. They feel lost and alone, overwhelmed and paralyzed by the negativity of the wickedly mean voice of their Inner Critic that is running their lives. They usually express this loss in their lives with the question “Why can’t I feel normal again?” but I give them another way to describe what they are really seeking. They want to know if they can reclaim their lives after abuse and achieve some kind of a “new normal” or anything close to it. When I agreed that might be possible, but also suggest that they could even be happy again and feel joy, they look at me incredulously and ask, “Is that really possible?”

But their eyes really shine when I tell them that the *My Avenging Angel Workshops™* I conduct for women like them are based on the idea that “living well is the best revenge.” They like that idea – they like it a lot! “Living well is the best revenge” is a quote attributed to George Herbert that becomes a mantra for the journey beyond abuse. To me, living well means freeing ourselves to live in the present, not the past, by taking the journey beyond surviving to thriving!

**VICTIM**



**SURVIVOR**



**THRIVER**

## FROM SURVIVOR TO THRIVER

What is a “thriver?” It’s a new word for most of us, so here’s my working definition:

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! She has found a network of women who understand and share her desire to move forward after abuse.

I suspect that you might have picked up this book because you were intrigued by the words “Thriver Zone” in the title. You might have been thinking, “What does it mean to be a thriver?” or “I’d like to be a thriver.” Most of all, “I’d love to live in the Thriver Zone!”

How to live in the Thriver Zone is what we’ll be exploring in this book. I believe it is the end result of a journey beyond abuse and beyond our limited beliefs about ourselves. That includes our narrow expectations of how our future life will turn out given the abuse, violence and trauma we have experienced in our past. We have only thought of ourselves as survivors of abuse at best and have no idea that we could live well or even find our happy ending! That is a pretty dire forecast!

But not to worry! I have imagined this book as presenting some real possibilities for all of us to see for how we can live as thrivers. We have some great role models to celebrate in this book for whom living well has been their best revenge. The stories of the seven women I interviewed for the Thriver Success Stories – I call them Super Hero Thrivers – will tell us about this journey beyond abuse, beyond even surviving, to find a thriving happily-ever-after!

All seven have attended one or more of my workshops over the years, been part of my follow-up group, attended retreats with me and have set and actually accomplished new, exciting goals in their life after abuse. (For more information about the *My Avenging Angel Workshops*,<sup>TM</sup> the follow-up groups and retreat weekends that I conduct, go to *Resources* in the back of this book.) In Part Four of this book, these amazing women will tell you what being a thriver means to them, what they have they accomplished as a thriver and their goals going forward. You’ll learn how they found new vigor, focus and purpose to their lives in being thrivers, not just

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survivors of abuse. Inspired by their stories, you'll have a chance to write about your own journey beyond abuse in a new and different way.

Watch for this ✍️ **PROMPT** for the writing exercises in this book!

For now, I'll include a summary here of what being a thriver means to each of the seven women – Adrienne, Cathryn, Jenny, Pamela, Sophia, Tawanda and Tennille – and how they have aspired to become a thriver in their lives.

(See the full story of each women, including their interviews in Part Four of this book.)

Enjoy the positive energy and clear focus reflected in the response of each of these women to the question: "What is a thriver?"

*Surviving is essential. Thriving is elegant.*

– MAYA ANGELOU

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## SUMMARY FROM THE THRIVER SUCCESS STORIES

### ***What Being a Thriver Means to Me!***

#### ***ADRIENNE***

I know I am a thriver because I can look at myself the mirror and see a happy face! My eyes are blue again, and there is happiness there now where before there was only gray and sadness. Yes, that's right! My eyes have changed back to their God-given color – blue.

I know I am a thriver because I now feel joy when I wake up in the morning! Joy! Joy! Joy! Joy to be alive, joy to work, joy to see my children grow to be adults.

I know I am a thriver because I see color in the world again! The world is a rainbow!

#### ***CATHRYN***

Thriving is living within my own personal power while still respecting others. Even if I am angry at those who hurt me, I still choose to treat them with respect and compassion. That is a very important value to me. Thriving means taking care of myself so well that I have energy

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## Living in the Thriver Zone

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to take care of others, even those who have hurt me. Feeling compassion for those who hurt me is the ultimate level of thriving to me. It is a level of integrity that comes from being whole.

### **JENNY**

At first, being a thriver was about living in the moment, letting go of what had happened to me in my past and living without fear. Now I feel that thriving is really about living authentically and letting go of the feeling that you have to please people or be worried about how other people feel about you.

### **PAMELA**

Before I came to Susan's workshop, I thought a thriver was someone who had it all together. She was rich, really warm, taking good care of her kids and had every quality you would ever want. Now I think of a thriver as somebody who takes whatever their life gives them – a lot of people have bad things going on – and they just walk through it. They are able to be kind to people along the way, pursue their goals and keep going and trying. Today I can see that I'm getting there as a thriver. I have grown a lot, and I've been trying different things.

### **SOPHIA**

To me, being a thriver is about movement. It is about processing our experiences in life, the good ones as well as the difficult ones, and doing self-reflection so that we can move on to that next level of self-improvement. Just as I have been inspired by those like Susan who have been empowered by the tragedy they have faced, I know that I, too, can be a role model for others by moving beyond the circumstances of my life. I have something I can give back to people who are hurting. We all have something that has caused us pain and trauma and giving back once we move beyond that pain and trauma is our legacy of hope to others.

### **TAWANDA**

Thriving to me is about living beyond the abuse, beyond the pain. Where I am today, compared to three years ago, is like I'm walking on water. Now I believe that there is nothing that can stop me except for me. I still struggle with my Inner Critic and how to keep it quiet, but that battle is nowhere near what it was before. Today I tell myself "I want to do this" and "I can do it." There is no more "Oh, I can't" or "What's someone going to think of me?" if I do this or that. Nope! I'm going for it! I'm doing it! I shortcut all that negative chatter. I have NO time

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for that anymore! In my journey from survivor to thriver, I have set my goals, kept my energy focused, quieted my Inner Critic and remembered my vision for the future. It feels like I'm living my fantasy in real life! It is so cool! No one else has ever done something like that before!

### **TENNILLE**

Thriving has allowed me to be more forgiving of myself and more compassionate even for people who have abused me. I don't have to hug them or be their friends, but I can and do forgive them with all of my heart. Would saying that make a difference to them? I don't know but saying it for myself makes me feel better when I'm not holding on to all that emotional baggage. Also, letting go of negative thoughts and energy keeps me more in positive energy, something that is very important to me on my journey from survivor to thriver. I need people around me who are positive and supportive.

Here are other comments about thriving from women who have worked with me:

*"I am a thriver, a person who can DREAM and take action to be productive. I feel I am becoming myself again. I am overcoming my fears and regaining my voice. Now I know I am not alone. I am allowing myself to love me!"*

— **PAM**

*"Susan's workshops and materials helped me to come alive and know that I am somebody. I am a thriver!"*

— **VONDA**

*"Because of Susan, I believe I have a chance to live and thrive after abuse. She has helped me get out of a dark room and see the light."*

— **GORDANA**

*"Susan is such an inspiration! Her work continues to help women to find their true selves. I will be forever grateful for her being in my life and showing me that I could do this - live the life of a thriver after abuse!"*

— **DONNA**

*"Susan has been there for me, connected me with other women and encouraged me to seize opportunities to move forward with my life. Her work has helped me focus on my passions without fear and grounded me in a community of strong women who are my role models as I move forward as a thriver."*

— **FAYE**

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*“Susan’s work introduced me to a space untouched by the abuse I have experienced. There my Happy Person Inside and I walk hand-in-hand as I rise from survivor to thriver! With all growth, there are many challenges along the way. For me the thought provoking, soul searching work and encouragement that Susan has provided made those challenges easier to move through.”*

— **TERI**

## THE JOURNEY OF THIS BOOK

My idea for this third book in *The Thriver Zone Series™* is to show you how the tools and techniques of the motivational model that I have developed have helped women take the journey beyond abuse so that today they are living in the Thriver Zone. I chose seven women to interview as our Thriver Success Stories so I could find out for you how they did it! (See the interviews with those women in full in Part Four of this book.)

I asked them how “living well is the best revenge” inspired them and how the tools and techniques in my motivational model have helped them to move on from experiencing the most horrific kinds of abuse, degradation and violence to surviving and even thriving! Strong, resilient and determined, they wanted their lives back, and by focusing on the positive and finding power, passion and purpose in their lives, they are getting them back!

Like these women and many others who have attended my workshops or read one or more of my books, you, too, can use the motivational guidance I have developed and included in *The Thriver Zone Series.™* You can live in the Thriver Zone and celebrate living well as *your* best revenge!

Each part of this book will give you tools and techniques so that you can:

- See yourself as the hero of your own story and answer the Call to Adventure in Part One and become a Super Hero Thriver in Part Two. You can overcome the challenges of your life and reap the reward of finding your true, authentic self – THE REAL YOU!
- Connect with the Happy Person Inside, a part of you untouched by all that has happened to you. Vanquish your Inner Critic’s power to sabotage your path forward. We’ll review these tools in the *Seven Steps to Thriving After Abuse* and *A Road Map to Manifest a Life of Power and Purpose* in Part Three.

- Learn from the women who share their Thriver Success Stories and serve as Super Hero Thriver role models now living well in the Thriver Zone in Part Four.
- Assemble your *Living in the Thriver Zone* toolbox and have an opportunity to test how well you are living in the Thriver Zone today in Part Five.

Remember: Living well is not only the best revenge, but the song of your soul and the fulfillment of all your dreams. Enjoy the journey!



*You basically have two choices about how to live your life.  
One is to be a survivor and the other is to be a thriver. Be a thriver.*

— THOMAS FRIEDMAN

