

My Head and Heart, Soul and Strength

Life's tough. Then there's things in life – disappointments, facing attackers, real and imagined fears, childbirth, almost dying, divorce – really tough! I've come to realize I would not be who I am today nor fully appreciate my life and the people in it without these incredible lows. I've definitely had some bumps along the way and I'm grateful for what they gave me in return.

My parents faced it too. Imagine what it was like for my Dad and Mom and the uphill battles they faced in the early 1950's. He fought in the brutal Korean War, lost many friends and classmates. Shortly after arriving to his next assignment in Okinawa, Japan, he met and fell in love with my Mom — only he's Jewish and she's an Episcopalian.

Lucky for me, they did marry. Years later, Dad was assigned to Frankfurt, Germany where I came into the picture. My Mom's doctor was in the hallway talking on the phone to his father in New York City. I was in such a hurry to be born, I came out so fast the doctor almost missed me. A breech baby, I landed feet first — ready to go. Fortunately, the umbilical cord didn't strangle me as I came out. I made up for it all by being a girl. After two boys — the first quite a handful— my Mom and Dad were willing to give one last try for a little girl — success!

As the baby of the family and only girl, I was blessed to be welcomed and loved. As a child, I felt that the sky was the limit. Years later, people and events chipped away at this foundation.

I faced plenty of uphill battles after graduating high school and joining the first class with women at West Point. I would go on to serve 34 years in uniform and command in combat, like my father before me. My choices and journey handed me many (aforementioned) life challenges. Several came with a very high personal cost. I was finding my way in the world, just like everyone else. Once I learned to look forward to push past uncomfortable situations, I fully embraced the blessings that emerged from these daily hardships. Life has a way of testing all of us. I prefer doing it early and often — a valuable gift indeed... wrapped in a love punch!

The tougher things became, the more perspective I gained... until I almost lost it all. While everything seemed fine, I thought my marriage only had a few issues until... pregnancy complications and resulting medical issues nearly killed me, almost took away my career, and revealed an unsupportive marriage. Stress is a great differentiator, bringing out the best or worst in someone. Blessed with a daughter like my parents, she filled me with joy. She became my beacon of light guiding me through a stormy period, where I would be mightily tested.

Although I'd already faced plenty of tough times, this period took years to move past. Why did things seem to be getting harder and harder? Losing my way, I was no longer the person I wanted to be for my daughter or myself. Sliding down to rock bottom, one day I collapsed on the floor. A military Chaplain's coin on a table caught my eye. One hand was reaching through the water to save another from the depths. The quote on the coin gave me divine inspiration and faith in the future. It gave me the strength to stand back up, taking one step at a time.

Soon after, I met Doug. He's the love of my life. I almost didn't recognize him because of the walls of distrust I had built. He earned my trust as a friend first. My life was finally feeling better. With Doug's help, I opened my mind, my heart and my soul again to life and love.

Even though life's rarely easy, I wouldn't want it any other way. We're busier than ever, we take on things that keep testing us, and look for ways to give a helping hand to others. It's clear that life bruises everyone. Still, our human spirit is stronger than we think. When I do what I do, others see what's possible when they engage their best, the true power of the human spirit. It's comforting to know inner peace is possible in a world filled with struggle and conflict.

Just like when my parents first welcomed and loved me as I struggled to enter this world, that welcoming feeling and love cradles me now. No matter how battered I've been by life, my scars are hard-earned and something I take pride in. It's much easier to see the joy in everyday situations. The people in my life and my faith now wrap me in a love that lights up within me and in the people around me, to include my Holy Apostles family. It's really good to be home again.

*Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and
with all your soul and
with all your strength.*
-- Deuteronomy 6:5

