

Secrets from the Tortoise

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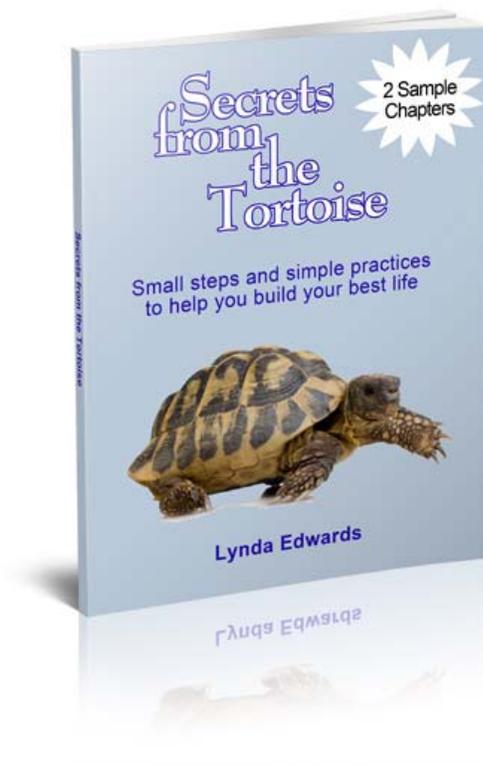
Small steps and simple practices
to help you build your best life



Lynda Edwards

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Disclaimer

The material ahead is designed to provide general information and suggestions about the subject areas covered. Although this material is offered in good faith, it also comes with the expectation that readers will use sound judgment in following any of the recommendations herein. In other words, this is not a one-size-fits-all book. While much of its material may apply to you, some of it may not.

Furthermore, the book is sold with the understanding that neither its publisher nor its author are rendering professional legal, financial, medical, psychological, relationship, or career advice. If you need expert assistance in these areas, please seek the services of a competent professional.

Just So You Know...

With regard to the stories and examples in this book, the ones I invented will be obvious. Those from real life I altered enough to protect people's privacy. Stories involving only myself describe what I actually experienced.

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My Own Introduction to Small Steps

One summer in the late-Nineties, my life began sliding South and moving fast. Physically, emotionally, even financially to a degree, stuff was coming apart all over the place. In retrospect, I view my life during that summer and several ensuing years as a series of perfect storms. Each “storm” combining just the right set of symptoms and circumstances to flatten me on the floor of the ring.

With each knockdown, though, the getting-up took longer. Exhausted, ill, often stretched paper thin, I sensed the count of ten drawing closer. Some days I didn’t much care, either. (If you imagine your own adrenal glands locked in double fast-forward, you’ll get a sense of the fun I was having.)

This was not a good picture. So I had to either pull myself together or say good-bye to the life I’d known. Maybe even say good-bye to life, period, if I couldn’t reverse things a little. Swaying there at the crossroads, half-expecting the owl to call my name, I felt that surely the key lay somewhere within. But no blinding insights came knocking.

Still, I knew I had to get out of the “ring.” The other elements I’d address as I could, but first things first. After all, how much could I do with the rest of my life if I was a basket case physically? Accordingly, I began listening (finally) to my gut.

That in turn led me to some cautious steps in a different direction. The first: broadening my focus beyond exclusively Western medicine. Thus, I hooked up with some remarkable complimentary healers—one by one. Some of those

therapies wouldn't even have occurred to me previously. But hard times tend to soften hard cases, I find.

Through trial and error, I also located a couple of terrific medical doctors. With the help of them all, plus my own clutching fingernails, I hauled myself back up the ropes. Naturally, there were setbacks—sometimes quite harsh—but I did finally get out of the ring. And I'm here to tell you that it was small steps all the way.

That complex and arduous process led me to some further steps, as well. After regaining some ground with my health, I also wanted my broader life to work better. This too has taken place (gradually) over time, an expedition that continues to intrigue me. Oh, let's be honest: sometimes it's more fun than a barrel of monkeys.

Much of what I've learned during this journey I'll be sharing with you here. Perhaps those observations can in some way help you sort out, change, or buff up your own life. That is my great hope and also why I squeezed out this book. Because, although it draws heavily from my own experience and observations, the book is really about you—

- ❖ Trusting yourself to know your own truth.
- ❖ Facing up to what you really want and then going after it.
- ❖ Being happy right here and right now.

Speaking of You

Feeling basically okay with your here and now already? If so, wonderful: my compliments. But you might also like to tinker a bit. Perhaps reorient the household work-play ratio, or maybe tweak your finances in certain ways. It's never too late to get serious about your money, as I can attest.

But you may want to punch up some other area entirely. It's possible, for example, that you've allowed the needs (often genuine) of others to edge aside your own. Well, that happens when people have kids, spouses/significant others, and aging parents; it's part of the rhythm of life. But you also may hear the clock ticking and understand at last that it ticks for thee. Could be time for some adjustments.

Or maybe a health issue is crowding you off the swings. Or you want "more" from life, at least something different, but don't quite know what that would look like. Whatever your desires, and whether or not you know them at this moment, the practices in this book can help you go after them—step by step.

So let the journey begin! What, you weren't expecting a trip? Not to worry: I think you'll like this one. For one thing, you're in charge. And, for another, such a journey could take you to some interesting places relative to yourself. Perhaps you've already observed that even a single change, a small step in a new direction, often leads to another and then another. Before you know it, a whole new path opens before you, and one you decide to pursue. Behold your journey.

To begin it, though, you'll have to stick your foot out. No, not to trip somebody but to put that foot on the path. So, why not ease into the fine-tuning and second-chancing that's waited patiently and perhaps lengthily for your attention? Go ahead and make a start. Take that first step. Discover for yourself where it leads and in which directions, for that will be not only the great question but also the great adventure.

My Role

Wondering what my role is in all this? Simply to offer structure and guidance learned "on the job." Although I can describe some of the terrain, you're the one who'll do the exploring. You're also the one who knows, or will discover, how you want your life to be.

Guided however you wish by my observations and suggestions, you can begin working toward that life. At the same time, you'll undoubtedly take more pleasure in the one you're living right now. So, it's win-win all the way. Are you throwing in?

If you answer no, please don't try to tell either of us that it's because you're too old or it's "too late." For as long as you're still breathing, you can influence your life. You can make changes. You can get things working and feeling better for yourself. In other words, the game ain't over 'til the player—that's you—folds. Meanwhile, the life you want is waiting for you on the field, Ace. Time to get out there and score.

Why it's Best to Grant Your Own Wishes

Gazing dejectedly across a sandy beach, a fed-up woman ponders her life. Such a hard worker, this woman, but today she's dropped everything and gone AWOL. Why? Because it's just not working for her. Overworked and underappreciated, she feels trapped on a treadmill of other people's needs and expectations.

As for enjoyment or fun, forget it. Who's got time? Who even remembers how? And lonely? She could write a ninety-pound book on lonely. What would it be like to share her life with a real partner instead of that jerk back at the house? Someone who genuinely cared about her and lent a hand now and then. Never seems to work out that way, though. In fact, she's pretty much given up on such hopes. Clearly, that kind of life is something only other people get to have. Oh, well...

As she prepares to trudge back home, the woman hears her cell phone ringing. Probably somebody wanting her to DO something. But when she pulls the phone out of her pocket, no name appears on the screen—only a softly glowing image. Peering more closely, she sees...a genie lamp? Oh puleez! Slapping on her reading glasses, she looks again. Still there; still a lamp. “Ho-ho,” thinks the woman sourly, as she punches the talk button. “Like I need practical jokes on a crummy day like this.”

Whoa—what's this steam coming out of her cell phone?! Jumping back, she tosses the phone a few feet away. There, before her astonished eyes, the steam slowly coalesces into a storybook genie. But how can this Be? Is she hallucinating? Does she need to lay off the sauce? What?!

Just then the genie speaks. “Greetings, Madame,” he purrs, “I, the genie of the lamp, have come to grant your dearest wishes. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is impossible for me to produce. So what would you like? Name two things,” says he, offhandedly axing the traditional third wish. “Just name them and they’re yours.”

Thunderstruck, the woman exclaims, “My God, you’re really here!”

“Indeed I am, Madame. And I’m waiting to hear your two wishes.”

“Hmmm, I don’t know. You strike me as...well, a bit shifty, if you want to know the truth. And besides that, aren’t there supposed to be three wishes? That’s how it’s been in the genie stories I’ve read.”

“Alas, Madame, we live in a world of diminishing resources. So we must all do our best with what we have,” says the genie, piously. “Now, please, tell me what you most long for.”

“What a crock,” thinks the woman to herself. But, after reflecting a bit, she says, “Well, I really would like to get away from here for a while. Just be with myself and get my head together a little. Tell you what: how about you put me into one of the fanciest hotels in the world for at least a month, all expenses paid.”

“Done!” cries the genie, whereupon the woman finds herself in a hotel suite beyond her wildest imagining. “Wow, look at this place!” she exclaims. “I’ve never seen anything like it—not even in magazines. And the view! It feels like I’m standing right on top of the ocean. Oh, this is amazing. Just incredible!”

Turning away from the windows at last, she sees that she’s standing beside a trolley bearing her name. Odd. And her clothing looks...well, like a maid’s uniform, actually. What’s up with that? Now both puzzled and annoyed, the woman exclaims, “Hey—what am I doing in a maid’s outfit? Genie! GENIE! What the (bleep) do you think you’re doing? I’m supposed to be staying in the fanciest hotel in the world.”

“But Madame,” murmurs the genie, appearing out of nowhere. “You are staying in one of the world’s most-elegant hotels, and your room and board are paid for. All of the hotel staff live right here in the basement of the hotel, with meals provided. I really fail to see the problem.”

“You turkey! You ghastly little toad! I cannot believe you did this to me,” cries the woman. “You deliberately tricked me! You know you did.”

“No, Madame, I gave you exactly what you asked for, nothing less and nothing more. But you still have another wish; perhaps you will use it more wisely,” says the genie with a smug little smile.”

Having now lost whatever (minimal) trust she had in this creature, the woman weighs her options. Not that good—she’ll really have to watch her step here. But, crossing her fingers, she decides to take a chance. “Okay, Genie, here’s what I want, and No Tricks!”

“Very well, Madame, lay it on me.”

“I wish to be totally surrounded by exceptional men,” says the woman, “guys who’d give me the shirt off their backs if need be. I want to be around some men who care about people, who lend a hand now and then without always wondering what’s in it for them. Maybe one of them will even care about me.”

“Shazzam!” cries the genie with a flourish. In a heartbeat, the woman stands on glowing wood floors in a beautifully preserved old hall. All around her she sees frescoed walls and gilded molding. Could this be some posh old inn, perhaps somewhere in Italy? And look: guys everywhere. Wow, this is more like it. Maybe she’s misjudged that genie, after all.

But wait a minute—why are all these men wearing dark robes? And they seem awfully startled at the sight of her. Oh, no! No, no, no, no, no. He wouldn’t! But he did: that rotten genie has put her right in the middle of a monastery.

What's wrong with this picture? Well, I really don't think we can quarrel with the monks, all of them great guys. And "Madame" herself is a woman of many parts, although we could argue that she shortchanges herself. For one thing, she quite possibly elevates the needs and wishes of others above her own. Consistently.

For another, she may take few, if any, genuine steps toward what she wants herself. In fact, she may not even know for sure what she does want. Plus, at least in this instance, she leaves wish fulfillment largely to others. And we've just seen where that can lead.

But let's leave Madame to sort things out, since we're really concerned with you, anyway. By her example, though, she highlights a valuable lesson. It's generally best to grant your own wishes. You, for example, quite likely have what it takes to do that: common sense and an open mind, guts and persistence. These—the real magic—probably live within you right now. Like Madame, however, you may not draw upon that magic as often as you could.

So—starting today, why not use your "magic" to get what you want? (Always remembering to add in the power of small steps.) That way, you don't have to worry about tricks or misunderstandings, because who knows better than you what you genuinely want? If you don't know that, or at least don't know for sure, Practice 5 can help you sort it out. Then, off you'll go: a tortoise with an afterburner!

Setting Off

“It’s better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.”

James Thurber

So—ready to go? Ready to undertake a personal pilgrimage with an evolving destination and a fluid timeline? If you do this wholeheartedly, what interesting and perhaps surprising revelations await. Among other things, you’ll discover or perhaps rediscover who you really are, as well as who you can be. You’ll discover again and again what you can do and what you can have. Best of all, you’ll set the direction of your journey yourself. Even so, it may lead to you places you never expected, but that’s half the fun.

If you wish you’d done such exploration (or more of it) years ago, I understand. I sometimes feel the same. But all of your experiences have brought you to this moment, even those which caused you pain or may seem, in retrospect, to have been a waste. Although experience can be a harsh teacher, it also yields cogent lessons. Some of those you quite possibly draw upon today.

So, please respect both your present and your past. In trashing parts of yourself or your history for any reason, you would do yourself a grave disservice. After all, you were probably doing the best you could. No doubt you still do. Moreover, if you now decide to go after just the life you want, you’re already a remarkable person whatever your circumstances. That same remarkable person could be starting something Big.

But why rush things? As of this moment, you need only put your foot on the path and take a single step. Then, take another and another. Your intuition, if you heed it, will show you what those steps should be. So don’t worry if sometimes you can see no further than the particular step you’re taking. If

you pay attention, the next one will reveal itself at the proper moment. Count on it.

The Journey

Please remember two things about your own journey. First, don't stop too soon! Although longer journeys present greater challenges, they often yield far-richer experiences and many more of them. Remember, too, that paths rarely proceed in a straight line. You can safely expect obstacles, forks in the road, and even detours—all these a part of the process.

Know as well that the journey itself can sometimes be as much fun as what you achieve. In other words, getting there is part of the fun. You may even find, as did Gertrude Stein, "no there, there." Why not? Because creating the life you want is really more process than destination, so "there" keeps changing. Besides, when so many possibilities exist, why limit yourself at any point by deciding you've arrived?

Another thing: when you break your journey into steps, and savor each one, you can enjoy your success many times. You may find this approach far more satisfying and fun than just putting your head down and your blinders on. Nor do you need to charge hell-bent toward the ultimate goal, or what you first imagined it to be. Not only can you take this journey by degrees, as gradually as you wish, but you may also find it leading far beyond the original destination. Never underestimate the power of small, consistent steps.

Living Here and Now

Whatever routes you choose toward the life you want, please be sure to anchor that same life in today. How easily we sometimes forget that what happens right here and right now constitutes our actual life. Here, in other words, is where the action is, and it's taking place now. The journey itself is part of Now.