

**If you want an egg roll,
get out of the pizzeria**

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This book is sold with the understanding that the author is not engaged in rendering psychological, financial, legal, or other professional services. While the author is a shopping expert, if expert assistance or counseling is needed, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

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Introduction: My Story

Shopping saved my life. I don't mean I found the perfect shoes to go with my black Tahari dress kind of shopping. I mean shopping literally saved my life. Somewhere along the road to where I am today—a dentist, a wife, a mother, and a healthy woman—two periods of my life grabbed me and shook me deeply. The first involved my relationships. The second was about my health. This book is about what I learned, and I hope it can help you get through your obstacles. Maybe even save your life.

In one cold, dismal week in December 1984, my marriage fell apart; I was fired from my job, and my car was destroyed. Any one of those events would have been stressful enough, but to have all three hit the same week devastated me. Every support system and source of security I had, or thought I had, disappeared.

Ending the marriage broke my heart, losing the ability to stay financially afloat terrified me, and losing the car that would get me to a new job put me over the edge. All I could do was cry. My sister listened to me through my tears. When my sorrow and sobs had run their course, she reminded me that I was, and had always been, an excellent shopper. She told me to go shopping.

She didn't mean for me to go shopping for a new wardrobe or a purse. She didn't mean for me to go on a melt-the-plastic-credit-card shopping spree. She meant I should get organized, and, with the same shopping skills I use to buy a new outfit, I should start shopping for a new job, a new place to live, a new relationship, and a new car.

I let her words sink in, and, as I considered her suggestion, I realized she was right. I had a big list. I did go shopping. These same skills that I used in the past to find the perfect dress, or the best birthday gift for my daughter, I brought into play to shop for my current needs. It worked. I got a safe car, a rewarding career which I look forward to each day, and—best for last—a husband who, to this day, remains the love of my life.

If that had been the end of my shopping story, I wouldn't have written this book. I would have cued the romantic music and credits, and that would have been my happy ending. But that wasn't the end of my story.

As my son entered the first grade, I was diagnosed with stage-four non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a virtual death sentence. This wasn't a wake-up call to take better care of myself. It was a last call, "Attention all shoppers, the store will be closing in fifteen minutes" kind of call.

I couldn't cure this with a shopping trip. Where do they sell a new, healthy body and a second chance? For months I woke up thinking, *What terrible thing is going to happen to me today?* I began waking up before dawn so I'd have extra time to worry. By thirty minutes after opening my eyes, I managed to get myself totally and completely unhinged.

I had no framework for this disease. I felt lonely, scared, and out of control. I felt afraid of living and afraid of dying. I struggled with my emotions. I felt paralyzed with fear and despair, unable to move but wanting to run away, to get away from what I thought and felt. I blamed everyone and everything. I felt mad at myself and angry with God.

I had just completed my fourth round of chemotherapy when the overwhelming thought, *I can't take it anymore*, flooded my being. I felt ready to die, but on my terms. Since dying became the only thing I could control, I decided to commit suicide.

Then the phone rang:

"What's doing?" asked my friend Melissa, who had battled cancer twice.

"I'm at the end of my rope, and I'm thinking of killing myself." The tears rolled down my face. There was nothing anyone could say or do to change my mind.

"Did you call the suicide hotline?" Melissa asked.

"Did you?" I asked back.

"Yes, five times," she said.

"What did they say?"

"The line was busy, so I kept trying. Then I had to stop to make dinner for my kids."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, the absurdity hit me. I began laughing. I was hysterical, but no longer with hopelessness. I kept crying, not from pain, but from knowing I was part of a family that needed me. My children would be home from school in a little over an hour to fill our home with the daily normalcy of life—math homework due tomorrow, a note that needed my signature, a lost ballet slipper. And then there would be dinner before scouts and dancing school. They were little things, but it was enough to change my perspective.

It woke me up and pulled me back into a place of hope as I realized that life, love, and all the little moments that make them up were precious. I got through the despair, and I never returned to that terrible place again. In that instant I decided that I may not have much time left, but I was going to live every minute of it to the fullest.

I decided my life was worth the effort it required to participate in this world. It was time for a new shopping list. I needed to shop for optimism that I would survive my illness; shop for career adjustment, because my fingers were numb from the chemo; and shop for self-expression that the disease couldn't take away from me.

The shopping metaphor helped me back into life. I used the same shopping skills I had years ago when my life fell apart. I filled my list with mostly emotional needs—hope, faith, resiliency, and an optimistic attitude—to start. I knew these less tangible items could be acquired with the same shopping expertise I had used in the past.

I realized that I could take the shopping metaphor a step further. I could view the people in my life as stores in my mall, and what each person offered in the relationship could be considered their unique inventory. They shopped as customers in my store to get certain needs met, and I shopped in theirs for my needs.

When my treatments ended and my health began to return, I looked at my relationships with myself and others—my metaphorical store—and realized I needed to make some renovations to become stronger for me to face the world. My customers, friends, and family who needed me, lined up outside my doors. I needed to replenish both my mind and body. Aha! I needed to visit the metaphoric food court of my mall, a place to nourish myself.

Learn to Shop Well and Get What You Want Out of Life

For twenty-five years as a dentist, I have exclusively treated people who suffer from severe and persistent headaches, face pain, and a condition many people call TMJ. As a result of their condition, the horrible pain creates intense stress that affects their work, relationships,

health, finances, and ability to carry out daily functions. I see the result of their pain on both a physical and emotional level, and I help them get past the trauma and back into living a satisfying life.

In this book, I'll share with you the powerful tools that I teach my patients and workshop participants to improve relationships, manage stress, relieve pain, and take back their lives. It doesn't matter whether you call this book a road map, a self-help book, or a shopping list. What does matter is that the information I'm about to tell you works. There are six simple rules for changing your life:

1. The only person you can change is YOU.
2. You have choices.
3. Your beliefs control your actions and you control your beliefs.
4. You can start today.
5. The universe will support you.
6. You are worthy of getting your needs met.

The shopping metaphor can help you break through obsessive and nonproductive thinking about relationships, work, finances, health, self-esteem, and other roadblocks. It offers a way in bringing clarity, creativity, and a sense of humor into transforming life's problems. It's just plain fun ... and it works like magic.

Our journey begins at the mall. Don't laugh, at least not too hard. At the end of the day, shopping for anything is all about making choices. If you thought you were a good shopper before, look out. You're about to become a shopping diva.



MY SHOPPING NOTES



