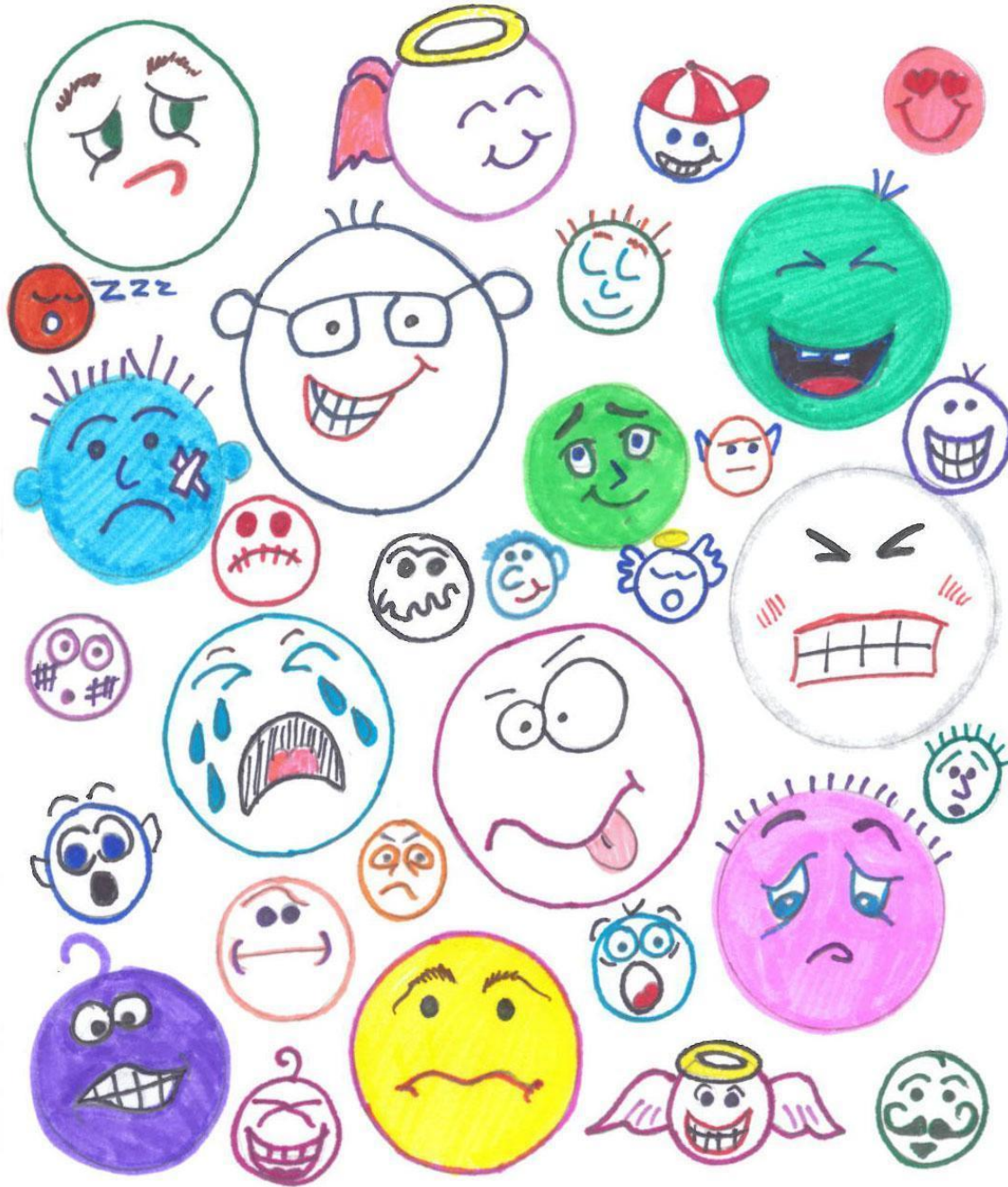


The Magic Formula- How to be at peace with yourself and others.

A spiritual memoir: to be shared with an important person in your life.

By Diane Diaz Gomez, Ph.D.



Watercolor by Holly Freeman, Ph.D. and Edited by Adam Corriea
Dedicated to my sisters, especially Lillian who said this book was an answer to her prayers

I recently read about an eleven-year-old boy who committed suicide after being led to believe his girlfriend had killed herself. It was not true. Apparently, it was a cruel joke perpetrated by the girl herself, something she will live with the rest of her life. I also knew a boy named Larry. He was in 8th grade and made some comments to a classmate that offended him. The student retaliated during class by shooting Larry in the back of the head. In my 32 years as a school counselor, I have witnessed the death of Larry, as well as another young man. The second boy was stabbed in the chest and collapsed outside my office. I saw his spirit leave his body. I was also on a school campus where two young men were shot and another incident where a beautiful girl had her face slashed with a box cutter. These two events happened at a school described as “the best kept secret in the district.” Even though these events were traumatizing, I love kids, and I consider this profession my vocation. I now know, despite these tragedies, my experiences allow me to share with others and write about them. Hopefully this book can help others struggling with peace by providing them with strategies I used to help me through those difficult times of my life.

Today, I regularly counsel students who are in danger of hurting themselves and others. The sad thing is that these kids are getting younger. A recent headline reported that two 6th grade girls in Wisconsin stabbed one of their classmates 19 times, hoping to appease an online horror character, Slenderman. When I read the article of the 11-year-old who committed suicide, I immediately thought of a group of boys who visit my office regularly for nutrition and lunch, who were the same age. I think of them and the joy and love that they bring me daily. They come by my door and are happy to see me. They build me up in so many ways and I know that I make a difference in their lives as well. They are beautiful to me and the best little bunch ever. I would be devastated if any of them were to hurt themselves. This book is dedicated to them and all kids. They are our future. I remind parents to treat the kids in their midst well, for one day, when they become adults, they will treat us in a similar fashion. What goes around comes around.

Even though I witnessed and experienced several major traumatic events, I have been blessed to have a profession where there have been many good times, as well. There is hope for the future. On the last day of school each year, our school has a talent show, and this past June, two 7th grade boys (Nicolas and Joah) brought down the house with their Michael Jackson dance moves and a vocal rendition of “Alleluia.” I recently wrote *The Secret Formula and Other Techniques for Helping Pre-Teens to Share Their Feelings & Thrive!* It contains various mindfulness strategies I have used over the years counseling kids. Then I came across an article about the Peace Pilgrim, a lady who gave away all her possessions and walked 25,000 miles across the United States with the intention of promoting peace. The article mentioned her desire for her message of peace to spread throughout the world, and so *The Magic Formula* was conceived to share her message of peace, which is this: **“There is a magic formula for resolving conflicts. It is this: Have as your objective the resolving of the conflict, not the gaining of advantage. There is a magic formula for avoiding conflicts. It is this: Be concerned that you do not offend, not that you are not offended.”**

We are experiencing division in our world and it is undoubtedly trickling down from generation to generation. Everyone can use a little peace these days and to be truly peaceful, peace must first begin within us, in our minds, in our thoughts and by our actions.

Some mornings, I will get a call about an upset student. “Are you available?” Within, a few minutes, a student appears at my door. I can see that they are upset, and sometimes crying. It is challenging at times to get them to share, but I remind them that they are in a safe place, and what they share with me will be confidential. The only way I tell, is if they are going to hurt themselves or others. My office is cozy, a little messy, perhaps, but I sense that it has good karma, and kids usually begin to talk. “When they feel safe, they will talk,” is a message that resonates with me.

I have a “feelings poster” on the wall; it is a large emoji chart with different emotions depicted by various facial expressions. Usually kids have knowledge of some of the core emotions: happy, mad, sad, nervous, frustrated, afraid, annoyed and jealous. In the past, I have pulled out an 8 - pack box of crayons and asked them to describe the emotions by color. Red they usually say is anger, blue typically represents sadness, yellow is often happy, and so on. I then show them a box with 32 crayons, and remind them: from these 8 primary feelings, we can usually name many more emotions. In fact, there are more than 3000 words to describe various emotions in the English language alone. But the bottom line is this entire range of emotions stems from two basic emotions: love or fear.

This is critical because if we want to be peaceful pilgrims we must operate from the “love emotions” that will make us feel and behave better. Knowing what emotions we are feeling on the inside helps us to manage our outsides better. A few weeks ago, I had a girl’s group, and I was sharing the crayons-feelings message with them. I asked them to write a list of as many emotions as possible. I was impressed with several of their lists. I then asked them to go around one by one, and say out loud a feeling they had written down, if anyone else in the circle had it listed, they all had to cross it out. If no one else had it on their list, they were to circle it and the student with the most circled feelings at the end, received a prize. The kids loved this activity and the next week, I was met with “can we play the emotions game again?”

Here are a few feeling words: (highlight those that are loved based!)

angry, abandoned, acceptable,	excited, jealous, embarrassed,	overwhelmed, perplexed,
criticized, afraid, accepted,	fantastic, judgmental, empty,	proud, powerless, rejected,
detestable, alienated, amazed,	fulfilled, mad, fearful, grateful,	respected, remorseful,
disgusted, apathetic, amused,	provoked, frightened, happy,	surprised, ridiculed, sad,
disrespected, ashamed,	repugnant, guilty, hopeful,	scared, shocked, skeptical,
confident, dissatisfied,	resentful, hesitant, hopeful,	startled, submissive,
astonished, confident, enraged,	ridiculed, hopeless, important,	suspicious, terrified,
bored, connected, frustrated,	sarcastic, humiliated,	victimized, vulnerable,
confused, content, furious,	inquisitive, threatened,	withdrawn, worried, worthless,
depressed, courageous, hateful,	ignored, inspired, violated,	calm, depressed, anxious,
despair, curious, hostile,	inadequate, indifferent,	frustrated, tired, determined,
devastated, eager, humiliated,	interested, inferior, joyful,	lazy, miserable, silly,
disappointed, ecstatic, hurt,	insecure, liberated, loving,	thoughtful, puzzled, annoyed
disillusioned, energetic,	open, insignificant, isolated,	resentful
infuriated, dismayed,	peaceful, jealous, playful,	
energized, irritated, distant,	lonely, powerful,	

It is not enough to just name the emotions that they are experiencing, but to understand why, as well. We need to feel them and label them. I then hand students *The Secret Formula* sentence frame and ask them to include an emotion in the first blank and describe what is making them feel that way.

I feel _____ when/because _____.

However, the secret to the Secret Formula is not using the word “you.” Saying “you” puts the listener on the defensive and they are likely to stop listening to what you say. I have students, using the sentence frame, tell me how they are feeling and why. Many times, it is due to conflict that they are having, usually with a peer who has hurt their feelings. Recently, I had a conversation with an adult who was crying about what someone had told her the month before, and a month later she was still crying about it. “Why don’t you try using the Secret Formula to let the other person know how you are feeling?” I asked. I know it is hard to be direct at times. Probably, due to years and years of not being able to properly express what others say or do to us, rendering us helpless. I am reminded of a quote I saw on Instagram; it read, “A lot of problems in the world would disappear if we talked to each other instead of about each other.”

I am glad that whenever I hand the Secret Formula prompt to a student, they respond by sharing their feelings and why. It is important to share this simple tool with others, so that they can express themselves in a way that respects the rights and dignity of the speaker and listener as well. Keeping your response in the “I” message allows the listener to take heed and responsibility for the message being expressed. They may not like what you have to say, but, at least for your own peace of mind, you put it out there. They can take it or leave it.

Sometimes, we tell others how someone made us feel, but not the person who needs to hear the message. This, in its simplest form is called “Triangulation,” and we do it all the time. I remember when I first started my education in counseling, one of my family systems classes taught this concept. I went home and shared it with my family, and to this day, almost 3 decades later, my mom mentions it. She recently said, “Mija, I remember that triangle thing!” It is hard not to triangulate at times but we must make a conscious effort to stop. Because when we triangulate with others, our inner peace is compromised.



Wikipedia definition of Triangulation: “A manipulation tactic where one person will not communicate directly with another person, instead using a third person to relay communication to the second, thus forming a triangle. Triangulation is also playing one (person) against another.”

I know that for some of us, we were taught not to express our feelings when we were growing up. Instead, we kept them bottled up, masked them, buried them deep, only to create additional problems later. Telling a person directly how their behavior is making you feel is the easiest way to convey your truth and live peacefully. The hearer may not like your truth, but the truth will set

you free. It can be hard to tell someone how you honestly feel, but honesty is the best policy and the truth is freeing.

Reflection: Is there someone in your life that you need to have an honest conversation with?

Practice using the Secret Formula, “I feel _____ when/because _____.” You must add an emotion in the first blank that describes what feeling you are experiencing, and then why. Seems so easy, yet it is very hard to do. If practiced regularly now, it can help you to have a more peaceful future. Keep practicing the Secret Formula, it really helps. Just remember the secret to the secret formula is not to say the word, “you.” As soon as you say, “you” the conversation stops and may head into the danger zone.

I went to a parenting class more than 30 years ago and learned that “SLAPPERS” stop communication as well. I loved this exercise.

S-arcasm (Sarcastic remark back)
L-ecturing (Response is speech like)
A-ccusing (Told you so!)
P-robing (Who were you with?)
P-lacating (Don’t worry, everything will be okay!)
E-valuation (What did you say?)
R-ejection (No, not true...)
S-olving (You need to.....)

My husband and I both went to this class and we were surprised at how often we used “SLAPPERS” in our communication with one another, and we learned how to listen better to one another because of this simple message. And we would call each other out when we used them by saying, “Slappers!” I added some new “SLAPPERS” to the list above. I call them “MUDI” because they muddy up the conversation making an issue more confused or complicated.

M-akes the conversation about them (They start sharing about their experience)
U-ninterested (Looks away and may involve themselves in another conversation close by)
D-istracted (Checks their cell phone or another object (playing) while you are speaking)
I-nterrupts (Does not let you finish what you were saying)

When someone engages in the above behaviors, it is easy to lose your peace. You may feel unheard or disrespected. It is not easy to listen properly. It takes intention and I can only think of one person who is good at listening. And when you are chatting with him, you know he is listening intently. How? He has his eyes focused on you, he is nodding and attentive, he keeps the focus on what you are saying and then summarizes back what he has heard you say. When I am with this person, I feel heard and respected, leaving me feeling calm and peaceful.

You too can become a good listener by doing the following:

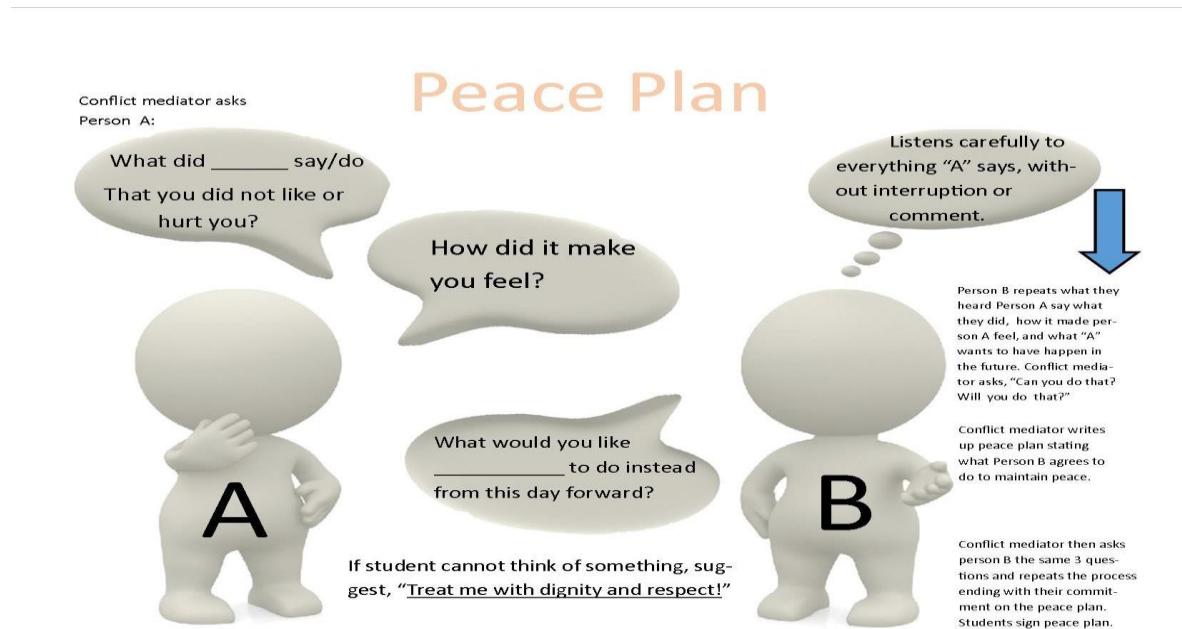
1. Pay attention. Give the speaker your undivided attention (put the cell away!)
2. Show that you are listening. Give the speaker eye contact and gesture that you are listening by nodding your head quietly.

3. Provide feedback- summarize what you have heard them say to you.
4. Respond appropriately- avoid using “SLAPPERS” or “MUDI’s”

A student came in to see me recently; he was hurt and angry because another student ridiculed his appearance. The boy was crushed. So, I called in the offender and we did a simple peace plan. It goes like this:

- (1) What did _____ say/do that you did not like?
- (2) How did it make you feel?
- (3) What would you want them to do instead?

There is a process to the peace plan. While person (A) is answering the 3 questions, (B) is asked to listen carefully. I remind person (B) that they will have their chance to share their side of the story too, without interruption. So once person (A) has said the responses to all 3 questions, I ask person (B) to repeat what they heard person (A) say what they did that they did not like, how it made them feel and what they want them to do instead. Person (A) listens while person (B) responds. I then ask person (B) what person (A) did, how it made them feel, what they want them to do instead, while person (A) listens intently. I ask person (A) to repeat what person (B) has said, and then we come up with resolutions, what they can do to be peaceful with one another, and conclude with both kids signing an agreement highlighting their commitments.



Path to Peace Plan

- . Be Honest
- . Listen Carefully
- . Do Not Interrupt
- . Stay in the "I message"

We agree as of today, _____, to do the following:

Date

Signature

Signature

Some students ask to sign a "No-Contact Contract" because they may be unwilling or unable to commit to a peace plan at that time. One young lady came in recently wanting to be released from the "No-Contact Contract" and change to a Peace Promise because she was ready to resume a relationship with the other student. It was this young girl who told me at the beginning of the year, that she did not want any negative energy. I was impressed that she even used the word, "energy," because, it is true, all feelings, have either high or low energy. You can guess which feelings attract more of the high-level energy, yup; it is the love based emotions. They make us feel good, inside and out. While the low-energy, fear based feelings are negative energy and deplete us until we feel we are running on empty.

In the earlier example with the two boys that I did the peace plan with, only the boy who was offended was hurt. He had done nothing at all to warrant the boy criticizing him. But once the offender heard how his comment made the boy feel, he quickly apologized for the comment. I love it, when it comes genuinely from them, unsolicited, because I know that in their heart they mean it and it is sincere. My son, Alex, who is 28, reminded me recently of my own words as a young mother coming back at me. When my boys were little and did something wrong, they would say, "sorry, Mom" and I would let them know that saying sorry did not let go of the hurt, it still hurt. Alex would eventually say, "Will you forgive me?" and so instead of saying sorry, he would ask for forgiveness.

I am reminded of this because just a few days ago, I did not listen as I should have, and I responded reactively to Alex, with judgment, hurting his feelings. I instantly had my peace taken from me and I felt very ashamed for my words. I said sorry, and that was when he reminded me, "Saying you're sorry, doesn't make it better." And it is true. I felt horrible and he felt horrible. He forgave me, but it was harder for me to forgive myself. I was reminded of the power of words and how, with our tongues, we can build someone up or we can tear them down. I was so tormented for hurting my son and it took me using only a few words and a few seconds to do so.

I recently had a mother requesting a conference regarding her son who seemed to be doing well in school, so I could not imagine what she would be coming in for. Later, when she and her son were in my office, she said, it was not an academic issue rather a personal problem. I handed her the Secret Formula sentence frame, pointing to the feeling chart on the wall, and asked her to let her son know how she was feeling and why, without using the “you” word. The mom took it and told her son how she was feeling and what had brought her to my office that day.

Her son listened carefully, and gave her his perspective of the situation. I then handed him the sentence frame asking him to respond to his mom, which he did. It was so simple. They were both able to express exactly what they were thinking, feeling and why. It was fantastic. The younger kids present, age 5 and 9, also wanted to participate and shared how they were feeling using the Secret Formula: I feel _____ when/because _____. I then covered my, “Things to Do When You Feel Blue List” and made them the feelings cube from the *Secret Formula* book so that they could take turns playing at home. It was great to see them leaving my office, peaceful and connected. The next day, I received a beautiful email, thanking me for the tools and the time to teach them these things that would help them in the future.

It may seem unimportant to express our feelings, in fact while on my way to work, I pass a parked car that has the following decal in its window, “f--- your feelings.” And it saddens me, because I know some kids are being exposed to this type of thinking and may be hesitant to share their feelings. They may not learn how to process their anger or hurt feelings and instead react in inappropriate ways. We may have been taught not to talk about our unhappy feelings. Instead, we say and do things that we later regret. Most of us, in response to conflict, flee, fight or freeze. But that does nothing to solve the problem. Instead, the issue gets buried deep within us, causing us pain, and exploding in harmful ways to ourselves or loved ones. I call these landmines, because one wrong word or action and there is an explosion that you never saw coming.

Thankfully, we can learn how to deal with those negative feelings and the thoughts that drive them and be in more *intentional*, rather than *reactive* in our responses by being mindful. Mindfulness is paying attention in the present moment, in an open and non-judgmental way. It allows us to experience the moment and be attentive to our relationship with the other person. To be intentional we:

STOP-Take a big breath from the belly

PAUSE- Practice Awareness Using Senses and Experience!

REFLECT- THINK! The key is to listen without judgement. Take a few moments and then respond.

RESPOND- If you can't think of anything to say, don't say anything. It is okay to not have a comment. Remember the incident with my son? I interrupted and reacted with judgment, big mistake that caused me tremendous heartache and furthermore my peace was taken from me! Trust me, I learned my lesson. My momma says, “When you make a mistake, learn from it.” Next time, I will practice what I preach and **STOP, PAUSE, REFLECT** and then **RESPOND**.

It is very easy to be reactive and much more difficult to respond appropriately. The key is identifying your reaction to the comment and possibly use a few simple comeback lines to improve the situation. I love what Ann Landers would suggest, “What do you mean by that?” This puts it back on them to say what they meant by their remark. Jesus was also direct in his communication with others, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong, but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” Despite him being hit, Jesus maintains his dignity, instead of reacting, he responds. He speaks out with *honesty*. He does not trade an insult with an insult. He is not angry. He simply asks a question. As my Momma says, “Throw the ball back at them.”

When you speak your truth to others in an assertive manner (taking care of your needs while respecting the rights of others) the truth does set you free. If someone cannot handle the truth, that is not your problem, it is their problem. If someone says something negative or insulting to you, let them know how that comment made you feel, or you will wear that comment like a heavy coat. And the next conversation you have with that person has the potential to escalate and before you know it, you’ve stepped on a landmine and there is an explosion. To prevent these types of escalations from happening, take the time to listen carefully. Use the following process to help you.

STOP, PAUSE, REFLECT & RESPOND

Come up with your own positive response, that way you can say it easily when the need arises. It will help you maintain your peace and dignity during what could become a very stressful situation. Remember, that when we do not address the issue honestly, instead keeping quiet and pushing our negative feelings down and down, they will erupt when we least expect it. Making a choice not to react to others’ negativity is also critical to maintaining our peace. Sometimes when I am with a group of people and someone starts making inappropriate comments about another person, I sometimes get sucked in, respond reactively, and lose my peace. I now know that to keep my peace, I should leave when tensions are high and go do something else. Decide to stay away from the negativity and choose instead to be with people who bring out the best in you, not the stress in you. One of my seventh graders wrote, “Don’t be negative, when you are negative, that starts drama and you lose friends!” It’s true. Surround yourself with people who are joyful and kind and radiate positive energy. When you spew negative energy, people will avoid you.

Kids are hungry for hope, encouragement, and a compassionate ear. Students who come in to see me tend to be lonely and are looking for someone to just listen. I wrote *The Secret Formula* and *The Magic Formula* for adults who love kids and want to have a connection with them and share this message. These books are meant to help those struggling with life issues and provide them with hope and support. We are all designed to connect to one another through love and with hope and when these elements are missing; all heck breaks loose, literally. I know how quickly our mood can go from happy to despondent in just minutes, sometimes with little warning or trigger.

Have you ever been there? The abyss? I have, and it is not a pretty picture. I think of the 11-year old who just hung himself. I wonder what was going through his mind during those few moments when he made the decision to kill himself. It only takes a few minutes in the abyss to make you lose it. I know that God gave me a glimpse so I could write about it and be sensitive to those that are struggling with peace. One of my students had to be hospitalized recently because

he made suicidal threats. Some teachers expressed puzzlement because he always seemed so happy. It is alarming because he was my 4th student treated for suicidal ideation within the last few months. For middle school kids, the suicide rate among 10- to 14-year-olds doubled between 2007 and 2014. Social media, terrorism, and academics have been highlighted as key issues for this age population. Experts say that to reduce suicide among teens, parents and teachers need to be educated about warning signs including changes in mood, signs of distress, changes in appetite and sleep patterns, loss of personal interests and a sense of hopelessness.

A singer recently hung himself after a concert. The article stated that his family was shocked at his passing, which was described as “sudden and unexpected.” “The family believes that if he took his life, he did not know what he was doing, and drugs or other substances may have affected his action.” I doubt the 11-year-old had drugs or substances, but negative thoughts affect our actions, as well. It is estimated that we have up to 40,000 negative thoughts a day, and because our mind makes things up and creates faulty thinking, we do things that can cause pain, suffering and tragedy. What about the girl who encouraged her boyfriend to kill himself? I Googled it, and up came the “Texting Suicide Trial: Will Guilty Verdict in Michelle Carter Case Change Laws for Good?” Her boyfriend, who had a history of mental illness and suicidal attempts, tried to kill himself and, in a moment of desperation, texted her and instead of helping him, she encouraged him to end his life. He killed himself after inhaling carbon monoxide.

One of my students, recently hospitalized for suicidal ideation, called the experience of being okay and then wanting to be dead as “The Gray Zone.” She described it to me, as a time, when all was well with her. She had been with her family shopping at the mall, and on the way home, she began to experience feelings of great sadness. She retreated into her room and then contemplated ending her life. She ended up being hospitalized and is now receiving therapy.

When a student comes in to see me saying that they are feeling suicidal, I ask them, “On a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being you want to kill yourself, where are you?” Surprisingly, many point to the 8-9 on the scale. One such 11-year-old girl was upset because her parents are in the process of divorcing and she found text messages on her father’s phone from another woman. She said she felt so bad about it that she had wanted to dart out in front of some cars, on a busy street near her house. Later it was revealed that the young girl was also communicating with someone on text messaging, claiming to be a fellow student. I could tell by the language and style of writing that the other party was not a student as she claimed. It reminded me of how the dad was carrying on with someone discreetly, as was his daughter. We are all seeking love and belonging.

I ask students to use the A/B/C tool to determine how they were feeling prior to the **B**ehavior (called the **A**ntecedent) and then to recollect what the **C**onsequence was (what happened afterwards) to get an idea of their thinking patterns and to record them in a journal. This way they can start to learn, through their writings and reflections, what their “triggers” are and work to identify them, if they can, then avoid them or manage them. *The Magic Formula* teaches us to promote peace from within by learning to transform our minds, communicate our feelings and connect with God. He promises to always be with us and help us, especially during our darkest hours. The only way to control your moods and feelings is through your thoughts, and what you think, you will become. What you fill your mind with, is what will fill your life. Make it Jesus. God is Love and He is so powerful that He can heal minds, bodies and relationships.

My goal is to share what I have learned over the years to help the whole child: mind, body and spirit. Too many times we neglect their “spiritual life,” as if it does not exist. I see these kids as they come into my office, full of innocence, and I do my best to encourage and educate them with love, because love is the antidote to the “abyss.” God is our lifeline who will pull us out of the abyss. God is the healer that we all seek. Love is why God created us. He loves us with an everlasting love. I am reminded of God’s love for me and that he is always with me, ever since I was a little girl, I know that he has been faithful, and promised to never leave me. Even through all the violence, I have experienced, God provides me with hope. This poem about hope was given to me by my cousin Olivia, during a very scary time for me and my family.

Hope knows that a positive outcome awaits. Hope is not only expecting a dream to come true, but having a deep assurance that it is within your reach. Hope is saying that you can. Hope knows that you can improve and that you can always get better with practice. Hope knows you can achieve your goals through hard work and perseverance. Hope is looking to the future with joy and having an expectation of better things to come. Hope is the knowledge that life is everlasting and that miracles happen every day. (I am going to write about the blush brush later!) Hope is something that never abandons you. Even when your life is filled with sadness and disappointment, a spark remains inside to help you get through the rough times. Hope is one of God’s greatest gifts to you, because it is the magic that inspires you to keep trying, learning, loving and living.

We all need messages of hope and this one says it perfectly. My cousin texted it to me when my mom was in the hospital, struggling with the side effects of chemotherapy. In my heart, I had hope that she would survive her 3rd bout of cancer. My faith was very strong, but I felt like a fish swimming against the current. I remember this poster from my youth of a single fish swimming against a school of fish coming towards it. My faith sustained me during this tumultuous time, when others thought my mom was going to die, I knew she would pull out of it and she did and is now home. I call her the Energizer Bunny because she just keeps bouncing back. I am grateful for the hope that God gave us, all the prayers that were said on her behalf, and her positive outlook, which so many of us rely on.

“Be a warrior, not a worrier,” my friend, Stacie reminded me. Interestingly, I learned my great-grandmother’s last name was Guerrero, which translates to “warrior.” If you read *The Secret Formula*, I wrote that we need to become like warriors, because life can be hard and challenging. But with God on our side, we can be peaceful! I am grateful to God for all the miracles he gives us, even little ones. Recently I was with my mom, and I needed a blush brush, so I thought to myself, I need to get one. So off we went to my mom’s dialysis appointment, and as I was leaving her there, I found a blush brush on the curb as I was closing my car door! Unbelievable, just an hour earlier, I was thinking I need to get one, and lo and behold there it was on the curb, outside the dialysis building. Thank you God, you are amazing!!

A week later, I was at my mom’s washing my hair and I asked her if she had any “No More Tangles,” I knew she wouldn’t but asked anyways. Later that evening, after leaving her house I stopped at the market, and there in the clearance section was one spray bottle of hair detangler, marked down 75%! I also had read an article about charm bracelets and wanted to wear mine, but noticed it was dingy and I would need silver cleaner. Guess what? Yup, found it there in the

clearance section as well, one jar of silver polish! I could go on and on about how God is good. He will give us our every need but sometimes we just do not recognize all the little signs of God's love for us and His promise that He will always be faithful. It is His nature to be all loving and kind, and when we forget this, our hearts are troubled and afraid, robbed of peace.

Everyone needs hope, love, joy and peace. God wants us to say "yes" to His plan for our lives and He is so gracious and merciful. He wants to be around us and with us. God will never leave us, God promises to be with us. We are the ones who turn our backs on Him and pretend we do not know Him, we try to run away, but He is always there, waiting. I thank him for being with me, especially during my darkest hours because I know He loves me and "that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). It is my favorite verse in the Bible. I also love Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Even through the storms of life, God is with me, protecting me, and I am grateful. Only God can give us the peace we desperately seek. To know Him is to know love and that is the miracle of *The Magic Formula*.

No one knows our joy or our pain as well as He does. We all have an inner life that is unique to me and you. It is filled with our thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams and our relationship with God. We have an outer life which consists of who we are, the things we do, our education, our jobs, our friends and family. We tend to focus on the outside life but not so much attention is put on the inside life and yet most of our relationships take place in this inner life, inside our minds. *The Secret Formula* reminds us to STOP, THINK, PAUSE and GO with our thoughts and many times, when I use the THINK (TTrue, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, Kind?) process, I do not even get past the "T," which asks, are the thoughts true? That is the time we need to change our thinking! I recognized this when I would be thinking negatively of someone, having an imaginary conversation with them in my head, and I would have to stop myself: "Not true, not happening!" and bring myself back to awareness and the present moment.

A girl came in to see me recently because she was feeling depressed and anxious and shortly before she left I asked, "Are you cutting yourself?" She stopped, nodded, and admitted she was. She showed me an essay that she had written, describing how she was feeling. I was blown away by her words and asked if I could share them, she said "yes."

It was dated 5/18

"It is a whiz and whir of many emotions: some good, some bad, and more intense than others. You would think that there would never be a dull moment for a mindset like this, and you are correct, but a dull moment is what the mind longs to have. There is more trouble than peace in this mind. Some days, it'll be perfectly fine and the birds are just singing and the sun is shining, but other days it's more filled with closed spaces and war sirens warning everyone of an oncoming attack. But usually, all of this is only comparable to a child playing with a light-switch; it's always on and off again and again, switching from emotion to emotion with no warning whatsoever. All these feelings and thoughts stay locked up in the mind, until they decided to break out.

“Why am I like this?” is like a daily question that has yet to be answered. Nobody will find the answer, you see, because there is not one singular answer to solve all of these problems. This isn’t some quiz to see if you can solve a problem or not, this is like a crisis to see if you can save a person or not. This was never about solving problems; this was about seeing whether or not a person can be saved from themselves.

The real problem is on the inside. The outside just looks so nice and happy that the inside wishes that it could be the same. The outside is just a blanket to cover up the real person in the inside, but that doesn’t mean that the inside won’t get exposed if the blanket starts to slide off. Sometimes the outside will try its best to cover it up, but the inside always finds a way out. This time, the long-hidden monsters are tearing their way out. They broke through the flesh, grazing the skin above it enough to leave an obvious mark. They seem to be too weak to make another opening, so they just keep desperately trying to get out through the same opening; the monsters keep opening it back up once it thinks it’s healed in order to only cause more pain.

They say I deserve it, they say it’s the only way I can avoid the pain of my thoughts. And I believe them. The pain of the attempt hurt just as bad as the pain of realization, but it still doesn’t amount to the pain my mind has endured and locked away for so long.

Maybe it should’ve been locked up. Maybe everything on the outside would’ve been kept the safe if everything on the inside just kept its mouth shut, but I couldn’t control myself anymore. I want someone to save me from myself. Please!”

These are the thoughts of a 14-year-old girl. On the outside, she is a 4.0 student, on the dance team, in an academic club, and part of student government, yet on the inside, she is anxious of what the future holds. It is amazing to me how articulate and insightful she is. I am reminded that it is during this adolescent period that the brain is going through its second major growth and how critical it is that kids at this age get the help and support they need to weather this stressful period in their life so that they can have a more successful outcome in the future.

Together, we addressed the issue of her cutting herself and we highlighted some key facts that she felt would be important for me to acknowledge here. NSSI (Non-Suicidal Self-Injury) is especially prevalent during middle adolescence but is higher among adolescent females. It can be attributed to changing bodies and changing relationships with family. Feelings of anger and sadness were discouraged in the family, and they may be afraid to share their feelings. NSSI is described as a new way to deal with overwhelming sadness and anxiety. For some, it is a single act, for others, it is a long-standing coping strategy that can last for months or years. I had a mother come in to talk to students about cutting and she said that in her youth “I used to cut myself to get back at my mom, but I was the only one who ended up with scars.”

Kids tend to cut themselves when they are bored, stressed or isolated. I give the “Things to do When Feeling Blue list” to kids engaging in NSSI, to help them learn new, healthy coping strategies, and encourage counseling to address their feelings of depression and anxiety. I also share with them TeensHealth.org. It is a great website. Type “cutting” in the subject search bar and so much great information will come up. You can also look up a variety of subjects related to mind and body that are important to teens. I also engage family support, as in the case above,

and the girl was so grateful, she had a sense of relief that others in her family now knew how she was feeling. She later related to me how helpful it had been and referred her cousin to see me.

We are all responsible for our experience. Every thought we think creates our future. It is not easy to change our negative, fear-based thoughts, but it is possible! The moment we decide to change our lower energy thinking to higher level, positive thinking by focusing on God, our lives improve. We also need to constantly let go of the past and forgive those who have caused us pain and suffering. This is not easy to do but the key to living a peaceful life is to be in the present, right now. Simply breathe and become present. Awareness is the only way to experience the power of *this* moment. To experience “mindful moments,” I put purple sticky dots everywhere, throughout my house, on my steering wheel, in my office, and whenever I see one I remind myself to stop, take deep breaths, and come to my senses to fully experience the moment and be present. These reminders have been so helpful; my brain now associates the word PAUSE with taking a deep breath. Now it happens automatically when I think of or see the word PAUSE.

My favorite exhortation is, “Be good and do good!” I used to think that my life would be boring if I was too good, but boy was I wrong. My life is amazing. It is not always easy but I am peaceful and a child of God and that is priceless. I also love this message from Mother Teresa (also attributed to Keith Kent) that was given to me by a teacher and is on my wall (Thanks Coach!). *“People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway. If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest anyway. What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous, be happy anyway. The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it will never be good enough. Give your best anyway. In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.”*

Prayer has also been a big part of my life and I remember having a bunch of prayers that I had copied and written down and posted on the side of my bed when I was 9 or 10. A morning prayer that I memorized went like this, *“God, you are ushering in another day, untouched and freshly new, so here I come to ask you God, if you’ll renew me too. Forgive the many errors that I made yesterday and help me try again dear God to walk closer in thy way, for Father, I am well aware, I cannot make it on my own, so take my hand and hold it tight, for I cannot walk alone.”*

Now that I am older, I pray constantly to maintain peace, and it has helped me through some of the most challenging situations in my life. Prayer for me is silently communing with God. I first begin by praising him, and then I will move to specific requests and wrap it up with gratitude. Keep it simple! When you know God is in control everything will turn out okay. As the last sentence in Mother Teresa’s poem conveys, ultimately it is your relationship with God that matters most. Be at peace with God, with yourself and with others. We came into the world alone

and we will leave alone and one day stand before God alone, and alone be accountable for what we did and did not do. My uncle Manuel recently passed, during his service his daughter asked members of his family to use only one word to describe him. Every word was love based. It was a beautiful tribute for him.

Reflection: What one word do you think/hope people will use at the end of your life to describe you?

We must operate from love based emotions as much as possible, because they create higher energy and help us to feel better because love ultimately covers all wrongs. I recently read a biography of Saint Francis of Assisi, who was wealthy yet gave up everything to follow God. He wrote the following Prayer for Peace: *“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace! Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury- pardon, Where there is doubt-faith, Where there is despair- hope, Where there is darkness- light, Where there is sadness- joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled- as to console, to be understood- as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life!”* I love this prayer because my goal is to leave this life with as few regrets as possible.

I had some girls together recently, they were talking about family members and one girl told us about her relationship with her older brother. She said that he is a loser and has not amounted to much, and that she lets him know it on a regular basis. We agreed that using “put downs” makes both the giver and receiver feel bad, creating negative energy. I repeatedly hear stories of conflict and poor relationships. It makes me think how easy it is to put others down instead of giving them “put ups” or words of encouragement. “Put ups” build the listener up and the giver as well. When we use “put ups,” it is a win-win situation. They feel good, we feel good. When we put others down, we feel down as well. Sibling relationships are challenging and have been since the beginning of time. But at the end of life, what do people say on their deathbeds that they wished they had focused on? That they had spent more time with family and lived an authentic life with God.

One 6th grade student wrote down the following regarding relationships with siblings. “They are important so try not to lose it. They have been with you your whole life and know you maybe more than you. Even if you fight you still end up loving each other no matter what because you’ve both been through so much together!” It’s true, families can be challenging. I woke up with a terrible headache recently due to a dream where I was being “triggered” constantly by family members. It was horrible, I felt my head was going to explode, and I know that it can. I was very glad when I woke up and regained consciousness, realizing thankfully that it was a dream!

You may find a mantra can help promote peace in your life. A mantra is a process to control your thoughts and is used during meditation to quiet your mind, because the mind can be full of noise. Some call it, “monkey mind!” Your mantra can help you cut through this chatter instantly, bringing you back to present awareness and peace. My favorite mantra is, “Life’s a beach!” Life can be like waves in the ocean, they can be treacherous, calm or choppy. The same waves can be fun or fearful depending on how you experience them. “Be still,” Jesus commanded the storming

waves, and they obeyed, becoming calm and peaceful. Jesus gives our life direction and purpose. Only He can calm our storms and bring peace to our souls. Through prayer and meditation we can focus on God, and be calm & still. I am at peace knowing God is at the helm.

I like a saying by Corrie ten Boom that goes: *“Look around you and be distressed, look within you and be depressed, look to Jesus and be at rest.”* I use the “breath” to bring me back to awareness and find myself taking deep breaths throughout the day. I was at a spiritual retreat, and as I was lying down very quietly I felt the “Holy Spirit” take a deep breath within me reminding me that God is as close as our breath and we were created with breath and one day will cease to exist without breath. I have reminded my sons not to grieve too much for me when I die because my hope is that “My last breath on earth will be my first breath in heaven!”

For me and you to be at peace now, we cannot worry about tomorrow; each day will have enough trouble of its own. Second, do not look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye while you pay no attention to the telephone pole in your own. I love this quote by Louis Nizer: *“When a man points a finger at someone else, he should remember that three of his fingers are pointing back at himself.”* If it was not an issue within them, they would not recognize it in someone else. The fact that they mention it about others speaks volumes about their own insecurities.

When a person pops into my mind, but before it becomes a negative thought (because the mind will do that), I say a blessing for that person (and myself, too!). From Numbers 6:24 the prayer goes like this: *“May the Lord bless you and keep you! May his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you kindly and give you (us) peace!”*

Blessing others became my only new year’s resolution and I started to experience peace immediately. I had almost a whole day free of negative thoughts until my husband said something to me that stole my joy! I did not think the blessing for him at the time but instead another quote came to mind, “Treat your loved ones, with loving care; you will only know their value when you see their empty chair.” All emotions give us a choice. When we get angry, we can react negatively or we can react positively. We can give “put downs” or we can give “put ups.” We can condemn or we can bless, the choice is ours. Choose love! When you respond negatively, you lose your peace, as will the other person. Words can hurt or they can heal. To be peaceful, use loving and kind words with one another. **THINK** before you speak and ask yourself, will your words build someone up, or will they tear someone down? If they are hurtful or mean-spirited, discipline yourself to refrain. There is power and strength not reacting and retaliating. More importantly you will maintain your peace.

God loves us with an everlasting love and it is His desire to do loving things for us in the here and now. When we experience moments of trial and despair we need to ask ourselves, “What does God intend by this? “Everything happens for a reason. Either it is a blessing or it is a lesson for us and to experience real peace during these difficult times, we need to know God as a friend. “He is our inside selves,” and no one knows our pain and our joy like he does. He is my best friend because he is loyal and never leaves me flat. Unfortunately, we worry more about the outside self (what people think of us) rather than listen to that small, still voice in our mind that is always with us, loving us. God may seem silent, but He is there. With time, the voice will

grow stronger. To know God is to know Peace. And with no God, there is no Peace. I love this poem by Helen Mallicott, called, I AM.

“I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking: “‘My name is I Am.’ He paused, I waited. He continued, ‘When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there, my name is not I WAS. When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WILL BE. When you live in this moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is I AM.’”

The Peace Pilgrim wrote, “When enough of us find inner peace, our institutions will become peaceful” and “how could one know God and not be joyous? Her peace message is contained in one sentence: **“This is the way of peace- overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth, and hatred with love!”** She also says, “Live this day! Yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision, but today well-lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow, a vision of hope.” Live this day and live it well. I advise my students to “be the best that they can be!”

On our tendency to worry, the Peace Pilgrim wrote that worry is a total waste of time and energy. If you are a praying person who prays with faith, you would immediately take what you are worried about to God. I have a God Box that I put my prayer requests into with the expectation that once I put the request in the box, I leave it alone, in God's hands, and I cannot take it back. It is not always easy to let it go but we must have faith. It is not easy to remain hopeful but with God on our side, we can know that whatever the outcome is, it is in His hands and He is in control. Worry is a sign that we need to address the issue causing us stress. I was counseling a student who was under immense stress, so I told him that stress is like sandbags that are weighing us down, preventing us from being all that we are capable of being. I drew his picture and then hung sandbags off him and we labeled them with things causing him stress. Before we knew it, he had identified ten sandbags. We then analyzed the sandbags to determine those affecting him most, and what he could do to alleviate them, that way he could cut the sandbag off. It was a very good way for him to see that he could rid himself of some of these sandbags and release them. If we want to soar, becoming the very best that we can be, we must let go of some of the sandbags that hold us down and learn how to balance those sandbags that cannot be easily discarded. A reminder to let it go, let it go, let it GO!

There will always be those sandbags in life that we cannot get rid of. It is important then that we learn how to live with them in a balanced manner. I remember my friend, Julianne, telling me, “You have a balanced life!” It is true. I have a full life, and I balance quite a few plates. I work full-time, care for our grandson a few days a week, spend time with family, go to yoga 2-3 times a week, and church twice a week. I do a little bit of everything, working to maintain balance as well as I can, because one slip and everything can crash. It is all about “self-care.” Remember the list of Things to Do When You Are Feeling Blue? You can use the same list (at the back of the book) when you are feeling overwhelmed. Or you can address some of those stressors in a positive way by doing something about it and tackling them in a meaningful manner. If you feel anxious about school work, study and complete assignments! If you feel out of shape, exercise or go for a walk! If you feel you are not doing anything worthwhile, create some meaningful goals. Instead of worrying about the future, focus on what you want to make happen and do something

today to make your dreams come true. I work on 2 mini-goals a day to keep things moving smoothly. What you do today determines your tomorrow!

When angry or afflicted with negative emotion, take time to be alone with God. Do not talk with people who are angry, they are irrational and cannot be reasoned with. If you or they are angry, it is best to leave and pray. The Peace Pilgrim wrote that tremendous energy comes with anger. She said, "It is best to transform it." Use that energy constructively on a task that needs to be done, or in a beneficial form of exercise. I recently got angry with my husband and I wanted to flee. Instead, I thought, I better do something from the Things to Do When you Feel Blue list, so I did something I had been dreading for years; I cleaned my clothes closet! I threw all the clothes to the ground, and little by little went through the clothes and kept only my favorites. I purged 3 large bags, organized everything and 3 hours later, my closet was transformed and so was I. My hurt and disappointment were replaced with a sense of accomplishment. It was amazing, anger gone, things that I thought I had lost were found and I gave the clothes to someone in need! Afterward, my husband and I were in a better state of mind and able to enjoy the rest of the day.

When my boys were young, and I felt I was on the verge of losing it, instead of giving them a time out, I would time myself out and go upstairs to my bedroom, a cup of coffee in hand, something sweet to eat and read the newspaper in its entirety. When I had finished the paper and I was feeling calmer, I would come downstairs to address the situation. It worked for me. When I worked at the high school, I remember telling a parent who was having heated exchanges with her daughter, to stop during their next confrontation, kiss her daughter on the forehead, put on her skates and skedaddle out of the room (get the heck out of there) before the situation got out of hand. I remember the mom coming back a few weeks later, telling me she did just that and that it worked, leaving a stunned girl in her wake, wondering what her mother was up to. Even as I was typing this, I heard Judge Judy say on TV, "If you make a child miserable, they will get back at you tenfold!"

When I get angry, I stop, PAUSE, take some deep breaths and consciously change my thinking. It is not easy to do and I ask God for help, "*Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner, grant me peace!*" I say it over and over. And how many times should I forgive others? Seventy times seven. Do I do forgive them, so they can hurt me again? No, I forgive for myself so that I can release the anger and negative energy, and move forward freely and peacefully before God. Sometimes, I think of what I am grateful for with regard to the person I am having trouble with and this helps me to put my anger in perspective. I may get upset about one negative action when there were many more positive actions that I could focus on instead. I want to replace the word "guilty" with "glimpse." Get a *glimpse* of what your life would be without that person in your life. I once saw in my mind, my husband's side of the closet, completely empty. As crazy as my husband drives me, I know I will be crazy without him. That glimpse helped me to be grateful for all the good that he does for me and our family and focus on that instead. (Thanks Steve!)

Is there someone you need to forgive? Is it yourself? When I have a student who is cutting themselves, I ask them to think about a time when they were happiest in their life I ask them how old they were, then I ask them to picture themselves at that age, and to visualize someone trying

to grab them by their arms with the intention of cutting them with a sharp object. How do they feel? I tell them that they need to protect that child and be kind to them, why would they want to hurt them? Like that young 17-year-old who was suicidal and called his friend for help, but instead of reaching out to his fear with words of love and comfort, she encouraged him to kill himself. We must love ourselves, take care of ourselves, ask God for help if someone is trying to take our joy away from us, and ask Him to be with us, especially during periods of darkness.

Two of my students were sad because someone was calling them names. I had to remind them that there will always be people who are talking about us or putting us down, but that does not mean we must accept what they are saying about us. These people will come and go in our lives and as we get older, we become more selective with whom we spend our time with. "Be with the people who bring out the best in you, not the stress in you!" My momma used to tell me a saying in Spanish, which translated in English to, "You are not a little piece of gold, so everyone would like you!" This is so true, I used to invest time and energy trying to be liked by certain people, and finally found my peace by giving them up. A 6th grader wrote, "Friends are such a big part of your life but sometimes you just cannot keep them. You will end up losing some but you will also make new ones. Be grateful if you get to stay with at least one of your friends for a very long time and learn to trust them before you tell them everything about yourself because some will backstab you!" I have been blessed to have faithful and loyal friendships since childhood. My friend Edna and I have a picture of us dressed as angels taken more than 50 years ago.

We cannot control what people say about us, we can only control what comes out of our mouths. Another quote I like is, "Just because it pops into my mind; does not mean it has to come out of my mouth!" There is tremendous peace and satisfaction in restraining from saying something that is not true, helpful, inspiring, necessary or kind. Some students were having difficulties with gossip. I reminded them of another dicho that my mom would share with us when we were growing up, "*En boca cerrada no entran moscas!*" Which sort of translates, don't open your mouth, talking trash, or the flies will go in!"

If you want to have peace in your life, watch what comes out of your mouth. Gossip is so rampant, I was at a store the other day and the supervisor was talking about co-workers and customers and it made me uncomfortable. It seems to me that more and more I am surrounded by gossip, which reminds me of a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt, "*Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.*" Be careful of people who gossip with you, because, "He who gossips with you, gossips about you!" I have discovered that there are those that gossip and those that do not. I cannot change them; I can only focus on being the best that I can be so when I stand before God one day, I will hear the words, "Well done my good and faithful servant." When people are engaging in negative behavior, I walk away so I do not get sucked in by the negative energy. It is not easy to do, but necessary to keep my peace.

Being at peace is our greatest strength and being fearful leaves us weak and vulnerable. The Peace Pilgrim says we must acquaint ourselves with the thing we fear. Fear can propel us into action. I am reminded that fear is not of God, and God gave us power, love and a sound mind and when we are afraid, fear is the enemy keeping us from God's peace and love. The Peace Pilgrim shares this meditation with us: First, she asks, could we agree that God's protection surrounds us? Know that you are God's beautiful child, always in God's hands.

Accept God.....Accept God's protection.....There is really no problem to fear. She practiced with this meditation.

Peace....be still.....and know.....that I am God.

Peace....be still.....and know.....that I am.

Peace....be still.....and know.

Peace....be still.

Peace....be.

Peace....

The Peace Pilgrim concludes, "And now, with the knowledge that we are God's perfect children, eternal and indestructible, let us go our separate way in love, but always remain together in spirit!" On prayer, she wrote, "You can visualize God's light each day and send it to someone who needs help. Within you is the light of the world. Visualize the light within you and spread it. First to those nearest you-your inner circle of support, family and friends, and then expand out gradually into the world. If you have a problem, take the matter to God in prayer, knowing it is in the best possible hands.

I learned this prayer a long time ago, I turn to it now when I feel anxious: *"When I am left alone and brought to feel despair, let not my heart forget Your love, Your promise You'll be there. Let not my eyes be blinded Lord, by wrongs that I commit, but help me now to know my sin, and now make up for it. I know I will never lose Your love no matter what I do, Your word is true, sure and firm while yet there is faith in You. Enable me to put my fears upon a hidden shelf and never be turned in again, still sorry for myself. Now grant me, Father, grace I need, before the light is gone, then after sleep I soon shall wake to meet the son and greet the dawn."*

Having a grateful heart also leads to peace and a constant prayer of thankfulness and gratitude is so important. When we recall things we are grateful for, the part of the brain that worries switches off. When students come in to see me and are anxious or worried, I ask them to write down 10 things they are grateful for in life. I also have them circle 8 things that they can do on the Things to Do When Feeling Blue list. Between those two tasks, I can see their minds starting to shift for the better. The Peace Pilgrim wrote, "The world is so beautiful, I am thankful. I have endless energy, I am thankful. I am plugged into the source of universal supply, I am thankful. I am thankful for this constant feeling of thankfulness, which is prayer." It is a constant state of awareness and oneness with God. The most important part of prayer is what we feel, not what we say. We spend a great deal of time telling God what we think should be done, and not enough time waiting in the stillness for God to tell us what to do. This is true for me as well. I often try to still my mind for 5 minutes and cannot. Sometimes, I can and sometimes I can't.

If you do not know what God's guidance is for your life you might try seeking the answer in silence. The Peace Pilgrim would walk silently in nature and wonderful insights would come to her, amidst the beauty of nature, which she would then put into practice. Her time with God

brought her much peace in her life. We can learn from the Peace Pilgrim simply by spending time alone with God. By opening our eyes to the beauty that surrounds us, we receive inspiration from God in the stillness of our minds. When you feel the need of a spiritual life, she recommends that we get to bed early, get up early, spend quiet time meditating (I have included a How To Meditate by Sebastian Temple at the back of the book) and get ready for the day. I start my day with this simple prayer, *"Dear God, please be with me, in all that I do and say, and help me to be pleasing to Your will, Amen!"*

The Peace Pilgrim also spoke about the power of our thoughts and how we need to choose positive thoughts and cultivate them every chance we have. We also need to live in the present moment. Do the things that need to be done and do all the good you can. Recognize all problems, no matter how difficult, as opportunities for spiritual growth and make the most of these opportunities. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he," which is saying very clearly that we are creating the conditions around us. Remember the blush brush, silver cleaner and the no more tangles? If you allow God into your life, He will give you the desires of your heart. He will not intrude; he wants to be invited in. I have a huge stained glass portrait of Jesus standing by my door, waiting for us to open it and let Him in. I had a life-changing experience when I was 23 and I remember opening the Bible and asking God to talk to me. I randomly placed my finger on the page and read a passage akin to, "The Lord has shown you mercy in your day of great distress!"

If we only realized how powerful our thoughts were we would never think a negative thought, because ***we become what we think.*** We need to concentrate very strongly on positive thoughts. If you think you can do something, you will. If you think you can't, you won't. Our thoughts can be our best friend or our worst enemy. The Peace Pilgrim wrote, "It is important for our thoughts to focus on the best that could happen in a situation- for the good things we would like to see happen" because we are creating every moment of our lives through thought! When a negative thought enters your mind, immediately counter it with a positive thought or action. Pause to consider God's great love for you and how he has provided for you in the past. Think of things you are grateful for and literally count your blessings, write them down daily in a gratitude journal!

The Peace Pilgrim reminds us to think of something encouraging to say whenever we meet someone, a kind word, a helpful suggestion, an expression of admiration, because love will prevail. You will feel good, as will the recipient. Her simple peace message is adequate- the way of peace is the way of love. Love is the greatest power on earth. It conquers all things. And that ultimate peace begins within. The Peace Pilgrim said, "Don't you believe peace is God's will for us?" We must pray for peace and act for peace in whatever way we can, knowing that peace is possible. Jesus comforted his followers with the message of "Peace be with you!" Pax Vobiscum, Shalom Aleichem, and As-Salaam Alaikum all express the sentiment in Latin, Hebrew and Arabic (thanks, Adam!) and a promise that "I am with you always!"

Never lose faith: God's Way is bound to prevail in the end. The Peaceful Pilgrim writes, "We must abandon fear and replace it with faith—faith that if we obey God's laws we will receive God's blessings." The price for our peace is abandoning our hate, allowing love to reign supreme in our heart. Most important of all, remember that children learn by example and we have an

influence on them. Here is a message from Mother Teresa, *“Children long for somebody to accept them, to love them, to praise them, to be proud of them. Let us bring the child back to the center of our care and concern. This is the only way the world can survive, **because our children are the only hope for the future.**”*

We need to give children our complete attention whenever we are with them and *be present* because we are happiest when we are focused on the present and in the moment. Recently, my husband and I were watching our two-year-old grandson as he came out of a deep sleep. He jumped off me, ran toward his uncle, and started to break dance, ending up on his back with his foot outstretched in his arms. It was hysterical! I ran upstairs to get my camera and came downstairs only to discover that he wouldn't do it again. His father and grandfather pleaded with him to do the dance one more time, but he wouldn't budge. This event reminded me of a poem which was recently shared with me. (Thanks, Heidi!)

“The Last Time” (author unknown)

“From the moment you hold your baby in your arms, you will never be the same. You might long for the person you were before, when you had freedom and time, and nothing in particular to worry about. You will know tiredness like you never knew it before, and days will run into days that are exactly the same, full of feedings and burping. Nappy changes and crying, whining and fighting, naps or a lack of naps, it might seem like a never-ending cycle. But don't forget... there is a last time for everything. There will come a time when you will feed your baby for the very last time. They will fall asleep on you after a long day and it will be the last time you ever hold your sleeping child. One day you will carry them on your hip, and then set them down, and never pick them up that way again. You will scrub their hair in the bath one night, and from that day on they will want to bathe alone. They will hold your hand to cross the road, and then never reach for it again. They will creep into your room at midnight for cuddles and it will be the last night you will ever wake to this. One afternoon you will sing “the wheels on the bus” and do all the actions, then never sing them that song again. They will kiss you goodbye at the school gate, the next day they will ask to walk to the gate alone. You will read a final bedtime story and wipe their last dirty face. They will one day run to you with arms raised, for the very last time. The thing is you won't even know it's the last time until there are no more times, and even then, it will take you a while to realize. So while you are living in these times, remember there are only so many of them and when they are gone, you will yearn for just one more day of them, for one last time.”

I had a similar poem on my refrigerator when my boys were small. I loved the last line because it kept me in line and reminded me to have as much fun as I could with my boys because they would grow up quickly, and they did! It is a good reminder to be in the moment as much as we can, because the days are fleeting and there is no going back.

To My Grown-up Son

Alice E. Chase- 1975

My Hands were busy through the day; I didn't have much time to play. The little games you asked me to, I didn't have much time for you. I'd wash your clothes, I'd sew and cook. But when you'd bring your picture book and ask me please to share your fun, I'd say: "A little later, son." I'd tuck you in all safe at night and hear your prayers, turn out the lights, then tip toe softly to the door...I wish I'd stayed a minute more. For life is short, the years rush past, a little boy grows up so fast. No longer is he at your side, his precious secrets to confide. The picture books are put away. There are no longer games to play, no good night kiss, no prayers to hear, that all belongs to yesteryear. My hands once busy now are still, the days are long and hard to fill; I wish I could go back and do the little things you asked me to.

We really need to live as if every day could be our last, not just with babies and young children, but with everybody. That was the biggest lesson I learned when Larry was killed. I had been chatting with him, and 15 minutes later he was shot by a classmate. I really suffered after that experience; I saw how quickly life could change from one moment to the next. I have learned so much since then. I now know to live in the moment, be present, and be the best that I can be. I know to love, and to forgive, like God loves and forgives me. And when I am afraid, I recite this prayer from my youth, "*Oh Little Flower of Jesus, ever consoling troubled souls with Your heavenly graces and unfailing intercessions, I place my confident trust, from the heart of our blessed savior petitions these blessings of which I stand in greatest need (say them here). Shower upon me your promises of virtue and grace, oh St. Therese, so swiftly advancing in sanctity and in perfect love of neighbor, I may someday receive the crown of life eternal.*" Amen.

My message to kids has shifted over the years, when I first became an academic counselor, I would tell them to work hard in school, do well in college, so that they can prepare for a successful future. Over the years, I added to my message. I now say, "Be the best parent that you can be!" If we were all the best parents that we could be, then the world would be a better place. I was reminded today, that children are gifts, and we are to treasure them. Sometimes it is not easy, but we must remember, that how we treat them, they will one day treat us. How we speak to them, they will one day speak to us. I hear my words from my grandson!

It may be hard for them to hear my message, to be the best parent that they can be, but if they remember how hard it was for them when they were young, and how they felt as a result of that behavior, they could choose to break the cycle, and become better parents. I remind them, it is our job for the next generation to be better than the one before. Keep things that you liked from your childhood, while releasing and not repeating those things you did not. For us to be the best that we can be, we must forgive others and move forward. I remind students that when we forgive others, we are really releasing ourselves from the negative energy so that we can be at peace and have a better future. Forgiving frequently is my pathway to peace because God constantly forgives me, too.

And hold your tongue! Discipline yourself. People associate the word "discipline" with punishment, but it stems from the word, "disciple" which means to educate. Use your words to

educate and encourage others, you do not know their story or what they are currently experiencing. It is not easy; I too, have reacted many times without thinking thoughtfully, offending someone. A reminder that we all need to discipline ourselves to listen, be present and understand just as Jesus stated in Matthew 15:16-19 “what goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth is what defiles them. Are you so dull?” Jesus asked them. “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person.” Choose your words wisely before you speak. As the Peace Pilgrim reiterated, “Be concerned that you do not offend, not that you are not offended.”

To maintain peace in our lives, take a few minutes each day to pray. Close your eyes and ask God to help us be kind, forgiving, and patient with one another and to love one another, as God has loved us. My Momma starts each day by saying, “The Lord’s Prayer.” It is a prayer that came from Jesus himself, “*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven, give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” I say a rosary each day and it calms me down tremendously. For me, saying the rosary is a form of meditation, and I have a sense of peace and tranquility when I am finished. I try my best to start and end my day in prayer. Only in prayer and meditation will we find peace. I am grateful that I have listed these prayers from my childhood throughout this book, and when I shared this thought with my niece Laurie, who is in her 40’s, she recalled the little prayers, and recited one that she too had learned as a young girl after reading it on my bedside wall!

Mother Teresa also gives us this poem on how to live. “*Life is an opportunity, take it. Life is beauty, admire it. Life is a dream, make it a reality. Life is a challenge, embrace it. Life is a duty, fulfill it. Life is a play, play it. Life is precious, take care of it. Life is riches, keep them. Life is love, enjoy it. Life is a mystery, discover it. Life is a promise, keep it, Life is sadness, overcome it. Life is a hymn, sing it. Life is a fight, accept it. Life is an adventure, take the risk. Life is happiness, meet it. Life is life, defend it. May life be a future of hope for you and your loved ones.*”

I also admire Thich Nhat Hanh, who wrote, “*We are very good at preparing to live but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice 10 years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive.*”

I started saying the rosary in 1997, when my momma was first diagnosed with lymphoma. I was with my sisters when my aunt Petra came and said “Enough crying, start praying!” We did and we had so many miracles happen during that time. I have continued to pray and it has helped me so much. To learn more about prayer and miracles, please be sure to read my next book and to “Fear God and keep His commandment, for this is the whole duty of our life. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). I just read this in the Bible and God said this is the conclusion of the entire matter!

How to Meditate!

The best place to meditate is a room (or in my case a chair), set aside for this sole purpose. There are two basic positions. The first is to sit/lie on a recliner or flat on your back on the floor (on a blanket). Lie with your feet about a foot apart, toes pointing outwards, and the arms comfortably at the sides, palms up. When you go into the position of your choice, make up your mind beforehand that you will not fall asleep. Before you start your meditation, remember: by the power of suggestion you can make the mind do anything you want it to do. You must use the mind to transcend the mind. The mind is master of the body. We do this by the power of suggestion which is the most powerful tool that the mind can use to go beyond itself. Start with a prayer, *“Oh Lord, You who are the indwelling presence and power within me, teach me how to meditate and to surrender to You, Amen!”*

Start with breath control. The breath and the mind are closely related and to meditate we must first use the breath to calm the mind. The simplest way is to breathe rhythmically. Breathe in slowly, counting to yourself 1, 2, 3, 4...etc., then breathe out slowly while counting to yourself the same number you breathed in. Try this for a few minutes. The breath will become calm and the heart and mind will follow. Begin the meditation, keeping in mind that suggestion is the most powerful tool with which we now use to bring the mind under control. We forget the body, by relaxing it completely and totally. After the prayer, turn your attention inward. Close your eyes so that your mind is not stimulated by anything outside. Send the suggestion, “relax, and relax” to every part of your body, starting with the feet, upward to the head, throughout your whole body. This should take 20 minutes.

Now the body is under control having been relaxed, but the mind will wander, unless it is controlled, too. As you sit in your comfortable position, pay attention to your breath. Mentally watch the breath flow in and out of the nostrils. Just be aware of the breath, do not try to control it. To control the mind, we must learn to concentrate and handle one thought at a time. If we can handle one thought successfully; we can handle any thought successfully. As you breathe in, mentally say “God,” and as you breathe out, mentally say, “Loves me”. This is said in the mind. Let the breath flow in and out, and as it flows in say “God” and when it flows out, say “loves me.” Let the breath flow its own way. Other phrases Temple suggests using are: “Jesus-Mary and “My God-My all.”

Stay focused on your breath, when it calms down; begin to chant your mantra mentally, over and over. If the mind gets distracted, don't worry. Gently bring it back to its mantra. Within one month, if done every day for at least 30 minutes, you should have an experience which is totally unique to you. With regular meditation, a greater calmness will reign in your mind and body. Temple concludes by saying, “Results may be imperceptible during the first few days because you are just learning to slow down and how to do the technique, so this will take some time and patience. You will become more at ease with others because you are now more at ease with yourself.”

It was a little miracle that I found this book by Sebastian Temple. It was just what I needed.

The Magic Formula for Everyday Success and Happiness

Every day:

- **Stop** and **PAUSE** (takes some deep breaths throughout the day and be in the moment!)
- If you do not like what you are thinking, **THINK** of something else! (Ask yourself before you speak or act, is it **true? helpful? inspiring? necessary? and kind?**) If not, restrain yourself.
- Have some fun from the “Things to Do List!”
- Meditate and still your mind for a few minutes with your personal mantra or little ditty.
- Do a random act of kindness or think of something encouraging to say to someone. When we give put-up’s, we feel good and the other person will feel good too. It is a win-win situation.
- Move your body. Get outside and walk or run, shoot hoops, play corn hole, ride your skateboard or your bike. Just 30 minutes a day will make a big difference.
- Read, and read everything. Get into a habit of reading; it will enrich your life.
- Practice gratitude by recalling 10 things that you are thankful for.
- Be present in all relationships. Really listen and cherish your time with others.
- Eat deliciously! (If it is delicious, eat it. If it isn’t delicious, don’t eat it)
- Seek the positive in every situation.
- Ask for help if you need it. There are people who can support you and it is okay to ask for help.
- Drink water.
- Get to bed at a reasonable hour.
- Pray without ceasing!!

“Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1Thessalonias 5:16-18

What to Do When You Feel Blue

Write a gratitude list	Make popcorn	Eat something spicy
Listen to music	Look up quotes	Look through photos
Hang out with a friend	Sing out loud	Take deep belly breaths
Stop and smell the roses	Keep a journal	Watch an old family movie
Find a ladybug	Work on a puzzle	Tell someone you love them
Go surfing	Hug someone	Stay in bed and chillax
Write a thank you note	Plant a flower	Visit someone who is lonely
Eat some chocolate	Play soccer	Learn something new
Learn the National Anthem	Take a bubble bath	Play video games
Sit by the water	Play a sport	Bake cookies
Play with a child	Make a new recipe	Write a little ditty
Play with an animal	Go skateboarding	Search for your mantra
Laugh out loud	Go to a park	Forgive someone
Go to church	Read a good book	Play corn hole or horseshoes
Get some sleep	Play solitaire	Ride your skateboard
Call a friend	Celebrate something	Go outside for a walk
Watch the sunset	Play board games	Organize something
Order pizza	Jump rope	Text someone
Stretch your body	Go to the mall	Call your grandma/pa
Meditate	Wash your hair	Work on your goal list
Compose a poem	Rearrange your room	Read comic books
Volunteer your time	Shoot some hoops	Play chess or checkers
Watch T.V.	Watch the clouds	Go ride the swings
Paint by numbers kit	Do some yoga poses	Make the feeling cube and play

