

*This book is for everyone who wants to improve his/her outlook on life. Reading about what others have done to improve life on Earth for all of us can change the way we think and make us feel better.*

## **Everything Happens For A Reason: Based On True, Inspirational Stories**

By Deborah Day Poor, LCSW

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BASED ON TRUE INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

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**Deborah Day Poor, LCSW**

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# Chapter 1:

## Animals Help Us Adapt To Changes

In December of 2004, in the Andaman Islands on the Indian Ocean, an aboriginal tribe survived a tsunami. They were able to do this for two reasons. First, their ancestors taught them to beware of a sea that recedes. The word-of-mouth information passed down from previous generations told them to go to higher ground if the sea went out because it would return as a wave as high as one hundred feet. Their second warning came from the animals who lived on the same Islands that they inhabited. Because the animals instinctively knew they were in danger, they moved away from the sea. Everything from birds who flew away to crabs who buried themselves in caves warned the "sea gypsies" of their need to get away from the sea. They did not deny or magnify their situation. Instead, they found a solution. The aboriginal tribes who followed nature's warnings survived a tsunami that killed over 230,000 people and devastated fourteen coastal communities.

Members of this tribe were interviewed on the television show "60 Minutes". By talking with them, the journalist learned that they have no words in their vocabulary for when or for want. The reasons for why this is true are simple. People who live in the now do not comprehend the word when because now is all there is. And, a tribe who lives off the land does not

think in terms of what they want. When they are hungry, they spear a fish and eat it. When an oncoming storm threatens their lives, they move away from the sea. They give little or no thought to the future and to their needs. Instead, they take care of themselves, one moment at a time.

We do not miss what we've never had. Often, it is people who have lived a life of privilege who find it hard to adjust to economic down turns. And, individuals who've always had their needs taken care of are apt to feel anxious, get depressed and turn to drugs for relief when changes force them to take care of themselves. Unlike nomadic tribes who have lived simple lives, many of our well to do populations find it more difficult to adapt to changes.

What we all have in common with primitive tribes is the opportunity to turn to animals for protection, comfort and relief. During the Korean War, a group of Marines bought an abandoned, skinny, red mare from the racetrack. Thinking that this horse might be useful as a pack horse, they brought her with them to the front lines. Soon, they learned that she was much more than a pack horse. She carried heavy ammunition for their newly acquired cannons, up big hills. The soldiers on the hill removed the ammunition and strapped wounded soldiers on her back so she could take them down the hill to safety. Because she was fearless and good at dodging

bullets, they called her Sergeant Reckless. She made many successful trips. It is reported that one day she made fifty-one round trips, totaling thirty-five miles that supplied the troops with 9,000 pounds of ammunition.

Sergeant Reckless was recognized by the United States Marine Corp for her courageous efforts. She is the only animal who ever held a military rank and she received two Purple Hearts.

The soldiers she served laughed together about how much this small horse ate. Knowing the contributions she made to their war effort, made them willing to share their food with her.

Horses help soldiers to recover from combat. The first time I worked with Ryan, I did not know how to help him. After doing two tours in Afghanistan, a psychiatrist diagnosed him with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He was re-experiencing the horrors he had witnessed. He had terrible nightmares, always sat facing the door, ready to protect himself and he over- reacted to unexpected sounds and quick movements. Normally, I tell my clients that they need to “feel it to heal it” and “grieve it to leave it”, but I did not think this approach would help him. Emotionally, he was trapped in his past. I needed to find a way for him to move on and feel safe living in the safety and security of his homeland.

I recalled how one of my previous clients, a sixteen-year-old anorexic girl had benefited from Equine Therapy. A treatment center she went to in Arizona provided anorexics with horses to groom, bridle, ride and walk. The horses helped the patients to focus on something other than themselves and their weight. Because horses are big animals and by caring for them, they became attached to them, they noticed that big can be beautiful. Growing accustomed to being with something as big as a horse took away some of the prejudice they felt towards overweight people. Also, being active outside stimulated their appetites and helped them to gain weight.

The first time I met Ryan, he was dressed in khakis trousers, a plaid shirt and loafers. He had a military haircut, but it was hard for me to imagine someone with his slight build and slumped shoulders as the head of a combat platoon. In a monotone voice, barely louder than a whisper, he told me about the medications he'd been taking to reduce his symptoms of anxiety and depression. He admitted that he was not obeying the warning labels on the bottles of his prescription medications because he was still drinking.

I asked him where he grew up and he said, "The Bronx." His answer made me feel hopeless. How was I going to convince a city guy, someone who had probably never even touched a horse, to consider Equine Psychotherapy Treatment? As per usual, I



turned the problem I had no answer for over to my Higher Power.

After he left, I read several articles about using Equestrian Therapy to help clients who were suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The articles identified horses as our most intuitive animals and stated that they will intuit and imitate the emotions of the people who interact with them. If the horse senses the rider's fear, he or she will mimic the rider's emotional state by being skittish or obstinate. Consequently, the horse's reaction to the client/rider is a good indication of how well the therapy is working.

One of the articles I read stated that for many people who have PTSD, an hour with a horse is the equivalent of five hours of psychotherapy. It explained how the motivation to control one's horse helped the sufferers to let go of their past and focus on what they were doing in the present. The feelings of mastery they felt when the horse obeyed their commands, boosted their self-confidence and helped them to stop thinking of themselves as hopeless.

During Ryan's next appointment, I asked him how he was doing. He shrugged his shoulders, looked at the floor and whispered, "Okay, I guess". I nodded my head and said nothing. My experience working with clients has taught me that saying nothing, allowing

the client to feel uncomfortable during the silence, often encourages them to say more. After a few uncomfortable, quiet moments, Ryan said, "My son asked me to take him fishing and I told him 'No'. I don't feel like doing anything."

Noticing that he was holding back tears let me know that he felt bad about disappointing his son. I used the opportunity to tell him that I was sorry to hear that his depression was making it impossible for him to be the kind of dad he wanted to be. Hearing my words made tears spill onto his cheeks. I told him there was something he could do to make him feel better soon. He looked up at me and in more than a whisper asked "What?"

I said, "This might sound strange to you but there's a kind of therapy that is done with horses. It has an excellent success rate for helping soldiers to recover from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). There's a nearby ranch that provides this. I want you to go there twice a week and work with them."

"I've never been on a horse", Ryan said.

"It doesn't matter. While you're there, you'll be with other riders. The ranch owners and their staff will provide you with everything you need to do this kind of therapy. I'll be in contact with them.

Reluctantly, Ryan took the information about the ranch that I gave him. He said he'd give them a call.

I let a few weeks pass before I called Ryan to ask him if he was going to Equine Therapy. Immediately, I noticed an increase in the volume and energy in his voice. He said, "I didn't like it at first, but it's getting better. And this week, I went to my doctor, and he said that my blood pressure and my heart rate have both improved significantly. I feel better. And I took my son fishing on Saturday."

With the help of the horse he called Dusty, Ryan continued to improve physically and emotionally. A horse who could go into Ryan's world by sensing what he was feeling was just what the soldier needed.

Gradually, his symptoms of PTSD went away and the boy from the Bronx bought his own horse. Caring for and riding his horse give him the therapy he needs to let go of his troublesome past and feel mastery over himself and his life.

The good results I witnessed in Ryan persuaded me to consider other clients as candidates for Equine Therapy. Since I worked with him, I have sent other clients who live with debilitating illnesses like Multiple Sclerosis, Cerebral Palsy, Major Depression and Anxiety to the ranch. Like Ryan, many of them found what they needed by bonding with a horse.

Fortunately, today, Equine Therapy is available in America from coast to coast.

We do not need something as big as a horse to derive the benefits of caring for an animal. Science has proven that household pets, like dogs and cats, help humans to improve their physical and emotional health.

Dogs are often trained to do for people what they cannot do for themselves. In 1931, two British women, Muriel Crooke and Rosamund Bond, taught four British dogs how to help blind people. By repeatedly giving the dogs simple commands and rewarding them for obeying, they taught the dogs what they needed to know to give visually impaired people back some of their independence. The dogs learned to sit, stay, lay down, retrieve articles, stop at curbs, move forward, turn right, turn left, disregard other animals and halt. Due to their efforts and the results they attained, a foundation known as Guide Dogs was founded in 1934.

After WWII, the need for guide dogs increased significantly. It was then that five community leaders in the metropolitan New York area decided to provide guide dogs, free of charge, to the legally blind and visually impaired. Today, more than 29,000 people benefit from the emotional support and the independence that a guide dog provides for them.

Those who have lost their sight are not the only ones who dogs rescue. Dogs incredible sense of smell allows them to detect cancer early, to smell a fire before the flames engulf a home, to alert a diabetic of their need to check their sugar, track down criminals and find missing persons, explosives and contraband. "Man's best friend" is highly sensitive to their owners and to their environment. The number of lives they have saved and improved is too high to calculate.

In 1993, Joan Dalton, vice principal at Mac Lauren's Lord High School in Oregon, unknowingly started a program that would make prisoners productive members of society and save the lives of dogs on "death row". Her love for animals began in her childhood with her love for her dog. One day, her best friend, Bugsy, killed one of their chickens while Joan was at school. After Joan came home from school and went inside the house, her mother closed the blinds. Her father loaded his shot gun, went outside and pulled the trigger. Joan was left to grieve the death of her best friend alone. Her parents never spoke of the incident again, but Joan knew that Bugsy killed a chicken because it was in his nature to do so and he'd been left unsupervised. The unconditional love she had received from him taught her that Bugsy was not a bad dog.

Many years later, while working as a high school vice principal, Joan noticed similarities between some of

her acting out students and Buggy. Like her dog, her students made mistakes. To help them get the second chances she believed they deserved, she started a program called Project Pooch at the Mac Lauren Juvenile Correctional Facility in Woodburn, Oregon. She convinced the authorities at the facility to allow the incarcerated youths to provide care for a dog living in a shelter. She started with one kid and one dog. While the dog was spared the consequence of an early death, the teen providing care for the dog was learning valuable life lessons. To get the dog to obey, the teen was learning to be patient, consistent and dependable.

Project Pooch grew because it helped teenagers turn their lives around. The authorities at the facility noticed that the ones taking care of the dogs were less aggressive, and their leadership skills and their ability to work well with others improved. The program brought meaning to their lives. Instead of focusing on ways to get even with people in authority, the youths were thinking about the well-being of their "adopted" pet.

Over time, the dog rescue/youth program needed more space. To accommodate this need, rescued dogs who had been paired with rebellious youths, were given kennels, and a dog agility course next to a study/meditation garden.

Veterinarians, K-9 officers, dog trainers, and groomers, were brought in to talk to the kids about their jobs. Their influence persuaded many of the teens to seek employment in these fields after they graduated from high school.

In 1999, Project Pooch attained non-profit status. By leaving her vice principal job to become the head of Project Pooch, Joan took a pay cut and sold her house to cover her living expenses. Today, after twenty-three years of working with dogs from shelters who improved youths' lives, Joan is retired, writing her memoir, and living with dogs who are considered unlikely to be adopted.

Can Do Canines began in 1995 and their first goal was to train service dogs for veterans. In this program, puppies who are eight weeks old are assigned to a trainer and to a handler. The trainers house break and crate train the dogs. Later, they train them to retrieve dropped items, to tug doors open, to push handicapped door buttons and to be a brace for an owners' balance. After attaining much success, this program was taken to a prison system where the dogs would receive attention from an inmate twenty-four hours a day. The trainer who taught the inmate how to care for the pup, took the dog out into the community to help the canine get used to traffic, strangers, animals, and other kinds of distractions.

Puppies Behind Bars started in a maximum-security prison for women in New York State in 1997. It began with five Labrador Retriever puppies. Female inmates were chosen to participate in this program because they had received no disciplinary action for the last twelve months and had never been charged with sexual abuse or cruelty to children or animals. Prison officials noticed changes in the inmates who were training dogs to become service dogs for veterans. Many of them cut back on the mental health prescriptions they'd been taking, and their attitudes improved. When interviewed, the inmates said they felt better because they took pride in being able to do something to help others.

A prisoner who had spent eleven years behind bars became a handler for a black Labrador appropriately named Shadow. During his incarceration, he was forbidden to touch anyone, and all he had to look forward to was a possible, upcoming parole. All that changed when Shadow came into his life. Shadow shared his cell, learned to obey his commands, gave him unconditional love and a reason for living. Instead of just marking time and feeling unloved, Shadow filled his heart with love and gave him a purpose.

Some of the dogs chosen to be in these programs have been rescued from hoarders and from owners who bet on them to win a dog fight. Others were lost and scheduled to be killed. So, the first living soul to



benefit from this kind of a program is the dog. The dogs are well cared for twenty-four hours a day. The ones who complete the program are awarded the Canine Good Citizen Certificate from the American Kennel Club. After that, they are given to a person or a family who needs them.

The second one to profit from the program is the prisoner. Immediately, prisoners who are given the opportunity to be dog handlers stop dwelling on themselves and start thinking about the dog's well-being. Doing so raises their self-esteem and teaches them new skills that they can use after they are released from prison. The recidivism rate for them decreases from over seventy percent to less than fifty percent. They are better prepared to break the cycle of poverty and unemployment that was often the underlying cause of their imprisonment.

Prison officials state that there is an improvement in prison environments that house dogs. The dogs are a happy distraction for the guards and the inmates. Animals, especially dogs, have a calming influence on them. Petting an animal releases an automatic relaxation response that lowers their anxiety and chases away their loneliness. Prisons that have barriers between blacks, whites and Hispanics discover that the inmates love for dogs gives them something to have in common regardless of their race.

The third recipient to benefit from this mutually beneficial program is the disabled person who is given a free, well trained service dog. The dog gives them back some of their independence, more peace of mind and freedom. Disabled veterans and first responders are the first people on the list to be given a dog. Many of them have reported that caring for their beloved pet reduced their depression and gives them a reason to go on living.

The success of these programs has made them grow exponentially. We now have over two-hundred-ninety facilities in our fifty states that use the free labor prisoners provide to train service dogs. The following are some of the programs that pair incarcerated men and women with rescued dogs for mutual rehabilitation: Pawsitive Change, Paws For Life, TAILS (Teaching Animals and Institutionalized Men Life Skills), Marley's Mutts, Magic City K9, Cuffs & Collars, Hardee Hero Hound Program, 45 MPH Couch Potato Greyhounds, Heel Together, Second Chance Pals, Woof (Women Offering Obedience & Friendship), Pawsitive Direction Program, Hounds with Hearts, Pups N Pals, and Puppies with a Purpose. The prison officials observing these programs notice favorable changes on both ends of the leash.

Many of us who think everything happens for a reason also believe that people come into our lives for a reason, a season or a lifetime. As I look back over my life, I recognize that the same has been true

for my pets. When I was about eight years old, I wanted a dog more than anything. My parents refused to get me one. One day, I was walking home on the sidewalk when a lively Springer Spaniel started to walk with me. I petted him, then looked back over my shoulder to discover who he belonged to. I saw a woman sitting on the porch. I stopped and pointed to the dog as a way of asking her if she was his owner. She said, "It's okay. His name is Pluto and he's a good dog." I must have looked confused because again she said, "It's okay" and smiled at me. I enjoyed the rest of our walk together because I felt like I had her permission to allow her dog to follow me home.

Mom was in our back yard pulling weeds when we arrived. She asked me where I found the dog and I told her what had happened. I gave the dog some water and Mom asked me not to feed him. A day or two passed, Pluto was still living in our yard when Mom decided he must be hungry and bought him some dog food. From then on, for about four years, he was my dog. He walked with me to school and was waiting for me at the school yard gate when school let out. In the summer months, he ran beside my bike on our trip to the lake. Together, we jumped off the pier into the water. We were constant companions until one morning when I was on my way to school, he jumped up and put his muddy paws on my new pink dress. I pushed him away. I forgot about the incident until school was over and

he was not there to meet me. Because I lived in a small, tight knit town, I was able to get friends and neighbors to be on the lookout for “my dog”.

For a few days, I felt very sad and lonely. Then one of my friends told me that he saw Pluto next to the town dump. Mom drove me to the dump and we found him playing with a bunch of kids who lived in the house next to the dump. I told them that he was my dog and we took him home. The next day, he was gone again. I begged Mom to take me back to get him and she said, “Pluto knows where we live and he’ll come back if he wants to.” I was angry at Mom for saying this until she found something in our World Book Encyclopedia that said that Springer Spaniels must have a playmate. Mom explained that I was growing up so I wouldn’t be able to give Pluto as much time and attention as I had before. She told me that she believed he was happy with his new family because he had lots of kids to play with. I thought about how Pluto had left his first family to walk home with me. I guessed that their kids had outgrown him so I became his new playmate and now he was leaving me to be with younger kids.

Many years passed before a new pet came into my life. My son, Jason, was playing in the woods near our house when he found three abandoned kittens. He asked me if he could bring them home. Immediately, we were both drawn to the all-black one’s warm, gentle nature. We found good homes for the other

two and lavished all our attention on to Midnight. She would not use a litter box. I believed this was true because living in the woods for a few months had taught her to go potty outside. While we slept, she roamed the neighborhood. In the morning, I called her and told her to get that boy up. She then went into Jason's bedroom and rubbed her face on his head until he got up. He was in a much better mood than he'd been in when we used our voice or an alarm clock to wake him up.

Jason generously allowed me to take Midnight with me to graduate school. Unlike most cats, Midnight seemed to enjoy car rides. And I needed her company because it was the first time that I had ever lived alone. Because she was an indoor/outdoor cat, Midnight lived a shorter life than indoor cats. One night, when she was roaming the neighborhood, she ate something poisonous and died a few days later. I missed her terribly for a few weeks. Then while getting my nails done, a chubby black and white kitten walked into the room where I was sitting with at least twenty other customers, looked around, then jumped up onto my lap, sat there and looked at me. Several times I told him to go away because I was not going to take him home. He persisted until I could not resist him and we went home together. Over time, I realized the reasons I needed Tuxedo. He was an affectionate cat who could sense when I needed him to stay close to me. I remember one night in particular when I was feeling

very sad. Tux put his paws against the middle of my back and stayed there all night. I am a restless sleeper, but my movements did not chase my devoted pet away. After twelve years together, Tux developed kidney problems and passed onto the promise land.

Looking back on my life helps me to know that all three of these beloved pets came into my life for a reason and for several seasons. Because most pets do not live as long as humans do, we do not get to spend a lifetime with them. And, like the people we love, they are all imperfect. Pluto left me. What dog does that? But the seasons we spent together were some of the best. Midnight was a scrapper. When I let her out at night, I could hear her fighting with other cats. In the morning, I found her licking her wounds. And Tux showed signs of being a food addict. I had to keep his food in sealed tight containers lest he get into the bag and eat enough to make him regurgitate.

When people toy with the idea of getting a pet, they often search the internet to find out one that is suited to them. For me, my best pets were the ones who found me. Their intuitive nature told them that I needed them. Like the horse that helped Ryan recover from PTSD, and the dogs paired with prisoners and with blind people, my pets have given me so much of what I've needed to live a happier, more productive life.

## **Summary**

Instead of listening to our favorite news channel, we could pay more attention to what we can learn from animals. Like the natives who saved their own lives by following the animals to safety, we can help ourselves.

We can refuse to deny or magnify problems brought on by changes. Instead of torturing ourselves with feelings brought on by negative thoughts, we can reframe our thoughts. We can recognize and give thanks for the blessings that we now have as a result of what many have done to improve life.

The horrible memories of his time at war were stored in Ryan's subconscious mind. They had given him PTSD and were making it impossible for him to live a productive life. Equine therapy forced him to focus his attention on how to ride a horse. By repeatedly doing this new activity, his subconscious mind released some of the hold it had on him. As he continued to focus more of his attention on mastering horse-back riding, his symptoms of PTSD decreased and his ability to live a productive life increased.

Joan Dalton chose to use what she learned from an intense childhood experience to help others. Instead of crippling herself by holding onto the anger she undoubtedly felt towards her parents for killing her

dog, she noticed similarities between acting out teens and her beloved pet. Observing the similarities inspired her to provide her students with an opportunity to care for pets. The program she founded increased her students' abilities to become productive members of society and led to prison programs that rehabilitate prisoners by pairing them with pets.

I've worked as a psychotherapist for more than thirty years. Most of the clients I've worked with suffer from mild to severe codependency. The ones who are severely codependent put up with very abusive partners. Ones who are less codependent, learn to speak assertively, to set boundaries and give up some of their tunnel vision. Instead of treating their abusive partner as their god and obeying his or her every command, they learn to take up for themselves. Pets help them to do this. By receiving the unconditional love that pets give, they stop believing that they cannot be happy unless they get the love they crave from their designated person.

We cannot make anyone love us. In fact, some people are incapable of giving love. But most pets give us unconditional love. More importantly, as human beings who are created in the image and likeness of love, we have a need to give love. Pets help us to fulfill that need and to adapt to life's inevitable changes.



*Everything Happens For A Reason*

For many of us, caring for our pet(s) give us a purpose. They help us to be less self-absorbed and more interested in the well-being of something besides ourselves. Our love for them improves our attitude, the one thing we can control.

*“Animals are such agreeable friends. They ask no questions; they pass no criticism.”*

George Eliot

## **Chapter 3:**

### **A Hint From Heaven**

I have chosen to write about a mental health professional for a reason. My work as a psychotherapist, for more than thirty years, has convinced me that much human suffering is caused by how we think. It is something we have control over. We can change our lives and how we feel by changing the way we think. Therefore, I'm hoping that reading about Viktor Frankl's life and his work will inspire readers to improve their lives by monitoring their thoughts.

Viktor Frankl, a Jewish teenager, living in Austria, was looking for answers to some of life's mysteries. He studied what his countryman, the Father of Psychiatry Sigmund Freud, said about the meaning of life. Freud said man would always have an unrequited need to understand the meaning of life because it is a meaningless illusion. Freud explained that man is driven by what he called the Pleasure Principle, and his desires are stored in his unconscious mind. He believed that our repressed memories were responsible for our neurotic thoughts and behaviors and our dreams were a window to our unconscious minds. He provided his patients with psychotherapy to help them become conscious of their repressed memories. It left many of them blaming their parents

and their past for their shortcomings and feeling incapable of changing themselves and their lives.

The second well known Austrian psychiatrist, Alfre Adler, was one of Freud's colleagues. His belief about the meaning of life was different from Freud's. He stated that man wants to overcome his feelings of inferiority and feel significant. He believed individuals were more conscious and more in control of their thoughts and actions than Freud gave them credit for being. He said the meaning of life is the meaning the individual assigns to it and problems are caused by ones who are not interested in their fellowman. His more humanistic approach to therapy took into account his clients' environment, their cultures, and their interactions with others. He believed that his role was to help them to establish healthy, realistic, rewarding goals so they would feel empowered and live satisfying lives.

The third Vienna psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, studied the works of Freud and Adler. At age nineteen, he was a student at the University of Vienna when he learned about a significant increase in the number of high school students who had committed suicide. He offered free counseling services to depressed youths who were contemplating suicide. The number of suicide attempts and completions among his clients greatly decreased. He believed that he had helped them by encouraging them to find meaning in their lives.

During this same time period, Hitler was rising to power and many anti-Semitic laws were passed. Feeling worried about his fate under Nazi rule, Frankl applied for a visa to the United States. His parents were overjoyed by the thought of their son being able to escape the Nazis by moving to America. However, when Viktor received the visa, he felt torn between his desire to leave and his need to stay and watch out for his aging parents. While he was struggling with the decision to stay or leave, he saw part of an engraved piece of marble at his parents' home. He asked his father what it was. His father told him he'd taken it from a nearby, nearly destroyed synagogue. His father said it had one of the ten commandments written on it. Viktor asked his father which one of the commandments was on it. His father replied, "Thou shall honor thy mother and father." Viktor decided that what was written on the marble was the answer to his prayers. He called it a "hint from Heaven" and allowed his visa to expire. He later stated that making this decision gave him a wonderful peaceful feeling.

While the Nazis continued to dominate Germany and take over other European countries, Frankl worked as the head of the Vienna psychiatric hospital for female patients who were at risk for committing suicide. By helping them to find their purpose, their reason for living, their attitudes improved and their desire to kill themselves decreased.

In 1938, Germany invaded Austria. After that, because Frankl was Jewish, he was not allowed to treat Aryan patients. He became the director of the Neurological Department of the Rothschild hospital because it was the only hospital that was still allowed to treat Jews. There he sabotaged Nazi procedures by giving mentally ill patients a false diagnosis so they would not be euthanized.

In 1941, Frankl started to write about what he believed was the meaning of life. He took what he'd learned from his education and from his work experiences and created a manuscript called "The Doctor And The Soul". Before finding what he called a "hint from Heaven" on the piece of marble at his parents' home, he had hoped to go to America where he could continue to work as a doctor and complete his manuscript. The manuscript contained what he referred to as logotherapy. Logo is the Greek word for meaning. In it, he stated that what humans want most is a meaningful life that gives them purpose.

At the Rothschild hospital, in 1942, he met a nurse named Tilly. They fell in love, got married and started a family. Under the Nazi regime, Jews were not allowed to reproduce so Tilly was forced to have an abortion. A year later, Tilly, Viktor and his parents were taken to the Teresian Ghetto, North of Prague.

After they arrived at the ghetto, men known as the Capos separated family members. The Capos were prisoners chosen by the Nazis to do their job because they were thought to have no scruples. They had permission inside themselves to inflict physical and psychological injuries upon the prisoners the SS had assigned them to control. The preferential treatment the Capos received from the Nazis persuaded them to keep their rewards by doing as they were told to do. They seemed to be disconnected from their hearts and unaffected by the cruelty they inflicted upon prisoners. They used brutal force, dishonesty, and betrayals to keep privileges that spared them the consequences of starvation and death.

From what was then called the ghetto, as many as eighty prisoners in each coach section of a train were taken to concentration camps. The camps were located miles from civilization. During the transport, prisoners sat on top of their luggage, hoping to arrive at munitions factories where they'd be forced to provide free labor. Many of them dreaded the thought of going to Auschwitz which was referred to as a death camp and as a killing factory because it was known to have massacres, gas chambers and crematories.

Viktor and his family were among the fifteen hundred passengers who'd been on the train for several days and nights. They felt their hearts sink when the train stopped at Auschwitz. They watched emaciated prisoners, dressed in rags, walking along desolate roads. The passengers were instructed to leave their luggage inside the train and to separate into two lines. A tall man, dressed in a spotless uniform, used his finger to signal each one of them to go to the right or to the left. Later, from prisoners who'd been at the camp for some time, they learned what the lines meant. Passengers who looked strong enough for manual labor and harsh living conditions were sent to the right line. The left line was reserved for women and for prisoners who appeared to be too sick or weak to be of use to the Nazis. They were soon sent to the gas chambers.

For those who passed the first selection, the Capos instructed them to stand on the spread-out blankets, to get naked and to drop all their possessions onto the blankets. The prisoners watched each other drop their clothes, their watches and other valuable pieces of jewelry onto the blankets. Viktor asked if he could hold onto his wedding ring and his manuscript. The Capos laughed at his request and forced him to give them up. The only things any of them were allowed to keep were their shoes, belts and suspenders. While they were standing together, naked, the Capos shaved all the hair off their bodies.

From then on, during their imprisonment, they were known only by the number tattooed on their arms.

By taking their toothbrushes and by not providing them with running water, the captives' need and desire for cleanliness was also taken away from them. They wore the same, unwashed clothes for six months.

The immense camp was surrounded by rows of electrical, barbed wire fences. It was also protected by search lights and by armed guards standing on watch towers.

Together, five hundred prisoners were held in a shed built for two hundred. Beds were built on tiers. Each tier measured six and a half to eight feet wide. Nine prisoners shared a tier and two blankets. They made room for each other by sleeping on their sides. They were grateful for the way their bodies huddled together helped in their fight against the bitter cold temperatures.

Before the sun came up, they followed Capos' orders to march along the road that took them to their work location. If they did not keep up with the group, Capos hit them with the butt of their rifles. They showed no compassion for men who were walking bare foot in the snow or in shoes that hurt their feet.



During the day, the prisoners worked as manual laborers. Men who were new to the camp worked in latrines and sewers. Those who had been there longer used shovels to dig up the ground and put in railroad tracks. Once, Viktor, all by himself, built a tunnel for an under-road water main. Each day, the only nutrition he was given was a watered-down bowl of soup and one piece of bread. His reward for doing this enormous amount of work was fifty pfennigs which he could use to buy twelve cigarettes or twelve bowls of soup. Because Viktor had at least three reasons to want to live, he chose the soup.

His immediate reason for wanting to stay alive was to help other prisoners adapt to life in the concentration camp. He looked for opportunities to tell them to do what they could to appear strong and healthy so they could avoid being sent to what the Capos called the showers which in reality were gas chambers. Frankl told them to stand tall, to follow orders and to ignore the pain they felt so they could work hard and walk briskly. Viktor needed to continue to remind himself and others of this important information because two of the worst consequences of their imprisonment was not knowing when they'd be released and if they'd survive.

His second reason for wanting to live was his desire to be reunited with his family. When life in the camp

felt unbearable, he recalled wonderful times he'd spent with his wife. He remembered her smile, her frank and encouraging words. When he concentrated on their time together, he could feel her presence. He did not know that his father had died during the first six months at Auschwitz or where his wife and mother were, so he held onto his desire to be with them.

Completing his manuscript and thereby sharing his thoughts about logotherapy gave him his third reason for living. He believed that prisoners who chose the cigarettes instead of the soup had given up their will to live. Living in the concentration camp was reinforcing his belief that what people need most is purpose. He noticed that prisoners who had a less hardy nature survived better than those who were physically strong but were not thinking about why they wanted to stay alive. Some of them committed suicide by running into the electric fence that surrounded the camp.

For the next four years, Viktor used his beliefs to survive deplorable living conditions. He noticed that things he had taken for granted when he was free, like a good night's sleep, a chance to sit down, a brief reprieve from hunger, he appreciated more than ever before. He attributed his change in feelings to the positive attitude he'd adopted and to the fact that humans cannot attain happiness by seeking it. Rather, he believed, happiness comes to

us when we appreciate what we have. On scraps of paper he found, he wrote down, "The only thing human beings can control is their attitude." He challenged himself to continue to have a positive attitude despite what he and the other concentration camp prisoners were experiencing. Believing that having a purpose is what makes it possible for humans to want to live under any condition inspired him to hold onto his reasons for living.

The years Frankl spent in concentration camps (1942-1945) reinforced his thinking about what people need most. He later wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." The years he spent in concentration camps dramatically strengthened his belief about what human beings desire and need above all else.

Finally, WWII ended and the survivors of the concentration camps were freed. Eleven million captives who were Jewish, communists, gypsies, homosexuals, physically or mentally defective, according to the Third Reich, died from starvation, suicide, diseases, and genocide. Viktor survived. After his release from the concentration camp, he learned that his wife, his parents, and his brother were dead. His sister managed to survive by moving to Italy.

After being set free, Viktor wrote a letter to his loved ones who were still alive. It revealed that he felt lonely, sad and tired. He admitted that all he had left were his duties. He was obviously going through his inevitable and necessary grief period.

Leaving the camp and learning about the deaths of his family members took away two of Viktor's reasons for living. But, he still had his work. Surviving life in the concentration camp strengthened him and his belief in logotherapy. He was eager to teach others that our primary goal in life is not for pleasure or for power as Freud and Adler claimed. He wanted his followers to know that we are driven by the discovery and the pursuit of what we personally find meaningful. No one can take from us what we hold to be true and dear inside ourselves. Frankl told his students, his audiences and his readers that suffering in life is inevitable. He stated that in life we will all experience hardships and obstacles. These things will make us stronger if we retain the right attitude and live purposefully.

Logotherapy is a type of psychotherapy that combines psychology and philosophy. The three basic principles of logotherapy are: 1) Life has meaning under all circumstances, even the most miserable ones. 2) Our main motivation for living is our will to find meaning in life. 3) We have the freedom to find meaning in what we do, and what we experience or at least in the stance we take

when faced with a situation of unchangeable suffering.

After his release from the camp, he rewrote the manuscript that the Nazis took from him and turned it into a book called "Man's Search For Meaning". He thought that the information contained in his book would be helpful to readers who were prone to despair. It describes, in detail, what life was like in concentration camps, and how his Holocaust experience reinforced his beliefs about what human beings need most. He taught that each person has a healthy core, that life offers all of us purpose and meaning and it does not owe any of us happiness. He warned against becoming materialistic and hedonistic.

While his book was selling over ten million copies in dozens of languages, Dr. Frankl was teaching at the University of Vienna and as a world-wide guest speaker. American universities, including Harvard and Stanford, hired him to work as a visiting professor. Altogether, he lectured at two hundred nine universities on five continents. From them, he received twenty-nine honorary doctorates. He taught that the only thing human beings can control is our attitude. He told his listeners and his readers that none of us can escape suffering, but we can choose how we cope with it. He repeatedly stated that we are conscious beings who are responsible for our decisions and what we need most is to live

meaningful lives. He believed that living a meaningless life was the underlying cause of anxiety, depression and neurosis. He stated that life has meaning in all circumstances and when we cannot change our circumstances, we are forced to change ourselves.

Instead of focusing on the past as Freud and Adler did, Frankl talked more about our futures. He stated that what gives life purpose is our love for someone, creating a work or doing a deed and adopting a modified attitude toward inevitable suffering. The work that he began before he was imprisoned was heavily influenced by the time he spent in concentration camps. The attitude he embraced to help him survive the tortures of the camps, solidified his belief in the fact that the only thing that cannot be taken from us is our positive attitude.

He encouraged his listeners and readers to use their suffering as springboards to help others to avoid similar situations and consequences. He warned them about adopting a hopeless attitude toward anything. He explained that our minds are vacuums that fill up with the thoughts we put into them.

In 1947, the Red Cross verified the death of Tilly, Frankl's first wife. She died from typhus in a concentration camp known as Bergen-Belsen. Shortly thereafter, he met and married a Catholic woman he called Elly. Together they attended

services at the Catholic church and at the synagogue. They celebrated Christmas and Hanukkah. They had a daughter named Gabriele who became a child psychologist.

After WWII, he wrote thirty-three more books. In them, he said that human beings have a mind and a body, but at our core we are spirit. He wrote that our cores are healthy and each one is unique. He encouraged his readers to find their purpose by responding authentically and humanely to life's challenges. He explained that the best way to find our purpose in life is by being true to ourselves and willing to serve others. He suggested we do this by creating a work, by loving someone or by adopting a modified attitude towards inevitable suffering.

In 1977, a successful lawyer named Joseph B. Fabry, moved to America. He too had survived the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp. He supported Frankl's theories by opening the Institute of Logotherapy in Berkeley, California.

In 1985, Dr. Frankl was awarded the Oskar Pfister award for the important contributions he made to religion and psychiatry.

In 1992, five years before his death, Frankl founded the Viktor Frankl Institute in Vienna to further his teachings.

## **Summary**

Hitler's rise to power and WWII was one of the worst times in history. However, the horrific consequences created during that time period, forced many people to change their thinking. Even many of Hitler's followers stopped believing in a superior race and became more accepting of people, regardless of their race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

Viktor Frankl changed the kind of therapy that Freud practiced to logotherapy which is like the psychotherapy used today. Instead of asking our clients to lie down on a couch and share what they remember from their childhood, we ask them to share what's bothering them. We attempt to go into their world by treating them with warmth, empathy, genuine concern and the belief that our clients will be able to solve their own problems. We ask them open ended questions, ones that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no answer. These questions are used to help our clients think about possible solutions to their problems.

A good example of how logotherapy works comes from how Dr. Frankl helped one of his clients overcome the depression he experienced after the death of his wife. Frankl asked his client how he thought his wife would have felt if he had died before her. The client stated that she would have been very sad. Dr. Frankl then suggested that by



outliving her, he had spared her terrible suffering. Immediately, his client had a new attitude about the loss of his wife. Instead of feeling victimized by her death, he could now find a good reason for why he had outlived her. Dr. Frankl's question helped his client to view his situation differently, to change his attitude and thereby lift his depression.

Today, we use the word "reframing" to describe how Dr. Frankl helped his client to change his thinking and overcome his depression. Reframing is a word used to describe the attitude we have towards any given circumstance. If we reframe something, we change the way we view it. By pointing out how his loss had spared his wife suffering, Frankl's client had a new way to view his wife's death. Instead of feeling victimized by his loss, he was comforted knowing that he and not his wife was suffering emotionally.

A good open ended question today's therapists use to help clients solve their problems is: "Is there anything you can do to make your situation better?" Asking them this question, encourages them to think about what they can and cannot do. By thinking about this, clients often conclude that there is nothing they can do except think differently about what's bothering them. It helps them to stop trying to control what they cannot control and to use their time and energy to change what they can change. Doing this makes it possible for them to give up their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness which is

the cause of their depression. It also reduces their anxiety by helping them to stop trying to do the impossible.

After surviving the horrors of life in a concentration camp by monitoring his attitude, Viktor Frankl was the perfect candidate to teach logotherapy to millions. He obviously continued to believe that the marble stone with the commandment written on it was still a hint from Heaven. Instead of becoming bitter and blaming God for his hardships, he built a new life for himself and used what he learned from his past to help others.

Dr. Frankl had packed what he needed inside himself for his difficult journey. In spite of being confined and tortured in a concentration camp, he found good reasons, (purpose) to stay alive. After learning that his wife and parents were deceased, he gave his life meaning by focusing on his desire to finish the logotherapy work he'd begun. Because he believed that our attitude is the one thing we control, something no one can take away from us, he used his to stay alive in the camps and to thrive after the war was over. Doing so required him to be courageous. Instead of becoming self-absorbed by his own situation, he was mindful of the needs of other prisoners and showed them kindness.

He remained true to himself by refusing to think of himself as a victim. He decreased his suffering by

*Everything Happens For A Reason*

taking full responsibility for his attitude and he helped many others to do the same.

*“Those who have ‘why’ to live can bear  
with almost any ‘how’.”*

Friedrich Nietzsche

## **Chapter 6: Valuable Lessons Learned**

Sometimes bad things happen to good people because, we as human beings created in the image and likeness of love, have not learned all we need to know. The following chapter provides a good example of how a kinder, more loving, generous approach to a problem brought about a better outcome. The chapter outlines one of the worst times in human history. It tells a brief history of how the signing of the Treaty of Versailles after WWI led to the start of WWII. And it tells how one loving soldier took the lesson learned from this tragedy and created a plan to prevent a third World War.

After WWI, Europe was in shambles. Its bridges, buildings, factories, mines and railroads were in ruins. While all of Europe was struggling to rebuild, the country living with the most hardships was Germany. By signing the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was forced to give up many territories and colonies, agree to greatly limit the size of their military and to pay reparations in the amount of approximately six thousand-six hundred million dollars, an amount equivalent to about thirty-two billion dollars today. The main objectives of the Treaty were to punish Germany for being the instigator of the Great War and to make it impossible for them to start another war. The Treaty even contained a war guilt clause

which stated that Germany should accept the blame for starting WWI.

Between 1919 and 1923, Germany's weakened economy made it impossible for them to pay their reparations. Consequently, France and Belgium took control of Germany's mines, factories, steelworks, and railroads to make up for their missing payments. This act made many of Germany's working class lose their jobs.

While focusing on their main objectives, the authors and signers of the Treaty of Versailles overlooked the effect their treaty would have on the German people. Right from the start, many Germans were outraged by the terms of the Treaty. Because the Treaty was signed in November of 1918, some Germans referred to those who had agreed to its terms as "November Criminals".

In 1922, Germany's economic depression made it impossible for them to pay their reparations. To offset this, the German government printed money that was not backed by the gold standard. Shortly thereafter, they entered a period of hyperinflation because their money, the mark, had very little value. Businesses failed, and unemployment soared. Their working class was hit hardest so they banded together in search of a new leader who promised them a better way of life.

Adolph Hitler, who had served in the Great War, used this time of desperation to become politically well known. In 1924 he was accused of treason for leading a rally in a beer hall in Munich. He was sentenced to five years in prison, but only served nine months. During his incarceration, he wrote "Mein Kampf", an over seven-hundred-page book, which outlined his political beliefs and goals. He wrote about his desire to revise the Treaty of Versailles. In doing so he intended to unite Germany into one Reich, make Germany economically self-sufficient and militarily secure, and take over some of their neighboring lands. The sale of his book made him a millionaire. The book's contents became well known because free copies were given to newlywed German couples. What captured the attention of even more people was Hitler's ability to tap into the energy of the German people. During a time when many of them felt hopeless, Hitler, a natural orator, gave fiery speeches that gave the German people hope for a better tomorrow. His followers turned the guilt and shame the Treaty of Versailles had dumped on them into anger for being mistreated. They united under the hope that this new leader would restore their pride and prosperity. Hitler boldly stated that many of Germany's problems could be solved if all the Jews and communist were forced to leave the country. By stating this, he created a common enemy. Many who listened to him found it easy to blame Jews for their current situation because the Jews, the majority of whom

had supported the Treaty of Versailles, were doing better financially. Historians believe this was true for three main reasons. First, while many Catholics and Protestants believed that the love of money was the root of all evil, Jews believed that their wealth was evidence of their adherence to Jewish laws. Secondly, Jews encouraged their young people to attain higher education. Jewish people who had more education worked as bankers, lawyers, doctors, and corporate leaders. In 1914, only one percent of the German population was Jewish, and sixteen percent of them were corporate heads. Thirdly, Jews were expected to marry each other so they created a tight knit community that financed each other. Consequently, while much of Germany's working class was struggling to survive, most Jews were financially secure.

The Great Depression, that followed the 1929 stock market crash, had an ill effect on all of Europe. Countries that had been awarded reparations from Germany demanded that they be paid what Germany owed them. The financial gains from imports and exports were greatly decreased and most German people could not adequately provide for themselves and their families. Out of desperation, more and more Germans looked for a new leader, one who would deliver them from their hopeless situation.

For many, Hitler was believed to be that leader. He led the Nations Workers Party (Nazi). Only ten years passed from the time he was imprisoned until the Enabling Act was passed in 1934. This Act allowed laws to be passed without Parliament's consent. In other words, a leader could legislate law without the approval of any other governing bodies. All checks and balances were gone. Consequently, Hitler declared himself to be Germany's Fuhrer.

Desperate people do desperate things. In the twenty-one years between the end of WWI in 1918 and 1939 when WWII began, the German people felt desperate. They were ready for a new leader who promised to restore the German Empire. Communications at that time were not what they are today so many Germans may have been unaware of what Hitler was willing to do to accomplish his objectives. During his reign of total control, he denied Jew's citizenship, forbid marriage and sexual relationships between Jews and Gentiles and declared a desire to eliminate "impure" races. He convinced his followers of their need to get rid of Jews, political dissidents, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, and handicapped individuals. After Hitler had established himself as the sole leader of Germany, he ignored the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and boosted the German economy by increasing the size of their military. Then he instructed his armed forces to invade Poland and WWII began. The result was a global conflict that lasted for more



than five years, killed about fifty-six million soldiers and civilians and again left Europe in ruins. Many of the “impure”, who survived the tortures of the concentration camps, had no place to go. A mass migration of Jews from Germany to Israel began. They left with symptoms of anxiety, depression and PTSD. For many, their mental and physical problems plagued them for the rest of their lives.

At the end of WWII, Europe was again left in shambles. American soldiers came home to an intact, free country, and to a GI bill that allowed them to further their educations, start a business or buy a house. By contrast, European men and women were struggling to rebuild their homes, neighborhoods and businesses. One-man, General George Marshall, who had fought in both world wars, had learned some valuable lessons. To prevent the start of a third war, he outlined a plan that helped to rebuild Europe and preserve freedom. As the keynote speaker at a Harvard commencement in 1947, he presented his plan. He described the horrible, current European condition. He stated that he was not against any country or doctrine. His desire was to rid Europe of hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. To do this, he recommended that the United States be willing to spend up to twenty billion dollars to rebuild war-torn regions. Instead of punishing Germany, his plan offered them an opportunity to benefit politically and economically from what the plan offered.

Secretary of State George Marshall said, "Global peace and freedom can be cultivated and achieved through empathy, compassion and co-operation among nations." He backed up his belief by creating the European Recovery Plan, also known as the Marshall Plan. It provided financial assistance to sixteen European countries. Every European government who was willing to help restore normal economic health to the world was allowed to receive the financial assistance. Complying with this agreement required that they co-operate with each other by not blocking any trade agreements. And all goods were to be shipped on American merchant vessels. The countries who received assistance were required to pay back only about five percent of what they received to cover administration costs.

The distribution of funds was based primarily on the country's needs. One-fourth of the money was given to Great Britain. Other countries that received a large portion of the contribution had been our Allies in World War II. Less money was given to the Axis countries and to those who remained neutral during the war. Soviet Union leader, Joseph Stalin, turned the offer down.

The European Recovery Plan was a huge success. It did what it was designed to do. It rescued European countries and stopped the spread of communism. By feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless, it did for Europe what they could not do for

themselves. Countries who may have banned together under another fascist leader were able to remain democratic while they increased their gross national product and gradually decreased their need for food rationing. The boost they got to their economy allowed for the rapid renewal of the European chemical, engineering, and steel industries. This outcome proved that Marshall was right when he said, "Communism wins only in countries plagued with economic problems."

Instead of feeling hopeless, the progress they were making under the Marshall Plan gave Europeans hope for a better tomorrow. Consequently, every country who received aid remained democratic and has lived in peace for over seventy years.

During WWII, United States army chief of staff General Marshall, built and directed the largest American army in history. He was responsible for the war strategy used at D Day on June 6, 1944. President Franklin Roosevelt said he could not sleep at night if Marshall was not in Washington, D.C. available for counsel. In 1947, FDR appointed Marshall Secretary of State.

When asked to describe himself, Marshall said, "My mother is a Republican, my father is a Democrat and I'm an Episcopalian."

The Marshall plan reflects the inclusiveness that is part of the Episcopalian faith. The Episcopalian doctrine states that they believe in a loving, liberating, life-giving God who loves everyone. Instead of punishing Germans, as the Treaty of Versailles had done, Marshall's Plan gave them the same kind of financial help that was given to American allies.

The Episcopalian Church sees itself as the middle way between Protestant and Catholic churches because it practices elements from both. This may be why it celebrates diversity. People from every race, socioeconomic standard and sexual orientation are invited to worship in the Episcopalian faith. Both men and women serve as priests and bishops. And all its members are encouraged to ask questions.

## **Summary**

Life's difficulties provide us with opportunities to grow and change. The difficulty can be a personal problem or something as global as WWII or a pandemic. What's important is for us to stop making the same mistakes. It is far better to learn the valuable lessons that life teaches us.

We can be tricked into believing that using force will solve our problems immediately. However, many lessons that we can learn from history teach us that this is not true. The signers of the Treaty of Versailles believed they could control the German people by punishing them. They failed to consider the uprising that would occur as a result of creating a desperate, hopeless situation for Germany. Fortunately, George Marshall opened his mind to a new way to solve an old problem. Instead of punishing them, he helped them. By doing this, he made it possible for war torn countries to recover economically and politically.

Marshall did not deny or magnify Europe's problems after WWII. Instead, he looked for and found a logical solution. The result of the Treaty of Versailles taught him that using force to try to control Germany did not work so he allowed himself to think "outside the box". I feel certain that he was the subject of much criticism before the results of the Marshall Plan proved that it was working to benefit all free nations.

*Deborah Day Poor, LCSW*

He stopped the spread of communism. All the countries who received aid under the Marshall Plan remained democratic. And his plan ended the European continent's ruinous cycle of warfare. For these reasons, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953.

*"The only way human beings can win a war is to  
prevent it."*

General George Marshall



Deborah writes for people who'd rather be happy than right. Working as a psychotherapist for more than thirty years has taught her that too many of us are our own worst enemy.

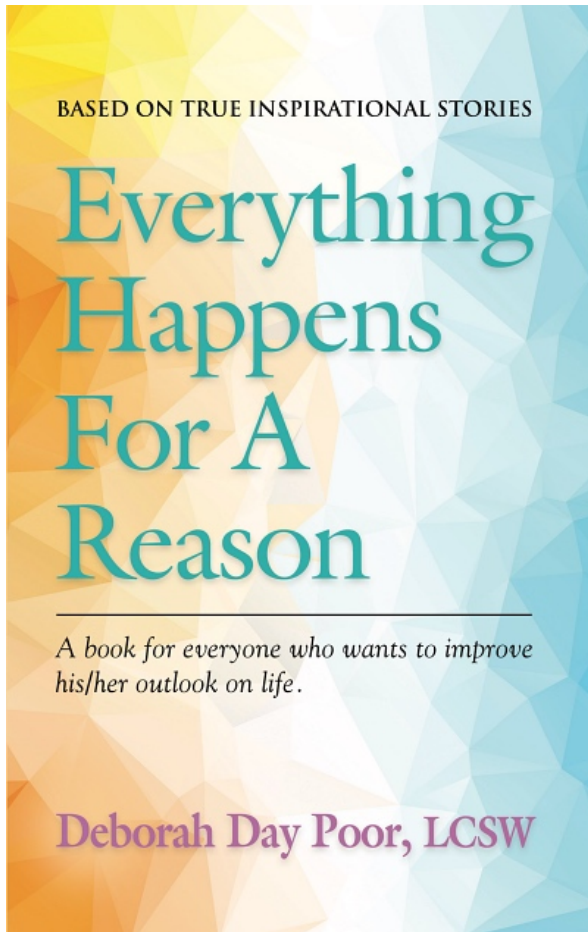
She believes that life is difficult, BUT there is no difficulty too great to be lessened. If you want FREE help from Deborah, visit her web site ([deborahdaypoorlcsw.com](http://deborahdaypoorlcsw.com)) or send a short e-mail to ([deborahpoor@verizon.net](mailto:deborahpoor@verizon.net)) that explains your problem. She will do her best to help you.

In addition to the three books described on her web site, Deborah has written two continuing education courses for her colleagues. They are titled "Couples No Fault Counseling: for couples who'd rather be

happy than right” and “Codependency: Causes, Consequences and Cures”. Professional Development Resources has been selling both of them for more than a decade.

Deborah's latest book, “Everything Happens For A Reason: based on true, inspirational stories” is an excellent choice for book clubs because it covers a broad range of topics. Busy members can choose the topic in her book that most interests them and share what they read. Deborah's easy to read writing style will make them want to read the whole book.





*This book is for everyone who wants to improve his/her outlook on life. Reading about what others have done to improve life on Earth for all of us can change the way we think and make us feel better.*

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